

Major Lessons From The Major Prophets

The 1995

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Lectures

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Lectureship Director

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Dedication

The Southaven church of Christ has been blessed throughout the years with many faithful, sound leaders. A debt of gratitude is owed to all elders and preachers from the past who have contributed to the present day stability and faithfulness of the Southaven church.

The future of the church is also bright. This is largely true because less than two years ago, two men of sterling faith and sound conviction were appointed to serve as shepherds of the flock at Southaven. Their leadership since that time has been a source of strength and encouragement to me and the entire congregation. Their godly wives, Othella Pierce and Sheila Simpson, have also served as shining examples of love and service to God.

The excellence of their leadership is rooted in their unswerving loyalty to truth and their compassion and love for the lost. Their love for the lost and their desire that the truth be spread far and wide are the very reasons why this lectureship and this volume have ever come to fruition. It is only fitting then, that this volume containing the lectures for the third **POWER** lectureship be sincerely and affectionately dedicated to the elders of the Southaven church of Christ, Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson.



Bill Pierce



Coleman Simpson

Acknowledgements

Books do not just happen by accident. In this, my first year of directing a lectureship and editing the book, I have gained a newfound appreciation for the other brotherhood lectureship books that grace the shelves of my office. I appreciate the editors of these books and all those who assisted them in the production of these volumes.

Closer to home, I am appreciative of the many individuals who had a hand in the production of this volume. First, a great debt of gratitude is due Paul Sain and Sain Publications. His wise counsel and expertise have guided me through the production of this book from start to finish. He has always been pleasant and encouraging. Even with a busy schedule, he has always found time to answer questions and offer assistance. A hearty thanks is given to all who assisted him in this endeavor.

Appreciation is extended to all of the faithful men who contributed manuscripts for this book. Countless hours of study and preparation are represented in this volume. In fact, it can even be said that years of study of scholarship are embedded within the pages of this book.

Thanks to Annette Kellett, Othella Pierce, Bonnie and Amy Reid, and Floy Manning. This quintet of ladies assisted greatly in proofreading the manuscripts prior to publication. They have worked behind the scenes, but their work has been vital. I wish to express appreciation to my faithful, competent and always pleasant, personal secretary, Geraldine Chaney. She has helped me in more ways than space will permit me to rehearse. She has encouraged me, reminded me, and stayed overtime to help me. I wish every preacher could have a secretary

like her. Thanks to the members of the Southaven church of Christ who have offered assistance and words of edification during the development of the lectureship and the book. I wish every preacher could preach at a congregation like this one. If you will pardon the personal nature of the next few lines, I will thank my mother and father for rearing me up in the way I should go. Their advice and counsel have endowed me with many lessons I have remembered during this project. I wish every son could have parents like them. Finally, I give thanks for a godly wife who has encouraged me in every phase of this work. She is an extraordinary preacher's wife and helpmeet. I wish every preacher could have a wife like her.

– B. J. Clarke, Editor

Preface

This is not the first **POWER** lectureship. Two great lectureships were conducted at the Southaven church of Christ in 1989 and 1990. These lectureships were: “The Providence of God,” and “The Minor Prophets.” Tremendous appreciation is extended to brother Thomas B. Warren and brother Garland Elkins for their capable leadership in organizing and directing those lectureships. The books from those two lectureships are still available from the Southaven church of Christ. The material in these books needs to be in the hands of every child of God.

When brother Garland Elkins joined the faculty of the Memphis School of Preaching and offered them his years of rich study and experience, the **POWER** lectureship was discontinued. In the middle part of 1994, several members of the Southaven church encouraged the elders to resume the annual lectureship. The decision was made to do that very thing. After some discussion, we decided that the Third **POWER** lectureship would be entitled: “**Major Lessons From The Major Prophets.**”

The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel have become known as “the major prophets.” This description is based upon the length of these books in comparison with the twelve books known as “the minor prophets.” The term “major prophets” is not meant to suggest that the speeches and writings of these prophets are any more important than those speeches and writings of those we term “minor prophets.” The term has only to do with the length of these books. In fact, one of the reasons why some exclude Lamentations from classification as a major prophet is due to its brevity. However, Lamentations is usually treated as a major

prophet because of its close topical association with Jeremiah and some of the events described in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. For this reason, we have included a lesson on Lamentations in this volume.

Some explanation should also be given to the first two words of our theme, the words “major lessons.” Of course, every lesson from God is a “major lesson” in the sense that it deserves our utmost attention. Our use of the phrase “major lessons” is intended only to show that this lectureship is a thematic study of the major prophets. The size of the major prophets has likely contributed to their being neglected for use in the curriculum of some of our Bible classes. This is tragic, because some of the greatest lessons “written aforetime,” “written for our learning,” and “written for our admonition” are found in these great books. Of course, there is no way that we can fully mine the depths of treasure found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel in one lectureship book. However, we can capture the essence of these books and profit therefrom.

This book contains an introduction to each of the books followed by a chapter emphasizing the major lessons of each book. The second section of the book investigates the Messianic emphasis of the major prophets. A third section examines the preachers and preaching of the major prophet period and the final section contains some special studies in the major prophets. You will find the subject material of these books as fresh and relevant as tomorrow’s newspaper. Our prayer in sending forth this volume is that it will glorify God and strengthen the reader.

– B. J. Clarke

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Introductions And Major Lessons

From The Major Prophet Books

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Chapter 1

Isaiah: An Introduction

Keith Mosher, Sr.

The book of Isaiah is one of the largest books in the Bible, along with Psalms and Jeremiah, and is one of the most important books in the Old Testament.¹ Baxter writes:

What Beethoven is in the realm of music, what Shakespeare is in the realm of literature, what Spurgeon was among the Victorian preachers, that is Isaiah among the prophets.²

Despite the reference in Spurgeon, one gets the idea from Baxter of the esteem in which this great book is held. Just a cursory reading will impress one with the grandeur and dignity of the “Messianic” prophet. The literary imagery is invaluable to a better understanding of the Old Testament, especially when studying apocalyptic texts such as Matthew 24 and Revelation.

This introduction will deal with the prophet; the two major problems associated with the writing; the themes; the Kings of Isaiah’s time both secular and Judaic as historical background; and the overall purpose of the book. An outline of the book and a chart of the historical period are provided.

Some in the church wonder about spending time introducing a book of the Bible and say that they “just

want to get to the text.” Such an attitude means that one is evidently unaware of the nature of the Bible. The word of God came through a community, albeit an inspired, prophetic community. Unless one is familiar with the setting of a message, one **can not** properly understand the message nor how to apply it today. Often well-meaning Bible teachers do harm to the actual Bible text because proper introduction has **not** been done. For this latter reason, introduction is vital and this assignment is a welcome one to this writer. The elders and ministers of the Southaven church of Christ are commended highly for requiring such efforts and for supporting a lectureship on which such teaching can be done.

Investigating The Prophet

The Jewish rabbinic teaching was that there were forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses in Israel based on a Bible “head-count.”³ Those prophets, Isaiah included, who taught from 800 B.C. are known as “classical” and were considered to be authors of sacred literature. The Jews would not accept a book as belonging to the canon of the Bible unless they were certain that a prophet penned it.⁴ Peter confirmed this latter fact by insisting that those prophets were carried along in their writings by the Holy Spirit and did not decide, on their own, what they would write:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:20-21).

Modernistic scholarship has insisted for nearly two

centuries that not until “the law” (i.e. the supposed post-exilic Deuteronomy) was codified during the Persian period (6th century B.C.) were “laws” available to the Jews. Then, from about the third century B.C. the “law and the prophets” came to be.⁵ Modernists further insist that the latter prophets from the time of Amos wrote from a “prophetic tradition” (This includes Isaiah) and **all** that any of the prophets wrote was just “sacred history” not God-breathed messages (cf. II Tim. 3:16).⁶ In fact, modern scholarship (?) assumed that the prophets antedated the law code, but archaeology has disproved the former theory by showing that Hammurabi, for example, codified laws before the time of Moses.⁷ So, modern scholarship wedded to an evolutionary concept of text-gathering and trying to dodge the archaeological evidence, now insists that the laws were orally “collected” and “aged” and then the prophets wrote.⁸ Modern scholarship changes its views to avoid a God-inspired view of prophecy.

On the other hand, Isaiah said that his message came from God (Isa. 1:1-2) and that the prophet had a direct vision from God in the beginning of Isaiah’s mission to Israel-Judah (Isa. 6:1-6). Modernists try to trouble the waters even here by insisting that “canonical” prophets were just following a long tradition in claiming that their messages were directly from God in order to claim authority from God.⁹ Were the prophets, then, liars? This “modern” (atheistic, K.M.) approach to the biblical text has even tainted professors in “our” colleges and has led many today to view the Bible as nothing more than an ancient community’s “intuitive” view of its existence from a “divine perspective.”¹⁰ But, what does the Bible say of Isaiah?

His name means something like, “Jehovah is Salvation,” or “Jehovah Saves.”¹¹ He was the son of Amoz, probably a Jerusalemite, whose ministry extended from 740 B.C. (Isa. 1:1; 6:1) until about 701 B.C. (Isa. 1:1).¹² Isaiah had access to kings and priest (Isa. 7:3; 8:2) and was married to a prophetess who bore Isaiah two sons—Shear-Jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa. 7:3; 8:2). The former name carries the idea of a “returning remnant” which signifies the core of the message to Judah by Isaiah concerning the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests and Jewish return. The latter name signifies that the coming invasions were to happen in haste.¹³

Isaiah keenly sensed his missions as seen from the names he gave his sons and his recall of his vision as a “man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). Along with his prophetic work, Isaiah was a royal historian who penned the “Acts of Uzziah” (II Chron. 26:22). Isaiah, indeed, had access to world leaders and world affairs (cf. II Kings 18:3–20:19). Valetton said of Isaiah:

Never perhaps has there been another prophet like Isaiah, who stood with his head in the clouds and his feet on the solid earth; with his heart in the things of eternity and with mouth and hand in the things of time; with his spirit in the eternal counsel of God and his body in a very definite moment of history.¹⁴

Another has called Isaiah the “dean of the Prophets” and often he is referred to as the “Paul of the Old Testament.”¹⁵

Investigating Two Major Problems

Two major problems exist that trouble students of the Isaiah text—authorship and unity. Modernists insist that there were three (at least) authors of the material:

In the case of the Isaiah tradition modern scholarship has been able to identify two additional personalities beyond that of Isaiah of Jerusalem who made significant contributions to the Isaiah tradition and to the literature which represents it. Because we do not know their names, they are referred to simply as the Second Isaiah (who lived in Babylon near the end of the Exile [sic] and the Third Isaiah (who was active shortly after the restoration of Jerusalem).¹⁶

Radical critics, like the one above, attribute only two-hundred sixty-two of the one thousand ninety-two verses to Isaiah, but when pressed they give no names to these supposedly excellent yet unknown writers. Lasor notes that:

One serious weakness of some modern scholarship has been to cite the almost universally recognized greatness of Isaiah—which is derived from the entire book—while denying that much of the book, including the magnificent chapters in the second part, come from the same prophet.¹⁷

Modernists list the first thirty-nine chapters as from Isaiah (mostly) chapters forty through fifty-five from “Second Isaiah” and chapters fifty-six through sixty-six from “Third Isaiah.” Such critics are Deists who do not believe that God has ever supernaturally spoken and, since Isaiah is filled with prophecy, especially futuristic prophecy, these modernists deny that one man could have written such things **before** they occurred. Note the following difficulties that arise when one denies that God ever inspired a prophet:

1. The first verse (Isa. 1:1) is a heading for the book. Where is there a heading from the “other”

Isaiahs?¹⁸

2. There is no manuscript evidence for dividing the sixty-six chapters.

3. No one doubted the unity of the book for 2500 years and no one knows the names of the supposed other authors.

4. The book, Ecclesiastes (c.a. A.D. 180) records Isaiah as a unit.

5. Isaiah chapters 40-48 speak of the Persian, Cyrus, in prophetic ways. Why, if he had already lived or were living, would he be spoken of as a future king?

6. Chapters 40-66 were written by one who knew Palestinian topography not Babylonian (as would be the case if the author were in Babylonian exile as critics claim).

7. There is a similarity of style and phraseology of chapters 1-39 and 40-66. The phrase, “Holy One of Israel,” for example, is common to the entire book. The literary style of the entire book is different from every other Old Testament text.

8. The Hebrew rule of canon was that the prophet must be named, and there is no Babylonian influence on the writer’s style.

9. The New Testament writers speak of only one book (cf. Matt. 3:3; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14-15; 15:7; Mark 7:6; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; 12:38-41; Acts 8:28,32 (from the so-called “Second Isaiah”); Acts 28:26-26; Rom. 9:27-29; 10:16-20; 15:12).

10. Jesus, Himself, read from Isaiah and the text records that the Christ was handed the book (Luke 4:17f). Surely Jesus would have commented if there had been more than one Isaiah!

The spurious “Second Isaiah” (often called deutero-

Isaiah” by scholars) is alleged to have lived in Babylon during Cyrus’ reign. Yet no one knows his name and his material is written as if he were in Palestine! No apostle nor Christ ever knew of another Isaiah. One last question for those who would assign chapters 40-66 of Isaiah to someone other than one prophet. Why would a Jew, supposedly living in Babylonian or Gentile exile, write about the salvation of Gentiles (e.g. Isa. 6:1-2)? Modern “scholarship’s” evolutionary view of the Bible is no different from modern “science’s” view of the earth’s development. Both views deny God’s actual involvement in the events.

Investigating Isaiah’s Themes

It is very interesting to discover that Isaiah involves his readers in the major themes of his prophecy in the very first chapter and that Isaiah’s personal introduction to the book bears a striking resemblance to the great prophet Moses’ remonstrance to the children of Israel at the time God first called them:

For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself above all the nations that are upon the earth...When ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image or the likeness of anything, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke Him to anger; I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go ever to possess it...I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing (Deut. 14:2; 4:25-26; 30:19).

Isaiah, too calls “heaven and earth” as a witness to the centuries from Moses’ time during which God had suffered the idolatry and rebellion of His people. Israel will be punished (by Assyria) and Judah will be punished (by Babylon) for all their misdeeds. The Lord repeatedly chastened the Jews by the sending of prophets, but eventually God could no longer tolerate their **sinfulness** (Isa. 1:3-8). Even so, God makes a **tender appeal** (Isa. 1:16-19) by **warning of judgment** (Isa. 1:24-25, 29-31) and **offering salvation** (i.e. a return from captivity; Isa. 1:26-28).

The four subjects listed above of sin, appeal, judgment, and salvation are recurrent themes throughout the book. Chapters one through twelve deal with Judah and Jerusalem; chapters thirteen through twenty-three are oracles of judgment and salvation; chapters twenty-four through twenty-seven concern judgment on the ancient world; chapters twenty-eight through thirty-five are warnings against allying with Egypt for military reasons; chapters thirty-six through thirty-nine are historical springboards to the next chapters and background to Ezekiel and Daniel and the Babylonian captivity; and chapters forty through sixty-six are prophetic of a future glory for the returning remnant from captivity and the coming Messiah. (See the summary outline at the end of this chapter.)

Judah’s rebellion has the heaven and earth as witnesses (Isa. 1:2). Just as Moses predicted, Judah did turn to idolatry and God rejected her from Palestine for Judah was sin-sick from head to toe (Isa. 1:5-6). Is there any hope? Yes, both for ancient Judah and for the sin-sick today, one can return to God and to Messiah (Isa. 1:18). In the latter sense, Isaiah’s message is as relevant

for today as it was for the ancient Jews. The Messiah came from them as their hope and ours and as the only hope for a sin-sick world (Isa. 52:12–53:12).

Investigating The Historical Background

The period of Isaiah’s prophetic work is well-established from the listing of the four kings who reigned in Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. (See the chart provided at the end of this chapter of the kings of Egypt, Judah, Israel, Damascus, and Assyria for this time period.)¹⁹

Uzziah reigned in Judah while Tiglath-Pileser (745-727) was establishing the Assyrian empire to the west.²⁰ Tiglath-Pileser (The “Pul” of II Kings 15:29) subjugated Babylon and Syria (ca. 743) but Uzziah died (ca. 740 B.C.) presumably before Pul could reach him. Isaiah began his ministry the year Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1).

Uzziah’s son, Jotham, ascended the throne of Judah when Pekah reigned in Israel (II Kings 15:32). During Jotham’s reign, Pekah and Rezin of Syria began to attack Judah (II Kings 16:37). The anarchy in Israel and Syria that occurred from such an unwise policy led to the overthrow of Israel and Syria by Assyria (II Kings 17:9f), but the overthrow occurred during Jotham’s son’s reign—Ahaz.

Ahaz feared Pekah and Rezin, but, excuse the pun, for no reason. In fact, Isaiah is sent by God to Ahaz in order to give the king a sign (Isa. 7:10-11). The wicked king, Ahaz, refused the sign (II Kings 16:1-20). (The Bible does not say what such a sign might have been.) Isaiah insists that Ahaz (i.e. the “house of David”) will get a “sign” anyway (Isa. 7:12-13). The seed-line of David will continue despite Ahaz’ wickedness and rebellion and

that continuing seed-line is a royal one (Isa. 7:15); well-able to survive history (Isa. 7:16). Some ask how a seed of a virgin seven centuries later could be a sign to Ahaz. Such a question misses the point. Isaiah is referring to the continuance of the “house of David” **despite** Ahaz’ fear and evil. God will keep His promise to Abraham and David (Gen. 12:1-3; II Sam. 7:12-14; Psm. 89).

Ahaz was succeeded by his son, Hezekiah (II Kings 18-19). Assyria was still conquering in Syria and Palestine and was continuing a policy begun by Tiglath-Pileser of resettling vanquished peoples in Assyria; especially were the skilled and learned taken. When Assyria conquered Israel there were at least **three** such “carryings away.”²¹ Ahaz seems to have “saved” Judah for a time by having appealed to Tiglath-Pileser (II Kings 16:7-10), but during the reign of Hezekiah, God will have to intervene in most unusual ways to save Judah.

Since Israel and Judah were the battlegrounds between Assyria and Egypt, Isaiah will urge both, but especially Judah, to return to God for protection. Unfortunately two opposing “political parties” in Judah interferred. Some desired to ally with Egypt against Assyria (II Kings 14:4) while others desired to submit to Assyria and to pay tribute to that war-like people (cf. Ahaz and II Kings 16:7-9). God’s purpose, on the other hand, had been to establish Palestine for His people; to make Jerusalem His holy city, and eventually to bring Messiah (II Sam. 7:12-17; I King 8:24-30; Isa. 2:1-4). The theocracy had begun at Sinai (Exod. 19:6f; Deut. 5:1f). But, the ancient Hebrews had lost their concern for a theocracy and had demanded a king like the ones all the other nations had (I Sam. 8:5). Israel could have had a godly, peaceful king (Deut. 17:4f), but she wanted

a warrior-king and Israel got her desire! Saul was not peaceful; David acted like a pagan-king; and Solomon, for all his wisdom, was idolatrous and adulterous. No king in Israel ever did right and very few kings in Judah were just. Therefore, during the reign of Uzziah of Judah, God raised up Assyria to remove the pagan rule of Israel and to begin the removal of the southern kings of Judah so that a theocracy would be in place in Palestine. The last king of Isaiah's prophetic time, Hezekiah, began to reign about 715 B.C. and died about 686 B.C. (twenty-nine years).²²

Ahaz' appeal to Tiglath-Pileser sealed Judah's fate for Ahaz signed away the nation's true liberty (II Kings 16:7). When Hezekiah succeeded his father, Ahaz, the policy of submission was **reversed** (II Kings 18:1-7) which policy brought the wrath of the new Assyrian monarch, Sennacherib, against Judah (II Kings 18:13f). Sennacherib's predecessor, Sargon II (who took Samaria in 722 B.C.) had earlier faced a rebellion from a Babylonian city-king named Merodach-baladan (II Kings 20:12; Isa. 39:a). Merodach-baladan made overtures in Hezekiah (Isa. 39:1f) and Hezekiah showed the Babylonian ambassadors the treasures of the temple (Isa. 39:2). A later Babylonian king will remember those treasures and will destroy Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple. His name was Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25). Isaiah also told Hezekiah that his offspring would be **eunuchs** in Babylon (Isa. 39:6) and Bible students well remember Daniel, Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan. 1:19). But, as noted above, during Hezekiah's reign God did some unusual things to preserve Hezekiah, who as yet had no heir to his throne but became sick unto death (II Kings 20:1). Hezekiah was given fifteen more

years so that a son could be born, for Hezekiah was the seed-line of the throne of David; the seed-line of Christ which must continue (II Kings 20:6; cf. Matt. 1:1-17). The son, Manasseh, born to Hezekiah was but twelve years old when Hezekiah did die (II Kings 21:1; II Chron. 33:1). The other unusual “thing” God did for Hezekiah involved the Assyrian, Sennacherib, already mentioned.

Hezekiah heard that Sennacherib (704-681) was of lesser ability than Sargon II and Hezekiah refused tribute (II Kings 18:7). Perhaps Hezekiah had surmised that Merodach-baladan’s rebellion gave opportunity for Judah to rebel against Assyria.²³ But, Sennacherib subdued Merodach-baladan and began a campaign against Judah (II Kings 18:13-16; Isa. 36-37). Sennacherib’s inscriptions corroborate the Bible’s account and augment it.²⁴

Sennacherib overran Tyre, and the latter’s defeat led many Philistine and Edomite people to capitulate.²⁵ A few held out—Ashkelon, Ekron, and Judah. The former two cities will fall and most of Judah, except for Jerusalem. While Sennacherib was subduing Lachish, Hezekiah sent to the Assyrian and sued for peace (II Kings 18:14).²⁶ Sennacherib demanded increased tribute even asking that Hezekiah strip the temple. Hezekiah did pay tribute (II Kings 18:15-16), but Sennacherib was not appeased (II Kings 18:17f; Isa. 36-37). He sent his commanding general or Rabshakeh to demand surrender (Isa. 36:2). Hezekiah, relying on God’s prophet Isaiah and the promise of deliverance, refused (II Kings 19:29-34; Isa. 14:24-27; 17:12-14; 31:4-9). Sennacherib was defeated—in one night (Isa. 37:36; II Kings 19:35). God’s messenger smote 185,000 Assyrians and when the Jews awoke, behold the enemy

were “all dead corpses” (II Kings 19:35). Sennacherib, himself, was slain by his own sons upon returning to Assyria (II Kings 19:36). Isaiah’s prophetic help had preserved Hezekiah and, more importantly, had preserved the seed-line of Christ.

Isaiah was God’s voice through a critical time in Israel’s history. The brief overview of that era above is by no means complete. But, the things that pertain to maintaining the seed-line of Messiah are those events which are most emphasized by Bible writers, especially Isaiah the Messianic prophet, and those ancient writers, therefore, did not write **all** of the history of a period.

Investigating The Purpose

The immediate purpose of Isaiah’s prophetic work was to urge his hearers, Judah, to **return** to God (cf. Jer. 2:32; Isa. 1:18). The primary reason for the need of a return of a faithful remnant was the bringing into history of Messiah (Isa. 53:1-12). Messiah was promised as the seed of Abraham and Messiah’s birthplace was to be **in** Palestine (Bethlehem-ephrata, Micah 5:2). Therefore, there **must** be a faithful remnant’s return from Babylonian captivity.

A secondary purpose of the Isaiah prophecy concerns the political conditions of that time period (740-701 B.C.). Judah was a battleground between Egypt and Assyria during the eighth century (II Kings 17). So, the Egyptian king, who is known as Shabaka or Shabako, an Ethiopian conqueror had unified Egypt and was the king whom Israel’s Hoshea had bribed to aid Israel against Assyria (II Kings 17:4). He was succeeded, eventually, by his brother-in-law, Tirhakah, who sought to form a league with Palestine against Assyria (II Kings

19:9). Tirhakah wanted the league’s headquarters in Jerusalem and later claimed victory over Sennacherib in the battle where 185,000 Assyrians would die by God’s hand (II Kings 19:35). Isaiah will constantly warn Judah **not** to form any alliances with Egypt, however, for Egypt is actually without God and without strength (Isa. 20).

Investigating Isaiah’s Literary Style

Some insist that Isaiah’s brilliant imagery had no superior and that his style “marks the climax of Hebrew literary art.” Isaiah uses **illustrations**, **epigrams**, and **metaphors** usually from nature (cf. 1:13; 5:1-7; et al). He uses the figure called **interrogation** alone with **dialogue** with God and nations (cf. 6:8; 10:8). There is **alliteration** (17:10,12), **parable** and **hyperbole** (2:7; 28:23-29), **word-play** (paranomasia, 5:7; 7:9), and **word usage** beyond his peers. There are 2170 different words in 150 Psalms. Isaiah uses 2186!²⁷

Jerome likened Isaiah to the great orator, Demosthenes and there is even poetry in the text.²⁸ Isaiah’s writing is **rhythmic**, **rich**, and **brilliant**.

Investigating Isaiah’s Theology

As to Isaiah’s doctrine of God, the attribute of holiness is most often stressed. Twenty-five times Isaiah speaks of “The Holy One of Israel.”²⁹ The expression “Holy One” (Hebrew, *gados*) stands alone at 40:25.³⁰ The root of *gados* carries the idea of one separate or apart not **from** but **to**.³¹ That is, all things connected with God are “set apart to Him” which fact Moses heard from the burning bush concerning the “holy ground” on which Moses stood (Exod. 3:5). That ground was devoted or set apart **to** God.

Holiness is required of those set apart to God (Exod. 19:6). Therefore, Isaiah speaks of sin as “uncleanness” or moral and ethical corruption rather than “profane” or ritualistic error. Jesus taught the same (cf. Matt. 15:1-18). A “holy” person is clean **inside**, that is in his soul.

God, to Isaiah, is also Saviour (Isa. 17:10) in terms of deliverance (especially from captivity) and God is Redeemer (ga-al) or “Recoverer” (Isa. 52:3) who will ransom His people. For such activity, God is to be glorified by His people (Isa. 44:23). God is supreme; He is ruler of all (2:8; 6:3; 37:19; et al).

Summary

The beautiful Isaiah text is from a time in Judah’s history when she could have learned vital lessons from the events surrounding her. Instead, Judah continued to seek national alliances, idols, and material aid rather than turning to God. Judah saw what Assyria did to Israel and almost did to Judah, but never really repented nor turned to God. Isaiah preached, pleaded, and prophesied, but only a remnant would return to the land following Babylonian captivity.

The only real hope for Israel, Judah, or anyone is Christ. Isaiah, the Messianic prophet, holds forth in song, prediction, and imagery the promise of the Son of God. There are four “Servant Songs” (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12); there are constant predictions (2:1-4; 9:6; 11:1-2; et al); and there is beautiful imagery of a “new heavens and new earth” (Isa. 65-66) or church in which God’s true worshippers will abide. Perhaps with Isaiah one should exclaim:

And an highway shall be there, and a way;
and it shall be called the way of holiness; the

unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those. The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein (35:8).

SUMMARY OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

Prophecies Of Judgment, Chapters 1-39

- I. Prophecies Concerning Judah And Jerusalem** 1-12
- A. Introduction 1:1-31
 - 1. Condemnation of Israel's corruption 1:1-9
 - 2. Condemnation of religious formalism 1:10-31
 - B. Prophecy of Christ's kingdom 2:1-4
 - C. Prophecy of the results of Judah's sins 2:5-5:30
 - 1. The grounds for such judgment by God 2:5-4:1
 - 2. The promise of comfort if they repent 4:1-6
 - 3. The parable of the vineyard 5:1-7
 - 4. The woes unto the wicked 5:8-30
 - D. Isaiah's vision of the Lord 6:1-13
 - E. Prophecies of Ahaz, Messiah, and Judah 7:1-12:6
 - 1. The calamity awaiting Ahaz 7:1-25
 - 2. The sign of the Maker: Shalalhashbaz 8:1-22
 - 3. The birth and rule of Messiah 9:1-7
 - 4. Prophecy against the kingdom of Israel 9:8-10:4
 - 5. Prophecy of God's use of Assyria 10:5-34
 - 6. Prophecy of Christ's coming kingdom 11:1-16
 - 7. A song of praise to God 12:1-6
- II. Prophecies Of Judgment Against The Nations** .. 13-23
- A. Babylon-her aggression, desolation, and fall 13:1-14:23
 - B. Assyria-her desolation 14:24-27
 - C. Philistia-her destruction 14:28-32
 - D. Moab-her abundance and pride gone 15:1-16:14
 - E. Damascus-a ruinous heap 17:1-14
 - F. Ethiopia-scattered and peeled 18:1-7
 - G. Egypt-internal upheaval for God is there 19:1-25
 - H. Egypt and Ethiopia-will be ruled by Assyria 20:1-6
 - I. Babylon, Edom, Arabia-desolation 21:1-17
 - J. Jerusalem-siege, death, captivity, Eliakim 22:1-25
 - K. Tyre-pride of glory stained 23:1-18
- III. The Apocalypse Of Isaiah** 24-27
- A. The destruction of Jerusalem 24:1-12
 - B. The attitude of besieged Jerusalem 24:13-15
 - C. The vision of judgment 24:16-23
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D. The blessings of the kingdom.....	25:1-5
E. A picture of heaven	25:6-8
F. The power of God.....	25:9-12
G. A song of the redeemed	26:1-21
H. The final judgment	27:1-13
IV. Prophetic Warnings TO Samaria And Judah ...	28-33
A. Prediction of the fall of Samaria.....	28:1-8
B. Warning to Jerusalem	28:9-29
C. Siege and deliverance of Ariel (Jerusalem).....	29:1-24
D. Denunciation of the Egyptian alliance	30:1-33
E. Denunciation of trusting in armament.....	31:1-32:20
F. Prediction of the Assyria's destruction.....	33:1-16
G. Prediction that Jerusalem will be delivered	33:17-24
V. A Cry Of Justice Against All Nations.....	34:1-17
VI. Judah Will Return From Exile.....	35:1-10
VII. History, Prophecy, And Song	
(cf. II Kings 18-20).....	36-39
A. Sennacherib tries to take Jerusalem	36:1-37:20
B. Isaiah's last word concerning Assyria.....	37:21-35
C. Hezekiah's gift of life from God	38:1-22
D. Assyria visits Hezekiah who sins	39:1-8

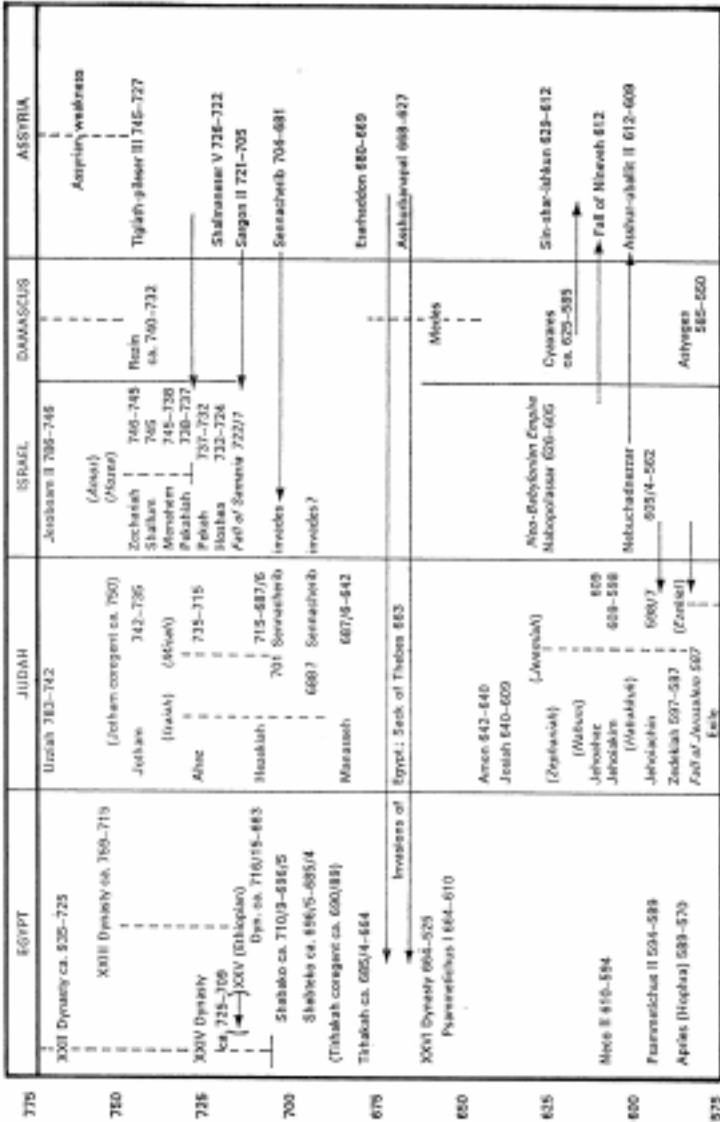
Prophecies Of Consolation, Chapters 40-66

I. Deliverance From Cyrus And Restoration	40-48
A. The deity of God is demonstrated	40:1-31
B. Supreme proof of God-His power to predict	41:1-29
C. God's servant and Israel's failure contrasted	42:1-25
D. Deliverance under Cyrus if Judah repents	43:1-45:25
E. Babylon's gods are impotent, she will fall	46:1-47:15
F. Judah will be delivered saith Jehovah.....	48:1-22
II. Messiah	49-55
A. Messiah's commission and work.....	49:1-26
B. Messiah's humiliation and steadfastness	50:1-11
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D. Messiah's suffering and glory	52:13-53:12
E. Messiah's kingdom is promised	54:1-55:13
III. The Future Glory Of The People Of God	56-66
A. Israel's unfaithfulness is rebuked	56:1-59:2
B. Israel is beseeched to forsake sin	59:3-59:21
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D. Israel's herald will be Messiah.....	61:1-11
E. Israel will be given a new name.....	62:1-12
F. Israel is recipient of prayer	63:1-19

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- G. Israel is to pray fervently 64:1-12
- H. Israel's prayer will be answered 65:1-25

IV. The New Kingdom Is Christ's 66:1-24



VI. Ca. Mid-Eighth to Mid-Sixth Centuries

Endnotes

1 See William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, **Old Testament Survey** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982) for expansion of the idea of the vital nature of Isaiah, especially chapters 28-29.

2 J. Sidlow Baxter, "The Book of Isaiah (I)" in **Explore the Book**, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1966), 217.

3 Joseph Blenkinsopp, **A History of Prophecy in Israel** (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 19.

4 Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, **A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 212.

5 Blenkinsopp, **A History of Prophecy in Israel**, 21-26.

6 Ibid., 22.

7 Geisler and Nix, **A General Introduction to the Bible**, 337.

8 Blenkinsopp, **A History of Prophecy in Israel**, 21.

9 Ibid., 27-29.

10 Ibid.

11 George L. Robinson, **The Book of Isaiah** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1954), 19.

12 Tradition insists that Isaiah prophesied until the reign of Manasseh (692-642 B.C.). See Lasor, **Old Testament Survey**, 366. Lasor adds that the Talmud (**Meg.** 106) records that Isaiah was a cousin of king Uzziah or a nephew of Amaziah born in or near Jerusalem (Ibid.).

13 A Jewish pseudepigrapha (false writing) called **The Assumption of Isaiah** records a tradition that Isaiah was martyred by being sawn in two, vertically (Lasor, 366), Bible students will recall Hebrews 13:37 here.

14 Quoted in George L. Robinson, **The Book of Isaiah**, 22.

15 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on Isaiah with Emphasis on the Messianic Hope** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 25 and Keith A. Mosher, Sr.,

“Unpublished Class Notes, Isaiah” (MSOP, 1995) because of Isaiah’s emphasis on righteousness.

16 James D. Newsome, Jr., **The Hebrew Prophets** (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984 reprint), 60.

17 Lasor, **Old Testament Survey**, 365.

18 The sources for these arguments are: Oswalt T. Allis, **The Unity of Isaiah: A Study in Prophecy** (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1950); Gleason L. Archer, **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974); George L. Robinson, “Isaiah,” in **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, vol. 3, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1939); and the New Testament.

19 The chart is from John Bright, **The History of Israel**, 481.

20 The historical notes are from a variety of sources including Bright, Turner, Sr., Jackson, LaSor, Young, Robinson, Haley, et al.

21 Rex A. Turner, Sr., “Unpublished Class Notes, History of Israel,” Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1978.

22 Edward J. Young, **The Book of Isaiah**, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969) was used in the essay for the dates. His timing of events is comparative to most commentators including Bright used above.

23 Bright, **A History of Israel**, 282-83. Bright notes much of the archaeological evidence also.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 284.

26 Bright notes that excavations at Lachish (II Kings 18:14) uncovered a huge pit into which Sennacherib threw 1500 bodies along with the every day garbage of the Assyrian army (Ibid., 284)!

27 Robinson, **The Book of Isaiah**, 22.

28 Ibid., 23.

29 Ibid.

30 The expression occurs in 1:4; 5:19,24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11-12; 30:15; 37:23; 41:14; 41:16; 41:20; 43:3; 43:14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9; and 60:14. There

occurs also “The Holy One of Jacob” (29:23); “God the Holy One” (5:16); “Your Holy One” (43:15); “his Holy One” (10:17; 49:7); and “Whose name is Holy” (57:15).

31 Lasor, **Old Testament Survey**, 381.

Chapter 2

Major Lessons From Isaiah

B. J. Clarke

The story of the Bible is essentially the story of God and man. In the Bible we learn of *how* man came to be. We then learn of *what* man came to be. And we also learn in the Bible about what man *can come to be*. The relationship between God and man is at the heart of all Biblical revelation. The book of Isaiah is no different. In reading this great book, which some have styled as the Mount Everest of prophetic literature, we are brought face to face with the relationship shared between God and His creation. A study of this great book enhances our knowledge of how God has interacted with man and it inspires us to give sober attention as to how we interact with Him.

An excellent introduction to the book of Isaiah has already been included in this volume; therefore, we shall not endeavor to reiterate overmuch the material found therein. However, it is necessary to lay a foundation for the material which follows, and thus, it will be helpful for us to give a thumbnail sketch of the overall purpose of the book. The message of Isaiah revolves around God's salvation of His chosen people through His judgment and grace. In the book, we see disgrace and vengeance wreaked upon the ungodly. But, we also see Jehovah's

victorious vindication of the righteous remnant of His chosen people. William A. Vangemeren succinctly captures the overall message of Isaiah:

The names of Isaiah (“Yahweh is salvation”) and his sons (Shear-Jashub [“a remnant will return”] and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz {“booty will very quickly be taken”}); see 7:3; 8:3) convey the essence of the book: (1) Yahweh is the source of salvation; (2) Yahweh will spare a remnant for Himself; and (3) Yahweh’s judgment is coming.¹

The book is divided into three primary sections. (1) Chapters 1-35 address the moral deterioration of the Jews. Because of their wickedness God promises swift and sure retribution. Threats of judgment are also meted out toward the foreign nations who had afflicted God’s people. (2) Chapters 36-39 form an historical interlude linking Isaiah and Hezekiah with events described in the book of II Kings and preparing the reader for the next section of Isaiah. (3) The final section of Isaiah encompasses chapters 40-66. Contrary to the heavy spirit of judgment and condemnation found in the first 39 chapters, these last 27 chapters of the book focus upon utterances of consolation from a God who is eager to comfort His penitent people. This clear dichotomy in the book has led to the observation that Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. The Bible is composed of 66 books. The first 39 books, which make up the Old Testament, zero in on man’s condemnation, helpless state and need for a Redeemer. The last 27 books, known as the New Testament, fixate upon the reality of redemption through our Redeemer and His promise to deliver us from the captivity of sin and take us to the home that He has

gone to prepare for us. Similarly, Isaiah has 66 chapters. The first 39 chapters focus upon man’s guilt, condemnation and hopeless condition apart from God. The last 27 chapters center upon God’s redemption of His covenant people and His promise to bring them home from captivity. This similarity of content between Isaiah and the Bible in general, has led many to affirm that Isaiah bridges the gap between the Old and New Testament more than any other Old Testament book.

The New Testament contains more quotations and allusions to the book of Isaiah than of any other book in the Old Testament, except Psalms. Forty-seven chapters from Isaiah are directly quoted or alluded to by Christ and the apostles. This is precisely why some have called Isaiah, “the gospel before the gospel.” George Robinson called the book “a large and illustrated Hebrew edition, so to speak, of the epistle of Romans,” and dubbed Isaiah as “the St. Paul of the Old Testament.”² There can be no doubt that the book of Isaiah reflects the glory of God and salvation of man through Jesus Christ. In fact, Isaiah is so Messianic in its content that some have nicknamed Isaiah as “the fifth evangelist.” Indeed, it can be said that “the hope of the people in Isaiah’s day was to be found in the Servant who would come; ours, similarly, must be in the Servant who has come.”³

The Messianic emphasis of Isaiah is expounded upon in several other lessons in this book. In this particular chapter, we will ask and answer two basic questions: (1) What does the book of Isaiah teach us about man? and (2) What does the book of Isaiah teach us about God?

What Does Isaiah Tell Us About Man?

A reading of the book of Isaiah is, in many respects, like reading a modern day newspaper. The same sins and criminal activities that make the headlines today, made headlines in the book of Isaiah. The climate of our day is tragically familiar to the climate of Isaiah's day. Political, moral, and social decay is in evidence on every hand. You may have heard the expression, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." This is certainly true of the attitudes manifested by man from the garden of Eden to this present time. Countless changes have taken place since God created the world. But, man's attitude toward God is basically the same now as it was then. Read the descriptions of humanity in the book of Isaiah and then pause and take a look at humanity today. We may have more gadgets than they had, but we may not have any more godliness. Survey what Isaiah records about man in his day, and see if you agree. In the book of Isaiah, man is depicted as:

1. Rebellious. It does not take long for Isaiah to give us a picture of humanity in his day. In the second verse of the book, God says, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." The extent of their rebellion is evidenced by the following verses. Jehovah describes His people as a:

...sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward...the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and

putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment (Isa. 1:4-6).

It is not a pretty picture, is it? America, as a nation, would do well to consider the similarities between her rebellion and that of Israel. More specifically, rebels within Spiritual Israel, the church, should examine these words and recognize the peril of their condition.

2. Ungrateful. Jehovah complains that His people had forgotten to recognize the bountiful blessings they had received from Him. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (Isa. 1:3). Despite the gracious care and lovingkindness God had showered upon His people, they had failed to appreciate it. The reason for this failure is grounded in their forgetfulness, namely their forgetfulness of God. “They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands” (Isa. 5:13). Israel failed to heed the warning given to them by God after their deliverance from Egypt and prior to their entrance into the promised land. God told them to remember the manner in which He had led them through the wilderness (Deut. 8:2). He described for them the matchless blessings of the land they were preparing to conquer and warned them not to get wealthy and forget Him:

For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones

are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:7-20).

This lengthy passage is worthy of inclusion in this study due to the fact that it is a microcosm of Israel's departure from God. They did the very thing God warned them not to do. As they reveled in the blessings of the promised land, they forgot to remember the source of those blessings. Had they been more mindful of the Lord's work, they would have been more inclined to manifest their appreciation.

This problem of forgetfulness and ingratitude was by no means confined to the children of Israel. In His indictment of Damascus and Samaria, God declared:

Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow (Isa. 17:10-11).

Human beings are not much different today. We become so enamored with our jobs and the wealth derived from our jobs that we forget about the real source of these blessings. So often, we fail to thank because we fail to think. Before we can be thankful we must first be thoughtful.

3. Hypocritical. One of the most scathing rebukes in the entire book is found in Isaiah 1:10-15. In this section God likens Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah. He informs His people that He is fed up with their sacrifices and burnt offerings. He sternly warns:

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot

away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil (Isa. 1:13-16).

The problem with God's people was not that they were failing to worship. They were offering their sacrifices with regularity. The problem was that they were failing to worship with the right kind of heart and life. These same individuals who were "piously" bringing their sacrifices to the priest for an offering to God were: (1) perverting justice by taking bribes (Isa. 5:23); (2) oppressing the poor, the widows and the fatherless (Isa. 10:1-2; cf. Matt. 23:14); (3) erring through wine and strong drink (Isa. 5:11-12; 28:7-8); (4) transgressing laws, changing ordinances and breaking the everlasting covenant; (5) deeply revolting and sinning with their own hand by the production of idols and images (Isa. 31:6-7); (6) working iniquity with their hearts, practicing hypocrisy, uttering error against the Lord, and devising wicked plans against the poor (Isa. 32:5-7); (7) complacent and at ease about their sinful condition (Isa. 32:9-11); and (8) obstinate, with a neck of iron muscle and a brow of brass (Isa. 48:4). But, at least these folks were regular about going to "church."

Going to worship is not enough! Being religious is not enough! Possessing a thorough familiarity with Scripture is not enough! Mark tells of a scribe who said unto Jesus;

...Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:32-33).

The latter portion of the scribe’s reply is reminiscent of Psalm 40:6-8:

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart (Psm. 40:6-8).

This passage appears puzzling at first because it seems to deny that God ever required His people to bring sacrifices and offerings to Him. Yet, even a casual reading of the books of Exodus and Leviticus shows that God did indeed desire and require offerings and sacrifices. Does Psalm 40 contradict Exodus and Leviticus? The solution to this apparent problem is to recognize the use of the hermeneutical device known as an ellipsis. An ellipsis is the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but that must be supplied. Keeping this in mind, the passage could read, “Thou didst not desire sacrifice and offering alone.” In other words, God never desired or required that His people merely go through the motions of bringing their offerings to Him. Two key words in the passage are the words “delight” and “heart.” God wanted more than mere offerings and sacrifices. He wanted those who brought

these offerings and sacrifices to do so with delight and love in their hearts. To this Micah agrees:

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:6-8).

Our God desires that we worship Him with sincere hearts full of love. The Father seeks true worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Jesus quoted a passage from Isaiah to condemn the scribes and Pharisees for drawing nigh unto Him with their mouth and honoring Him with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him (Matt. 15:7-9; Isa. 29:13). We must recognize that God never has and never will accept external actions without internal devotion. He demands sincere worship.

4. Proud. The pride of man is evidenced on nearly every page of Isaiah. Because of their great possessions, military strength and military alliances, the people were filled with “lofty looks,” “haughtiness” and “stoutness of heart” (Isa. 2:6-22; 9:9). Nations like the Assyrians, whom God had used as a tool to punish His people, became puffed up and regarded themselves as invincible (Isa. 10:12; 36:4ff). Hezekiah manifested human pride when he foolishly showed the Babylonians all the treasures of the kingdom (Isa. 39:1-5).

Other examples of human pride in Isaiah abound.

Because of human pride, they became “wise in their own eyes” (Isa. 5:21). Their “wisdom” led them to produce their own code of “ethics” whereby they began to call evil good and good evil. They put darkness for light, and light for darkness; and put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter (Isa. 5:20). They exalted human power to the “nth” degree. They were humanists. Their philosophy was “up with man and down with God.” Their confidence in human wisdom persuaded them to seek counsel from men rather than God. They visited familiar spirits and wizards who peeped and muttered instead of turning to the law and testimony of God (Isa. 8:19-20). They were a rebellious people, lying children, children that would not hear the law of the Lord. To stroke their own egos they searched for preachers who would prophesy smooth things rather than right things and deceit rather than truth (Isa. 30:9-13). The proud Babylonians consulted astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators (Isa. 47:13). In rebellion against God, His people turned to human armies for military protection. They trusted in the shadow of Egypt rather than in the strength of God (Isa. 30:1-2). For this, God pronounced a woe upon His people:

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together (Isa. 31:1,3).

Very early in Israel's history, even before they had an earthly king, God gave instructions concerning the conduct of these coming kings and where man's trust should be placed. Of the king, God decreed,

But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way (Deut. 17:16).

Israel ignored these instructions and forgot that "the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Instead they foolishly believed that they would somehow escape the "overflowing scourge" of God's punishment (Isa. 28:15). Contrariwise, God informed Israel that their "protection" was going to be like a man on a bed too short with a cover too narrow (Isa. 28:20). Their help from other nations would neither be long enough nor wide enough to provide for their needs.

God predicted that His fiery judgment would make it so that those who "are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay ("depend"-NKJV) upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Isa. 10:20). Accordingly, we should remember today that the hope of the world is not in the United Nations or foreign military alliances. Rather, our hope is in God. World peace will be achieved only by making peace with all men by the blood of the cross (Eph. 2:14-18). Let us never forget that "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (Psm. 118:8-9).

What Isaiah Teaches Us About God

Theology is the study of God. No study of the character and attributes of God would be complete without a thorough familiarity with the book of Isaiah. The sovereignty and holiness of God are primary features of the revelation of God in Isaiah. In the book, God’s power and glory are affirmed and exalted. He is described as “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). At the call of Isaiah the seraphims cried one unto another and said, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). Twenty-five times Isaiah refers to Jehovah as “the Holy One of Israel.” This phrase is used only six other times in the entire Old Testament.

Jehovah is further described in Isaiah as being “wonderful in counsel, excellent in working” (Isa. 28:29). He is full of glory and excellency (Isa. 35:2). He is the only God, the first and the last (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 45:5-6,14,21,22; 46:9; 48:12). He is incomparable (Isa. 40:18-28; 46:5). In fact, Isaiah demonstrates decisively that God is greater than the idols with which Israel and Judah were enamored. God’s superiority to idols is manifested, in part, by His ability to predict things to come, something that an inanimate graven image cannot do (Isa. 41:21-23; 48:5).

Speaking of the people’s idols, Jehovah said, “behold, they are all vanity; their works are nothing: their molten images are wind and confusion” (Isa. 41:29). Accordingly, “they shall greatly be ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods” (Isa. 42:17). The truth of the matter is that “they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image and pray unto a god that cannot save” (Isa. 45:20). The Lord refuses to give His glory unto

another, nor His praise to graven images (Isa. 42:8). They who make a graven image are vanity (Isa. 44:8-20). The sheer folly of trusting in idols is set forth by God in Isaiah 46:5-8:

To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors.

A passage from Paul's inspired pen describes the character of God and coincides precisely with Isaiah's revelation of the attributes of God and His dealings with man. To the Romans, Paul wrote:

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (Rom. 11:22).

The book of Isaiah affords us with a vivid picture of the goodness and severity of God.

The Severity Of God

Because God is holy, He must punish transgression against His will. Evidence of this truth is threaded throughout the entire book. After promising His people good if they would do good, God also warned:

But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it (Isa. 1:20).

He promised that the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed (Isa. 1:28). While it is true that God is love (I John 4:8), He is also a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). This imagery of consuming fire is prominent in Isaiah’s description of God’s wrath:

Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcases were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still (Isa. 5:24-25).

And again, we read, “Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother” (Isa. 9:19).

The writer of Hebrews speaks of how God’s judgment and fiery indignation would devour the adversaries (Heb. 10:27). This is exactly what happened again and again in the book of Isaiah. God predicted the downfall and judgment of His own covenant people (Isa. 5:5-30), and of the surrounding foreign nations (Isa. 13-23). In fact, one of the major themes of the entire book is God’s sovereignty over the nations in meting out

His judgments upon them. God often used foreign nations as tools to punish His own sinful people (Isa. 5:26-30; 7:18-20; 8:7-8; 9:11-12; 10:5-6). He has the power to muster the nations as His weapons of indignation to accomplish His judgment against sin (Isa. 13:4-5). In His sovereignty, He can use a nation as His rod of anger and then turn right around and punish that nation for its transgressions. This is precisely what He did with Assyria (Isa. 10:5-15; 14:24-27; 30:31-32; 31:8; 37:6-7) and Babylon (Isa. 13, 47). He possesses the power to break the scepter of the rulers and the staff of the wicked (Isa. 14:5).

And it doesn't matter which nation happens to be bearing the scepter. Before God the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. All nations are before Him as nothing. They are counted to Him as less than nothing, and vanity (Isa. 40:15,17). Though the nations rush against Him like the rushing of many waters, "God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off" (Isa. 17:13). The Lord is depicted as punishing the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity (Isa. 26:21). His power can make the earth empty, make it waste, turn it upside down, and scatter its inhabitants (Isa. 24:1). The Most High still rules in the kingdom of men today (Dan. 4:32).

The severity of God was often directed toward men and the nations who had exalted themselves in pride above God and His will. Twice in Isaiah 2, God promises that the lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of man bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day (Isa. 2:11, 17). As God is lifted up, the nations are scattered (Isa. 33:3). Accordingly, God could take a glorious nation like Moab

or Tyre and bring them to nought (Isa. 16:14; 23:8-9). The writer of Proverbs noted that “pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). And so it is in Isaiah. To the proud and arrogant Babylon, Jehovah declared,

And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible...And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 13:11,19).

Further denouncement against Babylon is recorded in a passage which is often misinterpreted as a reference to Satan. To the proud nation of Babylon, God said:

Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit (Isa. 14:11-15).

Indeed, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

Though it is not pleasant to think of this aspect of God's character, we cannot and must not ignore it. Neither should we ignore the purpose of God's severity.

The book of Isaiah clearly demonstrates that the purpose of God's severity was not only to punish but to purge. For example, God promised that "the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean" (Isa. 17:4). And what would be the result of this punishment? Verse 7 provides the answer: "At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel." Oftentimes, the wrath of God precipitates self-examination on the part of man and a greater reverence for God. God's judgment against Egypt would mean:

...the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them (Isa. 19:21-22).

Truly, when God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (Isa. 26:9). People will often pour out a prayer when the chastening of God is upon them (Isa. 26:16). God said to Judah,

Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction (Isa. 48:10).

He purged the iniquity of Jacob by making the stones of the altar as chalkstones beaten asunder (Isa. 27:9). We may not understand everything about how and when God chastens, but we know that in His sovereignty, He often exhibits His severity (Heb. 12:5-10). The book of Isaiah tells us so.

The Goodness Of God

Isaiah's picture of God is not lopsided. He doesn't present God as merely a mean and angry tyrant. The book is replete with evidence of the goodness of God. In His goodness He nourished and brought up Israel as a father would bring up a child (Isa. 1:2). Despite the rebellion of the people, God is always depicted as eager to redeem and gracious to forgive (Isa. 1:16-19, 26-27; 6:6-7; 43:25; 44:22). He is anxious to save (Isa. 48:18-20). His goodness toward Israel is manifested in the parable of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1-4).

Perhaps the greatest exhibition of God's goodness is seen in His faithfulness to preserve a remnant of His people. The importance of this preservation should not be underestimated. God had promised that He, by the seed of woman, by the descendants of Abraham, would bring forth the Messiah to bless all families of the earth (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4; Gen. 12:1-3; Matt. 1:1-17; Gal. 3:28-28). If God had allowed the Jews to be exterminated, His promise would have surely failed. But thankfully, “he is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). Every time that God preserved a righteous remnant of His people, He was preserving His promise that the scepter would not depart from Judah (Gen. 49:10). Examples of such preservation abound in the book of Isaiah.

God told Isaiah that the cities of His people would be wasted without inhabitants, that the houses would be empty and the land desolate. He promised to remove men far away from the land. Yet, God also said,

But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when

they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall
be the substance thereof (Isa. 6:13).

Even after pledging to allow foreign nations to carry away His people captive, God qualified this punishment by predicting that a remnant would return. A root of Jesse would remain. God would recover the remnant by assembling the outcasts of Israel and gathering together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. He would prepare a highway for the remnant of His people. And why? In order that Messiah's kingdom would be established (Isa. 11:10–12:6).

One of the greatest examples of God preserving His people involved the Assyrians. The Lord promised to “defend Jerusalem, deliver it and preserve it” (Isa. 31:5). When the Assyrian armies came and ravaged the cities surrounding Jerusalem, things looked mighty bleak. Thousands and thousands of Assyrian soldiers surrounded Jerusalem threatening to extinguish Judah. The Assyrian, Rabshakeh, stood outside the city and taunted the people. Sennacherib boasted that he had Judah shut up like a bird in a cage. Would the Assyrians destroy and annihilate Judah? Absolutely not. God was going to be faithful to His promise to preserve the seed through which His Son would come. In fact, God announced that a remnant of the house of Judah would escape and that not one Assyrian arrow would be fired within the city. Hence, God intervened and commissioned the angel of the Lord to smite and kill 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Thus, God's severity against the Assyrians was simultaneous with His goodness toward His people (Isa. 36–38). God's chosen seed survived (Isa. 41:8-20). God promised that He would not forget His chosen nation (Isa. 44:21). He had carried them from the womb and

would carry them to old age (Isa. 46:3-4). Judah would return from Babylonian captivity and the Messiah, God’s Servant would surely come and establish the kingdom (Isa. 49:5; 51:16; 54:1-17).

Conclusion

The interaction between God and man revealed in the book of Isaiah can be summarized as follows. Man rebelled against God, ignored the blessings he had received from God and exalted himself above God. God meted out severe and sovereign punishment against humanity for these transgressions in order that He might purge their sins. Yet, in His grace and goodness, God forgave His penitent people, preserved His people and prepared unmerited blessings for His people.

The situation between man and God depicted in the book of Isaiah is not all that different from the situation between man and God today. Man today forgets God and rebels against Him in stubborn pride. Accordingly, a severe God has promised punishment for such while at the same time lovingly extending the hope of forgiveness and eternal blessings. The word of Isaiah still cries out to man today. “Turn unto him from whom ye have deeply revolted” (Isa. 31:6).

Endnotes

1 William A. Vangemeren, **Interpreting The Prophetic Word** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 260.

2 George L. Robinson, **The Book of Isaiah**, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) 14.

3 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary On Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 14.

Chapter 3

Introduction To Jeremiah

Glenn A. Jobe

The second book of the major prophets in our English Bible is named for its principal character and author, Jeremiah, also known as the "weeping prophet." Jeremiah prophesied against Judah during the last forty years of the kingdom's existence prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B. C. and the 70 years of Babylonian captivity which followed. Thus, the book relates events from the time of righteous King Josiah's reign until the deportation of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.

The Title And Prophet

Jeremiah, whose name means "Jehovah establishes," was born (c. 652-648 B. C.) into the priestly family of Hilkiah, who is not to be confused with Hilkiah the high priest in Jerusalem who is associated with the discovery of the law in the Temple during the early days of King Josiah (II Kings 22:23).¹

Anathoth, the birthplace of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1), was a walled town belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, only three miles northeast of Jerusalem.² Since Anathoth was also the home of Abiathar, who served as priest under David (I Kings 2:26), there is a strong possibility that Jeremiah was a descendant of Abiathar. Based upon

the statement of Jeremiah 11:21-23, most scholars believe that Anathoth remained as his home for most of his life.

Archer calculates that Jeremiah began his work at the age of about twenty years³ in the days of Josiah and continued to the fall of Jerusalem following the days of Zedekiah. It seems that Jeremiah neither expected nor desired the task for which God called him. He protested that he was too young for the prophetic office (Jer. 1:6). However, there is no definitive way to know how old he was; estimates range from fourteen years to twenty years of age.

The time of his work is easily calculated from the text: (1) He was called to the prophetic work during the thirteenth year of Josiah (Jer. 1:2, 3; or 626 B. C.) and (2) during the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (605 B. C.) he states that he had been active for twenty-three years (Jer. 25:1-13).

As is so often the case with other prophets (especially with Christ), early public opposition to his work was led by the priests and prophets which eventually threatened his life. God warned him that this kind of opposition would arise and promised him divine protection:

For, behold, I have made thee this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priest thereof, and against the people of the land (Jer. 1:18).

The Nature Of Jeremiah's Work

The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had fallen to Assyria some one hundred years earlier, and the

Southern Kingdom (Judah) seemingly learned little if anything from it. This was a dark period of the nation, lasting some forty years. One hundred years before Jeremiah began his work Isaiah effected the miraculous intervention of God by frustrating the Assyrians in the invasion of Jerusalem. Jeremiah's work was God's final effort to save Jerusalem from Babylon, but failed.

Halley summarizes the tumultuous days of Jeremiah's work:

Jeremiah was called to the prophetic office (626 B. C.), Jerusalem was partly destroyed (606); further devastated (597); finally burned and desolated (586). Jeremiah lived through these terrible forty years, "the close of the monarch," "the death agony of the nation"; a pathetic, lonely figure, God's last measure to the Holy City which had become hopelessly and fanatically attached to Idols; carelessly crying that if they would repent God would save them from Babylon.⁴

Though Jeremiah could not spare Jerusalem from Babylon, one must not assume that Jeremiah failed as a prophet. Whenever God's spokesman faithfully and uncompromisingly proclaims the Word of God, he is successful regardless of people's reception to the message. Jeremiah was highly regarded by Jews in the years that followed. When the Lord asked His disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" some answered, "Jeremiah" (Matt. 16:14).

Historical Setting

Upon the death of his father Amon, righteous king Josiah assumed the throne in 639 B. C. at the young age of eight years. Thirteen years later (626 B. C.), God

called Jeremiah to prophetic service. Soon after Jeremiah began his work, Josiah initiated repairs to the Temple at which time the high priest found “the book of the law” (II Kings 22:8; 622 B. C.). The king was greatly shocked by what he read, and when the prophetess Huldah confirmed its message of doom (II Kings 22:14-20), Josiah called for a national assembly to renew the covenant that it contained. He purged the land of idolatry (II Kings 23:4-20) and reinstated the Passover feast (II Kings 23:21-23).

Inspiration pays tribute to the life and reforms of Josiah:

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him (II Kings 23:25).

But after 31 years on the throne (II Kings 22:1) Josiah was killed by Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt (608 B. C.). Jehoahaz followed but reigned only three months before he was deposed by Necho and replaced by Jehoiakim, brother of Jehoahaz.

During the reign of Jehoiakim (608-597 B. C.) Babylon became the dominant nation. In 597 B. C. Jehoiachin (Jeconiah or Coniah) assumed the throne but lasted only three months before being carried to Babylon. The last Judean king, Zedekiah (598-587 B. C.), was taken captive to Babylon where he died (II Kings 24, 25).

After the destruction of Jerusalem, leaders in Judah included Gedeliah (587 B. C.), who after he was made governor by Nebuchadnezzar, was killed by Ishmael (41:1-2). Johanan, who had warned Gedeliah of Ishmael’s

treachery, rescued those captured by Ishmael and fled to Egypt, taking with him Jeremiah. II Kings 22-25 and II Chronicles 34-36 chronicles this era of Jeremiah's ministry.

Other prophets who were contemporary with Jeremiah undoubtedly included Habakkuk and Huldah the prophetess. Zephaniah and Nahum probably preceded Jeremiah while Daniel and Ezekiel immediately followed him.

Authorship

Higher Criticism has disputed whether Jeremiah authored the book which bears his name. However, there appears to be sufficient internal evidence within the book to support the claim of the first verse of the book: "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin." Questions mainly arise after chapter 25 as to who wrote or edited the last 26 chapters of the book.

Though the Bible student can be confident that he holds in his hands the words of Jeremiah as given to him by God, there is little doubt that Jeremiah's trusted scribe, Baruch, is responsible for the scroll that we know as the book of Jeremiah. The volume we have is at least a third revision of the scroll that Jehoiakim cut up and burned (Jer. 36:23).

Development Of The Jeremiah Roll

Any study of the development of the Jeremiah roll must begin with chapter 36,⁵ for in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (604 B. C.) Jeremiah received instruction from Jehovah to commit to writing his prophecies from the time of Josiah until that day (Jer. 36:1-3). Jeremiah was already 23 years into his career. Being unable to freely

speak to the people (Jer. 36:5), Jeremiah was to commit his prophecies to writing so that Baruch, his able scribe, might “read in the roll ... the words of Jehovah in the ears of the people in Jehovah’s house upon the fast-day; and also ... read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities” (36:6). Accordingly, Jeremiah dictated to Baruch his words who “wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Jehovah, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book” (Jer. 36:4).

Smith rightly concludes that chapter 36 is instructive from several standpoints:

First, it throws considerable light upon the history of the Book of Jeremiah. The scroll produced at the dictation of Jeremiah was the first edition of the book. That book was destined to undergo two and possibly three subsequent editions before it finally reached the form in which it is found in the English Bible today. Secondly, this chapter provides a wealth of information about the mechanics of producing a Biblical book. Involved in the process were a roll-book, pen, ink, the selection of a scribe, and the actual dictation. It is not unlikely that the procedures followed here were followed in the case of many other books of the Old Testament.⁶

In the following year the contents of the roll were read before the people, the princes, and finally before king Jehoiakim who seized the roll, cut it with his penknife, and cast it into the fire (Jer. 36:20-23). It should be noted that these things were read from the scroll that Jeremiah had prepared so that,

... the house of Judah will HEAR all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they

may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin (Jer. 36:3).

That which Baruch “wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Jehovah” (Jer. 36:4) was as much the Word of God as the words that Jehovah placed in Jeremiah’s mouth (1:9)!

Sometime later Jeremiah dictated again the words in the roll which had been destroyed by Jehoiakim, and there were added unto them “many like words” (36:32). The phrase “added ... many like words” presents a problem also. Wood raises an excellent question, “If it could be discovered which prophecies were in the rewritten roll, would it be possible to separate the original from the ‘many like words?’”⁷ Driver concludes:

Thus, as regards the prophecies belonging to the first twenty-three years of Jeremiah’s ministry, there must always be some uncertainty as to what portions strictly reproduce the original discourses, and what portions belong to the additions made by the prophet in the fifth year of Jehoiakim. It is, however, not unreasonable to suppose that among these additions are included some of the more definite and distinct denunciations of the nation’s sin and of the coming judgment.⁸

Although the exact contents of these rolls remain unknown, these dictations may be considered the first stage in the development of the book.

The second stage⁹ consisted of the collecting of prophecies which were uttered subsequent to the fifth year of Jehoiakim. The few narratives of the prophet’s experiences and activities are in the first person¹⁰ until the introduction of Baruch, the scribe (chapter 36).¹¹ Yet,

chapter 26-45 contains much biographical material on Jeremiah and are written in the third person.

This has led many scholars to conclude that Baruch was responsible for a third, and possibly final edition of the book following the prophet’s death. For example, Schultz comments:

Intimately associated with Jeremiah, Baruch faithfully recorded the messages and the events as long as Jeremiah lived, and then may have completed and arranged the final edition subsequent to the prophet’s death.¹²

Problems With The Text

Scholars have noted that the Greek text as reflected in the Septuagint and the Hebrew text as found in the Masoretic text vary both in length and arrangement. This has led some to conclude the Hebrew text reflects the final edition of Jeremiah’s book by Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe. According to this theory, Baruch changed the arrangement and made additions after the prophet’s death. Thus, the Greek text, which is shorter, is considered by these scholars to be the original text or an earlier edition by Baruch.¹³

Our English translations follow mostly the Hebrew text, particularly the Masoretic text. However, the Septuagint translation (c. 250 B. C.) and the Masoretic text differ from one another in a way unparalleled elsewhere in the Old Testament.¹⁴ In many places the translation adheres with tolerable fidelity to the Hebrew. But in some places there are such startling differences that some scholars have been induced to inquire as to which is to be followed.

That the differences have existed for a long time is

evidenced by a quotation from Origen's epistle to Africanus. Concerning the problem he remarks,

In Jeremiah I noticed among many instances, and indeed in that book I found much transposition and variation in the reading of the prophecies.¹⁵

Scholars have noted that in a comparison of the two texts, there are two main differences which meet the eye. In the Septuagint, as compared with the Hebrew, there are a few additions but an immense number of trifling omissions besides, some of more importance. About one-eighth of the Hebrew text is lacking in the Septuagint. There is also a certain amount of alteration of passages, affecting the sense.¹⁶ The other variation between the texts is in the arrangement of the prophecies against the foreign nations. In the Hebrew the prophecies appear near the end of the book, but in the Septuagint they stand after 25:13 and thus before the section of kindred subject matter which begins the next verse. Also their order of sequence among themselves differs.

Wood summarizes these divergent features into five general classes: (1) Omission of letters, words, phrases, verses, and paragraphs, (2) Additions of letters, words, phrases, and sentences, (3) Transposition of letters, words, verses, and chapters, (4) Alteration of mood, tense, gender, person, number, and case, (5) Substitution of parts of speech, rhetorical expressions, syntactical forms and proper names.¹⁷

Problems Of Chronology

Bright suggests that Jeremiah is characteristic of many prophetic books in that they are not to be

considered literary productions of an author or authors (as is true of the gospel accounts; GAJ), but are rather a collection of prophetic sayings.¹⁸ In other words, the book of Jeremiah is not so written with a single goal for the entire book, but each of the prophetic sayings has a purpose and conclusion all its own. Thus, Jeremiah is a collection of prophetic sayings at different times and for various purposes. This makes the work a collection of shorter books.

The problem with the composition is that the book seems to be a hopeless “jigsaw puzzle” of prophetic discourses, biographical material, and historical narrative arranged without much, if any, plan of chronological sequence. For example, chapters 21 and 24 are designated as during the reign of Zedekiah (597-586 B. C.). But chapter 25, though appearing later in the text, is dated “in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah” (608-597 B. C.). Chapters 27 and 28 belong to Zedekiah’s reign, but chapters 35 and 36 bring the reader back to the time of Jehoiakim. The latter chapter goes as far back as the fourth year of that king.

Biographical materials relating to Jeremiah’s life is no less confusing. Pfeiffer designates chapters 26-45 as the “Biography of Jeremiah”¹⁹ but chapter 45 relates events that occurred at least twenty-one years earlier than the immediately preceding chapter. The Jewish captives carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar are addressed in words of comfort (chapter 29) several chapters earlier than the announcement made to Jehoiakim that the event is imminent (chapter 36). It is not strange, therefore, that one scholar calls the book a “conglomeration of prophecies,” and another designates it “the most unreadable book in the Bible.”²⁰

Outline of Jeremiah

It should be noted that our English Bible does not follow a consistent chronological order. As already mentioned, the order and the length of the book differ in the LXX and MT.²¹ This may account for the book's apparent lack of chronological sequence.²² For this reason the following outline is offered in an attempt to reorganize the book in chronological sequence.²³

I. Prophecies During The Reign Of Josiah

A. Prophecies before the Reformation of 621 B. C.²⁴

These are prophecies and events occurring before the discovery of "a book of the law" by Hilkiyah the high priest while the temple was under renovation.

1. The Call of Jeremiah (1:1-19)
2. The Call to National Repentance (2:1-4:4). At one time Judah had been faithful (2:1-3) but had become unfaithful (2:4-19) and calloused. Thus, she must receive divine retribution (2:20-3:5). Judah's Infidelity (3:6-25).²⁵
3. The Foe from the North (4:5-6:30)

B. Prophecies Immediately Subsequent to the Reformation of 621 B. C. This section is dated just after the reform of king Josiah in 621 B. C., the crucial year when a lost law book was discovered in the Temple.

1. The Proclamation of the Covenant (11:1-8)
2. The Sabbath Day Discourse (17:19-27)
3. The Plot Against the Prophet (11:18-12:6)

C. Prophecies Related to the Last Days of Josiah.

These orations have to do with Judah's persistent apostasy even up to the time that righteous king Josiah dies at Megiddo (609 B. C.) and the short

reign of Jehoahaz who assumed the throne after Josiah. Jehoahaz reigns only three months before he is deported by Pharaoh Necho to Egypt (cf. II Kings 23:30-34).

1. The Perils of Legalism (8:4-13)
2. The National Collapse after Megiddo (8:14–9:1)
3. The Lament for Jehoahaz (22:10-12)

II. Prophecies During The Reign Of Jehoiakim

- A. Prophecies before the Battle of Carchemish.
Pharaoh Necho places Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, on the throne after he deports Jehoahaz in 609 B. C. God sends Jeremiah to the house of Jehoiakim to issue warning against the royal house, but pride and covetousness leads the monarch to reject divine counsel. Jeremiah delivers the temple sermon in which he speaks of (1) presumptuous worship (7:1-15); (2) pagan worship (7:16-20); (3) priorities in worship (7:21-28); and (4) polluted worship (7:29–8:3).²⁶ Because of his oration, Jeremiah is arrested (26:1-10), tried (26:11-23), and is delivered from death (26:24). Upon his release Jeremiah relates the parable of the Potter, the sermon from the broken bottle and the linen girdle and shattered jar, all of which are vain efforts to admonish the wicked to mend his ways and the impending doom upon the city of Jerusalem.
1. The Warning to Jehoiakim (22:1-9, 13-23)
 2. The Temple Section (7:1–8:3; 26:1-24)
 3. The Parable of the Potter (18:1-23)
 - a. The visit to the potter (18:1-10)
 - b. The conditional nature of prophecy (18:11-

- 12)
 - c. The judgment upon an unrepentant people (18:13-23)
 - 4. The Sermon from the Broken Bottle (19:1–20:18)
 - a. The threat of punishment (19:1-13)
 - b. The prophet in stocks (19:14–20:6)
 - c. The lament of the prophet (20:7-20)
 - 5. The Linen Girdle and the Shattered Jar (13:1-17)
 - a. The sermon from the girdle (13:1-11)
 - b. The sermon from the shattered jar (13:12-17)
- B. Prophecies after the Battle of Carchemish.
- Nebuchadnezzar won a great victory over Pharaoh Necho in 605 B. C. (cf. Jer. 46:2; II Chron. 35:20). Jeremiah has now completed twenty-three years of his preaching career. The fall of Pharaoh Necho and the Egyptians should have impressed Judah that her enemy from the North (Babylon) was on the way to conquer her. God says “my servant” (Nebuchadnezzar; 25:9) will destroy Judah and take her into 70 years of Babylonian captivity (25:1-11). Other nations of the world will come into judgment (25:12-38). It is at this time that God commands Jeremiah to commit his prophecies to writing.
- 1. The Fate of Judah and the Nations (25:1-38)
 - 2. The Dictation of the Roll and a Message to Baruch (36:1-32; 45:1-5)
 - 3. The Fidelity of the Rechabites (35:1-19)
 - 4. The Message on the Drought (14:1–15:9)
 - 5. The Prayer of the Persecuted Prophet (15:10-21)
 - 6. The Inevitable Doom for Sinful Judah (16:1–17:8)
 - 7. The Prophet’s Appeal for Deliverance (17:9-18)

- C. Undatable Prophecies During Jehoiakim's Reign.
These are miscellaneous prophecies during the eleven year reign of wicked king Jehoiakim (607-597 B. C.).
1. The Wrath of Jehovah upon a Sinful People (9:2-26; 10:17-25). It is interesting to compare the relationship of 9:23-26 to 9:2-22 and 10:17-25 to 9:2-22.
 2. The Conspiracy of Judah against Yahweh (11:9-17)
 3. The Devastation of Judah by Hostile Neighbors (12:7-17)

III. Jehoiachin – And After

- A. Prophecies from the Accession of Jehoiachin to the Beginning of the Siege of Jerusalem.
1. The Prophecy against Jehoiachin (22:24-30)
 2. The Dirge on the Approaching Doom (13:18-27)
 3. The Two Baskets of Figs (24:1-10)
 4. The Letter to the Exiles (29:1-32)
 5. The Necessity of Submission to Babylon (27:1-28:17)
 6. The Discourse against the False prophets (23:9-40)
 7. The Oracle Concerning Zedekiah (23:1-8)
 8. The Message against Idolatry (10:1-16)
- B. Prophecies During the Siege of Jerusalem
1. The Prediction of the Fall of Jerusalem (21:1-14). Compare the relationship of 21:1-10 to 37:3-10.
 2. The Message to Zedekiah during the Siege (34:1-7). Compare 34:1-7 with 32:1-5.
 3. The Message to Zedekiah during the Tempor-

- ary Lifting of the Siege (37:1-10)
 4. The Rebuke to Judah Concerning the Hebrew Servants (34:8-22)
 5. The Arrest of Jeremiah (37:11-21)
 6. The Prison Life of Jeremiah (38:1-28)
 7. The Promise to Ebed-melech (39:15-18)
 8. The Prophecies of Hope from the Court of the Guard (32:1-33:25)
- C. Prophecies Subsequent to the Fall of Jerusalem
1. The Fall of Jerusalem and the Fate of Zedekiah and Jeremiah (39:1-14).
 2. The Remnant in Judah and the Murder of Gedaliah (40:1-41:18)
 3. The Future of Israel and the New Covenant (30:1-31:40)
 4. The Flight of the Remnant and the Prophecy against Egypt (42:1-44:30)

IV. Miscellaneous Prophecies Of Nations And Cities (46:1-51:64)

1. Egypt (46:1-28). Nebuchadnezzar will crush Pharaoh-necho at Carchemish (46:1-12). Nebuchadnezzar will ravage Memphis and Thebes (46:13-26). Judah and Israel will be chastened; the enemy powers will be destroyed.
2. Philistia (47:1-7). Tyre and Sidon were in league with her. All will be crushed by Nebuchadnezzar.
3. Moab (48:1-47). Moab helped Nebuchadnezzar against Judah, but later was devastated at his hands (582 B. C.).
4. Ammonites will be disciplined (49:1-39).
5. Edom likewise will be disciplined (49:7:22).

See the book of Obadiah.

6. Damascus will fall (49:23-27).
7. Kedar (Arabia) and Hazor will fall (49:28-33).
8. Babylon (50:1–51:64). The great empire will become an uninhabited waste, and the Jews are depicted as returning home (50:1-46). Babylon will be destroyed by the Medes (51:1-64).

V. Historical Appendix (52:1-34)

- A. Summary of Zedekiah’s Reign (52:1-3)
- B. Summary of the Siege and Fall of Jerusalem (52:4-27)
- C. Summary of the Number Deported to Babylon (52:28-30)
- D. Summary of the Honor Given Jehoiachin (52:31-34).

Conclusion

The evidence indicates that all of the prophecies and biographical accounts in chapters 1 through 45 are genuine. The discourses came from Jeremiah, and the narratives concerning events in his life are authentic records of actual facts. This does not mean that editorial work has not taken place. The many differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text demand the conclusion that there were at least two recensions of the book of Jeremiah. Conservative scholars, in the past, were not willing to admit this, but the evidence is irrefutable.

In the view of this present author, this position is most consistent with the book and with what God commissioned Jeremiah to do:

1. God did not tell Jeremiah to write a book, but to record these sayings in a book.

2. The book of Jeremiah is a compilation of various rolls. Each of these rolls existed separately and circulated independently. Each had logical, and perhaps chronological, arrangement within itself. When they were brought together to form the Book of Jeremiah there was no attempt to synchronize the individual rolls.

3. Jeremiah commissioned Baruch to write the initial roll (36:4) which was read to king Jehoiakim. When the king destroyed that scroll, Jeremiah again dictated to Baruch another scroll that included “many like words” (36:32).

4. Though written in the third person, chapters 26-45 contain much biographical material on Jeremiah. Jeremiah instructed his faithful scribe, Baruch that he would serve Jeremiah at personal sacrifice (45:1-5). Baruch knew the intimate details of Jeremiah’s life and work.

5. Finally when Jerusalem fell in 586 B. C. Nebuchadnezzar permitted Baruch to accompany Jeremiah to Egypt. Baruch may have done further editorial work on the rolls after the death of Jeremiah.

Endnotes

1 S.J. Schultz, “Jeremiah (the Prophet),” **The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible**, Vol. III, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 437.

2 Unger, Merrill F, “Anathoth,” **Unger’s Bible Dictionary**, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1966), p. 51.

3 Gleason L. Archer, Jr. **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction** (Chicago, Moody Press, 1964), p. 348.

4 Henry H. Halley, **Halley’s Bible Handbook**. Twenty-fourth edition (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 307.

5 See E. Sullin who says that chapter 36 is the “key to

the analysis of the prophet's work" (**Introduction to the Old Testament** [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923], p. 149).

6 James E. Smith, **Jeremiah and Lamentations** (Bible Study Textbook Series) (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1972), pp. 595-96.

7 Fred M. Wood, **A Chronological Reconstruction of the Life and Prophecies of Jeremiah** (unpublished doctoral thesis) (Louisville, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948), p. xxiii.

8 S. R. Driver, **An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), pp. 234-235.

9 Some consider this a third stage by separating the scroll developed by Jehoiakim from the rewritten one. But since the present discussion is the development of the book of Jeremiah in our English Bible, the destroyed scroll plays no part in the development of the book.

10 See Jeremiah 1:1-19; 11:1-8; 11:18-12:6; 13:1-17; 18:1-12.

11 Although Baruch's name first appears in 32:12-16, the chronological arrangement of the book places the events of 36:1-4 before 32:12-16 as will be demonstrated shortly.

12 Schultz, "Jeremiah," **Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible**, p. 441.

13 Ibid., p. 441.

14 Sellin, **Introduction to the Old Testament**, pp. 151-52.

15 "Origen to Africanus," in **Ante-Nicene Fathers**, IV (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 387.

16 A. W. Streane, "Jeremiah and Lamentations," **Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges**, Vol. 23 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1913), p. xxxviii.

17 Wood, **A Chronological Reconstruction of the Life and Prophecies of Jeremiah**, p. xxiii.

18 John Bright, **The Anchor Bible: Jeremiah** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1965), pp. 1vi-1vii.

19 R. H. Pfeiffer, **Introduction to the Old Testament** (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 484.

20 Raymond Calkins, **Jeremiah the Prophet** (New

York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. xv.

21 **The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible** (Vol. III, p. 441) compares the order of the text in these two texts: LXX MT

1:1-25:1	1:1-25:2
25:14-20	49:34-39
26:1-28	46
27	50
28	51
29	47
30	49
31	48
32-51	25:13-45:5

22 Conservative scholars who do hold that Baruch gathered and edited Jeremiah's prophecies include Edward J. Young, **An Introduction to the Old Testament** (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1964), p. 229 and Gleason L. Archer, Jr. **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), pp. 349-50.

23 The author is heavily indebted to Fred M. Wood, who has meticulously restructured chronologically the events in Jeremiah. The major points of the outline presented here are reproduced from the Table of Contents of his doctoral thesis. The author has found this outline very useful and recommends that the book of Jeremiah be studied in this way.

24 Smith comments: "Nearly all commentators are agreed that the messages in chapters 2-6 should be assigned to the reign of king Josiah. A reference to that king appears in 3:6. Certain verses seem to point to the period of Josiah's reformation which fell between the years 627 and 621 B. C." (**Jeremiah and Lamentations**, p. 145).

25 Scholars are not sure of the chronological positioning of 3:6-18. The **Pulpit Commentary** points out that some scholars place verses 6-18 at the beginning of chapter three. See H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exel, ed., **The Pulpit Commentary. Vol. 11: Jeremiah, Lamentations** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1919), p. 49.

26 Smith, **Jeremiah and Lamentations**, p. 222.

Chapter 4

Major Lessons From Jeremiah

Garland Elkins

Doubtlessly the prophet Jeremiah was one of the greatest men ever to live. After Jesus had withdrawn with His disciples into the lonely region of Caesarea-Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” (Matt. 16:13). The disciples answered Him, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elijah and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14). Jeremiah, like our Lord, exhibited tenderness, solitariness, sorrow, compassion, and great love for God and man. Like our Lord, Jeremiah was “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). Jeremiah is in many ways the saddest, loneliest, and grandest man in the Bible. In this category he ranks even in the company of Job, Paul and other great men of both the Old and New Testaments.

Some nations produce their greatest men at the beginning of their history, or at the end of their history. Jeremiah is the prophet of Israel’s sunset. We see him stand like an iron pillar amid the smoke and flames and darkness of Jerusalem’s overthrow and destruction.

The span of Jeremiah’s life covers one of the most dramatic, turbulent, and catastrophic periods of history.

He was called in early manhood at his home in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1,2) to speak the word of God to Judah and Jerusalem. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah and through the reign of Zedekiah. He prophesied for approximately forty-one years. In 608 BC, the good king Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Necho. In 606 BC, Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar subjugated Egypt. In 587 BC, the temple was destroyed, and afterward the people were carried into Babylonian captivity. In almost a quarter of a century, the empires of Assyria and Egypt were destroyed; a new world empire, Babylon, rose to power, and Jerusalem was burned, and the citizens of Jerusalem were carried into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar treated Jeremiah kindly and allowed him to choose to go to Babylon or to stay among those of his people that were allowed to remain in the land of Judah. Jeremiah elected to remain at Jerusalem with the governor, Gedaliah, who was set up by Babylon. However, when the governor was murdered, the fugitives forced Jeremiah to go down to Egypt with them, where he delivered his last predictions at Tahpanhes, and though we cannot be certain about it, tradition says there he was stoned to death.

Jeremiah, A Great Man Of Courage And Fidelity

Jeremiah was a man of great courage. It fell the lot of Jeremiah to speak a message of judgment upon the people of God for their wicked ways, their sins, and apostasies, and to declare and predict the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. That was why Jeremiah was the saddest and loneliest of men. He was in a terrible

predicament; he deeply loved his city and his people; yet God commanded him to foretell the utter and absolute overthrow of Jerusalem in Babylon, and the captivity as a judgment upon the people of Jerusalem and Judah for their sins. When one considers this situation, it is not difficult to understand why he suffered so much in his spirit. Doubtlessly no national prophet and leader has had so hard and difficult a message. Like Job he lamented the day that he was born, and yet he never wavered in his loyalty to God and His word. On one occasion Jeremiah thought that he would cease to speak as God’s prophet, but found that it was impossible.

Then I said, I will not make mention of him,
nor speak any more in his name. But his word
was in mine heart as a fire shut up in my
bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and
I could not stay (Jer. 20:9).

Jeremiah was a man of compassion and tenderness. It is a paradox that the stern message of judgment, woe, and captivity, which was declared by Jeremiah, was by a man whose heart was tender and whose feelings were stirred within him. It was his deep love and compassion for his people that made him cry out,

O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place
of way-faring men that I might leave my people
and go from them (9:1).

Jeremiah truly identified himself with the fate of Jerusalem:

It is nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold,
and see if there be any sorrow like unto my
sorrow (Lam. 1:12).

As Christ wept over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37) while he pronounced her destruction, so Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem as he spake the words of her doom. As Christians we should feel the sorrow and pathos of our nation due to her departing from the Lord. Especially should we feel the sorrow and pathos of a soul sinning against its Creator, and denying its Redeemer, as many souls are presently doing! Jeremiah was a man of great faith in God, and in what God would do for His people in the future. Shortly before the Reformer Savonarola was burned at the stake, he said,

If you ask me in general as to the issue of this trouble, I reply victory. If you ask me in a particular sense, I reply, death; for the master who wields the hammer, when he has used it throws it away. So he did with Jeremiah, whom he caused to be stoned at the end of his ministry. But Rome will not put out this fire; and if this be put out, God will light another.

Time and space will not permit us to pay our respects to even a high percentage of all the great lessons that we can learn from Jeremiah. However, we call attention to some of the great lessons that we can learn from the great prophet Jeremiah. He not only spake with word but often also in word **and** sign. Likewise Jeremiah, while predicting the coming overthrow and destruction of Jerusalem, projects himself into the future, and with a prophetic eye predicts that God's purposes are not ended.

This faith in the future reaches its climax in his prediction of the New Covenant, He wrote,

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of

Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be my covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

Thus, in this great prediction, Jeremiah, the prophet of doom, becomes the prophet of hope.

The New Covenant was made by Christ and sealed with His blood. “This cup,” He said, on the same night in which He was betrayed, “is my blood of the new Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). So significant is His New Covenant, that all God promises to do for the world, all that He promises to do for the salvation of our souls, is based upon the ground of that New Covenant that He made with the human race in Christ Jesus our Lord. The New Covenant is the means by which our Lord extends the forgiveness of our sins, the joy of fellowship with Christ, and the gift of eternal life. These and all other spiritual blessings are available only to those who are obedient to Christ (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8,9).

There are so many major lessons to be learned from

Jeremiah, our major problem in this lecture is to determine what we can leave out. Obviously, time and space will severely limit the lessons that we can discuss. Following are a few of the multitudinous lessons from the great book of Jeremiah, and from the life of the great prophet Jeremiah.

God's Word Is Inspired

In the first chapter of Jeremiah we learn that God put His word in Jeremiah's mouth:

Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in my mouth (Jer. 1:9).

Jeremiah makes it clear that no man is wise who rejects the word of the Lord.

The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord: and what wisdom is in them? (Jer. 8:9).

Many in our day disdain the Bible, God's body, and inspired word. We learn from II Peter 1:21 that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Christ promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). Therefore, the God breathed the scriptures were written to furnish us completely (II Tim. 3:16,17). They provide us with "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (II Pet. 1:3). Paul makes it very clear that the words that he wrote were provided by the Holy Spirit, and therefore the message was not the word of man, but rather of God! He wrote:

Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the

Lord teacheth: combining spiritual things with spiritual words (I Cor. 2:13).

And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe (I Thess. 2:13).

The Bible is verbally inspired. This means that the words of the Bible are God’s words, but God’s thoughts in the words of men. God told Jeremiah, “I have put my word in thy mouth” (Jer. 1:9). David said, “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (II Sam. 23:2).

The plenary inspiration of the Bible means that it is all inspired and God breathed in all its parts. Jesus quoted a passage from Psalms and then stated, “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Jesus also said that “Man shall live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). The world will pass away but the words of the Lord will not pass away. We learn from Romans 9:17 that God is speaking when we are taught the scriptures. Jeremiah wrote, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them” and “thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16). The “Word of our God shall stand forever” (Isa. 40:8). May we always speak as the “oracles of God” (I Pet. 4:11), and may we never add to, nor diminish anything from, God’s word (Prov. 30:5,6; Rev. 22:18,19; II John 9-11).

**From Jeremiah We Learn The
Sanctity Of Human Life**
God said to Jeremiah,

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations (Jer. 1:5).

Life exists before the birth of the child, and therefore, abortion is murder. When Mary entered into the house of Elizabeth and saluted her it is said of John the Baptist, "And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb" (Luke 1:41).

And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? For behold, when the voice of thy salutation came into mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy (Luke 1:43,44).

Both Jeremiah and John were human beings before they were born, and not merely "a blob of flesh" as some of the abortionists would say. Yet David wrote,

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy words; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them (Psm. 139:13-16).

Hitler caused the death of about six million Jews, and the world is still talking about it, and yet, the abortionists have killed more than thirty million babes in America in the last thirty years, and multitudes in

our nation defend such ungodly actions, i.e., murders. The writer of Proverbs wrote by inspiration that, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). **America is no exception to this rule!**

From A Study Of Jeremiah, We Learn That God’s People Often Are Ungrateful To God For His Great Blessings Upon Them

God said,

And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked not after things that do not profit (Jer. 2:7,8).

We Need To Read The Book Of Jeremiah And Be Warned Of The Danger Of Apostasy

Jeremiah underscores the fact that a child of God can fall from grace. He wrote, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (Jer. 2:21). Both Israel and Judah apostatized from the Lord.

The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn

thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also (Jer. 3:6-8).

One Of The Major Lessons From The Book Of Jeremiah Is That When People Forsake The Lord, They Turn Away To That Which Is Worthless, Empty, Vain And Condemning

The Lord had Jeremiah write, “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). Christ is the “living water.” To the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, “Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knowest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (John 4:10). In reply to Thomas, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Peter said of Christ, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

When God’s people turn away from Him, when they forsake “the fountain of living waters” they then hew “them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Denominationalism, both Catholic and Protestant, are broken cisterns that can hold no water. Paul warns that we must “(Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish the using;) after the

commandments and doctrines of men?” (Col. 2:21,22). Jesus said of some of His day,

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth one with their lips; but their heart is far from me; but in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8,9).

One must be moral to go to heaven. However, since none are perfect, and since only God can forgive sins, it is obvious that one cannot go to heaven apart from Christ (II Tim. 2:10). When one commits sins, he must be forgiven in order for him to enter heaven. Sins cannot be forgiven, and one cannot be saved apart from Christ. Jesus said, “For, apart from me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Salvation is **in** Christ, not out of Him. Paul wrote,

Therefore, I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they also may obtain that salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (II Tim. 2:10).

The Potter And The Clay

In Jeremiah 18:1-6 we read of the potter and the clay. The potter is the Almighty God. He plays a part in forming the character and shaping the destiny of men. The potter’s clay in Jeremiah’s story is man, the children of Israel. Isaiah wrote for Israel, “But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8). Man may be molded by the hand of God (the potter), or by the spirit of the world (Rom. 12:2). Youth is the most pliable time of life. Like clay, life becomes less plastic as time passes. Therefore it is highly important that we yield to the divine touch in the days of youth (Eccl. 12:1).

The potter has a pattern. Before beginning his work, the potter places his pattern before him. Then he takes into his hand the raw material, and shapes it into the likeness of the pattern. Every turn of the wheel and touch of the hand plays a part in making a vessel of beauty and usefulness (I Peter. 2:21).

God's pattern is the Christ. God desires to make every man like Christ—a vessel of beauty and usefulness (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10).

The potter's patience is also discussed by Jeremiah. He wrote, "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter" (Jer. 18:4). However, he did not throw it away in disgust, but "made it again another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. 18:4). Though the raw material at his side was plentiful, he continued to work with the same clay. Though another clay was as good or better by nature, he toiled patiently with what he had. Though Israel marred in his hand, he continued to work with her. Though Simon denied the Lord three times, our Lord loved him and brought him to repentance (Luke 22:61,62), and allowed him to preach the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:1-47). Though we mar in the potter's hand, he does not cast us aside, and never permit us to be restored to His service. His tender touch, through His word, should soften every heart (Rom. 2:4; James 5:19,20).

What about the potter's product? The kind of vessel he makes depends largely on the way the material responds to His will and way. Impenitent hearts mar in his hand. He who hardens himself against the potter will find improvement impossible. Rebellion, pride, stubbornness and self-righteousness resist the potter's

touch. Vessels of dishonor and broken pieces are found around the potter’s workshop. God changes His intentions as as nations or individuals change their behavior (Jer. 18:7-10).

On the other hand, God works a wonderful thing with the penitent—makes him into a vessel of honor. He takes the clay—base, unclean, unsightly—and converts it into an object of beauty and usefulness. By yielding to the potter’s touch, Simon the unstable sand became Peter the rock (John 1:42); and, John a “son of thunder” became the disciple of love. When the vessel is made into the likeness of the pattern, the potter places His own signature upon it, as His own workmanship (Eph. 2:10; Rev. 3:12). God calls all men by the gospel (II Thess. 2:13,14). The kind of vessel we become or fail to become is determined by the kind of clay we are. Paul wrote to Timothy:

Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his; and, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness. Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold, and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some of honor, and some of dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel of honor, sanctified, meet for the master’s use, prepared unto every good work (II Tim. 2:19-21).

Some Other Great Lessons In Jeremiah

The sin of Judah was undeniably written in their heart. “The sin of Judah is written with a pen or iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of their altars”

(Jer. 17:1). So undeniably was their sin written that seventy years in Babylon would be the result of such deep iniquity. In Moses' day, God said, "Let my people go," and therefore Abraham's seed was delivered from Egyptian bondage. However, in the days of Babylonian captivity God says, "Let my people stay because of their sin!" Like Jeremiah's belt (13:1-10), decaying, rotten and ruined, so were the men of Judah cast aside as useless for God's service. Trying to guide themselves, (10:23) they would not get the job done and the whole land was full of sin (Jer. 51:5). Their heart, being exceedingly wicked, had deceived them (Jer. 17:8,9). Their response to Jeremiah was that they desired him to speak smooth things (Jer. 5:30,31; Isa. 30:10). They became very angry with Jeremiah, and it is written,

Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die (Jer. 26:8).

Jeremiah Refutes Premillennialism

In Jeremiah 22:28-30 we have a passage that sheds light on the false doctrine of premillennialism, i.e., "the thousand year reign of Christ on earth." In fact, these passages clearly dethrone the entire system of premillennialism. Among other things Jeremiah wrote,

As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence (Jer. 22:24).

After predicting that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would capture the Jews, God then turned again and paid his respects to Coniah (Jechonias). He said,

Thus saith the Lord, write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah (Jer. 22:30).

In other words, God said that no one of (Jechonias) Coniah's seed would ever sit on David's throne **and rule in Judea again!** According to Matthew 1:2 and Luke 3:27, Christ came from this geneological background. Therefore, **He** could **never** rule in Judea and that **rules out** the premillennial doctrine which contends that Christ will reign on this earth—from Jerusalem. In Acts 2:30 Peter clearly told the audience on Pentecost that God had raised Christ to sit on David's throne. The seed of Coniah could not rule in Judea anymore, but Christ, the seed of Coniah is ruling now in heaven (Heb. 9:24). Therefore, when Christ passed through the clouds unto God the Father, the Ancient of Days, He received a kingdom (Dan. 7:13,14). Christ, our King, entered the everlasting doors of glory more than 1900 years ago (Psm. 24:7-10; Rev. 5:10-12). Paul preached the kingdom of Christ as a reality in Acts 28:31. John was in the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 1:9). All Christians are in the kingdom (John 3:3-5; Col. 1:13). Jesus was reigning over His kingdom, the church, in the first century, and he will reign over His kingdom, the church, until the end of time, and then, He will deliver up the kingdom unto God, the Father (I Cor. 15:24-28).

Jeremiah Exposes A Religion Of Formality But Not From The Heart

God, through Jeremiah, strongly denounced His people who put more trust in the temple than in God. Jeremiah wrote,

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord are these (Jer. 7:3,4).

In other words, what good was it to the people of God if they went to the temple, but continued to live as before? What good was it to go to worship in the temple but continue to reject the counsel of God?

The people of Jerusalem had turned away from God. God said,

Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle (Jer. 8:5,6).

Paul informs us that, before the end of time, there will be those who will have a form of godliness, but will deny the power thereof. He wrote,

But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, head-strong, puffed up,

lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding the form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof: from these also turn away (II Tim. 3:1-5).

Evil Men Ignore And Mistreat Jeremiah

After the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuzaradan, the captain of Nebuchadnezzar’s guard, freed Jeremiah and gave him the choice of staying in the land or of going to Babylon (Jer. 40:1-4). Jeremiah chose to remain in the land. “Then went Jeremiah into Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah: and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land” (Jer. 40:6). Ishmael killed Gedaliah, the governor, and then pressure was put on Jeremiah to go to Egypt with those who were fleeing. It is written,

And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem to go to enter into Egypt, because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land (Jer. 41:17-18).

So determined were the people to go to Egypt, that even though the later requested Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord for them, and they solemnly promised to do what the Lord wanted them to do, yet when Jeremiah informed them that the Lord wanted them to remain in the land, saying that if they would do so God would protect them and bless them and the Chaldeans would not harm them, Johanan and the people that were with him pretended that they were afraid of the Chaldeans. However, once the Chaldeans learned that Johanan had attempted to

warn Gedaliah of the murderous intent of Ishmael, and that he had taken men with him, and had gone to fight with Ishmael, it is most likely that Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans would have counted Johanan a hero. Therefore, it appears to me that Johanan and those with him only made use of their fear of the Chaldeans as a sham to cover their strong desire to go into Egypt.

Their determination to go to Egypt showed a lack of faith and trust in God, for He had promised to protect and preserve them if they would remain in the land as he had spoken to them through Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 42:7-12). Paul described those who want to believe a thing so badly that they will be accommodated to their ruin.

And with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess. 2:10-12).

Johanan showed his people, but he showed unbelief and engaged in willful sin, when they departed “to go into Egypt.” Johanan took all the people that were under his control, including Jeremiah the prophet, into Egypt, and traditions say that once in Egypt they stoned Jeremiah. We, of course, do not know whether this is true or not. However, we do know that God’s faithful servants have often been abused, even murdered. The Hebrew writer wrote,

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah: of David and Samuel and the

prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness was made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (of whom the world is not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes in the earth. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith received not the promise. God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:32-40).

Chapter 5

Introduction To Lamentations

Barry Gilreath, Sr.

Lamentations is one of the most complete studies of suffering found in the Bible. Jeremiah describes the horrible scene of destruction which had been prophesied if Judah would not repent of her evil ways. Is man today unlike Judah in thinking that he can sin with impunity? One need only look at historical events in the world, as well as some congregations of the Lord's church, to see that man's character has not changed. Likewise, God has not changed in His faithfulness to do what He has promised.

There has been little literature written on this important book. Many Christians have never sat in a class where Lamentations was discussed. I dare to say that there has not been an over abundance of sermons on this topic. Yet, realizing the importance of the truths contained therein, one might wonder why this is true. Perhaps this book has been shunned in man's study due to its overpowering grief and the reality of what God's wrath can be. Man today is often like those of Jerusalem in that we only want to hear the smooth things and not the whole counsel of God. However, there can be no doubt that the implications of suffering revealed in Lamentations should serve as a vital lesson for the

church today.

Out of the cloud of destruction rises an unchanging truth; God is faithful (3:23). These five funeral dirges testify to this fact. Blessings and cursings do come in accordance with His divine will. God warned Moses in Deuteronomy 28:47-48.

Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, when the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.

In Lamentations the reality of His judgment is carried out. Babylon did come to take God’s people into seventy years of captivity. Jerusalem was the God-favored city of all cities. She was the chosen seat of divine grace.¹ Judah, however, chose the way of foolish idolatry and thus apostasy was its tragic outcome.

The author of Lamentations is not specified in the text, but many Bible scholars attribute the writing to the prophet from Anathoth, Jeremiah. Versions such as LXX and Vulgate identify him as the author, as well as do early church fathers.² Jeremiah’s character and spirit are much the same in Lamentations, as in the book which bears his name. The writer also writes from the perspective of an eye-witness and Jeremiah would certainly qualify as such. These poems appear to have been written shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem around 587-586 BC.

Each chapter stands as an independent lament. Chapter one reveals Jerusalem’s affliction. Chapter two shows in greater detail God’s anger with Jerusalem’s

sinful ways. In chapter three the prophet speaks of his anguish and his hope. We are reminded of the mighty Jerusalem and the glories she had possessed. In contrast, in chapter four we are shown the degradation in which she finds herself. Finally, in chapter five, we find a prayer for restoration.

A definite pattern emerges which gives the book a unique structure. In chapters one and two each fourth line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet conforming in length to the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. This acrostic would certainly have been an aid in memorization but it also speaks to the complete suffering involved, suffering from A to Z.

In chapter three the message is intensified by a tripling of each letter from the alphabet. These sixty-six verses are shorter, producing a length similar to chapters one and two. In the midst of this chapter, Jeremiah shouts forth one of the book's main themes, "Great is Your faithfulness" (3:23).

In chapter four two stanzas at a time are introduced again using the Hebrew alphabet as an acrostic. Inspiration is not totally committed to this form since in a few instances two letters may be reversed. The closing chapter, while containing twenty-two verses, does not follow the acrostic pattern.

Chapters one and five are summaries of the disaster with chapters two and four revealing more of the specifics of the destruction. The climax of Lamentations comes in 3:23 when we see the beautiful truth of the faithfulness of God.

Often scholars have pointed to nations such as America to discuss national sins similar to Judah's as leading to a possible down fall. Certainly, there are

applications that can be made. However, doesn't it seem that the lessons would be more applicable to the church, the body of Christ? Hebrews 12:22-23 states that Jerusalem is a type of the New Testament church. She is spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16) who is now in covenant relationship with God.

Chapter One

Like A Weeping Widow

There are three parts to chapter one. Jeremiah first describes the present condition of the city (v. 1-7) and then relates why it was destroyed (v. 8-11). Then, beginning in verse 12, the lonely, crying, city speaks for herself. To make emphasis of loneliness there is the recurring statement, “There is no one to comfort her” (v. 2, 9, 16, 17, 21).

When Jeremiah viewed the destruction of Jerusalem all he could do was bow his head and weep. For over forty years Jeremiah had tried in vain to bring God's people to repentance so that captivity could be avoided, but the people would not listen. Jeremiah was treated more like a meddler or traitor than like God's spokesman. Now the city that was once great among the nations was nothing more than a slave. All of those who once paid homage to her now treated her with disdain and even her name was a hiss and byword. This city where God's presence was no more, is graphically proclaimed in verse three to be a city that “finds no rest.” Her inhabitants were in bondage much as are the inhabitants of hell. There was no rest from their tribulations. They were indeed in a hell on earth.

All that could be done now was to remember the days of glory when she had God's favor and realized His

strength in their lives. Zion was widowed spiritually, as well as politically.³ The worship of the God appointed feasts of the law of Moses passed with Jerusalem's fall. The temple was in ruin and the priests had nothing over which to officiate. God's people were in humiliation, and to make the suffering worse, we find the repeated proclamation that no one cares. This brought the greatest pain. "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" (v. 12).

What had brought Jerusalem to this point? We find the answer in verse eight. "Jerusalem has sinned gravely." Not unlike many men today, she was not concerned about her sins. She did not see their consequences but thought that they would remain hidden forever. Her sins were her downfall and when they were made known she was despised and alone in her sorrow. She was forsaken by God and by mankind. God's wrath is made plain to all. Her lack of heeding the preaching of God's prophets is stated in verse nine. She is described as one who would turn from her husband, the God of heaven, to an adulterous relationship with idols. She could not cover her sins with her skirts. Everything is open and naked before God. Pride would not let her accept the truth that she was in an unfaithful condition. She felt that God's favor had always been there and, therefore, it would continue. "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). The once sacred temple is even occupied by the enemies of truth. Misery and distress are everywhere as evidenced by the giving of earthly belongings just for a little food to eat.

The crying widow in her own mourning is presented in verse twelve. There is recognition that this judgment is from God, but she is complaining about this to those

who pass by, trying to obtain comfort from someone, anyone. Her hands are stretched out but no one responds, not even nations who were once allies will acknowledge her. “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?” (1:12). This is not unlike the world today who because of sin is blinded to the blood that was shed at Calvary. They simply pass by unconcerned and headed for the Devil’s hell! Jerusalem is now face to face with the reality that God had been faithful to his word as expressed in verse 18, “The Lord is righteous.” Perhaps now she was ready to repent, but it was too late to avoid the wrath of God.

Verse 20 begins a prayer to God for mercy. The punishment is accepted and the heart is contrite. Included in the last few verses is the request for a similar judgment to come upon her enemies, realizing that God’s nature of justice would demand such.

The church, the bride of Christ, must be on guard not to follow the example of Jerusalem in its unwillingness to listen to the call for repentance. Paul, through inspiration, wrote that a falling away would come during the first century (II Thess. 2:3). The Restoration Movement experienced the same thing in the 19th Century. Areas such as West Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana were once strong in their defense of truth. There was a determination not to go beyond the scriptures. Today this area is dominated by man-made doctrines and traditions. Only a remnant of the faithful exists.

Look at the recent history of the church where brethren who are anti-orphan home and anti-cooperation have brought division. Cult-like movements such as the Boston heresy have lead to a complete takeover of some congregations and departure from Bible truths. Faithful preachers have been replaced by religious hirelings and once sound elderships have sold out to compromise. Many

are proclaiming that the church must change to fit a changing society and are moving men away from the old path of a “thus saith the Lord.” The new hermeneutic is but another example of an attempt to move the church away from sound interpretation of command, example, and necessary implications. Congregations in many places have gone the way of Jerusalem. LET THE LAMENTING BEGIN!

Chapter Two **Reasons For Suffering**

It is perhaps difficult for us to imagine what the destruction and captivity of Jerusalem meant to the Jewish people. Suddenly they find themselves without spiritual direction or home affiliation. The once proud and confident are now no more than lowly servants. Judah had reasoned like the scoffers of II Peter 3:4:

Where is the promise of His coming? For since the Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.

They now suffered because of their failure to heed the warnings and now it was too late.

The opening stanza of Chapter two is similar to Chapters one and four. The word “How” is from the Hebrew term **Eachah** and is the title Jewish leaders used for many centuries as the name of this book.⁴ The word “How” is not in the form of a question, but a statement of amazement that this destruction has come.

This second lamentation of Jeremiah brings to light the anger of God in greater detail. Judah had sown to the wind and reaped a whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). A cloud is used as a veil as she is cast down, referring to her fallen glory. The phrase, “did not remember his footstool” (v. 1) is identified by Clarke as not remembering the Ark

of the Covenant that was housed in the most holy place.⁵ Judah was in a state of bewilderment. It simply had not occurred to them that God would be their enemy even to the point of destroying the temple. The verb “swallowed” in verse two is a vivid description of what God allowed Chaldea to do in carrying out His wrath. God had cut down the leaders and destroyed the palaces which is symbolized in the phrase “the horn of Israel.” In fact, all that had been good and innocent in God’s eyes was destroyed. In verse 12 we even see the children starving. No longer would hypocritical worship be heard because the temple had been turned under as a plowed garden and treated with contempt. The joyful sounds of worship had been replaced by the sounds of the Gentile destroyers. God was the builder as expressed in verse 7, “He stretched out a line,” but now to the heartache of the inhabitants, he removes the walls and gates that provided His precious protection. They were abandoned by their God and Jeremiah cries to the point that there are no tears left.

Verse 14 speaks of deceptive teachers who wanted the approval of men more than the approval of God. They preached peace when there was no peace. They would not expose the sins of Jerusalem, but rather soothed their conscience into hiding them. If these prophets had united with Jeremiah in exposing sin then Jerusalem’s repentance might have been possible. Now those opportunities were gone and the enemies of God were rejoicing and gloating in what they perceived as their victory, not realizing that the swallowing up was God’s judgment. They were simply used as His instruments.

God is the enemy of every false way (Psm. 119:104). We are reminded again what can happen when man is willing to listen to false teachers rather than heeding

the truth. Jeremiah described that the “Prophets preach falsely and the priests rule by their own power, and the people love to have it so” (Jer. 5:31).” This characterizes some Christians today when they want sermons that entertain and comfort; sermons that could be preached in any denomination. And they cringe when sins of denominationalism, and other departures from New Testament Christianity are exposed. Just like Jerusalem they have not considered the end of these ways.

It seems that the church is destined to be plagued with false teachers (II Pet. 2:1). We must be receptive to these warnings and constantly examine whether we be in the faith (II Cor. 13:5). False teachers may be difficult to detect since they present themselves as humble and religious lambs when in reality they are wolves in lambs’ clothing. Some may even be honest and sincere, thereby being self-deceived. The church’s best defense in these matters is an ever watchful eldership that leads by example through strictly adhering to the Word of God.

In verse 17 God is vindicated and we understand why the tragedy occurred. God had warned and man had not heeded. Even in the midst of this sorrow a ray of hope appears as we are once again reminded that God had been faithful to His promise.

Jeremiah closes the dirge with prayer for those who survived. The tender cry beginning in verse 18 mentions the city wall which symbolizes the people of the entire city. God is petitioned to especially consider the starving children and the dire circumstances of mothers eating their own offspring. We still see evidence of Judah’s reluctance to accept God’s wrath when the charge is made in verse 21, “You have slaughtered and not pitied.” If any people ever needed to pray, it was these.

A lesson on prayer should be taken from the phrase

“Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord” (2:19). God desires our fervent prayers (James 5:16) rather than repetitious phrases where little thought is given to the needs of the people. We often do not petition God for our true needs; and therefore, we have not because we ask not (James 4:2).

Chapter Three

The Prophet’s Personal Suffering

In chapter three the acrostic is changed to a tripling of each Hebrew letter to make a total of sixty-six verses.

The intensifying of the alphabet in this chapter perhaps serves as a vehicle to bring us to this glorious truth from on high: God is faithful (v. 23). The prophet’s cry of despair is sounded in verses one through twenty. His hope amid suffering is seen in verses 21-33. Verses 34 through 39 show that God is just in His discipline. There is a call for repentance in verses 40 through 42, agony for the deep affliction in 43-54, and Jeremiah’s faith in God is evidenced in verses 55 through 66.

As we begin in verse one, we immediately recognize that the prophet has felt the suffering along with the people. Often the innocent have to suffer the consequences of the sins of others. Such was the fate of Jeremiah whose suffering was unparalleled in his day. There are several metaphors which illustrate his agony such as trying to walk in darkness (v. 2), dealing with an aged body with broken bones (v. 4), being chained in a jail cell (v. 7), being the innocent prey of wild animals (v. 10), being struck by arrows (v. 13), being sick to the stomach from drinking contaminated water (v. 15), and trying to chew on rocks for food (v. 16). We want to turn our eyes away at the sight of this agony. Jeremiah is overcome, even to the point of questioning his faith in God. He had reached the depths of despair, and it is as

if he had never known happiness and prosperity.

Jeremiah's hope is quickly revived by remembering the source from whom all blessings flow. The people of God still had the blessing of life and each new day brought new compassion and mercy. These words found in verses 22 through 24 are some of the most notable in all of scripture.

Through the Lord's mercies we are not
consumed, because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning; great is Your
faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my
soul; therefore, I hope in Him!

These verses are the centerpiece of Lamentations, the climax of understanding. Even though the prophet was surrounded by misery and destruction, he could declare "The Lord is my portion" (v. 24)." He had a living hope based on a living God whose promises were fulfilled just as surely as His judgments.

Several observations are made as a result of this understanding which would benefit future generations. First, we should serve Him with patience because God is good and salvation is a sure promise (v. 25-26). Second, the faithfulness of God needs to be understood in the time of youth. God's word will discipline a child and give him a Godly perspective toward trials and temptations. The expression in verse 29 of "putting his mouth in the dust" reveals the humility that can result from a disciplined life. Could it be that undisciplined children among God's people will lead to greater apostasy in future generations? A third observation is that God's punishment of His people is measured and has purpose (v. 31-33). Finally, God is in control of this world and nothing happens without His permission (v. 34-36). No

one should complain about punishment, because in this we are brought to our knees to examine our lives and turn again to the Lord. It indeed is sweet to hear these words from an erring child of God, “I have transgressed and rebelled” (v. 42).

Perhaps persistence in tears would continue to focus God on this plight. Jeremiah seems to be haunted by the raping of the young women of the city. There was also a reference to being thrown into a pit. This could be a reference to the time during his preaching when he almost lost his life (Jer. 38:6ff). This is the basis for his appeal to God for help. He reflects that in his near death situation God heard his voice. This experience builds his confidence that God will hear his cries for help once again (v. 55-58). A contemplation of past blessings can serve as an encouragement during the difficult events in our life.

Chapter Four **The Kingdom In Ruin**

In this lament we have again an acrostic similar to the first two dirges. This poem is given more to description and less to theological comment than the rest of the book.⁶ There seems to be less emotion expressed than in previous dirges. First, there is a horrible description in verses 1 through 10, followed by an explanation in verses 11 through 20. Finally, there is an expectation of punishment for Jerusalem’s enemy, Edom. There is an expression of faith of a new day for Jerusalem.

As this dirge begins, the population is presented in desolation. Their most precious possession, their youth, were dead and scattered on the ground like broken

pieces of pottery (v. 2). Some of the children were in the process of starving, begging for food (v. 4). How pitiful this sight is! The imagery is that of a once prosperous city symbolized by gold, but now tarnished because of their sins. Since they had not considered their destiny (1:9), their actions are depicted as ostriches in the wilderness that ignore where they lay their eggs and, therefore, put their offspring in great peril.

A similar tragedy can occur today when the youth of the church do not receive their spiritual food through the teaching of God's word in their homes. Their souls can not thrive when they are not fed daily on the word of God. They will be destroyed without knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Many parents are grieving today because their adult children no longer have interest in things spiritual. How many of them would give all their worldly possessions to once again have the opportunity to nourish their children spiritually as they nourished them physically. Why is it that so often we are like Jerusalem in that we must suffer a great loss before we see the urgency of following God's word?

In verse six we also realize the greater punishment that Jerusalem faced as compared to Sodom. Sodom's fall had been quick, whereas Jerusalem's suffering had lasted for many months. The results were children starving for lack of bread and the wealthy scavenging in the garbage dumps. They were so famished that they could not be recognized. It would have been better for them to die by the sword than from the pangs of hunger. The prophecy in Deuteronomy 28:56-57 is fulfilled when mothers are described as boiling their children for food. This also occurs six centuries later in Jerusalem's final destruction in AD 70.

In verses 11 through 20, the poet presents an explanation of the reason for the tragedy. It was the wrath of God. It was considered impossible for the city to fall, considering its fortification. God had spared the city from Assyria during the reign of Hezekiah in 701 BC. A great victory such as this apparently led the people to think that God would always be their deliverer, regardless of how they lived their lives. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel battled against this “701 Theology.”⁷

One reason that God’s wrath was poured out was because of the sins of her prophets and priests (v. 13). Their lack of Godly guidance in standing for the truth contributed to this tragic circumstance. They had become defiled by the innocent blood that was shed. Their unwillingness to stand for truth with Jeremiah certainly was a formula for destruction. They received the greater condemnation and were treated as lepers. They were not only rejected in the city, but by other nations as well.

The people of Jerusalem had rejected the Word of God and had, as a result, developed some strong delusions. They just knew that a foreign nation would be their rescuer or that the anointed of God, King Zedekiah, would be able to protect them. However, Zedekiah was weak and corrupt and actually condoned their moral and religious corruption (II Kings 24:19). Paul warns that we too can suffer strong delusions and believe lies (II Thess. 2:10-11). Unless we are a people who love the truth and strive to adhere to God’s word, we, too, are headed for destruction. We should be bold in defending the truth, as was Jeremiah. It was prophesied that an end would come to Jerusalem’s captivity, but for Edom it would be another story.

The dirge ends with the prophesied punishment for Edom (v. 21-22). Problems between Zion and Edom can be traced back to Jacob and Esau. Naturally, Edom would rejoice over the fall of Jerusalem, but their joy would be short lived, for they, too, would be made to drink the cup of divine wrath. Their sins would be uncovered as well.

Chapter Five

Prayer

Chapter five has less lamenting and consists primarily of prayer for God to have compassion for the suffering nation. This last chapter is a summary of the previous four dirges. Jeremiah is pleading on Judah's behalf, "Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us" (v. 1). Each one of these short verses is different in form to the previous chapters. These twenty-two verses do not form an acrostic. This may be due to the more spontaneous nature of prayer which might not lend itself to the acrostic arrangement.⁸

The poem begins with a prayer for mercy and then a narrative of the reproaches Jerusalem had suffered. Their sin was the reason for this disgrace and Jeremiah begins to list the results. There were foreign troops now occupying the Promised Land (v. 2). There is tragedy in homes where children are deprived of the protection of their parents and wives have been turned into widows (v. 3). Life was hard, with their captives placing a price on everything, including drinking water and fire wood. They were constantly under the threat of death as they searched for food (v. 9). The appearance of starvation showed on their once healthy bodies. There was also the degrading situation of rape of the women (v. 11).

Jeremiah had warned of such in Jeremiah 6:12. Princes were literally nailed to the wall to suffer a slow death. Even the old population was degraded and the youth were used like animals in forced labor.

Perhaps one of the most telling situations is that of verse 7. “Our fathers sinned and are no more. But we bear their iniquities.” Deliberate rebellion to God had been their history for generations. The influence of these rebellious ancestors, no doubt, had an influence on their children. By following in their evil ways, they would suffer the consequences of their ancestor’s sins.

Today we must realize the danger of worldly traditions and attitudes which may have been handed down by our parents. Many souls are lost because of their unwillingness to leave false traditions of their families and follow the pure Gospel. Jesus said in Luke 14:26,

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Jeremiah leads the people in a prayerful confession in verse 16. “Woe to us, for we have sinned.” The once joyful and happy people are now in sorrow. Sin had taken its toll both spiritually and physically. They were praying for a return to God’s favor, to that elevated position that they had once known.

Man may try to deny the possibility of divine wrath, but let him see the truth in Lamentations. Man may ridicule and ignore the messenger who preaches the whole counsel of God, but that does not change the message. We need modern day Jeremiahs who have the needed courage to tell it like it is!

Did Jerusalem learn from this experience?

Apparently they did not! After seventy years of captivity, the rebuilding of Jerusalem began. She would have a glorious existence once again. The Son of God would come in the fullness of time to save the world. What would Jerusalem do? They would crucify the Savior on a Roman cross! History was due to repeat itself again when God would bring His final judgment on Jerusalem through the vicious army of Rome in AD 70. Have we as Christians learned from the historical account of the destruction recorded in Lamentations? Only time will tell when God brings His final judgment on us all.

Endnotes

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Chapter 6

Introduction To Daniel

Edwin S. Jones

With the exception of Genesis, no book of the Old Testament has been more unfairly evaluated than has Daniel. The ire of liberal scholarship glows bright red when it is directed against the writings of the noble statesman prophet of the captivity. It is truly a case of "Daniel in the critics den."

There is one particular reason why the book of Daniel gets so much negative attention. If the book was actually written in the sixth century B.C., its remarkable prophecies are especially embarrassing to those who reject the possibility of the supernatural. If Daniel was written six centuries before Christ, even the most skeptical of critics would find skepticism difficult to maintain.

As we develop an introduction to Daniel we will first give emphasis to the general purpose of the book and then to answering the most commonly raised objections to its historical character. At the end of this brief analysis, Daniel will stand on firm ground. The mouths of the critical lions will be closed by God's providentially provided evidence.

The General Purpose Of Daniel

Daniel was written during the time of the Babylonian

captivity. This period of captivity had been the result of the persistent, escalating disobedience of God's people. Deportation resulted, even as God had warned (Deut. 28:58-68).

From the perspective of a captivity that had resulted from progressive ungodliness, the people of God would have an opportunity to reflect on their lack of faith and consider their future. In this setting, Daniel was chosen to address the issue of God's sovereignty and its implications for Judah's future.

The book of Daniel is, therefore, divided into two aspects of God's rule. Chapters one through six emphasize God's rule in Daniel's life setting. Chapters seven through twelve relate the lessons of God's being in control of the present to His being the sovereign of Judah's future. There would be additional trying times for Judah. A serious threat would emerge from the coming Greek Empire. This threat would prove to be even more disastrous than had been Babylon's cruel hand (Dan. 8:1ff; 11:1ff). But that would not be all. At the time of the Messiah, Judah would be broken and Jerusalem would be destroyed at the hands of an exceedingly terrible empire, one that would follow the Greek dominion (Dan. 9:24-27). This diverse and mighty fourth world empire would even rise up against the people of the Messiah as war would be made against Christians (Dan. 7:1f).

The message of Daniel was a simple one for those Jews who were ravaged by Babylonian captivity. "God rules in the kingdom of men..." (Dan. 5:21). As Judah had faced trials at the hand of the Babylonians so she would face even sterner tribulations from the Greeks and the Romans. Eventually, because of a lack of faith,

Judah would fall never to rise again. Only those who looked to God would survive those future calamities (Dan. 7:22; 12:10-12). The lessons learned from the stories of faithfulness in Daniel’s day would be needed to survive even harsher trials in the future.

Critical Assaults On Daniel

As has been mentioned, the message of Daniel is dismissed by many scholars who entertain an antisupernatural bias. They do not profit from Daniel’s purpose because they do not believe that Daniel is historically accurate. Their charges against Daniel may be summed up as follows:

1. Daniel is not in the “Prophets” section of the Hebrew Bible. It is in the “Writings” section and was, therefore, written too late to have been from the sixth century B.C.¹
2. Antiochus Epiphanes receives the main emphasis in Daniel’s supposed prophecies of the future. This shows Daniel to be a propaganda vehicle written during the Maccabean period.²
3. The remarkable accuracy of the prophecies of chapter eleven ensure that they were written after the fact.³
4. Linguistic problems exist that assign Daniel to the second century B.C. The Aramaic of Daniel 2:4b–7:28 is not of the character of sixth century B.C. The 15 Persian loan words and 3 Greek loan words ensure that Daniel dates from after Alexander the Great c. 332.⁴
5. Daniel resembles apocalyptic works of the Maccabean period.⁵
6. The siege of Jerusalem in the third year of

- Jehoiakim is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament and is, therefore, contrived.⁶
7. Daniel 1:1 speaks of the third year of Jehoiakim as the time when Daniel was taken captive. However, Jeremiah 46:2 relates the battle of Carchemish (an event prior to the captivity of Daniel) to the 4th year of that King. A clear error.⁷
 8. Belshazzar as a king over Babylon was once unknown to history. Another fabrication charged against Daniel.⁸
 9. History knows no Darius the Mede as is mentioned in chapter six of Daniel.⁹
 10. There is no mention in history of a special class of people known as Chaldeans who served in Babylonian courts.¹⁰ Daniel is again charged with error.
 11. An advanced theology in Daniel that includes a developed angelology, a predicted Messiah, and a last judgment prove a late date.¹¹
 12. There are no precise predictions in Daniel beyond Antiochus IV (175-164). Therefore, Daniel must have been written about that time.¹²
 13. There is no record of Nebuchadnezzar ever having suffered madness.¹³ This story in Daniel was confused with the Qumran account of Nabonidus suffering an affliction at the hands of "the Most High God."¹⁴
 14. Ecclesiastes, which was in final form by c. 180 B.C., does not list Daniel among famous Israelites. This would show that Daniel had not yet been written at that time.¹⁵

15. Belshazzar is called Nebuchadnezzar’s son when in fact he was not.¹⁶

Answers To The Assaults Of The Critics

1. Daniel was not in the “Prophets” section but in the “Writings” division of the Hebrew Bible because he was not called as a prophet to minister to God’s people. He was much more a statesman who happened to receive visions. Additionally, the age of a document had nothing to do with the section it was placed in by the Hebrews.¹⁷ The Jews placed Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, and Song of Solomon in the “Writings.” They placed Joshua–II Kings in the “Prophets.”

2. Antiochus Epiphanes was very important to later Jewish history. He posed the greatest threat to the survival of the Jewish people prior to the coming of the Messiah.¹⁸ In the context of Daniel, a book born out of national calamity at the Babylonian captivity, a look to the next great national crisis is very understandable.

3. There are very accurate predictions about the Roman Caesars and of the persecutions of Dometian in Daniel (Dan. 7:1f). These went 250 years beyond Antiochus Epiphanes. Also, Christ was predicted as coming in the Roman Empire (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14). Rome did not conquer Judah until 100 years after Antiochus.

4. The supposed linguistic problems made famous by Driver prove to hold no weight. The Persian government terms would certainly have been known to Daniel who served in a Persian Court.¹⁹ The Greek names for instruments of music are readily explained by noting that Greek mercenary soldiers served in the Babylonian army at the Battle of Carchemiak in 605 B.C.²⁰

As to the lateness of Daniel’s Aramaic, the force of

such arguments has lost much weight in recent years. The Ras Shamra texts (dating from 15th century B.C.) have considerably weakened these kinds of arguments against Daniel by showing a more ancient quality to Daniel's Aramaic.²¹

Additionally, Archer points out that Daniel's Aramaic used an ancient internal-vowel-change passive form rather than the later prefix form. No internal forms have been found in the Aramaic documents from the Dead Sea Caves, the very community that liberal scholars believe was contemporary with a Daniel written in the second century B.C.²²

5. The resemblance of Daniel to Maccabean apocalyptic is well accounted for; Daniel becomes the standard for second century apocalyptic because he wrote so much about those times.²³

6. A siege of Jerusalem in c. 605 B.C. found in Daniel, but not directly recorded elsewhere might have the appearance of a problem, but it contains no substance. II Kings 24:1 and II Chronicles 36:6 certainly imply such a siege as Daniel 1:1 records. The Babylonian records corroborate the time table required to validate Daniel.²⁴

7. The problem of different dates for the same year of Jehoiakim's reign is easily resolved when it is noted that Babylonian kings did not count the first year of a king's reign while the Judean kings of that time did count the accession year.²⁵

8. Belshazzar is now a known historical figure. His father, Nabonidus, appointed him as second ruler and in that position he served as king in his father's prolonged absence.²⁶ This well accounts for the events of Daniel chapter five where Daniel is offered the position

of third ruler.

9. While history as yet has revealed no person known as Darius the Mede, plausible suggestions have been offered to link him to a petty king appointed by Cyrus or to Cyrus himself.²⁷ The LXX has the name Cyrus in place of Darius.

10. In the fifth century B.C., Herodotus spoke of a special class of Babylonian priests that he called Chaldeans.²⁸

11. The so called “advanced theology” of Daniel regarding angels, a Messiah, and a last judgment is shared by Zechariah and Malachi (Zech. 2:3; 3:1; 6:12; 9:9; 13:1f; 14:5; Mal. 3:1; 4:2). Many elements of this so called advanced theology are found in books considered even by liberal scholars to have been written at or before Daniel’s sixth century date.²⁹

12. Liberal scholars deny that Rome is predicted by Daniel’s visions of world empires. Therefore, they stop the prophecies with Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.). However, the internal evidence of Daniel will not allow such a conclusion to be drawn. Chapter 11:40f does not deal with anything known from the life of Antiochus.³⁰ Daniel clearly speaks of an empire following Alexander and the four basic divisions of his empire (Dan. 8:20-21; 7:6-7). The liberal contention that Media and Persia are the second and third of the four empires of Daniel chapters 2 and 7 is destroyed by the internal evidence also.³¹ The two-horned ram of Daniel 8 is one empire of both Medes and Persians (Dan. 8:20). The four-winged leopard of chapter 7 is overthrown by a non-Grecian beast (Dan. 7:6-8).

13. Nebuchadnezzar’s madness not being recorded would have been in keeping with attitudes about mental

illness in Mesopotamia.³² Nevertheless, Berossus, a Babylonian priest from the third century B.C., spoke of an illness Nebuchadnezzar suffered toward the close of his reign.³³ Eusebius preserved a tradition from the second century B.C. attributed to Abydenus that the king had been “possessed by some god or other.”³⁴

A particularly remarkable discovery was made by Sir Henry Rawlinson. He translated a tablet from the close of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign that spoke of the king’s inactivity for some four years.³⁵

Daniel’s supposed confusion of Nebuchadnezzar with Nabonidus because of a Qumran document titled the Prayer of Nabonidus, is also unsupported. Most likely this document was written after the time liberals believe Daniel was written.³⁶ The sickness of Nabonidus in this fragment may either support another historical event or may be pure fiction.

14. The writer of Ecclesiastes, an Apocryphal book, not only didn’t include Daniel, it did not include any judge except Samuel, and omitted Job, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Mordecai, and Ezra from its list.³⁷

15. Belshazzar being called Nebuchadnezzar’s son is easily explained. “Son” could have been used in the general sense of succession to the crown.³⁸ Another explanation is that there is evidence that Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.³⁹

Additional Testimony To Daniel’s Reliability

There are a variety of additional witnesses to Daniel’s inspired character. They include:

1. Daniel spoke of the city of Shushan when it was in the province of Elam (Dan. 8:2). The Greek and Roman historians knew only of Shushan being in a

province also named Shushan. We now know that the structure of the provinces was changed after the sixth century B.C. A second century writer would almost certainly not have been aware of this.⁴⁰

2. Josephus and contemporary Rabbis believed Daniel chapters 11-12 spoke of Rome as well as Antiochus.⁴¹

3. Recent studies indicate the Jewish canon was closed in Maccabean times. This would have made a Maccabean production unacceptable for inclusion in the Canon.⁴²

4. Josephus believed Daniel was one of the greatest prophets.⁴³ He used Daniel’s prophecies to refute the Epicureans who denied that there was a God who worked into human affairs.⁴⁴

5. Recent studies confirm that the Persian words in Daniel are more consistent with an earlier than a late composition of Daniel.⁴⁵

6. The Qumran sect preserved five independent fragments and a commentary on Daniel. This group was Maccabean in origin. These fragments date from the time when liberal critics say that Daniel was first written. How could such a newly written document have been accepted as Scripture?⁴⁶

7. I Maccabees 2:59-60 quotes Mattathias (died 166 B.C.) as citing Daniel chapters 3 and 6. I Maccabees was written around 100 B.C.⁴⁷

8. Ezekiel twice mentions a Daniel who was known for special abilities at discovering “secrets.” He used the Phoenician spelling of Daniel (Dan’el rather than Dani’el) because he wrote the message to a Phoenician king (Ezekiel 14:14,20). The liberals associate this Daniel with a figure in the Ras Shamra tablets. However, that person

was a Baal worshipper. Ezekiel would not have likely extolled the virtues of a Baal worshipper. Also it should be noted that the book of Daniel relates the word for “secret” and its cognates on nine occasions to Daniel in the second chapter alone.⁴⁸

9. Young mentions the unity of the book of Daniel by showing how it is interrelated in theme (ch. 2 with chs. 7-12; 3:12 with 2:49; 1:1-2 with 5:2-3; 9:21 with 8:15ff; 10:12 and 9:23). Also, he notes that Daniel’s character remains the same throughout the Book.⁴⁹

10. And most significantly, Jesus cites Daniel as the author of the book that bears his name (Matt. 24:15).

Conclusion

The ancient Porphyry was the first to question Daniel because he believed there could be no predictive prophecy.⁵⁰ Since then many wild claims have been made in attempts to discredit Daniel. From the Jewish rationalist, Uriel Acosta (1590-1647), who believed Daniel was a forgery to support a bodily resurrection,⁵¹ to the many modern critics who join Porphyry in rejecting anything supernatural, Daniel has received rough treatment from the critics.

The evidence, however, is solidly and conclusively in Daniel’s defense. Perhaps Keil said it best when upon giving evidences in support of Daniel he concluded by noting the most powerful testimony of all,

The testimony of our Lord fixes on the external and internal evidences which prove the genuineness of the book of Daniel...⁵²

Endnotes

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Chapter 7

Major Lessons From Daniel

Roger Jackson

The first seven chapters of Daniel are devoted to a single theme: “The deep convictions of God’s people.” The seventh chapter is an essential part of the development and culmination of that theme because it envisions the triumphant Christ ascending to “The Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:13,14).

In these powerful chapters are embedded many great lessons, and the best known of the ages. God’s people are called to serve Him in a hostile environment. This would be the ultimate test of their convictions, rewarded finally with a glorious triumph, whose implications reached into the “latter days.”

God’s people have always been called on to serve Him when the price was high. It was man who brought on suffering in the world in the first place. In Genesis 3:17-19 we are taught that man would suffer a difficult life and then return to the earth from whence he came. From that time until now all men have suffered. Job best expressed our attitude in the matter of suffering when he expressed his own uncompromising convictions in these words: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). Job did not know that it was not God who brought all of his misery on him. The same is true

today when people suffer pain and loss. They want to know why God brought all their misfortune on them when the devil is responsible.

The Hebrew Christians suffered a great measure of pain because they served God, but they took it with joy (Heb. 10:32-34). The prophets and righteous people of the past had been their examples (Heb. 11:36-40). And unknown poet wrote:

The Midnight Hour

That time when feeble eyes cannot penetrate
the darkness

When the oil of our Christian lamp is low; or
maybe life has almost snuffed it out.

Midnight - when we find ourselves chained,
bound and beaten.

When even death itself would be a welcomed
visitor.

The lasting beauty of Christianity is not
witnessed in the lives of people who
have been sheltered from the storms or
untouched by the world.

The real worth of Christianity is not captured
in a Sunday morning

Worship service with every man in his pew
singing 'Amazing Grace.'

The lasting weight of Christianity is not felt
when all is well.

If we would comprehend the real weight and
worth and beauty

Of Christianity we must view it at the
midnight hour when tragedy

Strikes, and triumph is fled; when darkness
hangs about us like a

Burial shroud and the silence of grief is
deafening.

When oceans of tears have been shed and all
of our hopes lie buried
In a lonely grave in a garden of memories.
When life has dashed our most cherished
dreams to the ground.
For some of us it is now 11:59 p.m., and
midnight approaches.

Daniel and his friends did not follow the course of compromise. Psalm 1:1 describes that course:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the
counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the
way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the
scornful.

First a man walks toward compromise, then the first thing he knows he is standing in the middle of it and after that he may be found sitting in it up to his ears. It is a lot like Lot on his journey toward Sodom. James reminds us that we should not blame God when we find ourselves in such a predicament, because we took the first step by our own choice (James 1:13-15). John breaks the whole matter down into three parts: (a) The lust of the eye (walking toward), (b) The lust of the flesh (in the midst), and (c) The pride of life (overcome) (I John 2:15-17).

There are four basic steps leading to compromise. The first step is that of socializing. I Corinthians 15:33 warns us that such companionship corrupts us. In spite of that adroit admonition, myriads of admirers of liberalism, lust and license daily expose themselves to the danger and court it with impunity.

The second step is that of philosophizing. Inspiration deals with some of the drivel which philosophy can birth in Isaiah 5:20 and Romans 3:8. In

a mad rush to substantiate the non substantive and give credence to the incredible, philosophers have historically gotten it exactly backwards. Men can always find excuses for believing and doing what they intend to believe and do, no matter what the consequences.

The third step toward compromise is to apologize. What men once knew to be wrong they begin to excuse after they are a part of it. You can rest assured that a man has visited Ashdod when he begins using the logic of the city sprinkled with the jargon of its citizens (Neh. 13:23,24). Men seldom defend what they do not practice.

The final step in compromise is capitulation. We should not expect an admission of the malady or of the fact that he was practicing what he once condemned (Gal. 2:12,13).

It is a gradual gravitation to the left. The Hebrew children could have excused it, had they been guilty, by appealing to their troubles, their peer pressures or even their environment, but it was a matter of conviction with them. Someone has said that an excuse is the "skin of a reason stuffed with a lie." When compromise arises where refutation once occupied a staunch opposition, soon there appears a silly justification no better than Aaron's, "I just threw these golden jewels into the fire and out popped this calf" (Exod. 32:24).

The Hebrew children and Daniel followed no such collision course with compromise. They had deep convictions. These deep convictions are needed more today than they were then, and I am not overstating the matter. This we shall now endeavor to establish without fear of successful rebuttal.

They Would Not Eat At The King’s Table

These great servants of God were offered the delicacies of the king’s cafeteria—a smorgasbord of sumptuous morsels (Dan. 1:8-16). There was just one problem; most of it UNCLEAN according to the Law of Moses. Well, what difference did it make? They were living under special circumstances and a long way away from home. They needed to change with the times. It was the 6th century, not the 7th. Was it not the spirit of the law that was important? Who wants to be a narrow minded legalist? There was no pattern, no “scriptural” and “unscriptural” dining, just as long as the feast was “to honor God.” They did not want to serve God by the numbers and practice five dishes of dining. If we are going to be that strait, what about the plates (round or square), the table (wood or marble), or perhaps the server (male or female)? How do we know what is authorized and that our “hermeneutic” is the right one? They could surely have used a new hermeneutic. It might be easier to tell a joke like, “Herman wasn’t even invited to the dinners.”

Included in the vocabulary of the Hebrew children was the word “unscriptural.” No problem, just redefine it. There were some things they could not do with God’s approval and they would not do because of their convictions. These convictions, based on the Word, guided their lives between two narrow cliffs and their pathway strait between two equally destructive ditches.

They knew that the basic central appeal of idolatry and even the thinking among their own ranks was. “Do anything you want to do.” Till this good hour the appeal of compromise, liberalism and worldliness is a looseness in law, a laxity in living and a license to live a profligate life without accountability. Even secular media personalities like G. Gordon Liddy and our own Dave

Stone of local notoriety recognize that fact. They explain that our woes in the moral arena stem from the disgusting ideology that people want immorality without consequences. Hence we have abortion, child murders, and acquittal of heinous crimes on the basis of how a person was treated as a child or the environment in which he grew up. No one wants to take responsibility for anything he or she does.

God approaches the matter from an entirely different perspective. From the mouth of an unlikely spokesman God caused the policy to be enunciated:

If Balak would give me his house full of silver
and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the
Lord my God, to do less or more (Num. 22:18).

God does not always give a pattern with His instructions, but when He does who will be so presumptuous to argue that it does not have to be followed? In Exodus 25:40, He admonished Moses to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him in the mountain. In Hebrews 8:5 the passage is applied as God's exact attitude when it comes to the church. A man who would miss that would miss the turn on an oval track.

It is not a matter of not knowing how God authorizes so much as it is the problem of an outright rejection of it. There is not the first hint of supportive information in the Bible for such foolish and fallacious notions that God authorized by personal likes and dislikes, popularity, opinions, human traditions, long standing practice, silence, or our inability to, "see any harm in it." That is the best compromisers can do, but they will compromise and go their merry old way or self willed conduct anyway; because when a person is

determined to believe a certain thing or do a certain thing, any old excuse will suffice. Every excuse was available to the Hebrew children, but the difference between them and the faithless was spelled c-o-n-v-i-c-t-i-o-n-s. When it comes to what God told the Hebrew children to do, which included what was forbidden, it may truly be said, “They would not bend.”

They Would Not Bow To The King’s Image

Nebuchadnezzar made a great image of gold. At ninety feet high, it would have been one of the seven wonders of the world (Dan. 3:1-6). Like robots before their time the people were instructed to bow before it upon an orchestrated signal. It must have been like the national anthem. There were six knees (Daniel totalling eight) that did not hit the turf on the signal. God had forbidden it (Exod. 20:1-3). If you want to talk about pressure to conform try imagining the heat the furnace generated. Well, the heat is still on. In the sweat of the constant rise in temperature it has amazed many of us to learn the names of some hot personalities who had to get out of the kitchen.

Some men have surrendered their convictions to the golden image of higher learning. Sowing before the golden image of education and the glitter of such titles as “doctor so-and-so” that’s about the only song they need to hear to begin groveling at the feet of faculties and bowing at the altar of academics. It has long since come to pass that a certain tribe of intellectuals consider a man unqualified to preach or teach unless he has a terminal degree. One man who was selected and appointed to become an elder let it be known that all the trouble in the brotherhood we are experiencing today

is the fault of men who do not have a doctorate. I found it rather amusing that he did not have one himself; but inconsistency and pure nonsense never floundered on the shores of compromise and, if ignorance were painful I know some thinkers who would make the Guinness Book of World Records for it.

The Jews required a great sign from heaven before they would believe and the Greeks required a degree of some sorts (I Cor. 1:18-26). I wonder how long it will be before the same crowd requires that the people in the pew have a college degree before they become Christians? If someone were to tell me it has already happened, it would not surprise me. I lead a sheltered life these days and do not get around like I used to. I seem to be the last to hear about these things.

A person compromises his convictions in his heart before he changes his mind. This is what John meant when he said there were some who went out from the brethren because they were not of them (I John 2:19). After such a transition it is not very hard to become harsh and critical towards things and people once held dear to us. A change of heart leads to questioning everything we ever believed. And if any opposition arises it is easier to be insulting than it is to be reasonable.

Some men have compromised their convictions because of the heat applied by popularity. We must be politically correct. What does that mean? It means we must speak in such a manner as to offer no offence to anyone. Now that is new, is it not? The Lord would not have gotten along as well in the 21st century as He did in the first. He was politically incorrect seven times in his statements recorded in Matthew 23. No one who has the spirit of Christ wants deliberately to be offensive,

but what about the folks who wear their feelings on their sleeves and who choose to stay out of step with common sense? Nothing is a shame anymore. No one is a failure. None of us are to blame for anything. Self esteem is the watchword, and popular is the man who gives it to everyone, even if nothing is beneath their dignity.

Some have vacated the old paths because of the heat of sectarianism. It is no secret why it happened. The sectarians finally got through to them. Day after day the endless invectives, jokes, sneers and vilification came until it became more than the faithful could bear. So, it was decided, with some help, that the sectarians loved the Lord just as much as anyone else. They were just as honest, sincere and devout as we were, and are. Far be it from me to draw lines and erect fences for God. The Hebrew children could not move old Neb's image inside their circle, but they could draw the circle bigger. And what about the brethren who decided to bow to the image? If they kept on drawing the circle smaller pretty soon only one of them would be in it and he might wonder if he could fellowship himself. That is the kind of tripe uncompromising brethren have been subjected to lately. It is pure insult without substance from a heart diseased by bitterness and hidden under a cloak of love. The old Babylonians loved their image. Perhaps they had tags they put on their chariots that said, "I love my image." In modern times it is, "I love my church." May God give us more men like the Hebrew children. If I needed a tag to advertise my faith it would read, "I love the Lord's church." Heat the furnace and throw them in it, but **THEY WOULDN'T BURN.**

They Would Not Preach The King's Message

In Daniel 5:25-28 it is recorded that King Belshazzar was engaged in a drunken feast when he saw a great hand over against the wall. The great hand wrote a short message on the wall which the king could not translate. You know the story. The writing was **Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin**, and it meant that God had seen (taken into consideration) Belshazzar's evil rule and determined to end it that night. Now if you had been in Daniel's place what would you have done? Well, I know what a host of men would have done. They would have softened the message to make it palatable. After all, this is the king. He would rather hear, "I'm O.K.: you're O.K." It would not have been easy to preach that text.

Some men have surrendered their convictions because of suffering and the lure of the dollar bill. The world knows how to put pressure on the wrong kind of men. In Amos 7:10-13 the faithful prophet was told:

O thou seer, go, and flee away in to the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel...

In other words, "We won't pay for that kind of preaching here." As long as some preaching positions and the large salaries that come with them are predicated upon numbers and nickels there will always be a host of unscrupulous men who will do anything and preach anything that will secure those jobs for them. Sitting on the pew every Sunday will be a tribe of men whose livelihood is lessened or threatened altogether; who will work up a multitude of ignorant support because, "...this, our craft, is in danger to be set at nought" (Acts 19:27).

It is at times like these that the preacher learns who controls the purse strings. You may find that hard to believe or even a hard thing to preach, but it is the case exactly. These sorry congregations, whose elders have abdicated their responsibilities, and sold their souls to the highest bidder, have put many good men on the with little or no regard for them, their families or the truth. They might as well erect an image of “ol’ moneybags” and start up the band because everyone is bowing to him already.

The Hebrew children were not afraid of the fire. They had the fire of God within them. They would not bend, they would not bow and they would not burn.

Historically and consistently God’s faithful servants have stood firmly upon the foundation of truth regardless of the consequences. John the Baptist was just such a man. In the face of a brutal king he was willing to say of his wife, “It is not lawful for thee to have her” (Matt. 14:1-4). Couldn’t he find anything positive to preach? When Paul stood before Felix he chose as his theme, “Righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). It had its intended effect, for Felix trembled. Paul was neither insulting nor arrogant. He had the same intention he would later have as he spoke to a young king, who responded inappropriately, “Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian.” We do not have to be ugly or offensive in our preaching, but we must be faithful. Like faithful Micaiah we must say, “As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak” (II Chron. 18:13).

Yes, historically God’s faithful have preached the Word (II Tim. 4:2), but just as historically they have paid the price, yet willingly (Acts 7:51-60). They knew

how it would come out in the end and that is why the final Book of God's inspired revelation to lost men is a book of victory (Rev. 20:12-15).

They Would Not Pray The King's Prayer

In Daniel 6:7 the host of unbelievers got together against one single man. Pray to anybody except the king and into the lion's den he would go. Daniel never wavered. Hard times were here. Would anybody blame him if he suspended his thrice daily praying? Here is his midnight hour. He would not budge. Although the king was distraught with the matter, he had no choice but to cast Daniel into the den. Early the next morning he hurried to the mouth of the den and asked:

O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions (Dan. 6:20)?

Every child in Sunday morning Bible class is able to answer that question.

What about you and your service to God? When people serve God for nothing more or less than what they think God will give them out of it by way of material goods, they will forsake Him if they are taken away. That is why when tragedy strikes some homes we hear, "Why did God let it happen?" "Where was God when my boy died?" "I go to church all the time and look what happened to me." Like Martha, they meet the Lord in the way and point the accusing finger, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Satan was astute enough to know that so many people serve God because they think it will bring them good times and material gain. That is why he said, "Doth Job fear God for nought" (Job 1:9)? It is a sign of that

woeful malady when problems cause people to quit the church. God’s people serve Him no matter what.

Psalm 37 has long been misused by sectarians to “prove” a child of God cannot be lost. It was never the Psalmist’s intention to convey such a message. Instead, he is speaking of the trials and heartaches of this life when he says,

Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast
down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his
hand (Psm. 37:24).

He is telling His people they will fall, and be hurt, but He is always there to help us get up again. We are more than conquerors of these evil things that happen in all of our lives because God is our helper (Rom. 8:31-32). Instead of building an impenetrable wall of bitterness and shaking our fists in the face of God, we must rise to the occasion in trials and tribulations and declare from the den of lions, “The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men...”

Chapter 8

Introduction To Ezekiel

Dave Miller

With the onset of rationalism and the Age of Enlightenment, the European intellectual community commenced to dismantle the authority and authenticity of the Bible. Their tampering consisted of the alleged existence of various uninspired editors and redactors who were credited with authorizing and collating the biblical documents into their present form. They also maintained that the miracles of the Bible were merely superstitious, pre-scientific descriptions of naturalistic phenomena not yet understood by human civilization.

The book of Ezekiel has certainly not been exempt from the butchery of literary criticism.¹ Attacks upon Ezekielian authorship began as early as the mid-1700s with G. L. Oeder. During the 1800s further erosion of scriptural authenticity was forthcoming from Leopold Zunz (1832), Abraham Geiger (1857) and L. Seinecke. The twentieth century has seen the higher critical manipulations of Kraetzschmar (1900), John (1905), Herrmann (1908), Hoelscher (1924), Torrey (1930), Smith (1931), Hertrich (1932), Irwin (1943), and Messel (1945).

In 1924, Gustav Hoelshcer postulated that only 143 of the 1273 verses in Ezekiel were written by the

historical sixth-century prophet while the rest was written by an anonymous author 150 years later. Torrey insisted that none of Ezekiel was written by the prophet. Rather, two separate writers created it after 230 BC in Jerusalem. The general trend of Liberal criticism ever since has continued in the direction of challenging the authenticity of Ezekielian authorship and the historicity of the events described, and affirming a late date for the book.

The attempts to deny authorship of the book to Ezekiel have revolved around two internal criteria. First, critics feel that the book demonstrates two completely different emphases. On the one hand, the first half of the book is filled with doom and gloom—the writer being extremely negative and hopeless in his presentations. But the last half of the book is filled with positive, encouraging expressions of future blessings. Critics have argued that these factors suggest the presence of two different writers.

Of course, this viewpoint is based upon purely subjective considerations. No inherent reason exists that forbids a single writer from presenting both emphases. In fact, virtually all of the prophets of the Old Testament announce judgment upon God’s people and/or their neighbors and then follow that judgment sentence with words of future hope and restoration if repentance is forthcoming. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Joel and Micah certainly follow this procedure. One must be in possession of a prejudicial perspective before approaching Scripture to come to such a conclusion.

A second attack upon Ezekiel has entailed insistence that the author gives evidence that he is writing from Palestine rather than from Babylonia. This

challenge to the integrity of the text fails to take into account several facets. First, Ezekiel's audience, who was with him in Babylon, were transplanted Jerusalem Jews like himself. His Jerusalemite audience would have numbered no less than 10,000 people (II Kings 24:14).

Second, in those passages where the author demonstrates apparent eyewitness knowledge of what is happening concurrently in Jerusalem, two factors are operative. News of what is happening in Jerusalem would have spread to the exiles in Babylon. But more obviously, Ezekiel was able to describe conditions in Palestine because he was supernaturally guided by God. One must posit naturalistic presuppositions and reject the inspiration of the Bible to conclude that Ezekiel could not speak of Palestinian events while situated in Babylon. If Ezekiel, and the rest of the writers of the Bible, were not the receptacles of divine revelation, then the Bible deserves to be ignored.

All theories and speculations which call into question the unity and integrity of the book of Ezekiel are unconvincing. They are fraught with unjustifiable assumptions and biases. They simply create additional inconsistencies and perplexities. The most convincing view is the traditional one that sees Ezekiel as the long recognized sixth century Hebrew prophet and author of the Old Testament book which bears his name.

Ezekiel—His Background And Times²

God, through the mouth of Moses (Lev. 26:14-45; Deut. 28:15-68), had warned his people that if they did not live faithfully once they took possession of the promised land, they would suffer severe penalties at the

hand of God. The ultimate punishment would be expulsion from the land. The ten northern tribes had already experienced the traumatic fulfillment of these divine threats when Shalmanesar IV of Assyria and his successor Sargon I swept down into northern Palestine, besieged Samaria, conquered the kingdom of Israel and deported the majority of the population into Assyrian captivity—from which they never actually returned.

Now, with the book of Ezekiel, the southern kingdom of Judah was about to receive from the Babylonians her due as well. She received her first blow in 605 BC. Fresh from his victory over Egyptian forces at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar entered Palestine and commenced an invasion of Judah. He captured Jerusalem and its king, Jehoiakim, who had to abandon Egyptian suzerainty and be reduced to a tributary. Several hostages were taken from among the youths of noble birth—including young Daniel. This first wave of prisoners was taken to Babylon and the seventy year period of Babylonian captivity predicted by Jeremiah set in.

Within three years, King Jehoiakim revolted against his Babylonian oppressors, eliciting a second invasion in 597 BC. When Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin ascended the throne at the age of eighteen. His reign lasted only three months before he was forced to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar who succeeded in taking Jerusalem a second time. This time, he banished the king and members of the royal court to captivity. He deported priests, all military personnel and the working class, leaving only the poor elements of society in the land. He also plundered the great Solomonic temple, removing a portion of its treasures to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar then appointed Jehoiachin's 21-year old uncle, Mattaniah, as a vassal king, changing his name to Zedekiah (II Kings 24).

This arrangement lasted some eleven years. Then Zedekiah, who was as evil as Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin who preceded him, instigated a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar, despite the instructions of God through Jeremiah (II Chron. 36:12). For the third time, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem, invoking a blockade and siege that lasted a year and a half. In 586 BC, he succeeded in penetrating the city walls and this time he showed no mercy. The city was put to the torch. Homes were burned, the great temple built by Solomon was leveled and the people were dragged away to concentration camps.

Zedekiah managed to escape through a passageway near his garden, but the Babylonians caught up with him on the plains of Jericho. He was taken prisoner and brought before Nebuchadnezzar in northern Palestine at Riblah. This occurrence fulfilled the prediction of Jeremiah who had declared that Zedekiah would see the king of Babylon face to face (Jer. 32:4; 34:3). Yet Ezekiel previously predicted that Zedekiah would not see Babylon (Ezek. 12:13).

These puzzling circumstances were fulfilled by Zedekiah seeing Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. But at that point Nebuchadnezzar ordered Zedekiah's two sons to be murdered before their father's eyes. Then an order was given for Zedekiah's eyes to be gouged out. He was shackled and carried to Babylon—in fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy that Zedekiah would be taken to Babylon but would not see Babylon. Thus ended the political existence of Judah.

Ezekiel–His Person

Amid these depressing scenes and in light of this colossal, catastrophic calamity that seemed to jeopardize the purposes of God through Israel, God raised up Ezekiel. The son of a priest, Ezekiel possessed the necessary power, courage and spiritual stamina to face the tremendous task that lay before him. His name was suited to the job–“God strengthens.”

Ezekiel was a citizen of Jerusalem. He was included in Nebuchadnezzar’s second deportation of some 10,000 people into Babylonian captivity in 597 BC–eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem. He managed to settle in his own home in the little village of Tell-Abib near Nippur some fifty miles south of Babylon on the Euphrates River. Tell-Abib was situated on the river Chebar. This river is better translated the Grand Canal–Nebuchadnezzar’s royal canal–and is known in cuneiform inscriptions as the Naru Kabari. It flowed from the Euphrates above Babylon southeast to rejoin the Euphrates below Ur.

Ezekiel was a married man and suffered the loss of his wife in 587 BC (24:16-18). Five years into the captivity, in 592 BC, Ezekiel was called by God to be a prophet–apparently at the age of thirty (1:1). He functioned in this capacity for twenty-two years until the twenty-seventh year of Jehoiachin’s captivity in 570 BC (29:17). His labors overlapped the work of Jeremiah, who remained in Palestine to address the remaining Jews there, and the work of Daniel, who was in his early years in Babylon. Habakkuk and Zephaniah also loomed in the background with their preaching efforts.

Ezekiel’s call was, itself, an awesome, soul-shaking experience. He saw God–represented by a Being who

could go everywhere and see everything, who possessed power in every location, and who governed the entire universe. Ezekiel's first act was to eat a meal that was spoon-fed by God. The meal consisted of a scroll (the form of ancient books). This book contained the message of God Almighty and when Ezekiel consumed it, he likened the taste to that of honey. His assimilation of this meal prepared him to speak God's words to the people.

Ezekiel—His Mission And Method

Ezekiel's work as a prophet may be contrasted with the work of Daniel. Daniel's prophetic service during the captivity centered more on providing the exiles with the example of how to remain loyal to God under adverse circumstances and to predict the victory of God's kingdom over the kingdoms of this world. Ezekiel's prophetic role, on the other hand, was directed toward the Jewish exiles themselves. As a watcher over God's people, Ezekiel focused on the central themes of judgment, repentance and salvation. In this regard, Ezekiel was comparable to Jeremiah.

When Ezekiel arrived in Babylon, Jerusalem was still standing and portions of Jewish society and culture were still operational. The Jewish population that remained in Palestine, as well as the exiled Jews in Babylon, continued to entertain a strong optimism that Babylonian tyranny would be short-lived. This sentiment was buttressed by the declarations of false prophets like Hananiah, who announced to the people that the Babylonian yoke would be broken within two years and that all deportees would be returned to their homeland (Jer. 28).

The widespread sympathy with this viewpoint among the people amounted to resistance to the decree of God. It demonstrated the people’s unwillingness to perceive the captivity as just and God-ordained. It failed to come to grips with the fact that the captivity would last seventy years. This stubborn defiance created an unfavorable atmosphere with which Ezekiel had to contend for the first six years of his ministry. For six years, he worked hard to tear down false hopes of an impending release from captivity. He strove to prepare the people for the even greater tragedy of Jerusalem’s coming destruction.

This work was not easy. He was dealing with people who were thrust into the most beautiful city of the ancient world, with its gardens and palaces, temples, and fortifications. Yet these exiles had been stripped of their possessions and businesses and reduced to poverty. They are described as “impudent and stubborn” (2:4), “briers and thorns,” “scorpions,” and “rebellious” (2:6). Their pride, their hard hearts, their refusal to face spiritual reality created a negative, unpleasant atmosphere in which Ezekiel was called to function.

When, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar completed his successive assaults against Palestine by destroying the capital city and temple, the Jewish nation began to face the fact that their optimism had been unjustified. The false prophets had lied to them and the destruction of the kingdom of Judah as a political entity had been made a final reality. God’s prophets, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, had been vindicated as correct and now needed to be heard. Now the people were in a more receptive mood and poised to give serious attention to Ezekiel’s verbal presentations. Having pronounced judgment

sentences upon the nation and her heathen neighbors, Ezekiel could next turn to the job of evoking repentance, rebuilding the national morale, and providing comfort in the hope of future restoration and salvation.

Before Ezekiel launched his mission, he observed that customary period of mourning (3:15; Gen. 50:10; Job 2:13). He mourned for two reasons: (1) They had lost everything, having been ripped from their homeland, and were now sitting in misery in a foreign, unfriendly country; and (2) They had the wrong attitude and were still steeped in stubborn defiance of God's will for their lives. Ezekiel mourned because he was commissioned by God and entrusted with the unenviable task of sounding the warning, alarming the people and shocking them out of their false sense of security.

Ezekiel's singular mission was to hammer the populace with the fact that the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity were spawned by God. Such drastic measures were necessary to correct the disobedient nation by extricating them from their apostacy and bringing them to repentance. Ezekiel was God's watchman (3:17), charged with warning the people. They needed to comprehend the meaning and purpose of the exile. They needed to learn from this national tragedy and then get on with submission to God and penitent living.

He found himself addressing a company of exiles—fragments of a shattered nation. They were what was left of broken homes—having lost loved ones, possessions, and their homeland. Some had even lost their God. They had seen their dreams dashed and their hopes fade. Ezekiel spoke to the people who had suffered, people who were acquainted with grief and blinded with tears.

Despite these adversities and traumas, they remained obstinate and unpliant before God. Ezekiel's interaction commences by going in among the captives and, in his own words, “I sat where they sat” (3:15).

He performed his duties in dynamic fashion. At times he was harsh and blunt. He certainly remained uncompromising. He portrayed fearless determination amid deep convictions. He was a strict moralist. Yet Ezekiel was a preacher who was deeply sympathetic and filled with love for the people. He understood the need to bring the people to their knees in humility in view of the judgment from God for their sins. But he also provided them with the assurance that they were still God's people and that future blessings would be forthcoming.

Ezekiel's prediction of restoration was characterized by profound assurance and jubilant anticipation. In the midst of depressing incarceration, this hope and joy was no doubt bolstered by that fantastic vision of God which he received at the beginning of his ministry. He was brought face to face with God's attributes of supremacy and sacrificial service, affiliation with man, yet infinite deity. He encountered the Supreme King of the universe who was willing to stoop in service to save.

In speaking to the exiles, Ezekiel spoke through them to the entire Israelite nation. In speaking to the nation, he spoke through them to all nationalities and to all times. People and nations face ruin today. Obstinacy and rebellion characterize themselves right to our hearts. Even in the midst of doom, gloom, sorrow and judgment, we can rise above to catch a glimpse of the ultimate victory. We can be catapulted into joyous singing and vibrant rejoicing as we anticipate the glory

that awaits the saints in eternity. There the ultimate activity of the soul will entail the worship of deity.

Ezekiel's preaching consisted of vivid imagery, dramatic style, weird symbols and peculiar psychic states. For example, he cut his hair and beard with a sword and then divided it into equal portions (5:1). He drew pictures of the fall of the city (4:1). He dug a tunnel under the wall and dragged his possessions through after him (12:5). He was even carried by his hair over mountain and plain to Jerusalem (8:3). Ezekiel used more symbolism and allegory than the other prophets. His writing is rich in pictures and metaphors as well as repetition of peculiar expressions and forms.

Especially noteworthy regarding Ezekiel's writing is the great emphasis which he places upon the divine origin of his message. He conveys this significance by saturating his writing with the use of several expressions. First, God consistently refers to Ezekiel as "son of man" (e.g., 2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3:1,3, 4, 10, 17, 25; etc.). Secondly, Ezekiel uses the interesting combination of the divine names "Lord God" (e.g., 2:4; 3:11,27; 4:14; 5:5,7,8; 6:3,11; etc.). The terms usually occur in the phrase "Thus says the Lord God" (cf., 3:27). Thirdly, he uses the expression, "Then they shall know that I am Lord" (e.g., 6:7,10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27; etc.). Fourthly, God frequently orders Ezekiel to prophesy or do other things (e.g., 2:1, 3; 3:1, 4, 11; 4:1; 6:2; etc.). Fifthly, Ezekiel claims "the hand of the Lord was upon me" (e.g., 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1). Sixthly, he explains "the Spirit lifted me up" (2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24). In the seventh place, he claims "the word of the Lord came to me" (1:3; 3:16; 6:1; 7:1; 11:14; 12:1; etc.). Eighth, Ezekiel says, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon me" (2:2, 3:24; 11:5). Finally,

there is the repeated use of the phrase “saith the Lord God” (5:11; 12:25; 13:8, 16; 14:11, 14, 16, 18, 20; 15:8; 16:8, 14, 19).

These expressions demonstrate that Ezekiel was a man who was literally driven and directed by the Spirit of God. He was inspired by God to write down the book of Ezekiel and preserve for posterity God’s message through him. He recognized himself to be under the governing influence and the inspired superintendence of the great God of the universe.

Our final consideration in grasping Ezekiel’s mission and method is the numerous indicators which help the reader to date the various sections of the book. Most of the material is in chronological order. Exceptions are due to the inspired purposes Ezekiel had in mind. The following chart may be helpful to the serious student.

1:2–5th year exile
8:1–6th year
20:1–7th year
24:1–9th year
26:1–11th year
29:1–10th year
29:17–27th year
30:20–11th year
31:1–11th year
32:1–12th year
33:21–12th year
40:1–25th year

Ezekiel–His Message

Already noted is the fact that Ezekiel’s essential message was twofold: (1) to convict the exiles of their rebellion against God and bring them to repentance; and (2) to foretell the future blessings that would eventually come. This twofold division of Ezekiel is evident in the

following outline which will help the reader to grasp the layout of the contents of Ezekiel:

- I. Announcements of Judgment & Doom (1-32)
 - A. Vision and Call (1-3)
 - B. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (4-24)
 - C. Judgment on Pagan Neighbors (25-32)
 - Ammon (25:1-7)
 - Moab (25:8-11)
 - Edom (25:12-14)
 - Philistia (25:15-17)
 - Tyre (26:1-28:19)
 - Sidon (26:20-26)
 - Egypt (29:1-32:32)

- II. Announcements of Future Hope/Salvation (33-48)
 - A. Redemption/restoration of Israel (33-39)
 - B. Reformation/exaltation of the Temple (40-48)

Beyond these fundamental focal points, a variety of instructive teachings, common to most of the prophets, emerge from Ezekiel's writings:

(1) God is transcendent and self-existent; he possesses absolute power over the universe.

(2) God is the key to life. Adversity and suffering will come when people disobey Him, but restoration, redemption and hope will come when people repent and obey Him. Indeed, obedience to God's commands is a central theme of the entire Bible.

(3) God acts and reveals Himself through the events of history. The result of His activities is that people come to know that He is the Lord (e.g., 12:16).

(4) God is the God of **all** nations. He is an international God. He judges all. All are accountable to Him. He rules with impartiality over the affairs of men.

(5) Every person is individually responsible to God (18; 33:10-20).

(6) God is gracious and good. He is genuinely concerned over the state of people. He wants all men to be saved. He is willing to accept their repentance and reward them. He is a God of hope—even in the midst of judgment.

(7) The ultimate expression of God's love for humanity is foreshadowed in the messianic overtones of the prophets (e.g., 17:22-24; 21:26-27; 34:23-24).

Endnotes

1 For discussions of the higher critical treatment of Ezekiel, consult Gleason L. Archer, Jr., **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction** (1964; rev. ed. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 369-373; Edward J. Young, **An Introduction to The Old Testament** (1949, repr. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 241-243; H. H. Rowley, **The Book of Ezekiel in Modern Study** (1953).

2 Works which have contributed to the preparations of this manuscript include: Clovis G. Chappell, **Sermons on Old Testament Characters** (New York, NY: Harper and Brother Publishers, 1925); Gesenius' **Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon** (1847, repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979); C. F. Keil, **Ezekiel, Daniel** (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976); G. Campbell Morgan, **The Messages of the Books of the Bible** (London: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.); Carl G. Howie, **The Book of Ezekiel** (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1961). Kyle M. Yates, **Preaching from the Prophets** (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1942).

Chapter 9

Major Lessons From Ezekiel

Gary W. Summers

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Gen. 1:27-28).¹

From the very first of the book of Genesis God sets forth very simply what is at the core of this world’s essence: Himself and the individual. This earth is the setting, but it is incidental to the relationship of God and man. Even the husband-wife relationship, which was instituted in the Garden of Eden and is fundamental to good marriages, families, communities, and nations, rates lower than this one (Luke 14:26). Of all the creation, only human beings are made in the image of the Almighty. They, and only they, must some day give an account for their actions (Rom. 14:12). Consequently, the most important, primary concern for everyone is: How do I stand with God?

The Bible was written for the express purpose of revealing exactly that information. God has always made

His will known to mankind – either in vocal form (through the prophets) or in written form (through the inspired word – II Tim. 3:16). Either means of communication was valid and authoritative (II Thess. 2:15).

Throughout time God has spoken in a variety of ways (Heb. 1:1-2). Today His revelation to man is complete (II Peter 1:3; Jude 3); the Christian age will culminate in the Lord's return (I Thess. 4:13-18). The focus of this study is a prior period – one which was a dark and sorrowful time in the history of the Israelites. It was a time when God's own people "mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (II Chron. 36:16). This wholesale rejection of Jehovah resulted in the Babylonian captivity, which occurred in three waves over a twenty year period (606 B. C., 597 B. C., and 586 B. C.). Man had forgotten God.

Ezekiel was a faithful prophet of Jehovah who proclaimed the character of God to a nation marked for captivity and sorely in need of developing the proper respect and attitudes toward Him. The book that bears Ezekiel's name defines all these elements: (1) the role of a faithful preacher; (2) the nature of God; and (3) the proper response of man to God. The major lessons of Ezekiel fall within this framework.

The Role Of The Faithful Preacher

In the Old Testament the prophets spoke by inspiration; their message was not of their own devising: "... but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20-21). There were prophets

in the church in the first century, also, but since those days inspiration has ceased because mankind now has God's completed revelation (II Peter 1:3).

Today's preachers should be the counterparts of yesterday's prophets in that our message is also not our own; rather, it comes from the inspired word of God. Many could profit from how God defined Ezekiel's role as a prophet, for it also describes us as faithful gospel preachers.

The preacher must set forth truth regardless of the response he receives or of harmful personal consequences.

And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house (Ezek. 2:6).

Not a few preachers have received "looks" ranging from scowls to contempt to utter hatred; some have received threats of personal harm or assurances they would be "fired." Elijah "ran for his life" from Jezebel (I Kings 19:2-3); Jeremiah was forced into mire for his preaching (Jer. 38:6); and Jesus was crucified.

But the reaction of the hearers is irrelevant. Truth must be preached "in season, and out of season" (II Tim. 4:2). While a preacher should present the message in the kindest and sincerest manner possible, he cannot begin asking, "How well will this be received?" or "Will the brethren want to get rid of me?" Such concerns are the first step toward compromise, "the watered-down gospel." No one should intentionally be abusive, abrasive, or insulting in his preaching, but God's man must

present God's Word.

Although it is much easier to tickle ears (II Tim. 4:3-4) and speak "smooth things" (Isa. 30:10), it is only the truth that will profit anyone (Prov. 23:23; John 8:31-32). And while it is easier to proclaim good news ("We are going to return to the land"), sometimes sadness and sorrow must come first ("Jerusalem will fall!"). Today, we must frequently convince people of the bad news that they are lost in sin before we can herald the good news of salvation through Christ. Paul made the Corinthian brethren sorrowful, but their repentance was a cause of rejoicing (II Cor. 7:8-11). It is the preacher's function to communicate the Word of God regardless of what it costs him.

Sometimes the price may be frustration. How many of us today can identify with the people's reaction to Ezekiel's "sermon"?

So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them (Ezek. 33:31-32).

"That was a lovely sermon, Ezekiel," commented one woman after he had finished. "Yes, very nice," chimed in another, as she shook his hand. Then, as soon as they were out of earshot: "He really does preach some good lessons, but he seems a little overly harsh in denouncing idols, worshipping the sun, or the custom we women have in this culture of weeping for Tammuz"

(Ezek. 8). “I know what you mean; it seems as though every prophet has a hobby of some kind he just has to ride now and then. Just ignore it.”

Today, brethren will likewise smile, compliment the sermon on principles of modesty, and then spend the afternoon at the beach. They will amen the sermon opposing instrumental music in worship and then take their families to the latest “gospel music” concert. They will express their appreciation for the lesson on sound doctrine, then head for the Nashville Jubilee. How frustrating for the Word of truth to be perceived as merely a “very lovely song” – as that which may be lightly dismissed!

Also discouraging is the lack of attendance or enthusiastic support for the Word of God on Sunday evenings, Wednesday evenings, or for special lectureships, or for gospel meetings. Robert R. Taylor, Jr., wrote in **The Living Messages of the Old Testament** of the story that B. C. Goodpasture told about F. D. Srygley.

Brother Srygley was conducting a “mission meeting” under a millshed. Interest was low; attendance was poor. Brother Srygley became discouraged. He went to his room for meditation and prayer. He began to read Paul’s first epistle to Timothy. He came to the words which said, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (I Tim. 4:16). Brother Srygley said something like this to himself, ‘I may not be saving anybody else in this meeting, but I am saving F. D. Srygley. That makes the meeting worthwhile.’ His preaching in the remainder of the meeting took on new life and

urgency. He preached as he had never preached before. Souls were touched and several precious people were baptized into Christ before it concluded. Discouragement must never stay our hands, seal our lips of proclamation, or make still the pen that writes for Jehovah's glory or man's profit (302).²

The ideal reception of the Word of God is that people will receive it and live it (James 1:22). (They will, if they are wise – Matt. 7:21-27.) In actuality, however, they may be indifferent toward it, two-faced about it, negligent of it, or hostile against it (not to mention the messenger who brings it). Whatever the response, the truth must be faithfully preached.

The preacher must set forth truth in order to deliver his own soul.

As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse – for they are a rebellious house – yet they will know that a prophet has been among them (Ezek. 2:5).

This point is elaborated on in Ezekiel 3:17-21 and 33:1-9. If the man of God warns the wicked to repent and he refuses, then he has delivered his own soul – even though the stiffnecked one remains lost. In other words, the preacher must first be faithful to God before being faithful to man. If he preaches the word of God, it will be a message man **needs** to hear. If he begins to craft the message to suit what man **wants** to hear, he has failed the hearers, God, and himself.

When Ezekiel finished warning Israel properly, they would know that a prophet had been among them. Dub McClish aptly commented on the sad scene one would observe in many of the “Lord’s?” churches today.

When some pulpiteers get through, their hearers may know they have had a politician, a psychologist, a social worker, an after-dinner speaker, a moralist, a story-teller, a book-reviewer, a back-slapping promoter or something else, but not a gospel preacher among them (**Living Lessons From the Prophets**, 205).³

Preaching is a serious endeavor; there are only so many opportunities to stand before the congregation and proclaim the Word. Each lesson must count! Like Ezekiel, we need to be today's watchmen so that we may deliver our souls. "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

The preacher must set forth truth regardless of whom the message affects.

In Ezekiel 34 God told the prophet to denounce the nation's leaders: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves!" (vs. 2). These men had failed to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back what was driven away, or seek for those who were lost. Furthermore, these misguided souls had ruled with force and cruelty (vs. 5).

Imagine working up this sermon. No compliments would be expected – or received. Israel had departed from God; whose fault was it? The shepherds – those entrusted with looking out for the best interests of the people. They had failed miserably by ignoring the work that needed to be done in order to selfishly satisfy themselves. Surely, it is a hard thing to rebuke leaders, but it must be done (I Tim. 5:17-20).

The church at the end of the twentieth century

parallels in some respects the church of one hundred years ago. Before our very eyes congregations are departing from the faith – only this apostasy is even worse than the one a century ago. Then it concerned false worship (instrumental music) and a corruption of church organization (the missionary society). This time is includes those items plus the tolerance of false doctrine (premillennialism, for example) and even a corruption of the plan of salvation itself!⁴

Who can be blamed for this tragedy? The shepherds of God's people who have supported false doctrine and false teachers instead of taking a stand for the truth stand guilty as charged. God told the leaders of His people in Ezekiel's day: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand" (Ezek. 34:10). Today's shepherds have been charged with overseeing the flock, the church which Jesus purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28-29). Elders also must give an account for the souls of church members (Heb. 13:17); will they escape judgment who have handed the flock over to the wolves?

The book of Ezekiel contains some serious, pertinent principles for the church today – both for preachers and elders. Preachers must preach the Word of God regardless of the consequences to them, regardless of the response of the people, and regardless of who is affected by the message. Ezekiel serves as an inspiration for all of us to be faithful to our Lord.

The Character Of God

What is God like? Although He is well-defined throughout the Scriptures, His character is clearly seen in how He deals with the nation of Israel. A number of

His attributes surface in the book of Ezekiel.

God's Glory

Who knows where the erroneous concept of God came from which depicts Him as an old man wearing flowing robes with a long white beard? Ezekiel saw above the firmament the likeness of a throne with the likeness of a man above it.

Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (Ezek. 1:27-28).

This description of brilliant radiance allows all mankind to perceive God's essence. His glory emanates from His perfect, holy, flawless, totally pure, sinless Being. No wonder John says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). Implied by this glory is the fact that God is worthy of worship, service, and reverence. The correct response of man is to stand in awe of Him.

God's Omniscience

In Ezekiel 8 God takes the prophet on a tour of wickedness. Israelites were participating in abominations that he would have had no knowledge of had not God revealed them to him.

Then He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land’” (Ezek. 8:12).

How foolish can man be to think that God neither knows nor cares what happens. David realized that God’s presence is everywhere and that He knows one hundred percent of what occurs each day (Psm. 139:7-12). He prayed for God to cleanse him from “secret faults” and to keep him from “presumptuous sins” (Psm. 19:12-13). Moses likewise recognized the futility of hiding anything from God. “You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance” (Psm. 90:8). Truly, “... there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

Did Israel really think God was unaware of their sins? If so, their self-deception would prove fatal. God assures them: “I know the things that come into your mind” (Ezek. 11:5). He further chooses to demonstrate His omniscience to His wayward people in terms of the prophecy of their destruction (Ezek. 6:1-6). When those things were fulfilled, “... you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezek. 6:7). Those who survived would learn a great lesson about the nature of God at the expense of those who fell. May we be more astute.

God’s Holiness

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you,’ says the Lord God. ‘My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine

lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord God' (Ezek. 13:8-9).

How sad that God's subjects so often forget that **God hates sin!** Would that brethren today, like the psalmist, might share the Lord's disposition and likewise hate every false way (Psm. 119:104). God hates lying (Prov. 6:17) – especially when it is done in His name. Some in the church today want to ignore false teachers, but notice how God “marked” (Rom. 16:17) these men; it is obvious that the Lord holds such men in contempt. In fact, His future treatment of them is another proof of God's omniscience and power.

Since God is holy, He cannot tolerate the slick, oily orator who gushes forth error. In Ezekiel's day they were preaching “Peace!’ when then is no peace” (Ezek. 13:10, 16). Today's false teachers are crying out for peace, also: peace with religious error, peace with the world, peace (ultimately) with the devil! Too many today are like the daughters of Israel who prophesied “out of their own heart” (Ezek. 10:17). No one has the authority to invent what he or she wishes God had said. If anyone speaks, it should be “as the oracles of God” (I Peter 4:11). God will judge the presumptuous; they will be no more (Ezek. 10:15).

God's Justice

Because God is holy, He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. This lesson is the one most often repeated throughout the book. Following are a few of the passages that teach the judgment of a holy God.

Thus says the Lord God: 'Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers..., I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy (Ezek. 16:36-38, but read 35-43).

Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophecy against the land of Israel, and say to the land of Israel, "Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I am against you, and I will draw my sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you'" (Ezek. 21:2-3, but read 21:1-27).

'You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled yourself with the idols which you have made ... Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you ... In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed ... Behold, therefore, I beat my fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst ... Therefore, I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,' says the Lord God (Ezek. 22:4, 6, 9, 13, 31).

Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, therefore you shall bear the penalty of your lewdness and your harlotry' (Ezek. 23:35, but read 22-35).

Therefore I poured out My fury on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it (Ezek. 36:18).

These are only a brief smattering of passages which repeatedly verify that God judges sin. Also worthy of study is the symbol of the cooking pot (Ezek. 24:1-14), in which God declares, “Because I have purged you, and you were not purged, you will not be purged of your filthiness any more, till I have caused My fury to rest upon you” (vs. 13). God refuses to hold back, spare, or relent; He will judge them according to their deeds (vs. 14).

Israel had degenerated to such a low level that even the influence of the righteous would avail nothing. “‘Even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘They would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness’” (Ezek. 14:20, but read 14:12-23). These three men, Winfred Clark points out, were known respectively for their preaching (Noah, as per II Peter 2:5), their praying (Dan. 6:25-28), and their patience (Job, as per James 5:11).⁵ Yet even if such men were collectively in the city, it was so corrupt that they with a combined influence would only save themselves.

This judgment upon Israel was not to be the result of chance. It would not be a mere accident. God was purposefully bringing evil upon them.

They shall repay you for your lewdness, and you shall pay for your idolatrous sins. Then you shall know that I am the Lord God (Ezek. 23:49).

Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed (Ezek. 33:29).

God's Sovereignty

Many people today, as in Israel 2,600 years ago,

think they can manipulate God. “Why, we’re all saved by grace,” they correctly affirm, but then they erroneously add, “Therefore, it doesn’t matter what we do.” Shall we continue in sin, or disregard sin, that grace may abound? The Jews must have felt that since they were God’s people they could “get away with” just about anything.

But just as He refused to be inquired of by Saul (I Sam. 28:6), so God rejected His nation. He despises being trifled with; He told Ezekiel to tell the people: “I will not be inquired of by you” (Ezek. 20:3). The reason for this disruption in communication was the extremely sinful condition of the people, as described in the previous section.

For when you offer your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day. So shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you (Ezek. 20:31).

How many people today operate by the same false notion that no matter what evils they participate in, God will forgive them? God is loving and merciful, but He is not a fool. Wickedness must be repented of, turned from (Ezek. 18:32). “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth” (Psm. 34:15-16).

God is also sovereign with respect to the nations. Whether He has a special covenant with them or not, He holds all responsible and accountable to Him. Notice the proclamations against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Egypt, and others (Ezek. 25-31).

They shall be desolate in the midst of the desolate countries, and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are laid waste. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have set a fire in Egypt and all her helpers are destroyed (Ezek. 30:7-8).

No one is excluded from being accountable to God (Acts 17:30-31). The realization of this fact should cause the Lord's church to be mighty in evangelism, knowing that we too must give account of ourselves (II Cor. 5:10). Who else can serve as watchmen (Ezek. 3:16-27) but those who know the truth and have a firm grasp on reality?

God's Grace, Love, Mercy, Forgiveness, And Power

All of these qualities are seen in His restoration of Israel. The majority of Israelites died for their sins. The remainder were taken captive and punished "by the rivers of Babylon" (Psm. 137). But God's great power is seen by His ability to breathe life into dry bones (Ezek. 37); He can make a garden of Eden out of desolate land (Ezek. 36:34-35); He can even give a new heart and a new spirit when He makes clean (Ezek. 36:25-26). With such they could remember their evil ways and loathe themselves in their own sight, for their iniquities and abominations (Ezek. 36:31). Man always has hope while the possibility of repentance exists.

The Proper Response Of Man Toward God

It would be useless to talk about man's responsibilities toward God if we did not possess a free will. God gave Israel (and us) a choice to worship and serve Him or not (Josh. 24:14, e. g.). Some begin life by

practicing evil and then turning to righteousness; unfortunately, the opposite also occurs (Ezek. 18:24-27). God pleads with people to make the right choice.

Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek. 33:11).

How hard-hearted must human beings be not to heed Heaven's piteous plea on our behalf! Truly, God is abundantly compassionate toward us; but He will not make the decision for us. That freedom is ours. How ought man to respond to a gracious, loving heavenly Father?

**Man's response should be one
of reverence.**

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes (Ezek. 36:22-23).

God is concerned about the treatment of even His name – that it be not profaned but rather hallowed (Exod. 20:7; Matt. 6:9). But reverencing His name is but a prelude to respecting Him in His entirety. And standing in awe of the essence of Deity means worshipping Him, serving Him, and being obedient in all things from the heart (Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 6:17-18; Josh. 24:14; Deut. 6:5).

**Man's response should be one
of gratitude and humility.**

None of us would enjoy life if God had not created us; but He has done so much more than that, blessing us physically and spiritually. God outlines what He had done for His people in Ezekiel 16:3-14. He depicts her as a dirty heathen infant, that He had to rescue and nurture into maturity. He clothed her and made her beautiful, adorning her with gold and silver.

Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed upon you, says the Lord God. But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it (Ezek. 16:14-15).

Notice that all of Israel's beauty was due to what God had done. It is no different today: whatever talents or abilities we have came from God. There can be no room for boasting or high-mindedness in the kingdom of God. As Paul asked the Corinthians, "What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). "... He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (I Cor. 1:31). The danger always exists that we will think we are blessed because we deserve it, which reveals a lack of both humility and gratitude.

Israel's playing the harlot (after having been made beautiful by the Lord) was equivalent to a slap in the face. Such ingratitude! Such pride! How could anyone behave in such a manner? And yet, who does not? Do not the atheist and the evolutionist foolishly misuse their

intelligence to worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:18-31)? Do not the Hollywood starlets and producers, as well as the pornographers literally do what God accused Israel of – disgrace themselves by making a spectacle of human flesh and advocating harlotries? And even in the church are there not some who would rely upon their own abilities to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:28-31)?

Proper gratitude for existence and salvation is to recognize that God created us in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10) and that Jesus purchased us so that He would have His own special people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-14). God has made us what we are, and He is with us as we perform His will (Matt. 28:18-20).

Man's response should be one of remembrance.

Israel's ingratitude was caused in part by a failure to remember what God had done. "And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your own blood" (Ezek. 16:22).

The word **remember** is the key word in the book of Deuteronomy (see 5:15; 7:18; 8:2; 8:18; 9:7; etc.), but Israel eventually **forgot**. About twenty years ago there was a song which emphasized the importance of remembering. Its words are repeated below (from memory).

Roll back the curtain of memory now and then.
Show me where You brought me from and
where I could have been. Remember, I'm
human, and humans forget. So remind me,
remind me, dear Lord.

Other key doctrines for God's people to **remember** are that God means what He says and that He punishes sin.

Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in their abominations. And they shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I will bring this calamity upon them (Ezek. 6:9-10).

**Man's response should be one
of rejecting the world.**

What problem has continually plagued God's people? Repeatedly, we have reenacted the pattern of flirtation with the world, association (fellowship) with it, and finally capitulation to it. The Israelites wanted a king to "be like all the nations" (Deut. 17:14; I Sam. 8:19-20). God forbade them certain practices to keep them separate from the nations (Lev. 19:26-31). In the New Testament John cautions: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world" (I John 2:15). Fondness for these things leads to an eventual downfall. Judgment was brought upon Israel for having succumbed "to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you" (Ezek. 11:12).

No one can rightly expect God to bless, provide, or protect when the desires of the heart lie elsewhere.

What you have in your mind shall never be,
when you say, 'We will be like the Gentiles,

like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone' (Ezek. 20:32).

How many times has it been said, "It only took God a few months to take Israel out of Egypt, but it took forty years to get Egypt out of Israel"? Such is surely the suggestion of this verse: "... They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt ..." (Ezek. 20:7). Likewise, Christians must be dead to sin and alive to Christ, squelching sin's desire for us (Rom. 6:11-14; Gen. 4:8).

Man's response should be one of tearing down idols in the heart.

Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity (Ezek. 14:3a).

For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. They have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me, passing them through the fire, to devour them (Ezek. 23:37).

The problem of idolatry is central to the book of Ezekiel (study chapters 16, 20, and 23). We must beware of making the same mistake in the modern era. Idols may come packaged differently, but they still abound. Instead of Chemosh, there is covetousness (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5); in the place of Remphan, there is Fame; Alcohol has replaced Ashtoreth; Moloch has given way to Movies; Milcom has become television's sitcoms; and abortion has arisen out of the ashes of Baal. Has America not enshrined personal convenience and pleasure in the place

of hard work and sacrifice? Have we exalted or crucified Self? “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (I John 5:21).

**Man’s response should be one
of faithfulness to the end.**

The book of Ezekiel clearly teaches that man cannot be faithful for just a portion of his life but rather until death (study 18:24-29 and 33:12-19). One may genuinely repent of former evils committed, turn to righteousness, and be saved. But one cannot give up the ways of God and remain His. It is sad to see all of one’s former good deeds become useless, but God is fair in denying the apostate a heavenly home.

Most people know someone who one walked in the light but now abides in the darkness of either error and immorality. It is the worst tragedy man can experience – to have known, taught, preached, and written the truth – to turn his back on it and cast it all behind him, along with God (Ezek. 23:35). Such a person tramples the Son of God underfoot, devalues the blood of Christ, insults the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), crucifies our precious Lord all over again, and puts Jesus to an open shame (Heb. 6:6).

Any influence these souls had for good is now being exercised for evil. Who knows how many may follow them into error, immorality, or indifference? Nothing, but nothing ought to be allowed to unsettle or shake us, or move us away from the love of Christ. Neither persecution, tragic events, ill health, nor all the demons in hell should be allowed to sway us from our trust in God (Rom. 8:38-39). Stand therefore (Eph. 6:10-17).

Conclusion

How are God's people to be defined? God's desire is that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them, and they shall be My people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:20).

And what about the world and its idols? Those things estrange us from our God (Ezek. 14:5). The only solution is to "Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations" (Ezek. 14:6).

Repeatedly, throughout this great prophetic book God has emphasized, "Then **you** shall know ..." (Ezek. 6:7, 10; 13:9; 23:49; 33:29; 36:22-23). The problem is that "you" only included a select few who would survive His judgment upon them to learn the lesson. But as few as might have profited from it, there will be none next time. When the final day of judgment arrives, everyone shall know the truth, but it will be too late to repent.

Then we shall know (by experience) that God is, that Jesus is His Son, that He died on the cross for our sins, and that we could only be saved by His blood. **Then** we shall know how foolish and futile were the idols that we enshrined in our hearts. **Then** we shall know that the things upon the earth that so many prized so highly were vain and useless. **Then** we shall know that God and spiritual concerns should have had our highest priority. **Then** we shall also realize belatedly that no more opportunity exists for turning, for repentance. **Now** is all the time we have to make the appropriate changes in our lives. Prophets of old and preachers of the gospel today have set forth the message of how mankind should respond to the God who made us; let us heed His Word.

Endnotes

1 All quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

2 Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren, eds., **Living Messages of the Old Testament**, Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1977.

3 John Waddey, ed., **Living Lessons from the Prophets**, Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1985.

4 One statement that covers all four areas is Carroll D. Osburn's, which he wrote in **The Peaceable Kingdom**: "There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who differ on ... whether instrumental music is used in worship. There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiastical matters such as congregations organization, or soteriological matters such as whether baptism is 'for' or 'because of' the remission of sins" (91-92). Following these criteria, what should not be allowed in Christian fellowship? The obvious answer is: one who believes and advocates truth.

5 This article appeared in the April 16th, 1995, issue of the Cedar Bayou bulletin (Baytown, Texas).

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A Prophetic Look At Christ In The Major Prophets

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Chapter 10

The Virgin Birth Of Jesus Christ

Winfred Clark

When this topic is introduced, one is aware of the fact that he enters the realm of the miraculous. If there is any doubt about the supernatural intervention of God in the affairs of men one will have difficulty in this area. This is not the first generation of people who have had problems dealing with the matter of the Lord's Sonship. Again and again you will find this discussed. For example, Jesus Himself entered the discussion. Remember this question?

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? (Matt. 16:13).

On another occasion you will find Him asking, "What think ye of Christ, whose son is he? (Matt. 22:42). One can see that our Lord was not afraid to address this question. He was not hesitant to discuss the matter.

The Virgin Birth Was Prophetically Foretold

One will surely have no problem with this statement of fact. One of the best known of all prophecies concerning this birth is the following by the prophet

Isaiah:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

We recognize this to be a Messianic prophecy found in this great book of prophecy. This prophecy was uttered during the time of Ahaz, king of Judah. An alliance had been formed between the nations of Israel and Syria against Judah. They were in the position to overthrow the kingdom of Judah. Isaiah and his son came to reassure Ahaz and to support such by offering a sign (Isa. 7:11). Ahaz would ask for no such sign. It is then that Isaiah uttered a prophecy to the “house of David” (Isa. 7:13). The virgin birth to come would be a sign. It would signify some things. The sign would be something to “behold” (Isa. 7:14). This birth would demand attention. Such is ever the case of miracles. That is the reason they are called “signs” (John 20:30-31).

We are aware of a controversy which has raged over the word “virgin.” The Hebrew word is “**almah.**” It is used in six other instances and in each case it means, “an unmarried chaste woman. Genesis 24:43 makes reference to Rebekah. You will note that Genesis 24:16 calls her a virgin. Exodus 2:8 refers to Miriam. Psalms 68:25 refers to “damsels.” One will find two references to such in the Song of Solomon (1:3; 6:8). Proverbs mentions such (Prov. 30:19). All of these cases show us a woman, or women, who are chaste and have not known a man. But, we are not left in doubt as to “the” virgin of whom Isaiah spoke. We have a New Testament commentary on that which concerns the virgin. Note:

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Matt. 1:22-23).

We do not have to wonder which “prophet,” for we have the words of Isaiah. But these verses also show us in context the identity of the virgin of whom Isaiah spoke.

But Isaiah had other things to say about this birth:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of (his) government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

You will notice that the prophet will speak of such being in the present tense. It is “a child IS born,” “a son IS given.” But how can this be since it would not come to pass for hundreds of years? Note what Paul would have to say about such: “(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). When God says a thing will occur, such can be spoken of as though it had already taken place. It is just that sure. The language of Isaiah will clearly set forth the humanity of our Lord. This is seen in the passage that will say, “unto us a son is born.” That would mean his

incarnation. That means he would be made flesh (John 1:14). That means God would be manifest in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16). But these passages will also show us the deity of our Lord. Note: “...his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God...”. This would affirm His deity without a doubt. How could He be called such if He were not divine? We will also find within these verses the authority of our Lord. We see where the “government would be upon His shoulders.” He is the one who would sit upon the throne of David.

We should not be surprised by these prophecies. We find a prophecy of such by God Himself through Moses. Note:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

There can be no doubt about this passage having reference to the virgin birth of our Lord. It is here that we learn that it would be “her seed” that would bruise the serpent’s head. It would not be the seed of man and woman, but only of the woman. This is in keeping with what Paul would later say, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law (Gal. 4:4). Notice please, “made of woman.” Thus, when one comes to the book of Isaiah and hears the language of the foregoing discussion, he is not surprised. He is well aware of the fact that such had already been promised.

But we also find others prophecies concerning this birth. Do we not have a prediction of this birth by the angel Gabriel? Note,

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:31-33).

There can be no question about the prophecy of this virgin having a child. There is no question about such a birth being of a virgin. There can be no question about whether this child would be male or female. He would be a son. There would be no doubt about His position. One can surely see the similarities to be found between what the prophet Isaiah had to say and what we hear from the angel. But why not? They both get their information from the same source. Both spoke of the virgin birth of our Lord.

We also have prophecy from Elisabeth to Mary about Mary and her child. Notice Luke's description:

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed (art) thou among women, and blessed (is) the fruit of thy womb. And whence (is) this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed (is) she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord (Luke 1:41-45).

One does not read this language without seeing additional information concerning the virgin birth of

Jesus. One could also add to all of this the **prophecy of Zacharias** (Luke 1:67-80).

We can say without fear of contradiction that the virgin birth was prophetically foretold a number of times and by a number of voices. If we need the mouth of two or three witnesses we surely have these.

The Virgin Birth Is A Proven Fact

When one reads the New Testament he will find evidence to support the virgin birth in abundance. An honest reader will have no problem seeing that which was prophesied as coming to pass. One could present the evidence to support such in a number of ways. We shall pursue several. Any one of these would be ample for the honest and sincere mind. There is the **conduct of Joseph**. We find a record of such in the following:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just (man), and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which

being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS (Matt. 1:18-25).

This is a lengthy reading but it will contain the evidence one would need. We will note several things about the birth of our Lord. One, we are seeing within these verses a very good man. Two, we are seeing a good man who was espoused to Mary. Three, we have a good man who knew he was not the father of the child of Mary to whom he was espoused. Four, He was willing to listen to what the angel would have to say as to how the child was conceived. Five, he was willing to accept the angel's explanation as to how she conceived the child. Six, he was willing to accept Mary after she had conceived the child. One would have to say the conduct of Joseph would go a long way toward proving this was not an ordinary birth.

But one would have to also take into account the **reaction of Mary**. Surely her reaction will tell us something of the nature of this birth. You will recall the announcement of the Lord's birth to Mary as recorded by Luke (Luke 1:26-33). In this announcement we are told, "thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Notice the reaction of Mary after she was told she would have a child. "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). There was no question in her mind as to how a child would ordinarily be born. There was no question in her mind that she had not been with a man. But the angel gives her the answer as to "how" she would give birth to a child:

And the angel answered and said unto her,
The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the
power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:
therefore also that holy thing which shall be
born of thee shall be called the Son of God
(Luke 1:35).

This explanation satisfied Mary. That was the way she reacted. Note what Luke has to say about the matter. “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38). One needs to also note what Mary would do after this. Remember that she is now with child of the Holy Spirit. Some would say she would have a child by a Roman soldier. Thus the child would be illegitimate. But where does she go? She goes to the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth (Luke 1:40). But this is a man who is a priest (Luke 1:5,8). If she is going to give birth to a child conceived out of wedlock would this not make her guilty of adultery? But what was the penalty for such? Surely we know such was death (Deut. 22:20-21). Would not this priest demand that she be put to death? Was this not the very thing Joseph was trying to avoid (Matt. 1:18-21)? Does she react like a woman who is giving birth to an illegitimate child?

Again, how would you account for her reaction when Jesus was on the cross? Is He not being placed there, in part, because He claimed to be the Son of God? If He were not what He claimed to be, would Mary not be a heartless woman to allow Him to die because of this claim?

But, what of the testimony of God? Do we not have some statements of God Himself concerning the identity of Jesus? You will remember one at His baptism. “And

lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Again:

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Matt. 17:5).

On two occasions we have a record of God’s identification of Jesus as His Son. Surely the testimony of God would stand up in any court. Surely there would be no danger of impeaching this witness.

One can add to all of this **the resurrection of Jesus**. This, too, is supportive of His being the Son of God. Note what Paul had to say about the matter in his letter to the church at Rome. “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). If any in Rome had any doubt about the Lord being the Son of God, the resurrection would prove such to be the case. His resurrection by God proves He is who He said He was.

The Virgin Birth Is A Pillar Of Faith

There are some things upon which our faith will rest. Surely the virgin birth of our Lord would qualify as one of those cardinal teachings upon which our faith will rest. Brother Rex Turner has well stated this fact in his book concerning Systematic Theology. This would have to do with fundamental things. If one were able to discount successfully the virgin birth of our Lord; he would be able to discredit all the rest. All would stand or fall together. The claims of the Bible would mean nothing if one could find the claim for the virgin birth

to be false. But we know such to be true and trustworthy and thus a vital support for our faith.

Such **undergirds the dependability** of God. Fulfilled prophecy will surely show God’s dependability. We have seen the content of that prophecy uttered many years before and now it comes to pass just as the prophet had said. In fact one would do well to take another look at the record. “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying” (Matt. 1:22). Thus what the prophet had said was about to come to pass. But that does not surprise us for we have seen God’s word confirmed time and again. His dependability is a well documented fact. It is also a declared fact. Time and again we will see in our Bible that God is faithful. Note:

Let us hold fast the profession of (our) faith without wavering; for he (is) faithful that promised (Heb. 10:23).

Such is declared again by the same writer:

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised (Heb. 11:11).

But not only is the dependability of God documented and declared; it is also demonstrated. This we have found in the virgin birth of our Lord.

Such confirms **the deity of Jesus**. This matter is brought to the fore by a question proposed to a group of Pharisees. Note:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him,

The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thine footstool? If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son (Matt. 22:41-45).

Jesus proposed some questions to focus on what they would think of him. He points out the fact that David, by inspiration, called Jesus Lord. Jesus would then ask them, "If David calleth him Lord, how is he his son?" The only way that could possibly be the case would be for David's Lord to be born of one of the descendants of David. This is the very thing which occurs in the virgin birth of our Lord. This is the matter under discussion when Paul said:

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared (to be) the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:3-4).

So the same one who was the son of David according to the flesh, is also the Son of God. Thus we have God in the flesh.

Such **upholds the authority of Jesus**. This is the bottom line of this whole matter. You will notice that God will use the matter of His sonship and authority together. Listen to what He has to say:

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Matt. 17:5).

One cannot miss that point at all. God couples who He

is with what He would have to say. God affirms that since He is who He is then He must be heard. God points to His Son as the one who has the authority. Did not Jesus affirm the same? “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). One cannot separate the virgin birth of our Lord from who He is. Note again what Paul would have to say. “And declared (to be) the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). He is seen to be the Son of God. But He is also seen to be the Son of God with power. The Hebrew writer would also affirm the same sort of thing:

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

His sonship and authority go hand in hand.

Conclusion

When one deals with the virgin birth of our Lord, he deals with the incarnation of Jesus. Such is affirmed over and over in the New Testament. It does not deny His pre-existence but rather affirms it. This is clear in the book of John when he says:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Paul affirms much the same thing time and again. Note,

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God: But made himself

of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

We have no doubt as to who was born of the virgin. But we are not left in the dark as to why He was born of the virgin. Let the Hebrews writer tell you:

Wherefore when he cometh in to the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me (Heb. 10:5).

We thus know that He came into the world through the womb of a virgin to die for all of us. Yes, "he by the grace of God tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Chapter 11

Christ, The Light Of The World

Maxie B. Boren

Total darkness in the physical realm is eerie. About twenty-five or thirty miles southwest of Carlsbad, New Mexico, there is a National Park called Carlsbad Caverns. It is one of the largest and most extensive caves in the world. Included on the tour of this phenomenon of the natural world which God created, is one particularly large area known as the "Big Room." In years past, groups going through the main cavern were always seated in that "Big Room" by the Park Ranger while information was given concerning the discovery of the cave system there, the early explorations, and the usual materialistic explanation of the millions of years involved in the formation of the stalactites and stalagmites. Following about a ten minute lecture relative to these matters, the Park Ranger would then tell the people that "for fun" he was going to give them a taste of what it was like to be in the cave without the benefit of lighting. All were cautioned to remain seated, and not to panic. Having dispensed this information, he would then have the lights turned off for about half a minute. A hushed silence was invariably the immediate response of the people as the lights went out. It was always a rather testing experience for the tourists, even

for just the few fleeting seconds involved, even though surrounded by others, with full confidence that the lights would soon be coming back on. Yes, it is a dreadful and foreboding feeling to be in total darkness, when a person can absolutely see nothing at all! It is an eerie experience! In fact, the practice has been stopped in recent years due to some people becoming hysterical in the complete darkness, and even one individual reputedly having committed suicide.

Spiritual darkness is worse. The complete blackness of the Carlsbad Caverns' experience has been shared with you for the sake of comparison. One thing worse than darkness in the material realm is darkness in the spiritual realm. And to a large measure, that characterizes the foreboding situation existing in the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the days of Isaiah, the prophet. (As a point of chronological information, the work of Isaiah is generally dated in "round numbers" from about 760 to 700 B.C., in the times of the kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, of Judah.) Both realms of the division, which had occurred in about 933 B.C., had strayed from God. But of the two, the northern kingdom, or Israel, as it was known, was particularly corrupted by heathen influences and the evil leadership of continuously wicked kings. While the thrust of Isaiah's work was to the southern kingdom, Judah, yet he was not unmindful of events unfolding among his kinsmen to the north.

A Look At Isaiah 9:1

Israel walked in darkness. We are not surprised in the text under consideration, that reference is made to the diminished spiritual condition of a certain portion

of the northern kingdom...the land in which the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali dwelled. (Zebulun’s inheritance was west of the Sea of Galilee, and Naphtali’s was west and northwest of the same Sea...read Joshua 19:10-16, 32-39...this areas was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles,” primarily because of the failure on the part of the tribes of Zebulun, Naphtali, Asher, and Ephraim to drive out the Gentile nations such as the Canaanites, Amorites, and perhaps the Phoenicians and Syrians as well, and the fact that many of these cohabited the land with the Israelites dwelling there...read Judges 1:28-35.)¹ Revealed to us is the vexation which God brought upon them because they had chosen to walk in ways contrary to His will. Let us note the verse and then we will endeavor to give a brief exegesis of it:

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles (NKJV).

The word “nevertheless” conveys the idea of “notwithstanding.” The idea expressed is this: notwithstanding the fact God had brought appropriate affliction upon Zebulun and Naphtali through the Assyrians (the “first” time most likely refers to the oppression recorded in II Kings 15:27-29 and Isaiah 7, in the days of Pekah, king of Israel, and Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria), which “afterwards” would be more severe (see II Kings 17), yet the gloom, or dim prognosis emanating from such oppression was brightened by what is stated in verse 2:

The people who walked in darkness have seen

a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.

The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, far removed from Jerusalem, the center of Jehovah worship, and influenced by the heathen dwelling around them and among them, and mis-directed by one wicked king after another, were depicted by the prophet as having “walked in darkness.” The illustration given at the outset should help us to grasp considerable insight into the religious and moral debilitation that must have surely existed, prompting the descriptive phrase from Isaiah’s pen. These people were undoubtedly living apart from God! Yet, in spite of their sinfulness and their choice of the darkness in which to live, Jehovah was gracious enough to “let them see light!” And as generally recognized, light is symbolic of knowledge, truth, deliverance, and joy!

The promise of light. Whether or not verse 2 may have had immediate reference to some sort of momentary enlightenment and deliverance pertaining to the inhabitants of Zebulun and Naphtali of that time is uncertain. But one thing we know for sure, it was a prophetic statement concerning the coming of the Messiah, who is in fact the Great Light! Of this there can be no doubt whatsoever. Because the apostle Matthew, in relating where Jesus went following His temptation by Satan in the wilderness, informs us:

He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, **that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet**, saying, ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness

saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned (Matt. 4:13-16, NKJV).

Further, two of the verses that follow in the early context of Isaiah 9 are indisputably Messianic. Note verses 6 and 7:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, ever forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (NKJV).

Several passages from the New Testament could be cited to substantiate the prophetic implications of what Isaiah wrote: Matthew 1:18-21; Luke 1:26-33; Acts 2:29-36; Ephesians 1:21-23; 2:14-17; II Thessalonians 3:16, etc.

A Brief Examination Of Isaiah 42:6-7

I, the Lord have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, **as a light to the Gentiles**, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house (NKJV).

Christ to be sent on a great mission. A careful analysis of this verse leads to the conclusion that God is herein speaking to His Son. God is inherently righteous, and His purpose to lead men out of darkness and to save them from sin was righteous. Therefore, He

selected One who was eminently righteous in order to provide the Way to make men right with Himself. It is as though God said to His Son something like this: "I have called (or appointed) You to accomplish this great work of making it possible for men to be saved from sin that they might be made right with Me. I will hold Your hand in the accomplishing of this noble mission. Thus, I give You to be the Savior, and covenant to the people; to provide light to the Gentiles, to open eyes of those who grope in the darkness, and to release the prisoners from the prison house."

This blends harmoniously with Isaiah 61:1-2, which was read by Jesus before the synagogue in Nazareth as being fulfilled in Himself, as recorded in Luke 4:16-21:

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (NKJV).

Christ and the covenant. On his first missionary journey, in the city of Antioch of Pisidia, the apostle

Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel to those assembled in the synagogue there. In doing so, he quoted from Isaiah 55:3, where the text talks of “the everlasting covenant” and the sure mercies (or blessings) of David, and made it clear that this was offered in Jesus Christ as He declared:

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins... (Acts 13:38).

Paul’s very mission, as given to him by the Lord, was to go to the Gentiles with the message of truth:

...to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me (Acts 26:18, NKJV).

Yes, He came to offer man a covenant relationship with God! Concerning our Savior, the inspired penman wrote:

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second (Heb. 8:6-7, NKJV).

Christ is the “author and finisher” of our faith (Heb. 12:2)–the originator and head of the New Covenant (Col. 1:18), the One that shed His blood to make it reality (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:20), and the One who is the surety of it (Heb. 7:22). Christ is the heart and core of the covenant, because apart from Him there is no hope (John 15:5; Eph. 2:12). In Christ there is the promise of life eternal but without the Son there is no life (I John 5:11-

13). How precious are the promises of God (II Peter 1:4) when we realize they are given through Christ (Eph. 1:3) to us and there is nothing “iffy” about them, for “in him is the yea; wherefore also through him is the Amen...” (II Cor. 1:20, ASV). Perhaps the great apostle to the Gentiles summed it up best, when he wrote of the Christ:

For in Him dwells all the fulness of the
Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him,
who is the head of all principality and power
(Col. 2:9-10, NKJV).

Regrettably, vast multitudes choose darkness.

People living today in our country take pride in how much knowledge has been acquired over the last half century. And we must concede, it really is amazing what the combined effort of men’s minds have attained. Incredible advances have been made in most every field of human endeavor—in communications, transportation, electronics, medicine, space exploration, etc. No wonder ours has been called the age of advancement. The accumulated knowledge of man has easily quadrupled since the year 1900. And yet, *the vast majority have chosen to remain devoid of Bible knowledge, and have opted to walk in spiritual darkness!* This appalling ignorance is evidenced in the fallacious answers men give to the basic questions regarding human life...its origin, its purpose, its destiny! And, of course, it is evidenced in the way they live...in a mad pursuit of sinful pleasure. But this is really nothing new. The history of mankind since the garden of Eden has been one of rebellion to God, and a rejection of the light He has offered to dispel the darkness.

Jesus Christ Is The Light Of The World

There is only one true light. Indeed, Jesus came to illuminate a world steeped in darkness! He came to open the eyes of the spiritually blind! To set the captives free! He came to save men from sin!

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (John 8:12, NKJV).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God** (John 3:16-21, NKJV).

The Bible teaches plainly that Jesus Christ was with God (Greek–*theos*) in the beginning, and that He Himself was God. This is a profound thought, but more easily understood when attention is given to the Greek word, *theos*, which is translated by the English word, God. *Theos* means deity; the possessing of Divine attributes and characteristics of deity...thus, signifying the eternal nature, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. of one

so designated.² While there is but ONE *theos*, yet there are three Persons in the Godhead...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, and in view of the passage citation given above from John chapter 3, let us note another Scripture context that pertains to our subject:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it** (John 1:1-5, NKJV).

Rejected by the Jews. Yet, when He came to the nation of the Jews, they rejected Him. In fact, one of the most pathetic recordings in Scripture pertains to that rejection: “He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not” (John 1:11, ASV). Addressing a gathering of these very people, the Lord indicted them by saying,

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life (John 5:39-40, NKJV).

Notice how that in spite of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God and the light of the world, and the fact that He graciously came from the heavenly realm for the singular purpose of greatly benefiting mankind, yet the nation of Israel refused to understand or accept Him. They obstinately closed their ears and eyes to the truth!

Concerning these calloused souls, Jesus said:

And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them (Matt. 13:14-15, NKJV).

They refused even though His affirmation of being the light of the world was substantiated beyond any doubt by the mighty deeds and wonders which He did! Jesus declared, “the very works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36). Thus, toward the closing of the fourth account of the life of Christ, the apostle recorded:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31, NKJV).

Recognizing the demonstrative proof of Jesus’ supernatural power graphically revealed in the miracles He performed, the inspired historian, Luke, was careful to include twenty of them in his account to Theophilus of the life of Christ. And in his second letter he penned to the same individual, which was but a continuation of the narrative we call the gospel according to Luke, he stated, “The former account I made, O Theophilus, **of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...**” (Acts 1:1).

Not surprisingly, Luke was guided by the Spirit into carefully recording the beginning of the apostle Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know... (Acts 2:22).

Why We Should Follow Jesus

Though millions have rejected Him in times past, and millions still reject Him today, the insightful believer follows the Lord for good reasons!

Because of who Jesus is. As we have taken note, Jesus was, yea He is, the only begotten Son of the Living God! What He did verified that fact. What He taught verified it. The flawless character qualities He exemplified without fault verified it. And the fact He loved us so...enough to give His life in our stead, draws us to Him. Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself" (John 12:32, NKJV).

Because of the salvation He offers. He came to "seek and to save" the lost (Luke 19:10). The apostle Paul wrote:

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (I Tim. 1:15).

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men (Titus 2:11).

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (II Cor. 5:21).

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (II Cor. 8:9).

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:4-5).

In giving instruction to His apostles concerning the dissemination of the gospel message, Jesus commanded:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved;** but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16, NKJV).

Salvation is IN CHRIST (II Tim. 2:10). One must be “in Christ” in order to be a new creature (II Cor. 5:17), to receive the spiritual blessings so freely given of God (Eph. 1:3), and to have the prospect of life eternal (I John 5:11-12). Those that do not obey the gospel will suffer eternal punishment (II Thess. 1:8-9).

Because of the abundant life one enjoys in Christ. Jesus came that men might “have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). After nearly fifty years of being a Christian, I confidently affirm from the bottom of my heart that the “life in Christ” is the most meaningful, most fulfilled, and most happy life a person can live while residing on this earth. It is the only life that affords peace passing all understanding (Phil 4:7), and assured hope of life everlasting that serves as an “anchor” to one’s soul (Heb. 6:19). But to enjoy the

“abundant life” in Him, one must be sincere and earnest in really trying to “walk in His footsteps.”

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:6-7).

Conclusion

In view of the fact that Jesus Christ is our Savior, and the great and only true light of this world, then those who are Christians should follow Him implicitly. We should be extremely cautious to never contaminate ourselves by carrying on any semblance of a relationship with the kingdom of darkness. Paul emphatically declared to Christians,

Therefore, do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them...Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and **Christ will give you light**” (Eph. 5:7-8,11,14, NKJV).

And the apostle Peter admonished Christians with these words: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of **Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light** (I Peter 2:9, NKJV).

May every Christian rejoice and be thankful for what God has so graciously done for us in providing

salvation in Christ, and the wonderful hope of life eternal that transcends this veil of tears! And how thankful we should be for Jesus, who is our Savior, and the continual great light that shines so brilliantly in the darkness surrounding us to make our Way sure! To God belongs the praise and the glory, which was well stated by Paul so long ago: “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21).

Endnotes

1 **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, Vol. 2, p. 1163.

2 W. E. Vine, **Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words**, p. 160. Joseph Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament**, p. 285.

Chapter 12

Christ, The Branch

Billy Bland

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins (Isa. 11:1-5).

My appreciation is expressed to the eldership, deacons, preachers, and the fine congregation of the Southaven church of Christ for hosting this lectureship on the Major Prophets. This volume will be a fine addition and companion to the previous ***Power*** lectureship on the Minor Prophets. I also appreciate the opportunity to discuss the wonderful topic of "Christ,

The Branch.” It is hoped that this lesson will be such that will bring glory and edification to the church.

The Word “Branch”

All are familiar with the word “branch.” It is used in the Bible both in a literal and a figurative sense. It can be used as a literal shoot from a vine or tree that puts forth a branch. It is also used in the sense of a descendant. The word of God figuratively uses this word to describe the prosperity of putting one’s faith in God, “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch” (Prov. 11:28). It is used to describe God’s people as they came out of Egypt and were planted as a vine in the land of Canaan (cf. Psm. 80:7-12). Christ states that He is the vine and His disciples are the branches (John 15:1ff), illustrating how disciples must have fruit in Him or be cut off. (Interestingly, some think that the word “Nazarene” is from the root of the Hebrew word “*hetser*” translated branch in Isaiah 11:1.¹)

But this word also describes the Christ that was to come into the world. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah all speak of Christ as “the Branch” (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13).

Why Is Christ Called The Branch?

There can be no doubt that the branch is a reference to Christ, because Paul, in Romans 15:12, quotes Isaiah 11 and applies it to the Gentiles coming into Christ.

And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust (Rom. 15:12).

When a New Testament writer quotes an Old Testament prophesy and shows its fulfillment, that is the end of the matter. Isaiah is speaking about Christ!

As seen in our text the background of Isaiah 11:1 goes back to Jesse. He (Isaiah) said that a rod (or “shoot” ASV), would come forth out of Jesse and a “Branch” would grow out of his roots. Jesse is the father of David (Ruth 4:17), and God had made a promise to David that out of his seed would come a king who would establish His kingdom.

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever (II Sam. 7:12-13).

At times the house of Israel would become very small. It looked like it might even be destroyed. In Isaiah chapter 10, God is showing the destruction of Assyria (Israel’s enemy), yet there would be a remnant of Israel that would be spared. These would put their trust in the Lord.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness (Isa. 10:20-22).

Although the forest of Assyria would be destroyed, there would come forth a shoot out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch shall grow out of His roots (cf. Isa. 11:1). God’s spirit would rest upon Him and would rule with righteousness and equity.

Because of the sins of Israel, she would lose her power. In fact the earthly kingdom of Israel would end with Coniah. Jeremiah in his writings speaks of this.

Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah (Jer. 22:28-30)

Note carefully that the Lord said Coniah would be childless, and that he would not prosper in his days. He then makes this prophecy: “for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.” Thus the earthly kingdom of Judah comes to a close.

Keep in mind, however, that God promised to King David, that one from his seed (a descendant), would live and set up a kingdom. How could this be if the earthly kingdom of Judah came to a close with Coniah?

Interestingly, Jesus Christ is of the lineage of Coniah (cf. Matt. 1:12 “Jechonias” is the same as “Coniah”). One must remember that Jeremiah stated that no one of Coniah’s seed would prosper, sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more **in Judah** (emp. mine, B.B.). Jesus Christ, descendant of Coniah, is not

ruling in Judah. He reigns from heaven, where He sits on the right hand of God.

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:25-36).

Although Judah and Israel had been reduced to seemingly nothing because of sin, God would spare a remnant through whom the Branch would grow and bless

His people. Amos, God’s courageous prophet, speaks of this in his book.

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this (Amos 9:11-12).

This prophecy is quoted by James in Acts 15:16-17 and is applied to the New Testament age and in particular to the system set up by Jesus Christ (i.e. Christianity). James then makes this remarkable and thought provoking statement: **“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world”** (Acts 15:18).

Isaiah, the messianic prophet, shows that out of the remnant of God’s people, there would come a “shoot” out of Jesse and a “branch” would grow out of his roots. He would bless the world and give us peace. This peace is described by the figurative usage of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the kid (goat), etc. The vicious animals would be tamed and their diets changed from carnivorous to being strictly vegetarian (cf. Isa. 11:6-9).

This peace which the Messiah would bring is fulfilled in Christ. Paul spoke of this peace in Ephesians 2:13-17:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished

in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh (Eph. 2:13-17).

When Jesus was born, an angelic host appeared to shepherds abiding in a field and sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). This peace is fulfilled in Christ.

Jeremiah speaks of Jesus being “the righteous branch” that would grow up unto David (Jer. 23:5; 33:15). Zechariah, likewise, speaks prophetically of Christ, as “the Branch” in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12-13. When this branch would come, God would remove the iniquity of that land in one day,

And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zech. 6:12-13).

To understand this passage, one should know something of its background. Israel, because of her sins, had been carried into Assyrian captivity. Judah, the lower two tribes, did not learn from the mistake of Israel, and continued in her sins. Because of her sins, she likewise was carried into Babylonian captivity. Her first

carrying away was in 606 B.C., then again in 597 B.C., then finally in 586 Babylon destroyed the temple and completed taking Judah into her captivity. After Nebuchadnezzar’s death in 562 B.C., Babylon had a series of weak rulers. In 549 B.C., Cyrus, a Persian, had defeated the Medes and united the Medes and Persians. In 539 B.C. Cyrus entered into Babylon and took the city. Isaiah had earlier prophesied that Cyrus would allow the Jews to return to their homeland (cf. Isa. 44:24–45:7). Upon their return in 536 B.C., the Jews restored the altar and laid the foundation of the temple, which had been earlier destroyed. However, the work ceased for a period of sixteen years and God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the hearts of the people for the purpose of encouraging them to complete their work. Haggai asked the question, “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?” (Haggai 1:4). Zechariah, who was contemporary with Haggai, prophesied of a temple that would be built by “the Branch.” God’s people and purpose would endure and “the Branch” would grow up out of His place.

Zechariah mentions at least six things regarding “the Branch.”

1. The Branch would grow up out of His place (v. 12). Isaiah had prophesied,

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him (Isa. 53:2).

Here Christ is compared to “a tender plant” and as a “root out of a dry ground.” Attention is here given to the

fact that He would grow out of a “dry ground.” There was nothing about the surroundings of Christ that added to His greatness. In fact, Israel was not a world power but was herself under subjection to Rome. Yet out of this dry ground, the Christ would come. There have been times when a person thought that a plant was dead and would start to uproot the plant only to discover there was a “shoot” coming from this plant which might grow into a mighty tree. Christ is the mighty branch that came up out of His place.

2. He shall build the temple of the Lord (v. 12). Solomon’s temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Under Zerubbabel’s leadership the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild this temple. Zechariah stirs up the hearts of the people to complete this work. Zechariah foretells that the Branch will also build the temple of the Lord. This temple which the Lord would build is the church of Christ. Writing to the church of God in Corinth Paul states,

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (I Cor. 3:16-17).

In his second epistle to them, he shows how the temple is to be kept holy and separate from idols.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (II Cor. 6:14-18).

This same apostle will write to the Ephesians, impressing upon their minds that they are the temple of God.

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22).

The temple under the Old Testament foreshadowed and gave way to the temple of the Lord in the New Testament. Other institutions fade in comparison to the glorious temple of the Lord. Interestingly, Paul does not even mention to the Ephesians the temple of Diana, though it came to be one of the seven wonders of the world. It cannot compare to God’s holy temple. We are to remember that “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).

3. He shall bear the glory (v. 13). Jesus Christ is the builder of this temple and He likewise bears its glory.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

The church of Christ is indeed a glorious church and will be presented as such to Christ upon His second coming. It is in the church of our Lord that we glorify God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).

Notice is here given that one is to glorify God “in the church,” and not out of the church. It is sad that many do not see the true greatness of the church. Denominations have so confused the minds of the mass, that they think one is saved and glorifies God out of the church as easily and scripturally as one glorifies God in the church.

The church glorifies God in that it shows His manifold wisdom.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Eph. 3:10-11).

Jesus Christ, the Branch, is the head of a great body, called the church. “And he is the head of the body,

the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18).

4. He shall sit and rule upon His throne (v. 13). One notices that this “branch” is a king. In fact, He is the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords (I Tim. 6:16). He, today, sits and rules upon His throne. The Hebrew writer presents Him presently as king.

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Heb. 1:3).

He has His throne and rules with a sceptre of righteousness. “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Heb. 1:8).

Sadly, some would like to dethrone the Christ and have Him reigning on some future date as an earthly king. They think that He is now on the Lord’s throne but will one day come back and occupy David’s throne. The simple truth is, David’s throne is the Lord’s throne. A comparison of I Kings 2:12 with I Chronicles 29:23 will reveal that while Solomon sat on David’s throne, he was sitting upon the Lord’s throne. They are one and the same.

Jesus Christ was promised to sit upon the throne of David and this has been fulfilled. In the context of II Samuel 12, David was assured; “And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: Thy throne shall be established forever” (v. 16). This promise was reverberated in Luke 1:32-33,

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32-33).

All of this was fulfilled at the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Again, Peter settles this in Acts 2:30-33.

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear (Acts 2:30-33).

Daniel by inspiration of God, had foreseen this event.

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Jesus Christ does sit and rule upon His throne today.
May all willingly submit to His rule.

5. He shall be a priest upon His throne. Under the Old Testament system, people made sacrifices through a separate priesthood known as the Levitical priesthood. Over the priesthood of that day was a high priest. Today Christians comprise a “royal priesthood,” and thus there is no separate priesthood. Jesus Christ serves as the Christian’s High Priest.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:24-25).

Zechariah informs us that Christ has a double function or office. He is a priest while He is on His throne. Thus Jesus is prophet, priest, and king. This is the greatness of the one called “the branch.”

Jesus Christ is not an high priest after the lineage of Aaron, rather, He is an high priest after the order of Melchizedek. This had been foretold by the Psalmist in the long ago. “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psm. 110:4). The Hebrew writer quotes the Psalmist and makes application to Christ. “As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order

of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:6).

6. The counsel of peace shall be between them both (v. 13). The branch that would grow up out of His place and build the temple of the Lord and bear the glory and sit and rule upon His throne gives the counsel of peace between his priesthood and kingship. The world is ever seeking for lasting peace. Some turn to drugs, worldly (sinful) pleasures, etc. looking for peace and happiness. Jesus Christ offers peace to a troubled world. He is termed as the “Prince of Peace.”

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

Again, note the connection between peace and the kingdom in the above passage. Remember that Zechariah had stated that “the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

The book of Ephesians shows that true peace is to be found only in Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile

both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (Eph. 2:14-16).

If one is to have peace with God, he must be “in Christ.” Jesus said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The Premillennialist Abuse Of These Passages

Premillennialism teaches that the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament has not yet been established. In spite of the multitude of Scriptures which show that the kingdom has been established (Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:13-14; John 3:3-5; Heb. 12:28, etc.), premillennialism states that when Jesus returns, He will establish a kingdom in the city of Jerusalem and reign a literal one thousand years.

But, if premillennialism is true (which it is not), why didn't Jesus set up His kingdom when He came the first time? The premillennialist answers, “the Jews rejected it.” The kingdom then, according to them, had to be postponed.

In accordance with this speculative theory, Scofield says this chapter is a prophetic picture of the glory of the future kingdom. This is the kingdom announced by John the Baptist as “at hand.” It was then rejected, but will be set up when David's son returns in glory.² Note the impact of Scofield's comments. John announced this kingdom as at hand, but he was wrong! (That is according to the premillennialist).

In similar fashion, W. E. Blackstone says, “Surely nothing is more plainly stated in the scriptures” than

that the Israelites are to be restored to Canaan, and Jerusalem rebuilt.³ He uses (misuses, B.B.) Isaiah 11:11 as one of his proof texts.⁴

The major problem for those writers (and other premillennialists), is that the inspired writers of the New Testament quote these very passages and show their fulfillment in Christ. Paul, in Romans 15:12 quotes Isaiah 11:10 and shows its fulfillment in Christ. The peace described in Isaiah 11:6ff is fulfilled in Christ recorded in Ephesians 2:14-16. The nations mentioned in Isaiah 11:11 are mentioned in Acts 2:9-11.

Rather than establishing premillennialism, Zechariah 6:12-13 disproves its theories. Zechariah states that Jesus will be a priest while He is on His throne. Yet Hebrews 8:4 says He will not be a priest while on the earth (remember the priests came from the tribe of Levi and Christ came from the tribe of Judah). If Christ will be a priest while on His throne, but will not be a priest on earth, then His throne will not be on the earth.

There are many other ways the prophets disprove man's theory of premillennialism, but that is the subject of another writer of this book. The above are simply offered to show how the system of premillennialism does not fit with the passages dealing with "the branch."

Lessons Learned

There are many valuable lessons for us from the writings of the prophets. Below a few of them are stated as related to the subject of "Christ, the branch."

1. God is true to His promise. He promised that Christ would come through the lineage of David (see II Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 11:1; Amos 9:11-12). God was true to His promise.

2. God’s care for His people. Although God’s people turned from Him, He still loved them and left a remnant. When man truly repented of his sins, God allowed him to come back into His fellowship.

3. The greatness of the church is seen in that it is the Lord’s temple. “The branch” that was to come would build the Lord’s temple. This temple is the church of God (I Cor. 1:1-2; 3:16-17).

4. Jesus Christ rules in righteousness. Jeremiah states:

In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land (Jer. 33:15).

The Hebrew writer says He rules in righteousness.

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Heb. 1:8-9).

America, and all the world, need to love righteousness and hate iniquity.

5. Christ is exalted. Zechariah states that the branch would bear the glory of the Lord’s temple. May we glorify God in the church (Eph. 3:20-21).

Conclusion

Although God’s people had turned away from Him and given in to idolatry and been greatly reduced, a rod or shoot did come out of the stem of Jesse and a branch did grow out of his roots. The world has been blessed by

this branch. Today, He offers salvation to all that come to Him. One day, He will return to receive the church unto Himself (Eph. 5:25-27). May we love Him, honor Him, and obey Him.

Endnotes

- 1 Wilson, William, **Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies**; (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 48.
- 2 Biederwolf, William Edward, **The Millennium Bible**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 59.
- 3 Blackstone, W. E. **Jesus Is Coming**, (Old Tappen, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1932), 162.
- 4 Ibid., 167.

Chapter 13

Christ, The King And Cornerstone Of His Church

Paul Sain

Thank you for the invitation to be a part of the *Power* lectureship. May we add our voice to *many* others who have expressed delight that this series exists again. We love and respect the good church that meets at Southaven. We share many common desires, interests, and goals. Though our paths cross very little, our hope is in Jesus Christ, and our eternal goal is the mansion He has gone to prepare.

May I add a touch more emphasis to the valuable study of the Major Prophets. The great soldier and inspired Apostle Paul declared the valuable truth that the things written aforetime can be so beneficial, if we will learn and profit from it (Rom. 15:4¹). May we carefully approach this entire lectureship study with awe.

Our Subject: Christ, The King And Cornerstone Of His Church

We shall build upon the following basic points: (1) The Bible declares that Jesus Christ was/is King of kings and Lord of lords; (2) The Bible declares Christ as the promised Messiah; (3) The Bible emphasizes Christ as the builder, purchaser, head and cornerstone of His

church; (4) The Bible defines the way of salvation for man – in Christ, in His church, and ONLY in His ONE body.

Note what the Bible teaches concerning “**Jesus Christ Throughout The Scriptures**” (with a special emphasis toward Jesus as the **King**, and **Cornerstone** of the Church).

OLD TESTAMENT ~

Genesis.....	The Creator of all and Promised Seed of Eve
Exodus	The Sacrificial Lamb of God
Leviticus	The Scapegoat and Atonement
Numbers	The Star of Jacob
Deuteronomy	The Prophet like Moses
Joshua	The Captain of the Lord's Army
Judges	The Saviour of the Oppressed
Ruth.....	Our Kinsman Redeemer
Samuel	The Despised and Rejected King
Kings	The King of Kings
Chronicles	The Lord of Lords
Ezra	The Restorer of God's law
Nehemiah	The Builder of Bulwarks; Lord of All
Esther.....	Protector of His people and the Providence of God
Job.....	Our Risen and Returning Saviour
Psalms	The Son of God, the Coming One, the Reigning One, the Leader of Praise, David's Son, David's Lord
Proverbs	Our Wisdom of all ages
Ecclesiastes	The Wise Man of God
Song Of Solomon	My Beloved
Isaiah	Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Suffering Substitute
Jeremiah.....	The Lord of Righteousness
Lamentations	The Man of Sorrows
Ezekiel	The Throne Sitter
Daniel.....	The Smiting Stone
Hosea	David's Greater King
Joel.....	The Lord of Bounty
Amos	The Rescuer of Israel
Obadiah	The Deliverer

“Christ, King And Cornerstone”

Jonah	The Buried And Risen Saviour
Micah	The Everlasting God
Nahum	Our Stronghold in the day of wrath
Habakkuk	The Anchor of our faith
Zephaniah	The Judge and Cleanser
Haggai	The Lord of Presence and Power
Zechariah	The Smitten Shepherd
Malachi	The Great Refiner and Purifier

NEW TESTAMENT ~

Matthew	King of the Jews
Mark	The Servant of Jehovah
Luke	The Perfect Son of God
John	The Word, the Son of God
Acts	The Ascended Lord, Present King
Romans	Our Righteousness to serve
I Corinthians	The Firstfruits of the dead
II Corinthians	The Sin-Offering for us
Galatians	The End of the law
Ephesians	The Redemption Giver and Cornerstone of the Church
Philippians	Supplier of every need, Our Strength
Colossians	The Image of the Invisible God The Preeminent One
I Thessalonians	Our Returning Lord
II Thessalonians	The World's Merciful Judge
I Timothy	The Only Potentate, The Mediator
II Timothy	The Bestower of Crowns
Titus	Our Great God and Saviour
Philemon	The Father's Partner
Hebrews	Our High Priest
James	The Lord of hosts
I Peter	The Center of Old Testament Prophecy
II Peter	The Longsuffering Saviour
I John	The Word of Life
II John	Son of the Father, in Truth and Love
III John	The Truth to follow
Jude	The Believer's Hope
Revelation	The King, Lord, and Conqueror!

~ Charles R. Williams via
Hartsville Pike church bulletin
Gallatin, TN (1986) ²

1. The Bible Declares Several Facts About Jesus Christ, King Of Kings And Lord Of Lords

Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-3; 14:5; 17:5). It was by Christ that all things were made (John 1:3; Eph. 3:9). God sent His only begotten Son to earth (John 3:16; Luke 19:10). Christ was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:21,25). He lived on earth, tempted like all men, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15; I Peter 2:22). Jesus promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). He offered Himself as the sacrifice upon the cross, for the sins of the world (Heb. 9:28; Rom. 5:6). Jesus built His church and it began on Pentecost (Acts 2). Christ is the head of the church, the body (Eph. 1:22-23). He is the Saviour of the body (Eph. 5:23). He is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6). He is our High Priest (Heb. 7:24-27). The Son of God will come again (Acts 1:11), and will one day judge all (II Cor. 5:10). Jesus now is King in His Kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world.

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

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

We shall notice in more detail later, but briefly may we be reminded of the various "*pictures*" we have of the church of our Lord. In the inspired Scriptures we find the church as the "**body**" of which Christ is the head, and we are individual members. The church is also compared to an "**army**" of which Christ is the

commander-in-chief, and we are soldiers fighting faithfully against the enemy, until the victory is secured. The church is also compared to a “**kingdom**” of which Christ is the King, and we are citizens.

Of the numerous prophecies concerning Christ from the Old Testament prophets, we note especially the one from Daniel concerning the kingdom,

And in the days of these kings **shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed:** and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44, emp. mine, PS).

Christ spoke of the kingdom when He said He would give the keys to Simon Peter,

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church;** and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the **keys of the kingdom** of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:16-19, emp. mine, PS).

The Son of God is the King of kings, over His Kingdom which began almost 2,000 years ago. His Kingdom is still in existence today. How wonderful and thrilling it is to be subjects in His Kingdom.

2. The Bible Declares Christ As The Promised Messiah

The Almighty hand of Jehovah is clearly demonstrated in the numerous prophecies from various inspired writers, who wrote from different years, from different lands, who had different backgrounds; yet the inspired writing blended together. The following listing is incomplete, but proves the power of God, and the fulfillment of these prophecies create greater faith.

Prophecies Concerning Christ

	Prophecy	Fulfillment
Seed of woman	Gen. 3:15	Matt. 1:18
Seed of Abraham	Gen. 12:1-3	Gal. 3:16
Seed of David	Psm. 132:11	Acts 13:23
Born of a virgin	Isa. 7:14	Matt. 1:18
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Luke 2:4-6
John, forerunner	Isaiah 11:3	Matt. 3:1-3
Anointed by Spirit	Psm. 14:7	Matt. 3:16-17
A deliverer to people	Isa. 61:1-3	Luke 4:16-21
Without guile	Isa. 53:9	I Peter 2:22
Performed miracles	Isa. 35:5-6	Luke 7:18-23
Stone of stumbling	Isa. 8:14	Rom. 9:32
Betrayed by a friend	Psm. 41:9	John 13:18-21
Sold for 30 pcs. silver	Zech. 11:12	Matt. 26:15
Smitten on cheek	Micah 5:1	Matt. 27:30
Numbered among thieves	Isa. 53:12	Mark 15:28
Cast lots for garments	Psm. 22:18	Matt. 27:35
Ascended into heaven	Psm. 68:18	Acts 1:9
Kingdom for world	Psm. 2:6	Luke 1:32
Kingdom	Dan. 7:13-14	Phil. 2:9-10

Jesus Christ was the Messiah of which the prophets of old spoke, and the people anticipated:

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, **We have found the Messias**, which is, being interpreted, the Christ (John 1:41, emp. mine, PS).

The woman saith unto him, **I know that**

Messias cometh, which is called Christ:
when he is come, he will tell us all things (John
4:25, emp. mine, PS).

The Jews, for many generations, had looked for and hoped for a personal deliverer. Based upon the promises they had received from Jehovah, they had a longing for the Messiah, their Saviour.

The term “Messianic” is used in a double sense to describe the larger hope of a glorious future for the nation, as well as the narrower one of a personal Messiah who is to be the prominent figure in the perfected kingdom.³

Yet, without doubt, the idea of the Saviour, for whom they had longed, suffering and dying upon a cross was totally foreign to their concept of a Saviour and Lord.⁴ Even the disciples of Christ did not understand His frequent references to His suffering and death that would soon be upon Him.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Saviour and promised One.

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David...Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ...This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted... (Acts 2:29-33).

The Bible declares Jesus Christ as mankind’s Saviour ~ the Messiah, Saviour, Redeemer, Lord and King.

3. The Bible Emphasizes Christ As The Builder, Purchaser, Head, And Cornerstone Of His Church

May we once again, "*as if for the first time*," review the thrilling story of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His church, body, kingdom.

Jesus Christ BUILT His Church (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2)!

In Matthew 16, the Biblical record quotes Jesus as saying,

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In Mark 9:1 we find the following words:

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

After the Lord was resurrected by Jehovah from the dead, and during the few days He walked among His followers, He told them to not "*depart from Jerusalem*," but "*wait for the promise of the Father*" (Acts 1:4). Then He said,

But **ye shall receive power**, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and **ye shall be witnesses** unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

As the Lord had instructed them, the disciples "*continued with one accord in prayer...*" (Acts 1:14). Then we find the joyful words of Acts chapter two unfolding before

us, recording for all mankind the establishment of the church of Christ:

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

Peter, standing with the eleven, began to preach the powerful, convicting, pricking gospel of Christ (Acts 2:14). He spoke of prophecies made long ago (Acts 2:17,21,25,29). He declared these facts in a simple, powerful, convincing way. Peter further said,

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The people cried out, *“What shall we do?”* They were convinced they were guilty and needed to pursue an action of seeking forgiveness, atonement, reconciliation. But they did not know what to do!

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

The Biblical record states that,

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

The church that Christ promised He would build was built, just as the Lord had promised! It was built during the lives of some of those to whom He had spoken (Mark 9:1). It was in Jerusalem, as prophesied (Acts 2:1-3).

Jesus Christ PURCHASED His Church with His blood. The church was bought and paid for with the shed blood of the Son of Jehovah God.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed **the church** of God, which **he hath purchased with his own blood** (Acts 20:28).

The inspired Hebrew writer concisely states that,

...almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission (Heb. 9:22).

Had it not been for the old rugged cross; had it not been for Calvary; had it not been for the love of the Son of God for sinful man, then forever our souls would be lost in eternal torment!

Jesus Christ is the HEAD of His Church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18)!

In the context of our Lord challenging His disciples with going into all the world with the gospel, He stated all power had been given to Him in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18).

We read in Paul's inspired writings,

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the **head over all things to the church, Which is his body**, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:22-23).

And **he is the head of the body, the church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

The Saviour is supreme. He is the King over His Kingdom. He is the Ruler and Lord, the HEAD. He has “*all authority*” and rights as the purchaser of His body.

Jesus Christ, The Rejected Cornerstone. Note three of the gospel accounts statements of Christ,

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become **the head of the corner**: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? (Matt. 21:42).

And have ye not read this scripture; **The stone** which the builders rejected is become **the head of the corner**: (Mark 12:10).

And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, **The stone** which the builders rejected, the same is become **the head of the corner**? (Luke 20:17). (emp. mine, PS.)

The vast majority of the people in the first century rejected the Son of God. Oh, they at first were interested in hearing Him, seeing Him perform grand miracles, and hearing this “*new*” doctrine. But soon they turned against Him. As Isaiah spoke in the long ago,

He is **despised and rejected** of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was **despised**, and we esteemed him not (Isa. 53:3).

The loving, compassionate, tender Saviour came to earth to redeem sinful, rebellious, evil man. Christ came NOT for personal benefits nor glory. He came to serve,

rather than be served. Yet, the majority rejected Him. Sadly, the majority continue to reject Him and His saving message and way.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the church, whether rejected by the majority or not. He is the head of the church even if 99.9% reject Him. Remember the tragic rejection of Noah and his preaching during his day, with only Noah and his family as righteous in God's sight. Sadly, almost everyone in Sodom and Gomorrah were evil, but a choice few were righteous.

4. The Bible Defines The Way Of Salvation: In Christ, In His Church, And ONLY In His One Body

Jesus Christ has stated clearly and concisely the way by which one may enter His church, the body of Christ. Obviously we must hear the gospel (Rom. 10:17). Upon hearing of God, Christ, the way of salvation, heaven, etc., we believe with all our heart (John 8:24; Mark 16:16). Upon the foundation of faith, we turn from our life of sin, serving Satan, living in the flesh, and turn (repent) (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38). We are eagerly willing to confess Christ as the true and living Son of God (Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10). Then, we are willing to be baptized (immersed) into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 8:29-39), for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38). When we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine (Rom. 6:17), Jesus Christ adds us to His church (Acts 2:47). We do not "*join*" the church for which Christ died. It is not possible to join Christ's church. But when we submit our will to the will of the Father, fully and completely obey ALL that is concisely stated in the Holy Scripture that one must obey in order to be a child of

God, then we are saved *“in Christ”* and become a child of God, a member of His body, a Christian.

The salvation from our sins is found **ONLY** in Jesus Christ! It is found **ONLY** in His blood-bought body! It is found **ONLY** after we obey, and the blood of our Lord washes away our sins.

Note the relationship we have and enjoy in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Jesus Christ Is: Our Saviour I John 4:14	The Church Is: The Saved Eph. 5:23	A Christian Is: Saved Rom. 8:24
Our Redeemer Titus 2:14	The Redeemed I Peter 1:18	Redeemed Eph. 1:7
Our King I Tim. 6:15	The Kingdom Heb. 12:28	A Citizen Eph. 2:19
Head Of Body Eph. 1:22-23	The Body Col. 1:18	Member Of Body I Cor. 12:27
An Heir Of God Rom. 8:16	Joint Heirs Rom. 8:17	An Heir Of God Gal. 3:29
The Shepherd John 10:11	The Sheepfold John 10:11	In The Flock Acts 20:28

What a grand blessing it is to be saved, redeemed, a citizen, in the flock, in the body, and an heir of God! How richly blessed we are!

But then consider, if Christ had not come to earth, and had not shed His precious blood on the cruel cross, then: (1) atonement for our sins would not be possible (I Peter 2:24); (2) the saving, powerful gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), would not be available and able to save (James 1:21); (3) there would not be an invitation from our Saviour (Matt. 11:28-30), to all mankind, to come to Him for redemption; (4) there would not be a church, purchased and built by the Saviour, in which we find

salvation (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28); (5) there would not be a prepared mansion (John 14:1-3) awaiting the faithful of God, and (6) death would and should be feared, instead of viewed as a “gain” (Phil. 1:21).

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible, unless otherwise stated.

2 Charles R. Williams, Hartsville Pike church bulletin, Gallatin, TN, n.d.

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Chapter 14

Christ, Revelation Of God's Glory (Isaiah 40:3-5)

Brian K. Giselbach

It gives me great pleasure to present this lecture titled, “Christ, the Revelation of God’s Glory” from Isaiah 40:3-5. The burden of this lecture will be to focus your attention on Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the revelation of God’s glory. Let’s take a moment to read Isaiah 40:3-5:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight
in the desert a highway for our God. Every
valley shall be exalted, And every mountain
and hill shall be made low; the crooked places
shall be made straight, and the rough places
smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth
of the Lord has spoken.'

Background Of Isaiah 40:3-5

At the close of His earthly ministry, during a series of righteous rebukes leveled against the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus turned to the holy city itself and cried,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your

house is left to you desolate; for I say to you,
you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed
is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'
(Matt. 23:37-39).

In the first verse of Matthew, chapter twenty-four, we are told that Jesus “went out and departed from the temple.” Later, just as Jesus had predicted, Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 by Roman legions under the command of Titus. Jesus later elaborated on the destruction in Matthew, chapter twenty-four.

Matthew’s account of these things is remarkably similar to the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the departure of God’s glory from Jerusalem and the temple around 587 B.C. Ezekiel saw the glory of God in the temple (Ezek. 8:4). But also present was the corruption of temple worship. In verse 6 of Ezekiel’s vision, God warns that He is being driven out of His own house by the practices of idolatry. The process of God’s withdrawal from His temple was gradual (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4; 10:18-19). At last, the Lord’s departure was complete. Not only did the glory of the Lord withdraw from the temple, but also from the city of Jerusalem itself (Ezek. 11:22-23). After the departure of the Lord from the temple and the city, both were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity.

Similarly, Jesus, the revelator of God’s glory, announced His departure from Jerusalem and her temple in Matthew 23:37-39. After Christ’s departure, signifying God’s rejection of His people, the city and the temple were leveled by Roman soldiers.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel proclaimed a message of hope and comfort for God’s people. The glory of God would

return to the holy city and its holy temple (Ezek. 43:1-12; 44:1-6).

Isaiah’s message to the exiled people of God was not very different from that of Ezekiel. Isaiah was instructed to bring an encouraging word to a people who longed to return to the land of their fathers.

Before discussing Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-5, it needs to be mentioned that some “scholars” have cast doubt on the authorship of Isaiah 40-66. The reason for this is due to a change from the theme that was developed in Isaiah 1-39. It is argued that there must have been two authors of this book, one who lived before the exile and spoke of God’s judgment that would be brought to bear on Judah, and another one who lived during or after the exile and spoke of deliverance. It is necessary to point out therefore that many of the New Testament writers themselves attributed these later chapters to Isaiah (see Matt. 3:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 12:38; Acts 8:28-34, etc.) We are encouraged that the dual-authorship theory is a relatively recent view brought on by liberal theologians. There was never such a view in Jewish tradition.

There is no question that a new tone is set in the book of Isaiah beginning in chapter forty. God’s people had been broken. The Babylonian exile had brought them low. Now there is a message of hope and deliverance. Listen to the opening lines (Isa. 40:1-2):

‘Comfort, ye, comfort My people!’ says your God. ‘Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

Notice the repeated use of the word “comfort.” Isaiah

brings good news to the people of God: their restoration is about to take place. The sins that led to their captivity have been “pardoned.” The punishment that was inflicted by the Lord is full and complete. The excitement builds as Isaiah continues (Isa. 40:3-5):

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight
in the desert a highway for our God. Every
valley shall be exalted, And every mountain
and hill shall be made low; the crooked places
shall be made straight, and the rough places
smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth
of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah does not identify the herald. What matters is the message. The prophet here alludes to a custom that was well known to any ancient Eastern audience. Whenever someone of royalty would announce that he was coming into a certain region of the kingdom, all things were prepared and set in order for his arrival. Isaiah calls upon the people of God to make preparation for the coming “of the Lord.” The word “prepare” suggests the idea of conversion. Isaiah was seeking to bring about change in the hearts and behavior of the people. He exhorts them to make the way smooth and free of every obstacle. This should be understood as a condition that they were required to meet.

Notice that the prophet makes reference to a highway. He does not seem to be saying that this highway is to be traveled on by the people as they return to their land. The highway is for God. The way is to be prepared for the Lord. The glory of the Lord departed from Zion years before. It is the glory of the Lord that now returns. The people of God were to ready

themselves, in keeping with the majesty and essential greatness of God, for His return.

It is to the Lord’s majesty and greatness that Isaiah refers when he states that “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” What does the phrase, “the glory of the Lord,” mean? This is of great significance. The word “glory” in the Hebrew, primarily means “brightness” or “light.”¹ When the word is applied descriptively of God, it refers to His beauty, majesty, and power. The word is often employed by the Old Testament writers to describe the manifestations of God in judgment and deliverance. The Old Testament is filled with examples of the use of “glory” as applied to Jehovah. David praised God before the assembly of Israel (I Chron. 29:10-11):

Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation; and David said: ‘Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.

When Isaiah was called to be a prophet, the angels cried, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3)! Moses described how “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exod. 40:34f).

The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew is “doxa.”² Again, the New Testament is filled with statements attributing glory to God. Paul the apostle spoke of God’s glory in regard to His “eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20-23). The apostle prayed that the Colossians would be “strengthened with all might according to His glorious power...” (Col. 1:11). In Ephesians 1:17, the

apostle refers to God as “the Father of glory.” D. M. Lloyd-Jones, in his exposition of this expression, wrote,

Glory is God. Glory is the summation of all the excellences and perfections and attributes of the Lord God Almighty Himself. That is why He is known at times in the Scriptures as ‘the glory.’ The ultimate characteristic of God is glory. He is that in and of Himself. His essence is glorious. It is unutterable, absolute perfection. So we can but stand in amazement before this expression, ‘the Father of glory.’³

When was “the glory of the Lord” to be revealed? The prophet Isaiah elaborates on this later (Isa. 44:28–46:1-8). The Lord would redeem His people and restore them to Jerusalem where the city and the temple would be rebuilt. Although this was the Lord’s doing, Cyrus, King of Persia, would be the instrument of God in this grand display of glory. The deliverance would be so great that “all flesh shall see it together,” meaning there would be no doubt that all would realize that God was at work among His people.

The Messianic Nature Of Isaiah 40:3-5

Isaiah’s prophecy has been called by many Bible students as “the gospel before the gospel.” The primary fulfillment of this prophecy involved Israel’s return to Palestine and the holy city. Albert Barnes wrote that “few events have ever more impressively manifested the glory of God than the redemption of His people from Babylon.”⁴ Barnes and others agree, however, that one event does surpass, in beauty and wonder, the deliverance of Israel from Babylonian captivity. That event is the coming of Jesus Christ for the purpose of revealing the Father to all of mankind and effecting

their deliverance from sin.

The Messianic import of Isaiah 40:3-5 is almost obvious. But all doubt is removed when you turn to such passages as Luke 3:3-6:

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’

All four writers of the gospel apply Isaiah’s prophecy to John the baptizer (Matt. 3:1-2; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 3:3-6; John 1:19-23). The gospel writers point to John as the voice or herald in the wilderness who has come to prepare the people of Israel (and subsequently the world) for the One who would bring deliverance from sin. John came preaching,

I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose (John 1:26-27).

In harmony with Isaiah 40:3-4, John preached a message of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). He was sent by God (John 1:6) to remove as many obstacles as possible so that Christ and His kingdom could be established in the hearts of men. We are told that John was largely successful in his work (Mark 1:5; Luke 3:5-6). Nevertheless, John met

opposition (Luke 3:19-20; 7:30). All who preach as John preached will meet opposition.

It is clear then that John's ministry of preparation is foretold in Isaiah 40:3-4, but what about the work and ministry of Christ? Isaiah said that preparations must be made for "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (Isa. 40:5). How does Jesus Christ reveal, display, or make manifest "the glory of the Lord?" John F. Walvoord, in his book, **Jesus Christ, Our Lord**, gives a good treatment of how many of the Old Testament references to God's glory are applicable to the Messiah, and thus to Jesus.⁵ He cites such passages as Psalm 24, and 72, Isaiah 4:2, 63:1; and Daniel 7:14. Regarding the phrase, "the glory of the Lord," Barnes wrote:

The phrase here means evidently the majesty, power, or honor of Jehovah. He would display his power, and show himself to be a covenant-keeping God, by delivering His people from their bondage, and reconducting them to their own land. This glory and faithfulness would be shown in his delivering them from their captivity in Babylon; and it would be still more illustriously shown in his sending the Messiah to accomplish the deliverance of his people in later days.⁶

How Jesus Christ Revealed / Reveals The Glory Of God

Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to effect deliverance from sin for the whole world. To this end He was born in that little town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 1:18-25; 2:1; Gal. 4:4-7). Jesus Himself declared that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost"

(Luke 19:10). Many of the Samaritans, who received Jesus with open arms, declared Him to be “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). In order to be “the Savior of the world,” Jesus had to show that the way to God was open and accessible to sinners. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Later, Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us” (John 14:8). Jesus replied, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father, so how can you say, show us the Father?” (John 14:9). Philip, and probably the other disciples, was looking for a physical manifestation of God’s power and glory. Jesus makes it clear that He is the revelator of God to mankind; whatever attributes the Father possesses, the Son also possesses. These attributes however, though manifested to a degree in the miracles Jesus displayed, were largely seen through the discernment of a willing and believing heart—as we shall see.

In the first chapter of John’s gospel account (v. 14), John writes:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Notice several things here. First, we can easily identify the “Word” or “Logos.” He is the One John identified as God, who was with God in the beginning, and through whom all things were made (John 1:1-3). The Word is Christ, whom John identifies as dwelling in the flesh. Second, Christ possesses glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” In other words, Jesus possesses

all the attributes of God—wisdom, power, splendor, etc. Charles Hodge gives the following summary of Jesus' Divine attributes and prerogatives:

...it has been commonly supposed that Jesus meant to say that man had not revealed it, but he seems rather to have referred to himself. 'This truth you have not learned from my lowly appearance, from my human nature, from my apparent rank and standing in the world. You, Jews, were expecting to know the Messiah by his external splendor, his pomp and power as a man; but you have not learned me in this manner. I have shown no such indication of my Messiahship. Flesh and blood have not shown it. In spite of my appearance—my lowly state—my want of resemblance to what you have expected, you have learned it as of God.' This they had been taught by his miracles, his instructions, and by the direct teachings of God on their minds.⁷

Third, John testifies that he and others “beheld His glory.” How was this possible? Can men ever see the glory of God in all of His brilliance? On one occasion, Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord (Exod. 33:18). But God declared, “You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me, and live” (Exod. 33:20). John seems to be reiterating this idea in verse 18, when he writes, “No one has seen God at any time.” But notice what John writes, “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (v. 18). How then was John able to behold “His glory?” Through the declaration or revelation of God’s glory in Himself, that is, in His flesh. The revelation of God and His glory was not so much a visual thing as it was a spiritual truth to be discerned. Jesus came to reveal the nature and purpose

of God in His flesh. But His flesh also “veiled” His Divine attributes; to the extent that if men so desired they would see only His flesh and nothing more. Those who were willing, however, saw the glory of God beneath the fleshly exterior.

Listen carefully to a portion of the conversation between Jesus and His disciples in Matthew 16. When Jesus asked them what the people were saying about His identity, the responses were many and varied. The answers all demonstrated reflection on the part of the populace. Then came the crucial question asked by Jesus, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). This was an important question because it demonstrated whether or not Jesus’ revelation of God’s glory was getting through to those closest to Him. Simon Peter declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). Yes, that was the right answer! Peter had drawn the correct conclusion! And how does Jesus respond?

Blessed are you, Simon BarJonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matt. 16:17).

Barnes gives a wonderful commentary on the significance of this statement:

All divine attributes are ascribed to Him. He is declared to be omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, and immutable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is set forth as the creator and upholder and ruler of the universe. All things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist. He is the object of worship to all intelligent creatures, even the highest; all the angels (i.e., all creatures between man and God) are commanded to prostrate themselves before Him. He is the

object of all the religious sentiments; of reverence, love, faith, and devotion. To Him men and angels are responsible for their character and conduct. He required that men should honor Him as they honored the Father; that they should exercise the same faith in Him that they do in God. He declares that He and the Father are one; that those who had seen Him had seen the Father also. He calls all men unto him; promises to forgive their sins; to give them rest and peace; to raise them up at the last day; and to give them eternal life. God is not more, and cannot promise more, or do more than Christ is said to be, to promise, and to do. He has, therefore, been the Christian's God from the beginning, in all ages and in all places.⁸

The disciples, as all men must do if they are to be saved, looked beyond the mere appearance of things. They saw that Jesus was more than just a man; more than just a prophet. They saw Him as He truly was—God in human flesh. Today, only when men see Jesus as He truly is, the Son of the living God, can they accept and respond to the message that God longs to communicate to all mankind. Jesus, as the revelation of God's glory, shows us God as He truly is. God is holy and just. God is gracious and merciful. God longs for us to approach Him without fear. He longs for us to be reconciled to Him and live with Him forever. All of this the Saviour has revealed.

Consider some of the events in the earthly life of Christ which manifestly declare His glory. First, the glory of God was manifested at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11). Jesus turned the water into wine, thereby displaying the power of God. This was His first miracle

and it revealed His glory (His Divine nature) in a convincing fashion.

At the grave site of Lazarus we again see a manifestation of His glory (John 11:17-44). Martha thought it unwise for Jesus to ask for the stone covering the entrance of the tomb to be removed. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and by now the body would naturally have an odor. But Jesus, who was Lord of nature, asked Martha, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God” (John 11:40). The phrase “glory of God” was a reference to His power to raise Lazarus from death.

On another occasion, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up into a mountain (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). There He was “transfigured” before them. This means that He was changed in His form or appearance. Moses and Elijah also appeared before the disciples in a glorified state. A voice from heaven said to the disciples, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Luke 9:35). The purpose of the transfiguration was clearly to impress the three men with the truth that Jesus was greater in power and splendor than either Moses or Elijah, and, to prepare them for His crucifixion and the struggles which lay ahead. R. C. Foster in writing of this event, said that the disciples “beheld a glory of which they had not dreamed and which caused earthly pomp and circumstance to become insignificant.”⁹ Later, Peter would write,

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when

such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (II Peter 1:16-18).

Of course, nothing surpassed the glory of the Lord that was revealed through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. During the last week of His earthly life, Jesus exclaimed,

Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name (John 12:27-28).

Previously, Jesus had declared, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (John 12:23). Only heaven could have devised a plan for saving sinful man through the suffering and death of God's son. But Jesus had given honor and praise to the name of the Father in living a life of perfect service and submission to the Father's will. Now the glory of God would be revealed in the final act of Jesus' voluntary sacrifice. The crucifixion was an exhibition of God's power over sin. By Jesus' atoning death, God was making satisfaction for man's sin (Rom. 3:21-28). Of Jesus, the Hebrews writer said that he was "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3).

Jesus knew that following His suffering there would be glory. He prayed about this before His betrayal,

I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given Me to

do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was (John 17:4-5).

After His suffering, Jesus returned to the glorious state He longed for and prayed for. Peter wrote that God “raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (I Peter 1:21). Paul said that Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection was the beginning of His exaltation to glory. Today, there is power for us in His resurrection to glory. In writing of the ark of Noah’s day, Peter wrote in I Peter 3:21-22:

There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Application And Conclusion

There are three things we should think about as we reflect on “Christ, The Revelation of God’s Glory.” First, we have a powerful message to proclaim to the world. Peter proclaimed to that Pentecost crowd two thousand years ago that by Jesus’ death and resurrection, God had “exalted” Him (Acts 2:33) and made Him “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). We are further reminded that salvation is said to be the product of proclaiming the “name” of Jesus (meaning the sum total of what Jesus did and commanded to secure our salvation).¹⁰ Let us then be about the business of loudly

proclaiming the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12)!

Secondly, we must look forward to Jesus coming in glory. When Jesus comes in the clouds it will be a glorious and awesome event. Jesus Himself said,

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt. 24:30).

Paul exhorted us to look “for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Lastly, we anticipate sharing in the glory that Christ now enjoys. He said that He was going to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-3). We are confident that this will be a place of glory. The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as “bringing many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10). Oh, how we look forward to that glory!

All glory and praise
To the Lamb that was slain,
Who has born all our sins,
and has cleansed ev'ry stain.

Endnotes

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Chapter 15

Christ, The Chosen Servant For The Gentiles (Isa. 42:1-7)

Kevin L. Moore

The word “servant” occurs some twenty-four times in the book of Isaiah, but it does not always have the same application. In chapters 42-53, a “Servant” is described who is quite distinct from all others. He is depicted in neither a national nor a temporal sense. In the passage now under consideration Isaiah looks to the future, to a deliverance far greater, in both nature and scope, than Israel’s release from exile.

A Brief Exposition Of The Text

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice. Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law (42:1-4, NKJV).

The identity of the “Servant” in this text has been the subject of much controversy and debate among liberal

scholars. But for everyone who believes in the inspiration and all sufficiency of Scripture, the matter is easily settled. He is identified by the Holy Spirit as Jesus the Christ (Matt. 12:15-21). Moreover, the ancient Jews, as interpreted in the Targum, understood this to be a reference to the Messiah.¹ Barnes affirms:

...the entire description is one that is exactly and entirely applicable to the Lord Jesus. It is *as* applicable as if it had been made *after* he had appeared among men, and as if it were the language of biography, and not of prophecy.²

Jehovah describes His servant as one “whom I uphold.” The Hebrew *tamakh b’* means “to lay firm hold of and keep upright.”³ He is God’s “Elect One,” or the One whom God has chosen for this special purpose (Matt. 12:18; cf. I Peter 2:6). The affirmation, “in whom My soul delights” is comparable to “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). This statement was made subsequent to “the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him” (Matt. 3:16), identifying Jesus as “the Anointed One” (John 1:32-34; Acts 10:36-38; cf. Isa. 61:1).

Because He was “anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38), Jesus was equipped to “bring forth justice.” To “bring forth” (*yosi*) means to “publish, proclaim.”⁴ The word “justice” (*mishpat*) is found again in verses three and four, and it is reasonable to assume that it has the same meaning in all three places. Although it may be employed in a variety of senses, here it stands parallel with “His law” (v. 4), so it most probably has reference to the law published by the Messiah, viz. the gospel (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18).

This system of justice was to be proclaimed by God's servant "to the Gentiles." It is not the case, as some have asserted, that from here "the prophecy momentarily leaps forward to the effects of Christ's Second Advent, in His Millennial reign."⁵ The Messiah, during His initial advent, reached out to some who were not Jews (Matt. 8:5ff; Mark 7:25ff). But this prophecy saw its ultimate fulfillment as the Lord's disciples proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 2:39; 15:7; et al.), according to His commandment (Matt. 28:19; Acts 13:46-47).

Concerning the fact that God's servant "will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street," Rawlinson observes:

His methods shall be quiet and gentle. He shall not seek to recommend his teaching by clamor or noisy demonstrations. There shall be a marked unobtrusiveness in all his doings.⁶

Barnes further comments:

He shall not use loud and angry words, as they do who are engaged in conflict, but all his teaching shall be gentle, humble, and mild.⁷

It is noted by Matthew that these words found fulfillment as Jesus quietly avoided the murderous plot of the Pharisees and bid His followers not to make Him known (12:14-19).

"A bruised reed He will not break." The word "bruised" (*ratsuts*) signifies "what is cracked, and therefore half-broken."⁸ The reed, which grows in marshy or wet places, denotes "that which is fragile, weak, easily waved by the wind, or broken down."⁹ (cf. Matt. 11:7). The image seems to reflect those who are without strength, poor in spirit, lowly and dejected. God's servant

would not add to their afflictions, but would compassionately and tenderly extend relief.

“And smoking flax He will not quench.” Flax was used as a wick for oil lamps, and the word “smoking” (*keheh*) refers to “that which is burning feebly, and very nearly extinguished.”¹⁰ This may suggest the condition of one who is feeble and disheartened, and whose will to endure is about ready to expire. In the context of Matthew’s reference to this prophecy, multitudes were being healed by Jesus (12:15-23). McGarvey notes that these figures of speech “fitly represent the sick, and lame, and blind who were brought to Jesus to be healed. The statement that he would not *break* these bruised reeds, nor *quench* this smoking flax, was an emphatic declaration, by contrast, that he would heal their bruises and fan their dying energies into a flame.”¹¹

“He will bring forth justice for truth.” While the servant would be sympathetic in dealing with those wounded by the harsh realities of life, He would not compromise the absolute standards of justice.¹² Matthew interprets this phrase “justice for victory” (12:20). The term “justice” (*mishpat*), as noted earlier, appears to stand “for that authoritative announcement of the divine will which was sent forth in the gospel; and the victory in that which the gospel is winning.”¹³

“He will not fail nor be discouraged.” Vincent observes that this phrase is “beautifully suggestive as describing the servant of Jehovah by the same figures in which he pictures his suffering ones...He himself, partaking of the nature of our frail humanity, is both a lamp and a reed, humble, but not broken, and the ‘light of the world’.”¹⁴ Even though occasions for discouragement would arise, God’s servant would show

no sign of weakness until he had fulfilled his purpose,¹⁵ viz. the establishment of “justice” (*mishpat*) in the earth (cf. vs. 1, 4), i.e. until He had “proclaimed God’s universal rule.”¹⁶

The “coastlands” (or “isles” KJV), corresponding to “the earth,” represent distant nations (cf. 51:5). That they “shall wait for His law” signifies “to wait with longing for a person’s instruction,” and suggests that “the messenger to the Gentile world will be welcomed by a consciousness of need already existing in the heathen world itself.”¹⁷

Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house (42:5-7, NKJV).

Jehovah shifts His language from having spoken *about* His Servant in the third person, to now speaking *to* Him personally. It is emphasized and made abundantly clear that this special Ambassador is from the Creator of all things (cf. 44:24; Acts 17:24-25). He has been called “in righteousness,” which expresses the idea of that which is rigid or straight, and denotes the observance of a fixed rule.¹⁸ Jehovah, as a righteous and just God, purposed to send His Servant to accomplish His righteous scheme.

As God upholds His Servant, He will give Him “as a covenant to the people” (cf. 49:8; 54:10; 61:8). This

undoubtedly has reference to the “new covenant” of which Christ is the Mediator (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13). While scholars debate whether Jews or Gentiles are meant by “the people,” God’s Spirit makes it clear that this covenant was intended for **all** people (Isa. 2:2-3; Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 2:14-18; et al.).

The Servant of God is also described as “a light to the Gentiles” (cf. 9:2; 49:6; 51:4; Luke 2:32). “Light” is the emblem of purity, holiness, knowledge, and instruction, and so the Messiah is depicted as “the light of the world” (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46; Rev. 21:23). The exclusiveness of Judaism was to end under the Messiah’s reign. This found its fulfillment in the impartial proclamation of the gospel by those heeding the command of the Lord (cf. Acts 13:46-47).

It was to be the task of God’s Servant to “open blind eyes,” both physically (Matt. 12:22) and spiritually (Matt. 13:16-17), and to “bring out prisoners from the prison” (cf. 61:1-2). To those in captivity of sin and darkness (John 8:34; II Peter 2:19), the Servant of God offers spiritual deliverance (John 8:32; Rom. 6:17-18).

Practical Application Of The Text

The term “servant” is used not only with reference to the Messiah, but also to the nation of Israel (41:8; 49:3) and to spiritual Israel, the church (62:1-3; 65:15; cf. Rom. 6:22; I Peter 2:16). Considering these three “servants” of God, let us examine and compare their **missions**, the **manner** in which their missions were (are) carried out, and the **means** by which their missions were (are) carried out.

The Servant of God (Jesus) essentially had a three-fold mission: (1) To bring forth God’s system of justice

in the new covenant, i.e. the gospel; (2) To offer spiritual deliverance; (3) To extend this even to the Gentiles. The first phase of His mission was fulfilled as he became the “Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Heb. 8:6), and this He accomplished “by means of death” (Heb. 9:15). He fulfilled the second phase of His mission by coming “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), and “to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17), accomplished in that He “died for our sins...was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3-4). The third phase of His mission was fulfilled in directing His followers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), inclusive of the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:34-35; 11:18; et al.).

The manner in which His mission was carried out was that of gentleness, humility, compassion, and love.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

He taught:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls (Matt. 11:29).

He...

...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men...he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:7-8).

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to

lay down our lives for the brethren (I John 3:16).

While He was capable of being forthright and aggressive when the situation demanded it (Matt. 12:12-13; 23:13ff), this does not seem to have been His customary approach.

What were the means by which His mission was carried out? Even His enemies confessed, “He trusted in God” (Matt. 27:43). This statement is indicative of Jesus’ own words:

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (John 6:38).

And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:29).

And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed (Luke 5:16).

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:38).

Another “servant” of God (Israel) had a mission to fulfill. Despite the apathetic and ethnocentric nation she became, Israel’s initial purpose was to be God’s “witnesses” (Isa. 43:10-12; 44:8) to the nations (Psm. 145:12), so “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God” (I Kings 8:60). In light of the fact that all the earth belongs to Jehovah, the children of Israel were meant to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6), serving as God’s intermediary.

The manner in which this mission was “carried out,” unfortunately, was characterized by reluctance,

rebellion, and resentment (Jonah 1:3; 4:1ff). Peter's statement to Cornelius seems to represent the typical Jewish attitude:

You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation (Acts 10:28).

The people of Israel were personified by prejudice, hatred, ignorance, fear, and unconcern.

The means for carrying out this mission, which Israel had at her disposal, were not utilized. They had God's written law, but it was neglected and disobeyed (II Kings 22:13). They had God's prophets living among them, yet they persecuted and murdered them (Matt. 23:29-37). They made the commandment of God of no effect by their human traditions and ordinances (Matt. 15:3-9). Essentially, Israel failed in her mission.

God's "servant" (the church) has also been given a mission. We have been divinely commissioned to go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). This is the responsibility of the entire church collectively, as well as each member individually. As physical Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests," even so all members of Christ's kingdom belong to "a holy priesthood" for the intended purpose of proclaiming "the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter 2:5-10). Everyone who has been reconciled to God through Jesus has been given "the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:17-18). Is our response to this mandate an imitation of Christ or of Israel?

The manner in which this mission is to be carried out should emulate Christ's manner.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth (II Tim. 2:24-25).

While there may be occasions when a more confrontational approach is called for (II Cor. 10:2), this should be the exception rather than the rule.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Prov. 15:1).

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one (Col. 4:5-6).

The power of the truth is often weakened when it is applied with too much ferocity. A surgeon must be delicate and gentle with his scalpel lest his treatment causes more harm than good.¹⁹ If people cannot see the love of Christ in our words and actions, our labors will most likely be in vain (John 13:35; II Cor. 5:14).

The means for accomplishing this mission are beyond human capabilities. “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). If we rely solely on our own wisdom, resources, and might, we are destined to fall.

For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,

that the excellence of the power may be of God
and not of us (II Cor. 4:5-7).

Our faith “should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (I Cor. 2:5). We ought to “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17), “that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified” (II Thess. 3:1). God’s power which enables us to fulfill our mission is made available through His inspired word (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12). We have been “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (I Thess. 2:4); He “has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:19). Thus, the reason more souls throughout the world have not been reconciled to God is not because the word lacks power, but because most in the church have been negligent in “holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:16).

Will our mission be fulfilled? In what manner and by which means will it be undertaken? If we are like the Jews of old, our mission will be approached with reluctance, discrimination, and indifference, and the means at our disposal will be neglected and discarded. Seventy-six countries are still without missionaries of the churches of Christ, and those which have them desperately need more. The world’s population is approaching six billion, the vast majority of whom has never heard the unadulterated gospel. Thomas Carlisle wrote,

And Jonah stalked to his shaded seat and waited for God to come around to his way of thinking. And God is still waiting for a host of Jonahs in their comfortable houses to come around to his way of loving.²⁰

If we are Christ-like, on the other hand, our mission will be pursued with obedient zeal, in a loving, humble,

and compassionate manner, utilizing the powerful means of prayer and God’s word to accomplish this noble task. May God help us to “follow His steps” and to “walk just as He walked” (I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6).

Endnotes

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Chapter 16

Christ, The Comforter Of All Who Mourn

(Isa. 61:1-4)

Glenn Colley

What a pleasure it is to participate in the **POWER** lectureship, to be associated with B. J. Clarke, and the good people of the Southaven church of Christ. In my judgment, brother Clarke is one of the finest young preachers in our brotherhood today, and I am happy to call him my friend.

While this chapter of the lectureship book is in manuscript form, for our preaching brethren who may desire to outline this lesson, I want to offer the following main points which this chapter will develop: Jesus came to earth to be a preacher, a healer, a deliverer, a comforter, and a planter. All of these are beautifully portrayed in the first three verses of this sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, and I hope those who may be encouraged to preach from this wonderful chapter, will enjoy the study as much as I have.

“Why did my Savior come to earth?” are the sweet words echoing from a familiar and beloved hymn. The answer is not found in only one or two books of the Bible, but from all 66 books! Our attachment to Jesus must be nurtured and not permitted to grow stale. For that reason we must be students of God’s word, Old and

New Testaments. Some Christians do not appreciate the importance of the Old Testament. However, its importance is clearly seen in the fact that many New Testament teachings cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the Old Testament. For example, how would one fully understand the Lord's Supper without the Passover teaching of the Old Testament? How would we fully understand the early details of the conversion of the Ethiopian in Acts 8 without an understanding of Isaiah 53 from which the Ethiopian was reading when Philip approached him? So it is not inappropriate for us to answer some important questions about Jesus using the Old Testament. Why did He come to earth? What kind of Master is He? Did He come to comfort or to curse?

Our text for consideration reads,

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.

Is this a Messianic prophecy? Yes! In fact, the strongest possible evidence is found for it to be so. The Son of God proclaimed it to be, in Luke 4:16-21. As Isaiah was authorized and directed to proclaim liberty to the

Jews in Babylon, so was Christ, God’s messenger, to publish a more joyful jubilee to a lost world.

Jesus came to be a preacher. The text reads, “...the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...”

The phrase “good tidings” is simply another way to say “the gospel.” Romans 1:16 teaches a lesson so desperately needed in churches today: The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

Every preacher has a cause. Not all are noble. Jonah preached to Nineveh, though reluctantly. John the baptizer preached to prepare the way for the Master, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (John 3:2). Noah was a preacher of righteousness according to II Peter 2:5, and was successful in seeing eight souls saved by water (I Peter 3:20). The preacher called Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He came to “seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Our preaching today, if worthwhile, is based on Jesus in two ways. First, on the “Rock,” which is the reality that Jesus really is the Son of God as He claimed (Matt. 16:16-18). The fact is, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain” (I Cor. 15:14). Second, our preaching is based on Jesus in that we teach what He taught. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus gave the perennial command, “Teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you...”

Jesus preached the glad tidings to the meek. The original teaching in Isaiah refers to those sighing in a long captivity in Babylon. Luke uses the word “Poor” instead of meek, but the thought is the same. Jesus taught, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). Those who were receptive

to the teachings of Jesus and those who today *are* receptive, are those who view themselves as they really are, that is, utterly and completely dependent on Jesus for their lives and futures. As we sometimes sing, “Oh Thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy praise.” Only when I am poor in spirit, or meek in spirit, will I seek and appropriate the riches of Christ’s grace to my life. This is no doubt why Mark observes, “The common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

Jesus came to earth to be a healer. He came to “bind up the broken hearted.” As broken arms and legs are rolled in cloth to give them ease, and bleeding wounds are bandaged that they may be knit together, Jesus binds our broken hearts. It is important that Jesus is not only a sympathizer, like us, but He is more. He is a healer. Some who are hearing this lesson today are living proof of this very point. You came to this lecture broken hearted and low, but being with Him in worship and being with His people, helps heal that heart. On the Lord’s day we eat the Lord’s supper, we sing praise, we pray through Jesus to God. While our worship is directed to the Father (John 4:24), the worshippers derive strength for the soul. As says the song, “Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life; Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life...”

Jesus heals broken hearts today. When I’ve lost a loved one to death, He’s there (I Thess. 4:18; Matt. 11:28). When the world abuses me, He’s there: “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33). When people in my work mistreat me, He is there: “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto

me’...” He is the water of life to the thirsty, and the bread of life to the hungry. He is the bright and morning star to those who sit in the darkness of sin. He is the great physician and the balm of Gilead to those who suffer physically or mentally. He is a healer of those who mourn.

Incidentally, the fact that Jesus was a healer was the evidence John the Baptist was given by the Lord that He was the Christ:

The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matt. 11:5).

The publicans and harlots came to Jesus (Luke 15:1). One sweet penitent woman, called “a sinner,” washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:38). Jesus has the healing people need.

Jesus came to earth to be a deliverer. Or, as Isaiah phrases it, “...to proclaim liberty to the captives...” Jesus came as a prophet to preach, as a priest to heal, and as a king to issue out proclamations. Those proclamations were of two kinds: First, He brought peace to His friends. Second, He brought war to His enemies.

“Liberty to the captives” must have sounded sweet to the wearied hearts of those who first laid eyes on these words. Cyprus delivered the Jews from Babylonian captivity. By comparison, we, by the guilt of sin, were bound over to the justice of God, and were in a sense His lawful captives. We were sold for sin until payment could be made for this catastrophic debt. It is evermore remarkable that the debt was made to God, and yet God was the one who furnished the payment price. As

we sing, "Gone is all my debt of sin..." Jesus paid it all. Romans 8:1 says,

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1).

NO CONDEMNATION! No freedom compares to the freedom we have in Christ.

This is the gospel proclamation, and it is like the blowing of the jubilee trumpet, which proclaimed the great year of release. In Leviticus 25:9,40 we learn that during jubilee the property went back to the owner, who through poverty had sold it. The Hebrew captives went free. In Isaiah 61:2, which evidently refers to the year of Jubilee, it is called, "The acceptable year of the Lord," and shouts to us of the gift of salvation from sin. It is good news. It is very acceptable.

Included in this concept of Jesus as our deliverer from sin is implied this stern warning: This deliverer brings war to His enemies. Here it is called "The day of vengeance of our God." Our Lord takes vengeance on Satan, on death, on hell, and on the powers of darkness. Jesus Christ triumphed over them in His cross when He conquered death. He spoiled and weakened them. He shamed them. He made an open show of them for who they really are. Colossians 2:15 says,

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it (Col. 2:15).

Hebrews 2:14-15 says,

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood (that is, human, GC), he also himself likewise took part of the same;

that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

The Lord will also take vengeance on those of the children of men who reject His offers. These people will not simply be left behind, but will also be treated by Him as enemies. The very thought ought to make us tremble.

When Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16), He showed the year of the Lord, and also the day of vengeance of our God. How sad that so many modern churches are bent on nothing more than making people feel good—even if it means they will feel good in their sins. The justice of God cannot be wisely ignored. Only a fool would ignore the justice of God (II Thess. 1:7-8).

Jesus came to earth to be a comforter. Isaiah says He came “to comfort they that mourn.” This does not mean that Jesus comforts people who mourn out of an ungodly heart and motivation, but rather those who suffer and mourn after a godly sort. Christians in our day who mingle their tears with people of past generations in the daily struggle to do right are spotlighted here. They want to be what God wants them to be. Of these people Jesus spoke when He said, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

What did He give to comfort them that mourn? “Beauty for ashes.” To understand this metaphor, one must appreciate the connection of ashes to mourning in the Old and New Testaments. Consider these passages:

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes (Matt. 11:21).

When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; ...And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:1,3).

And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes (Job 2:8).

For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes (Jonah 3:6).

O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us (Jer. 6:26).

And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying (II Sam. 13:19).

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: (Dan. 9:3).

Think of it now! Jesus came to give “Beauty for

ashes.” They shall not just be raised from the ashes, but also be made beautiful and pleasant. There is a bit of elegant poetry in the original text just here. It is a paronomasia in the original. It reads, “He will give them *pheer* (beauty) for *epher* (ashes).”

He will give the oil of joy for the mourning. Oil makes the face to shine, whereas mourning disfigures it. Consider Hebrews 1:9 –

Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Heb. 1:9).

He will give garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The “spirit of heaviness” is like a coal oil lamp flickering and about to go out. Few people reach old age without several times wearing the spirit of heaviness. And yet, the Lord offers instead the garments of praise. Such garments were only worn for special occasions of joy like thanksgiving days. Incidentally, where God gives the oil of joy, He also gives the garment of praise. So often we seek Him strongly when we are grieved, and forget Him when life is more pleasant. Our joy should draw us to Him, and not just our grief.

Finally, **Jesus came to earth to be a planter.** Our text reads,

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.

Think of it! Instead of broken under the heaviness of grief, He makes us like strong trees. Some suggest that

the original indicates oak trees. Like a husbandman carefully prunes, waters, fertilizes, and nurtures his trees, our Lord cares for us. We then, with His abundant help, bear the fruit of righteousness. Although many passages could be cited to reinforce the tree analogy, consider these three:

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

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Psm. 1:1-3).

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up (Matt. 15:13).

Jesus fulfilled the sweet prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3. He preached. He healed. He delivered. And in so doing, He became forever the greatest comfort man will ever know. "Take the world, but give me Jesus!" May we ever be thankful that we are so graciously offered beauty for ashes.

Chapter 17

Christ, The Bearer Of Our Iniquities

Wendell Winkler

Isaiah 53 is the zenith of Old Testament revelation. It is the apex of Isaiah's inspired writing, and preaching. To read it brings tears to the eyes and profound gratitude to the heart.

Isaiah 53 is unquestionably Messianic. The Ethiopian Eunuch had been reading Isaiah 53 and, when he asked Philip of whom was Isaiah speaking,

Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8:26-40).

See also John 12:37,38. In fact, Isaiah 53 contains no less than sixteen Messianic prophecies. Accordingly, observe the following chart:

The Prophecy

Rejected of men, v. 3
Man of sorrows, v. 3
Wounded for our offenses,
v. 5
Healed by his stripes, v. 5
Love laid our iniquity on him,
v. 6
Opened not his mouth, v. 7
No violence nor deceit, v. 9
Made grave with rich, v. 9
Days prolonged, v. 10

The Fulfillment

John 1:11,12
Matt. 26:38; Heb. 9:28
Romans 4:25; 5:6-8; Heb.
9:28; I Peter 2:24; 3:15
I Peter 2:24-25; Matt. 27:26
II Corinthians 5:21; Romans
8:3
Matt. 26:62,63; 27:12-14; I Peter 2:23
I Peter 2:22
Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:43ff
Romans 6:9

Divide spoil with strong, v. 12	Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:8; John 12:31
Numbered with transgressors, v. 12	Mark 15:27,28; Luke 22:37
Intercedes for transgressors, v. 12	Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24
Be righteous servant, v. 11	I John 2:1; Phil. 2:5-11
Justify many, v. 11	Rom. 4:25; 5:18
An offering for sin, v. 10	Eph. 5:2; Heb. 7:27; 9:14
Reconcile us, v. 5	II Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 2:13-19; Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:20-22

Isaiah 53, inseparably joins the Lord's death and man's sin. (a) "He was wounded for our transgressions," (v. 5). (b) "He was bruised for our iniquities," (v. 5). (c) "With his stripes we are healed," (v. 5). (d) "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," (v. 6). (e) "For the transgressions of my people was he stricken," (v. 8). (f) "Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin," (v. 10). (g) "For he shall bear their iniquities," (v. 11). (h) "He bore the sin of many," (v. 12). Eight affirmations are thus made. Sin is blacker than hell and worse than sin. For had there been no sin there would have been no Satan, nor would there have been a hell. And had there been no sin there would have been no Calvary! Accordingly, let us observe:

Yes, sin was of such a nature, and is of such an essence, that Calvary had to be! Thus, let us never take sin lightly. Sin is still spelled S - I - N! And when you pronounce it you can still hear the hiss of the serpent and feel the sting of his fang. Yet, is it not true, that many look upon sin as being something completely inconsequential. We hear it said, "It will all come out in the wash," or "It will not be remembered a hundred years from now." Then we hear sin flippantly spoken of as just (a) an illusion of mortal mind, (b) immature development, (c) a concept fostered upon the people by

the priest and the religionists of days gone by, enabling them to keep the minds of men captive, and (d) a carry-over from an animal inheritance.

Man calls sin accident;
 God calls it abomination.
Man calls sin a blunder;
 God calls it blindness.
Man calls sin a chance;
 God calls it a choice.
Man calls it fascination;
 God calls it fatality.
Man calls it infirmity;
 God calls it iniquity.
Man calls it luxury,
 God calls it lawlessness.
Man calls it trifle;
 God calls it a tragedy.
Man calls sin a weakness;
 but God calls it madness.

It was sin that platted that crown of thorns, that drove those spikes, that thrust that spear, that ejected that spittle, and that hurled those sarcastic barbs! And as we stand beneath that cross and feel the warm blood from the Saviour’s open veins trickle upon us, and as our ears hear his excruciating groans, and as our eyes see His now mangled body—well, how could anyone love to indulge in sin here! How could anyone do otherwise than, “Abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9).

For sin, it were, that slew Him,
And not the hand of men:
Judge, then, the consequences,
Of just one sinner’s sin!
 – Carlos Beam

A man was being severely and brutally attacked by some ruffians. Death was imminent. When, all of a sudden his brother appears upon the scene of action and rescues him from the attackers; but, only at the expense of giving his life because of a slit throat and stabbed heart. What would you think of the rescued brother keeping and cherishing the knife, the instrument of death, frequently showing it to his friends, saying, "Isn't this nice, isn't this wonderful, isn't this pretty?" We would say that such a man is mentally deranged! Yet, many who would thus affirm are cherishing and keeping sin—the very instrument that killed Jesus—in their lives! This is done (a) when a man will not avail himself of forgiveness of sins by obedience to the will of God, (b) when a man will not give up a given sin, and (c) a man will not admit or confess sin.

I. In Bearing Our Iniquities, His Death Was "Vital"

According to Isaiah 53, (1) **He reconciled us**. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him" (v. 5). Man, because of sin was estranged from God (Isa. 59:1-2; James 4:4). Thusly, reconciliation was needed and, through his punishment (chastisement) he effected such (Col. 2:22; II Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:13-18). Furthermore, sin will separate a man from God (II Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 25:41). And, suffering on the cross as man's sin bearer he was momentarily separated from God as is evident from his plaintive cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Matt. 27:46). Because of who He is and because of what He did, with one hand He clasped the hand of God and with the other hand He clasped the helpless hand of man and reconciled man to God.

(2) **He healed us.** “And with his stripes we are healed” (v. 5). This healing is spiritual in nature. Matthew 13:15 reads, “and should be converted, and I should heal them,” whereas the parallel in Mark 4:12 reads, “they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.”

(3) **He justified us.** “By his knowledge (that is, by our knowledge of Him, John 6:44-45) shall my righteous servant justify many” (v. 11). To justify is to absolve from guilt. Guilt results from the infraction of law. Thus, the word “transgressions” and “transgressors” appear in verses 5,8,12, with such signifying to break, violate or go beyond the law, the code of standard (I John 3:4; Rom. 4:15).

(4) **He intercedes for us.** “And made intercession for the transgressors” (v. 12). The Christ who died, the Christ who was raised is the Christ “who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34). “He ever liveth to make intercession for them,” reads Hebrews 7:25. Such being the case he now appears in the presence of God for us (Heb. 9:24).

II. In Bearing Our Iniquities, His Death Was “Vicarious”

(1) He was perfect; and thusly did not die for Himself. Isaiah, in this chapter, speaks of the Messiah as “my righteous servant” (v. 11). Also, of Him we read, “Because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (v. 9). You see, if He had been a sinner, He would have needed a Saviour, and, He who needs a Saviour cannot be one.

(2) Isaiah 53 repetitiously emphasizes the fact that He died for the sins of others. Thus, vicariously “He

hath born *our* griefs” (v. 4). He “carried *our* sorrows” (v. 4). “He was wounded for *our* transgressions” (v. 5). “He was, bruised for *our* iniquities” (v. 5). “The chastisement of *our* peace was upon him” (v. 5). “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6). “For the transgressions of *my people* was he stricken” (v. 8). “For he shall bear *their* iniquities” (v. 11). “He bore the sin of *many*” (v. 12). “Made intercession for *the transgressors*” (v. 12).

(3) An illustration. During the war between the states a man could hire one to go to war in his stead. Such an arrangement was made. But, as matters would be, the one hired was killed in battle. The man who had done the hiring marked the grave of the fallen soldier and had the epitaph written thereon, “He died for me.”

III. In Bearing Our Iniquities, His Death Was “Propitiatory”

(1) Isaiah 53 affirms the propitiatory aspects of the Messiah’s death. “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6). Again, “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief” (v. 10). Too, he was “smitten of God” (v. 4). Then verse 11 states, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” Notice, “and shall be satisfied.” Now, observe the following paragraphs.

(2) Because of his sinlessness, Christ could serve as the propitiation for my sins (I John 2:1-2). He did no sin (I Peter 2:22). Though tempted in all points like as we are, He was “yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). As our high priest he is,

...holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:26-27).

To those who had dogged his steps and scrutinized his life he could say, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46), and, they could not find one flaw in His character, one misdemeanor in His life, or one discrepancy in His doctrine.

The sinlessness of Christ was prefigured by the spotless lamb offered under the Old Testament (I Peter 1:18-19; Heb. 9:14; John 1:29).

If Christ had sinned, He would have been a sinner and, consequently, in need of a saviour. And, He who needs a saviour cannot be a saviour. Thus, to function as our Saviour He had to be sinlessly perfect.

The five primary attributes of God are His holiness, justice, mercy, love, and truth. When man sinned (1) God's holiness was offended. Then, (2) God's justice became operative and said that man must pay the penalty for His infraction of the law. But, (3) God's mercy triumphed over His justice. And, (4) God sent His Son, a demonstration of His love. Concerning all of which (5) we read in the truth. Now, in reverse order let us note: (a) in the *truth* we read about the coming of Christ. (b) This was a demonstration of God's *love*. (c) Such was prompted by His mercy. (d) With Jesus dying on the cross, the penalty of the law was paid, and God's *justice* was appeased. (e) Then, Jesus being sinless, God's *holiness* was satisfied. Yes, holiness demands holiness (I Peter 1:16). Thus, it took the death of the Son of God, He who was infinitely perfect, to satisfy God's holiness. Man might have died and appeased justice; but, being

sinful as he was, he could never have satisfied God's holiness. Man might have died and appeased justice; but being sinful as he was he could never have satisfied God's holiness. Hence, we can easily see that only the perfect Son of God could adequately pay the price for the sins of the world.

(3) **Notice** – Indeed, only because He was sinless (Isa. 53:9,11) was our Lord qualified to be the propitiatory sacrifice. No, my death would not suffice. Thus; the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ depletes me of all self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. Yes, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (I Cor. 15:10). See also II Corinthians 3:5).

IV. In Bearing Our Iniquities, His Death Was “Vicious”

(1) Isaiah 53 thrice affirms the reality of the Messiah's death. “For he was cut off out of the land of the living” (v. 8). “...and with the rich in his death” (v. 9). “He hath poured out his soul unto death” (v. 12).

(2) Isaiah 53 vividly paints a word picture of the treatment given our Lord prior to and precipitous of His death. He was (a) despised (v. 3), (b) rejected (v. 3), (c) smitten (v. 4), (d) afflicted (vs. 4,7), (e) wounded (v. 5), (f) bruised (vs. 5,10), (g) beaten (v. 5), (h) oppressed (v. 7), (i) stricken (v. 8), (j) taken (v. 8), (k) cut off (v. 8), (l) put to grief (v. 10), (m) classed with transgressors (vs. 9,12), (n) in travail of soul (vs. 11,12), and (o) killed (vs. 9,12).

(3) **The New Testament description.** The graphic description of our Lord's death is found in Matthew 26:17; Mark 14,15; Luke 22,23; and John 18,19. No

wonder such is called “even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-11).

V. In Bearing Our Iniquities, His Death Was “Victorious”

(1) Isaiah 53:10 affirms

He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

(a) He saw His seed in that His spiritual posterity was born because of His sacrifice. (b) His days were prolonged in that He was raised to die no more; yea and live forevermore, for “death hath no more dominion over him” (Rev. 1:17,18; Rom. 6:9). (c) The pleasure of the Lord prospered in His hand in that “God hath made that same Jesus, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). He now, as king of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:14), sits on the throne of God (Rev. 3:21). Additionally, “For it pleased the Father that in him shall all fulness dwell” (Col. 1:19; 2:9).

(2) Isaiah 53:12 affirms,

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.

Colossians 2:14,15 reads,

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Consequently, Hebrews 2:14,15 encourages,

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Conclusion

(1) Review. In bearing our iniquities our Lord's death was (a) vital, (b) vicarious, (c) propitiatory, (d) vicious, and (e) victorious.

(2) Isaiah 53:2.

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

A little unattractive girl in a home for homeless children wrote a note and placed it in the forks of a tree outside the wall of her home. When the superintendent found it and read it, the message simply said, "To whoever finds this: I love you." Yes, and again, of someone else it was written, "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." So we took him outside the wall and nailed him to a tree. And, whoever will go there will still find written, "To whoever finds this: I love you."

Chapter 18

Christ, The Mediator Of A Better Covenant

Winford Claiborne

One of the most troublesome areas of religious thought pertains to the relationship of the law of Moses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the first few years of the church's existence, misunderstandings about the law caused many heartaches and divisions among God's people. Paul and Barnabas encountered certain men in Antioch of Syria who taught the church in that city: "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). The "dissension" (*staseos*: uproar, insurrection) and "disputation" (*zeteseos*: debate, questioning) were so intense that Paul, Barnabas and certain others "determined that they should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:2). The apostle Peter went to the very heart of the matter with his comments and questions. He affirmed that God had put no difference (*diekrinen*: distinction) between Jews and Gentiles. In the gospel era, God had purified the hearts of the Jew and the Gentile by faith. Thus Peter asked,

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they (Acts 15:10-11).

The churches of Galatia experienced confusion, anger and bitterness over teachers who were trying to bind some parts of the law of Moses on the church of the New Testament. Some of the Judaizers among the Galatian churches had pressured Paul to have Titus, a Greek Christian, circumcised.

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily (*hoitines pareiselthon*: slipped in unwanted) to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage (*katadoulosousin*: abject slavery): to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:4-5).

Later in the Galatian letter, Paul severely criticized those who were being entangled again with the yoke of bondage of the law of Moses. If anyone observed circumcision as a religious obligation, he was a debtor to do the whole law.

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from (*ekpipto*: fall away from or fallen out of) grace (Gal. 5:2-5).

Modern religious teachers have made and are making the same blunders which caused so much trouble at Antioch and among the Galatian churches. Stephen L. Carter’s 1993 best-seller, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, will for many years be studied and quoted by theologians, politicians and others who are deeply disturbed over the trivialization of religious devotion by

law and by politics. Carter's book contains many thought-provoking ideas, but he has not read or does not believe the Scriptures which emphatically teach that the Mosaic covenant—all of it—has been removed—"nailed to the cross" (Col. 2:14-17). Carter writes:

As a Christian (he is an Episcopalian, W.C.), I have no doubt of either the continuing validity of God's covenant with Israel (see Rom. 11:29) or of my own spiritual inheritance from the Old Testament tradition.¹

Stephen Carter is apparently a very knowledgeable legal scholar, but he has failed to understand many passages which show the end of the law of Moses and the establishment of the gospel of Christ. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change in the law" (Heb. 7:12).

Carter expresses perplexity...

...by the insistence of so many believing Christians that the Jews can find salvation only by rejecting the special covenant that has nurtured them through centuries of hostility and horror.²

Does Stephen Carter know about the conversation among Moses, Elijah and Christ at the mount of transfiguration? How could he miss the fact that God himself said concerning Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him" (Matt. 17:5)? Has he ever read these words from Hebrews:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

Besides, the apostle Peter said to the Jews:

This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12).

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The great prophet Jeremiah constantly reminded the Jews of their disobedience to God and of the consequences which were bound to follow.

Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:12-13).

Jeremiah warned of God's impending judgment against the nation of Israel, but he assured them that God would make a new covenant with all of the nation—the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31).

Jeremiah 31 is the only passage in the Old Testament which specifically mentions a new covenant. It outlines many of the features of that new covenant. The passage has been treated differently by different groups. For example, the people of the Qumran community near the Dead Sea applied the new covenant to their beliefs and practices. For them, the Mosaic covenant became new when they added their own rules and regulations to it. The Manual of Discipline and other documents from Qumran demonstrate how legalistic the men of of that Dead Sea community were.

Christians for almost two thousand years have

applied the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34 to the covenant which Jesus Christ came to establish. The reasons for their doing so are very plain. No other approach to Jeremiah's prophecy so completely fulfills its message. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the era it ushered in fit every detail of the prophecy. Besides, divine inspiration affirms that Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the New Testament law. Hebrews 8:6-13 makes that truth too plain for anyone to deny.

The Fulfillment Of Jeremiah 31: Hebrews 8:6-13

Hebrews teaches that God has at many times and in different ways spoken to the human family, but in these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). Hebrews 1 explains the reasons why God has spoken to us by the Son rather than through angels. (The law of Moses was delivered through angels.) Just as Jesus is greater than the angels; so the law given through Jesus Christ is greater than the law given through Moses. Comparative adjectives and adverbs are used throughout the book of Hebrews to show that we have a better covenant, a better way, better promises, a better mediator, and so forth. Even if we were privileged to live under the law of Moses—and we are not—why would we do so since the new law is better in every way than the old?

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

The Mosaic law provided for priests who offered gifts and sacrifices. Hebrews insists that Christ could not be our high priest if we lived under the old covenant.

He came from the wrong tribe.

If perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertains to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood (Heb. 7:11-14).

There is no way the law of Moses could be binding on anyone—including people of Jewish descent. Attempting to identify and locate priests from the tribe of Levi and from the family of Aaron would be an impossible task. The Jews themselves do not know which men came from Levi and which came from other tribes. And even more important, we have a new high priest—Jesus Christ—who serves after the order of Melchisedek and not after the order of Aaron. Besides, there is no special order of priests under the new covenant. Every Christian is a priest (I Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6) and Jesus Christ is our high priest.

The Christian’s high priest sits at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. He is “a minister (*leitourgos*: one who performs rituals and ceremonies in worship services) of the sanctuary (*hagion*: holy place) and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man” (Heb. 8:1-2). The language of this text is highly figurative. Jesus and the new covenant supplant every ordinance and regulation of the law of

Moses. The Jews had a tabernacle which God ordained. We are blessed with “the true tabernacle.” “True” (*alethinous*) is not contrasted with false, but with the shadow or the picture.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect (Heb. 10:1).

Every high priest—including Jesus Christ—was ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices. The Jewish priests offered the blood of bulls and of goats, but Jesus Christ offered His own blood.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13-14).

The gifts, sacrifices and ordinances of the old law had a very definite place in God’s scheme of human redemption. They...

...serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount (Heb. 8:5).

As great as the old covenant was—and it was without question God’s law—it pales in comparison to the new covenant.

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry (*leitourgias*: service dedicated to God), by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (Heb. 8:6).

The priests of the law of Moses were a privileged class of men; they had a special ministry. The office of the priest under the Mosaic covenant should have been honored—both by the men themselves and by other Israelites. Tragically, the priests were often immoral and reprobate. They brought shame on one of the greatest offices in the nation of Israel. To a great extent, the Jews suffered morally, financially and spiritually because of the poor leadership of many of the priests—including many of the high priests.

Our high priest has obtained a more excellent ministry or service. He has become the mediator of the new covenant, a covenant established on better promises. The word “mediator” (*mesites*) refers to a middle man, an arbitrator. (*Mesos*, middle, *eimi*, to go, a go-between.) The word “mediator” (*mesites*) is used only six times in the New Testament, three of those in Hebrews. The other passages read as follows:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15).

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel (Heb. 12:24).

Why is the covenant Jesus came to establish called a “better covenant?” The reasons given throughout the

book of Hebrews are many, but I shall mention just a few. The new covenant provides a “better hope” (Heb. 7:19). It is established on “better promises” (Heb. 8:6). Those who live under the new covenant have “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). We are promised a “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35). While the covenant God made with Moses was unquestionably a great covenant—the greatest the human family has ever seen—the new covenant is better in every way.

The word “covenant” (*diathekes*) appears thirty-three times in the New Testament, seventeen times in Hebrews alone. The same word is rendered “testament” thirteen times in the New Testament. “By so much better was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Heb. 7:22). The word primarily signifies a disposition of property by will or otherwise. One synonym of the word is “agreement.” The new covenant was “established on better promises.” The promises of the gospel era are primarily spiritual—not physical. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises and provides complete forgiveness of sins, freedom from the bondage of the law of Moses and the blessings of eternal life.

The “Faults” Of The Law

“For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second” (Heb. 8:7). The word “covenant” in verse seven does not appear in the original. But the feminine gender (*prote*: first) makes it clear the Hebrew writer was speaking of the first covenant, that is, of the law of Moses. The language in this context simply cannot be misunderstood and misinterpreted. The Hebrew writer wants us to know about the “first covenant”—the law of Moses—and the new

covenant—the gospel of Jesus Christ. How could any truth be any plainer?

If the first covenant—the law of Moses—had faults (*amemptos*: faultless), flaws, blemishes, why would the Psalmist write, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Psm. 19:8)? What were the faults of the law of Moses? Why did not God give the Jews a faultless law? Did the faults of the law lie in God’s inability to give a perfect law or with man’s inability to receive it?

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (Rom. 8:3).

The faults of which the Hebrew writer speaks were not mistakes or errors. The Jews were unable to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. So God gave them a law which would lead them to Jesus Christ—the mediator of the better covenant. If the first covenant could have accomplished for the human family all which God desired for us, there would have been no need for a second covenant or law.

The Gospel Replaces The Law Of Moses

Because the law of Moses could not accomplish the ultimate aims God had in mind for the human family, He said,

...Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Heb. 8:8).

As has already been pointed out, the law of Moses was good and was ordained of God, but it could not provide all the good which God had in mind for fallen men and

women. So God Himself said, "Behold, the days come when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Verses 8-12 are taken directly from Jeremiah 31:31-34. In the Hebrew Bible, the verses are from Jeremiah 38:31-34, but in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), they are from Jeremiah 31.

David L. Edwards, a very liberal theologian by his own admission, wrote a book with the title, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*.³ The plan of the book was very simple. Dr. Edwards wrote a chapter on some topic and then Dr. John R. W. Stott responded to the chapter. Dr. Edwards wrote concerning the law of Moses:

For the Jews are the people who have always reminded the Christians that God does not deal savingly only with the Church or only with those who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior...A passionate longing for their salvation, and a final conviction that it would come, were what made Paul write some of his most profound passages to the Romans.⁴

Either David Edwards does not understand the book of Romans or I do not understand it. It is evident from Romans that Paul deeply loved the Jewish people and would do all within his power to see them come to Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:3).

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved...For

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness
to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:1,4).

The Roman letter, like the book of Hebrews, shows that we can be saved only by believing in Christ and by obeying the gospel.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God (God’s way of making men righteous) revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

How can anyone overlook the fact that Jeremiah was predicting the removal of the old covenant and the establishment of the new? The Jews tragically did ignore Jeremiah’s predictions and, as a people, they not ready for the new covenant when it came. Many modern churches, perhaps most modern churches, have made the same mistake. For example, Seventh-Day Adventists and other sabbatarians want to require the keeping of the Ten Commandments, including the sabbath commandment. Dominion or Reconstructionist theologians argue for the observance of many legal and judicial facets of the law of Moses. Some Dominion theologians are agitating for capital punishment for homosexuals.

The new covenant which God promised would not be according...

...to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant,

and I regarded them not, saith the Lord (Heb. 8:9).

Obviously, there would be some overlap between the two covenants. They both came from God and dealt with many of the same moral and spiritual issues. Adultery is specifically condemned in the law of Moses (Exod. 20:14). It is also specifically condemned in the gospel (Matt. 5:28-29; Gal. 5:19-20; I Cor. 6:9-11). The Old Testament forbade homosexual acts (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). The New Testament just as strongly opposes homosexuality (Rom. 1:26-27; I Cor. 6:9-11; Jude 7). But no one is required to obey any commandment because it is found in the Old Testament. The New Testament guides us in our moral values and in our work and worship. The Old Testament did come from God Almighty, but its precepts and commandments are no longer binding on anyone—either Jews or Gentiles.

God's rescue of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, His leading them through the wilderness and giving them the law at Mount Sinai constitute a thrilling story of God's love and grace. There can be no doubt of the supernatural events surrounding God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. "He took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." Did the covenant God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai include the sabbath commandment? If it did, would that not mean that sabbath-keeping would not be binding under the new covenant?

The reason the law of Moses was cancelled is explained very plainly: "Because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord." The conditions of the first covenant are spelled out in many passages. Deuteronomy 30:15-20 is just one

example. Two verses from this passage will have to suffice because of space.

But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it (Deut. 30:17-18).

The Jews broke the terms of the covenant; so God drove them out of the land and made the covenant null and void. God cannot be accused of being unfaithful to his agreement. It was the Jewish people who had violated the terms of the agreement.

Some features of the new covenant are outlined in Hebrews 8.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people (Heb. 8:10).

As the Hebrew writer stressed in verse 9, the new covenant and the old would differ in a number of ways. One of the differences is most encouraging to all men everywhere. Every human being who believes in Jesus Christ and accepts the terms of the gospel is in the “house of Israel.”

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of

faith are blessed with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:7-9).

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).

The prophecy of Jeremiah shows conclusively that all men—both Jews and Gentiles—are spiritual Israel and recipients of the new covenant.

The Lord promised to put His laws in the minds of those who accept the terms of the new covenant. It is absolutely necessary to stress the role the mind plays in our becoming and remaining Christians. Our Lord instructed His followers to love God with all their strength, their soul and their mind (Matt. 22:37). Paul wrote of the need to renew the mind (Rom. 12:2). Prominent writers in modern times often mention that many so-called evangelicals and conservatives are not using their minds. A prominent English philosopher and theologian, Dr. Os Guinness, complains of our not using our minds. In his splendid book, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds*, Dr. Guinness accuses “Christians” of not thinking Christianly. “American evangelicals in the last generation have simultaneously toned up their bodies and dumbed down their minds.”⁵ Do members of the churches of Christ fit into that category? Are we refusing to use our minds to think Christianly?

The laws of God are to be written on the hearts of the members of the body of Christ. “Mind” and “heart” are often used interchangeably in both testaments. Jeremiah and the Hebrew writer may be using the heart as a synonym of our emotional lives. True Christianity affects more than just the intellect, although modern preachers among us accuse us of being “left-brained”

people, that is, people who have no feelings but rely solely on their emotions. Such talk is silly on the surface, but we should be affected emotionally by what we believe and practice.

God will be our God and we shall be His people. A similar promise was made to the Christians at Corinth.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (II Cor. 6:17-18).

What a wonderful blessing—that Christians are sons and daughters of the King of the universe!

When a child was born into a Jewish family, he was automatically a member of the elect nation. He did not have to join it; he was a Jew by birth. Circumcision was a sign of the child’s belonging to God’s people. According to Jeremiah, the people under the new covenant would have to reach an age when they deliberately chose to be children of God. They would become Christians—not by birth—but by rebirth (John 3:3-5)—not by generation but by regeneration.

And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest (Heb. 8:11).

Some religious groups have made grievous blunders in interpreting Jeremiah’s prophecy. They have concluded that the New Testament downplays the need for intellectual apprehension. In fact, some of our own preachers accuse churches of Christ of being “left-brained” people and not “right-brained.” Left-brained

people rely more on their intellects than on their emotions. Besides the fact that scientifically such a division of the mind's functions cannot be sustained, the Scriptures make it very plain that we are to love God with our minds. Jesus said,

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

In view of the New Testament's emphasis on the Teacher and on teaching, why does Jeremiah predict, "They shall not teach every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord?" For any person to become a New Testament Christian, he has to know the Lord first. He does not have to be told that he is a Christian. He must know the Lord in order to become a Christian. The book of Acts shows how teaching was done in every case of conversion. There are at least thirty different Greek words in Acts which refer to teaching: preaching, announcing, heralding, etc.

Under the new covenant, God promised He would be merciful to our unrighteousness and our sins and iniquities would not be remembered any more (Heb. 8:12). There is nothing in the New Covenant which guarantees that men will not sin. We all sin and come short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). When we do sin, God will be merciful to us. When we repent of our sins, he will forgive those sins and will remember them no more. Jeremiah uses the word "forgive" (Jer. 31:34). The Greeks had two words which referred to the cancelling of a bond

or a debt. *Chiazein* means to put an “X” (*chi*) over it. *Exaleipho* means to wipe out, to erase, to wash away. “Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out (*exaleipho*) when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). The Greek for forgive or remit (*aphesin*) means to remove, to send away. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psm. 103:12).

If there were ever any doubt in anyone’s mind about the meaning of the old covenant and the new, it should be removed by these words:

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).

The old covenant had achieved its purpose. The new covenant has supplanted it. The old covenant came to an end on the day of Pentecost, but it completely vanished with the overthrow of Israel in A. D. 70. That covenant—all of it—has vanished away.

Conclusion

Confusion over the relationship of the two covenants has done untold harm to the cause of Christ. It has led countless thousands of people to return to the bondage which the old covenant engendered (Gal. 2:4-5). It has placed a veil over the face of both Jews and Gentiles so that they “could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished” (II Cor. 3:13). But there is no need for such confusion if one reads carefully Hebrews 8 as it fulfills Jeremiah 31:31-34. The message is too plain for anyone to misunderstand.

Endnotes

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3 David L. Edwards with a response from John Stott, **Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue** (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

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A Study Of Some Of
**The Preachers And
Preaching**
Of The Major Prophet Period

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Chapter 19

The Prophets Prophecy Falsely And My People Love To Have It So (Jer. 5:30-31)

Bobby Liddell

We rejoice in the new beginning of the *Power* lectures, and express appreciation to all the members of the Southaven congregation, its good and godly elders, and its capable and dedicated minister and lectureship director, B. J. Clarke, for their work to make it a reality. Surely, much good shall come, and God shall be glorified, and that for many years to come if this old world stands, through the efforts put forth in this lectureship.

The text for this lecture is:

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:30-31).

Biblical Prophecy

The Bible is a book unlike any other in all the world for many reasons, one of which is its fulfilled prophecy. Prophecy is, by definition, that which is spoken forth.

The Hebrew word for “spokesman” is *dabar*; and while the term is used hundreds of times

in the Old Testament, it is rendered spokesman only once (Exod. 4:14-16, BL)...The Old Testament original word for “prophet” is *nabi*, and it is defined...as a spokesman, speaker, prophet...A prophet who was faithful to Jehovah, always spoke God’s word, which had been committed to him, faithfully; but... there were men who claimed to speak for the Lord—men who neither received a message from on high, nor represented the Lord faithfully in that which they spoke.¹

That which is spoken forth, in true prophecy, is that which could not be known by man unless revealed by God; thus, whether predictive (foretelling) or declarative (forth-telling), and whether having to do with events past, present or future, prophecy signifies the speaking forth of the will of God through man to man.

The word “prophet” is derived from a Greek word which is a translation of the Hebrew and means “bubbling over.” The Greek word is “prophetes,” which is derived from the Greek “pro” and “phanai,” meaning “to speak for,” i.e., to speak for another. So, etymologically the word, in its parts, expresses the following ideas: “Pro” means (1) “beforehand,” (2) “in public,” (3) “in behalf of,” or “for;”; “phanai” means “to speak.” Hence the etymological meaning, “to speak for” or to speak for another. Therefore a prophet is “one who speaks to men, on behalf of God, the message he has received from God, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”²

By prophecy, God gave instruction, information, prediction, warning, reproof, comfort, and hope. By prophecy, and its fulfillment, God confirmed His word to be His word; that is, Divine Revelation. Thus, fulfilled

prophecy is proof of the Bible's being inspired of God. True predictive prophecy is found only in the Bible.

The God of the universe gave, through men, His prophecy to men. True prophets spoke forth only that which was given them by God.

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21).

The Bible simply and plainly presents God's definition of a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:18, where God said,

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him (Deut. 18:18).

So, as shown by this passage, a prophet: (1) was chosen to be so by God, (2) had words from God put in his mouth, and (3) was to speak only that which God commanded him.

False Spokesmen

The Holy Record plainly affirms that there were false prophets in Old Testament times.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (II Peter 2:1).

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake

unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart (Jer. 14:14).

God did not send false prophets! Nor, did they get their message from God! Yet, they spoke forth lies in His name; thus, in essence, they blamed God for their lies. God does not take lightly the telling of lies in His name.

Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord (Jer. 23:32).

False prophets are prophets of no profit. Instead, their lies exact a great cost.

The prophets had the responsibility to speak forth God’s Word—the Truth (John 17:17)—not lies. Just as surely, today, God’s preachers are to preach the word of God, not the lies of Satan or his servants (II Tim. 4:1ff). Thus, servants of God who claim to preach His word are to take heed to themselves and to their teaching (I Tim. 4:16). False spokesmen, teaching lies as though they were the truth, deceive and destroy.

For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error (II Peter 2:18).

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God challenged the followers of false gods and their prophets to prove their gods by the test of prophecy.

Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together (Isa. 41:22-23).

Again, God said:

I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass (Isa. 48:3).

and

I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them (Isa. 48:5).

Almighty God gave this admonition:

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:22).

Thus, the true test of a prophet is the fulfillment of his prophecy. False spokesmen always fail this test. Even so, for many, their influence is only slightly diminished, if at all.

False Statements

Jeremiah faced the opposition of false prophets who

promised, “Peace, peace; where there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11).

They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you (Jer. 23:17).

The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him (Jer. 28:9).

The prophets, who were charged with delivering God’s word, were prophesying falsely, telling the people all was well and that God was with them. They did so because they sought to please the people and the princes.³

Jeremiah, who himself was both prophet and priest, delivered God’s message which condemned those in both positions. Because of his steadfastly speaking forth the word of the Lord, in opposition to the false statements of the false prophets, Jeremiah faced prison and death (Jer. 11:21; 26:8).

Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard (Jer. 26:11-12).

The priests were acting with the prophets to further their deceit. They followed their own way, not God’s, and got rich and fat (Jer. 5:28). They went along with

whatever the prophets said, upholding their error, and reinforcing their influence, all for the sake of keeping their own priestly office which brought them wealth and power. Both prophet and priest gave false security and false hope. They united in their self-serving departure, and that to the people's destruction. The religion they offered was, "...a superficial religion, a religion which did not get in the way of one's everyday life."⁴ False brethren, today, offer the modern equivalent and some members of the Lord's church "love to have it so."

False Standard

The standard shared by prophet and priest was not the word of God (Jer. 5:13; 23:21). By their false standard, they: (1) dealt falsely (6:13; 8:10); (2) prophesied lies in God's name (14:14; 23:25; 27:15-16; 29:8-9); (3) were profane and wicked (23:11); (4) spoke forth *their* words from their own hearts and mouths (23:16,26); (5) used their tongues and said, "He (i.e., God, BL) saith" (23:31); and, (6) stole God's words from their neighbor (23:30). God said:

The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord (Jer. 23:28).

There must be a standard for God's people. That standard must be the word of God. There is a standard for all who live today. Jesus said:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Jeremiah said:

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23).

These liars were saying what they knew the people would receive. Thus, having tested the wind, they went boldly forth with a message that pleased their hearers.

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

In rejecting the Divine Standard and upholding a humanly devised measure, they sinned against God, themselves and the people. Like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day, they were blind guides (Matt. 23:24). “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14).

Falsehood Supported

One part of the text we wish to consider more closely is this: “My people love to have it so.” The people were guilty, just as were the prophets and priests, because they delighted in the lies told to them. All three, prophets, priests, and people, were encouraging each other in error. Each did his part to undergird the false idea that everything would be fine. The people had closed their eyes and ears to the truth and were ready to follow the blind guides of error, but refused the call to repentance from God’s man. They were happy to hear a lie which promised peace and security, instead of God’s

message of truth warning of impending doom.

God said, through Jeremiah, that which was happening was astonishing and horrible.

After enumerating the sins of his people in ever-darkening series, the prophet at length reaches a form of evil worse than all others, at the sight of which he starts back with an exclamation of horror; that is corruption at the very fountain of instruction and worship, and the willing acquiescence in it by the nation.⁵

Man looked upon the situation entirely differently, thinking the deception and corruption perpetrated by prophet and priest were acceptable, even desirable, and nothing about which one should be alarmed. Obviously, the people saw no reason to reject the false message. It pleased them and that was all that mattered. They loved to have it so.

Thus, they saw the true prophets who opposed the lying prophets and corrupt priests as hateful, unloving troublemakers. Remember Ahab's assessment of Elijah:

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? (I Kings 18:17).

Elijah's response was accurate and direct:

...I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim (I Kings 18:18).

Today, those who speak the truth are accused of being the ones who cause trouble, divide brethren and lack love. Yet, the real culprits are those who have forsaken the commandments of the Lord.

"Falsehood is generally far more pleasant to the

ear than truth...”⁶ They rejoiced to hear “It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword or famine” (Jer. 5:12), instead of God’s reproof and rebuke. Who did the people like and to whom did they listen? They rejected Jeremiah’s (God’s) message of repentance and reform for the smooth speech of false prophets. They found comfort in not having to restrain themselves from sin, nor conform to “law keeping.” As Clarke said, “When profligate people stand up on behalf of profligate priests, corruption must then be at its height.”⁷

To put it simply, they liked to have their ears tickled and accepted, with open arms, those who would tickle them (II Tim. 4:3-4). Thus, they turned away their ears from hearing the truth to listen to fables. They hardened their hearts to the will of God, till they no longer even recognized it (I Tim. 4:2). The people should have strongly and consistently withstood the false teachers and their teaching. That would have immediately put the false prophets and priests out of favor and out of business. Instead, they knowingly and willingly supported them because that served their desires.

The pressures to please people are great. The weak, ungodly, and those lacking true trust in God succumb. Let us be as Paul who said:

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Paul was not in the people-pleasing business. Neither was Jeremiah. Both sought to please God. Would that all who claim to speak God’s word were likeminded. If

pleasing God pleases men, the faithful rejoice. If pleasing God does not please men, the faithful stand fast. The question is not do men accept us, but does God? “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him” (II Cor. 5:9; cf. Eph. 1:6; 5:10).

False Security

The question the people had to face was, “...what will you do in the end thereof?” “The word ‘end’ means the ‘ultimate issue of a course of action’”⁸ The people were near-sighted; that is, they failed to look down the road of religious error to see where it lead. It always leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). Even so, they could not stand in the judgment and plead ignorance. “The common people know full well what is going on and like it that way.”⁹ They had rejected God’s word, and, in so doing, had rejected God. So much for the false idea of “The Man, but not the plan,” perpetrated by some who say we can accept Jesus while refusing to obey His will. One of the sadder sides to this story is that they knew better. Yet, they forsook the knowledge of God for that which pleased them.

Note the price they paid to get what they wanted. They sought peace at any price and sold their souls to follow those who promised peace to them. They accused the Lord of lying and accepted the lies of men. Stancliff said, “The people have made the Lord out as a liar by refusing to believe the prophets who tell of danger.”¹⁰ The people loved the present world with its treasures and pleasures (I John 2:15-17). Such was the downfall of Demas (II Tim. 4:10). They thought only of the present and foolishly failed to consider the future. They gratified

their desires for the moment, but put off the answer to the question, “...what will ye do in the end thereof?”

What would be the ultimate end of the false prophets? Of King Zedekiah, Jeremiah asked:

Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? (Jer. 37:19).

They had deceived by their lies. God would deal with them.

Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them (Jer. 14:15-16).

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes (Jer. 29:21).

Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against

the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month (Jer. 28:15-17).

What would be the ultimate end of following false prophesy? Despair, destruction, and death! The same is true for those today who follow false teachers and their lies. Yet, would not many of those who loved “to have it so,” express surprise at their eternal fate? In spite of their solemn protests, they shall hear at the judgment, “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23).

Conclusion

Some denied there was a problem in Jeremiah’s day. Yet, it still existed. Some deny there is a problem today. Yet, it is still there. Not only is there a problem with those who teach error, but as great a problem with those who support and uphold false teachers. Zerr said, “If a man is merely favorable towards the wicked teaching and practice of another it makes him a partaker of those evils.”¹¹ Paul, by inspiration, said: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). The apostle of love, John, recorded it this way:

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

The solution in Jeremiah’s day is the same solution to the present problems we face. Hear God and do His will. “Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob,

and all the families of the house of Israel” (Jer. 2:4). We must get men back to the Bible. We must insist on Bible teaching and preaching. We must desire and demand to hear the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Eternity hangs in the balance.

“False teaching lightens the yoke of God’s law, and removes His fear from the conscience: and with this, man is ready to be content.”¹² And, sadly, even today, so many of the people love to have it so.

Endnotes

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Chapter 20

The Former Prophets: Precursors To The Major Prophets

Mike Vestal

The wonderful relationship between the Old and New Testament is well summarized in statements like, “The New is in the Old *contained*, and the Old is in the New *explained*,” and “The New Testament is in the Old *concealed*, and the Old is in the New *revealed*.” In a very real way, these two basic divisions of the Bible are inseparably related. For the Christian, Jesus is the theme of both covenants (cf. Matt. 5:17-20; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Heb. 10:7). When viewed carefully, the Old and New Testament form a meaningful and purposeful whole as they progressively unfold the will of the Almighty concerning the salvation of man to the glory of God through Jesus Christ our Lord (I Peter 1:10-12; II Peter 1:19-21).

From a fairly ancient time, the Jews divided the books of the Old Testament into three sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The second of the three divisions consisted of two subdivisions: the Former Prophets, which included Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, and the Latter Prophets, which included Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Twelve. The Former Prophets were called such by the Jews not so much

because they were particularly prophetic in content, but because their chief characters were viewed as having held the position of a prophet. It is my purpose to attempt to do two things: first, to point how the Former Prophets blazed the trail for the Latter Prophets, especially for the Major Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; and second, to analyze some of the early prophets and the characteristics they possessed that are worthy of imitation today by the people of God (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11).

The Former Prophets As Trail Blazers

Why should the Former Prophets be considered trailblazers? *By virtue of the fact that they served as God's prophets prior to the coming of those men of God known as the Major Prophets.* Although the etymology of the Hebrew word for “prophet” is somewhat obscure, the nature of the prophetic office is clearly defined in the Old Testament. A prophet was an individual who had received revelation from God and was to relate it to men; the prophet served as one who spoke God's word to the people. The prophet was one who felt as Amos, “The Lord hath spoken; who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8). The Old Testament prophet could well relate to the words of Balaam, “I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God, to do less or more” (Num. 22:18). In Deuteronomy 18:18 God defines a prophet in these words, “I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” The Lord told Moses, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it” (Deut. 4:2). Micaiah's attitude was typical of God's prophet: “As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak” (I Kings

22:14). The voice of God as heard through His spokesmen the prophets was to be heeded; the prophets spoke with such authority that they demanded obedience to their message from the people because it had come from God Himself (Isa. 8:5; Amos 3:1).

Early figures like Abraham (Gen. 20:7; Psm. 105:15) and Moses (Deut. 18:15-18; Hosea 12:13) are designated prophets. Apart from Deborah (Judg. 4:4) and the man sent during the Midianite oppression (Judg. 6:8), no prophet is specifically mentioned as such in Joshua and Judges. Jeremiah 7:25 does state, "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets." However, the role and function of a prophet seems to take on a new and expanded role with the rise of Samuel. During Samuel's youth, "the word of the Lord was rare" (I Sam. 3:1). But as I Samuel 3:19-20 says,

So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him
and let none of his words fall to the ground.
And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew
that Samuel had been established as a prophet
from the Lord.

This was a point acknowledged by Paul in Acts 13:20 when he said, "After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet."

A brief look at some of the descriptive names given to various prophets shows a great deal about the character and origin of a prophet's ministry. He was "a man of God" (I Kings 12:22) in the sense that he was chosen by God to serve as a prophet. A prophet was "a servant of the Lord" (I Kings 14:18), indicating that he was to be faithful to the Lord. A prophet was also "a messenger of the Lord" (Isa. 42:19), showing that he

was sent by God, and a “seer” or “beholder” (Isa. 30:9-10), indicating that his insight came directly from the Lord. Scripture also describes a prophet as “a man of the Spirit” (Hosea 9:7; Micah 3:8), revealing the source of his information as being God the Holy Spirit. Finally, God’s prophet was to be “a watchman” (Ezek. 3:17) in the sense of being alert for the things of the Lord among the people. Therefore it becomes obvious that by their act of functioning as prophets, the Former Prophets would have a pivotal role in blazing the trail for all those who would follow in the prophetic order.

The Former Prophets blazed the trail for those who would follow them in the sense that *they tell us much of the history of the nation of Israel from the receiving of the Law of Moses until the time Judah goes into captivity to Babylon*. The Hebrew grouping of the Former Prophets as covering the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings includes eight hundred to one thousand years of history! What a gap there would be if God had not raised up these courageous individuals to record important matters of history. The Former Prophets tell us of the Israelites taking the land of promise (Josh. 4-Judg. 3). They tell us of the period of the Judges (Judg. 3-I Sam. 10). They speak of the United Kingdom in its glory under the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon (I Sam. 11-I Kings 11), and relate circumstances that led to the coming of the Divided Kingdom and the captivity of the Northern tribes (I Kings 12-II Kings 17). What they actually do is detail the rise and fall of a nation. The Former Prophets serve as a very important historical bridge to see why things had degenerated so from the receiving of the Law until the time the Southern Kingdom eventually goes into

Babylonian captivity (app. 605 B. C.). They blaze the trail by taking us up to the period of the Major Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Another reason why the Former Prophets can legitimately be called trail blazers for Isaiah and the other Major Prophets is *because they too had earlier appeared in the presence of earthly kings and rulers, but not primarily as politicians, but as the voice of God in declaring His word to these leaders*. Former Prophets like Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha and Micaiah and others had stood before powerful and influential leaders to declare God's word. They served as prominent advisors to the kings in matter ranging from war to the various kings' personal corruption. For example, both Elijah and Elisha were lamented as "the chariots of Israel and its horseman" (II Kings 2:12;13:14), because of the valuable role they had played in standing boldly before earthly leaders and setting forth the will of God concerning the nation.

The Former Prophets served as trail blazers *because of their strong opposition to idolatry and their desire for pure worship*. Samuel told Israel,

If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only (I Sam. 7:3).

The young prophet from Judah denounced the setting of the golden calf in Bethel (I Kings 13:1ff). Elijah carried on a running conflict with Ahab and Jezebel due to their wickedness and idolatry. In I Kings 18:21, Elijah asks all the people of Israel at the contest on Mount Carmel, "How long will you falter between two opinions?"

If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.” The Former Prophets were uncompromising in their stance for the unperverted worship of the Almighty.

The Former Prophets can rightfully be called trail blazers *because of their powerful examples of godliness*. Their respect for what God told them, their understanding that there is no peace apart from righteousness, their appreciation for the sovereignty and blessings of God and their willingness to endure hardship as necessary for what was right made them mentors not only to the Major Prophets who followed them, but also to all those who desire to please the Lord. Hebrews 11:32-40 speaks of “Samuel and the prophets” and others, stating that “the world was not worthy” of them (vs. 38), and that they “obtained a good testimony through faith” (vs. 39).

The Former Prophets can be considered as trail blazers for Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other Major Prophets for *without them, history would not have been exactly the same*. Had men like Samuel and Elijah not arrived on the scene when they did, surely the nation of Israel would have suffered. These prophets can easily be viewed as a gift from God to fulfill His purpose, reveal His will and to protect the nation from evil until Christ, the Promised Seed would come (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:19-29). God chose to work in and through the Former Prophets to eventually achieve His will for man’s salvation centuries later in Christ. As Peter himself said, “Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who would follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:24).

The Former Prophets As Examples

The very word “example” has to do with “a pattern to follow” (cf. I Peter 2:21-22; I Cor. 11:1). Our example and influence ought to be the reflection of a God-like character (cf. Matt. 5:3-12). Due to the number of individuals who served in the prophetic office during this period, we will only be able to briefly analyze a couple of them and a few of their attributes. In highlighting some of the Former Prophets, what characteristics did they display worthy of our imitation today?

Samuel serves as divine proof one man, when yielded to the direction of God, is of more value than a multitude of men left to their own devices (cf. Rom. 8:31; Jer. 10:23). Few leaders have filled so many roles, and with such distinction, as Samuel. He was a priest, prophet, judge, king-maker, educator and nation-builder. Samuel has rightly been called a second Moses, for while they were separated by hundred of years chronologically, both men indeed found the people of God in their respective times enslaved, in ignorance and seemingly without hope (cf. Judg. 21:25; I Sam. 3:1). Both men were instrumental in leading the people out of such circumstances, and just as Moses ushered in the giving of the Law, so Samuel is responsible for anointing Israel’s first king. God Himself would link Moses and Samuel together as intercessors in Jeremiah 15:1, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.”

Samuel was the answer to his godly mother’s prayers. Hannah was childless, and poured out her heart in sorrow to God for a son, whom she promised to give

to the Lord “all the days of his life” (I Sam. 1:1-18). And when Samuel was weaned, she kept her promise without regret or repining (I Sam. 1:19-28). In a time when children are often viewed as unwanted, as intrusions that keep people from living their own lives, how Christians need to remember “children are a heritage of the Lord, The fruit of the womb is His reward” (Psm. 127:3). “Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psm. 127:5). And when so many parents are negligent in teaching their children the way of God, how important it is to remember as did Hannah that children are really His in the first place. He lends them to us as parents for a while in order that through our training they will be His forevermore (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:4-12). Hannah took young Samuel to Eli the priest where he “ministered to the Lord” (I Sam. 2:11).

Samuel “grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men” (I Sam. 2:26). Eli never seems to have resented Samuel at all, but instead prepared the youth to serve the Lord better than he and his sons would ever minister. And Samuel grew spiritually and socially under his tutelage. It is sadly evident that Eli’s own sons were not so inclined towards spiritual growth; their evil dealings were the talk of the town (I Sam. 2:22-25). God Himself indicated that Eli was at least partially to blame for their behavior (I Sam. 2:27-36). Eli’s crowning failure was that he honored his children more than his God (I Sam. 2:29), and for that he reaped a bitter harvest. His sons “made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them” (I Sam. 3:13). What a lesson for today. Like many other fathers, Eli’s loving discipline was far too little and much too late! (cf. Prov. 13:24; 19:18; Heb. 12:5-11).

It is interesting that when the word of the Lord does come to young Samuel, it is Eli who after some misunderstanding finally recognizes this for what it is. Eli instructs Samuel to say, "Speak Lord, for your servant hears" (I Sam. 3:9-10). What a marvelous statement, and an even greater attitude lies behind it! God may not be speaking to us audibly as He did to Samuel, but we still hear His authoritative voice through His Word (Heb. 1:1-4; Matt. 17:5; John 12:48). Scripture is the very Word of God (I Thess. 2:13-14; II Tim. 3:16-17). Samuel's first message from God was one of doom for kindly old Eli's wicked house. It was a hard message for a sensitive soul like Samuel to bear, but eventually he told Eli (I Sam. 3:11-18). There is a certain nobility to Eli's remark in I Samuel 3:18, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him."

I Samuel 3:19-20 states,

the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet from the Lord.

No one doubted to whom Samuel really belonged, and no one questioned where he really stood. When Christians "stand fast in the Lord" (Phil. 1:27; II Thess. 2:15) and are "perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment" (I Cor. 1:10), we can make an impact like unto that of Samuel. We will be speaking volumes for the Lord and His salvation. One thing is sure; the Word of God will not fail us, but it is possible for us to fail the Word of God (John 17:20-21; Gal. 5:7; II Peter 2:20-22). And when we fail to trust and obey the Word of God, we fail God Himself (cf. Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46).

As a judge, Samuel was a man of resolute faithfulness to God. I Samuel 7 records the return of the ark of the covenant to Israel and of Israel's subsequent repentance under the leadership of Samuel. Times that had earlier been dark and “Ichabod” (without glory - I Sam. 4:19-22) were looking brighter. One man's determined faithfulness can truly influence many others to draw nearer to God (cf. Matt. 5:13-16; I Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9). And even if it does not, faithfulness to God is always right (cf. II Peter 1:5-11).

Like Eli before him, Samuel's own sons brought him no lasting joy due to their wickedness (I Sam. 8:1-5). “But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice” (I Sam. 8:3). It sadly is one of those incidents which proves, “the only thing men learn from history is that men do not learn from history.” The people of Israel used the advanced age of Samuel and the wickedness of his sons as a rationale for a king. They said, “Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations” (I Sam. 8:5). He knew the pain of seeing the people use his own flesh and blood as a partial reason for rejecting God. How that must have weighed upon Samuel's soul! Today, not only elders, but all Christians must be diligent to properly manage their own households (cf. I Tim. 3:4-5; Eph. 5:22-6:4). We dare not through our neglect have our loved ones be the stumblingblocks that influence others to reject God.

With prophetic insight, Samuel knew their request was in reality a repudiation of the theocracy - the rule of the nation by God - and they were demanding a monarchy so they could have a government like that of other nations. God told Samuel,

Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them (I Sam. 8:7).

In order that they would enter the arrangements with their eyes wide open, God charged Samuel to warn them of the heavy cost to them if their request were granted (I Sam. 8:11-18). But the people were weary of having a Leader they could not see, and would not be dissuaded. It seems today in the church there are some who cannot be satisfied with the leadership of God and His Word. They are on a seemingly never ending quest for something more (cf. Jer. 6:16; II John 9). It is tragic that some in our brotherhood want the gospel plus something else – the gospel plus slick marketing techniques, the gospel plus entertainment, the gospel plus secular psychology or the gospel plus denominational error. If Israel was guilty of rejecting God in its cry for an earthly king, what of those today in spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16) who reject the all sufficiency of His Word?

Even after anointing Saul as Israel's first king, we see the depth and concern for the nation found in his words, "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you" (I Sam. 12:23). As Samuel saw the steady deterioration of Saul over the years, he must have agonized greatly. Finally, the word of the Lord came to Samuel with this remark, "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments" (I Sam. 15:11). The same verse goes on to say, "and it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night."

It was Samuel who later went to Saul to tell him that because of his repeated disobedience to the will of God, because of his hard-headed determination to have it his way whatever the cost, the Lord had rejected him as king (I Sam. 15:22-23). Samuel plainly stated, “The Lord has torn the kingdom from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you” (I Sam. 15:28). And in one of the most touching verses in the life of Samuel, I Samuel 15:35 says,

And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Not only must there be courage in declaring the word of God today, there must be a sensitivity to souls like that of Samuel! (II Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:19-20; Eph. 4:15). When we do not feel profound pain and sadness when people reject the Lord, something is terribly wrong with us!

One of the greatest lessons we can learn from Samuel is the value of prayer. He was literally born and nurtured in prayer. It has been poignantly said, “Praying Samuels come from praying Hannahs.” It follows then that those well schooled in prayer ought to come from praying households. Samuel’s life is literally filled with intercessory prayer (I Sam. 7:5; 15:11), and the people believed in the power of his intercessions (I Sam. 7:8). It is no wonder Samuel is linked with Moses by Jeremiah as one of the great intercessors (15:1). Psalm 99:6 says, “Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called on His name; They called upon the Lord, and He answered them.” When prayer becomes as meaningful and powerful to us as it was to Samuel, what a tremendous force for good

the church will truly become! (Luke 18:1; Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18).

In thinking about the life of Samuel, one point repeatedly stands out. There was never any doubt about whose side Samuel was on. From his youth through his old age, his life is a model of consistency. Whether in life or death, he is always on the Lord's side (cf. I Sam. 28:3-25; Rom. 8:31-39). Is this the kind of legacy we are leaving? (Rev. 2:10). How more servants of God like Samuel are needed today!

"A man of God" is the description of a prophet out of Judah who cried out against the sin rampant in Israel during the reign of Jereboam. A wise individual will try to learn from the virtues and vices of others. The fascinating, yet sad story of this prophet in I Kings 13 contains many valuable lessons for the people of God today.

This prophet had the courage to speak out against sin in the highest places. Jereboam was a wicked king who did evil more than all who were before him (I Kings 14:9). As head of the Northern Kingdom, he changed the object, place, priesthood and time of worship to accommodate his purposes (I Kings 12:28-32). The man of God out of Judah had great courage to speak out against such rebellion (I Kings 13:2; II Kings 23:15-20). Without question, there is a time to be slow to speak (James 1:19), but there is also a time when rebellion against God warrants courageously telling it like it is (Jude 3; Gal. 2:5). How all God's children need the wisdom and discernment to be able to distinguish properly (cf. Phil. 1:10; Heb. 5:11-14). And we need the courage to be able to speak boldly as we ought (cf. Eph. 6:18-20).

The prophet out of Judah also illustrates the fact that some will adversely react to the word of God upon hearing it. Jereboam wanted to lay hold on him (I Kings 13:4). In every time, some biblical themes are unpopular, go against the majority view and may be considered “politically incorrect.” However, this is no excuse for failing to declare the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Personal conflict, pride and social prominence are not the issue, righteousness and holiness are (Matt. 5:6-8; I Peter 1:15-16). The prophet would not stay with Jereboam and accept his hospitality, for God had commanded that he “eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way you came” (I Kings 13:9). Now that definitely was not the easiest thing, but it certainly was the will of God.

The man of God out of Judah also reminds us that it is possible for God’s servants to believe a lie (I Kings 13:14-18). An old prophet told him that an angel said to bring the man of God to his house, but the old prophet from Bethel lied. The sad fact is the man of God out of Judah placed his very life on human testimony and not upon the divine revelation he had received and which had been confirmed from the Lord. It is often easy to justify and rationalize our behavior by what “seems” or “feels” right, but God’s objective word is the standard by which conduct is to be judged (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; Jer. 10:23; Isa. 8:20). We are instructed to “try” the spirits to see whether they are of God (I John 4:1). We cannot afford to just blindly follow others because deception and false teaching are very real evils to be avoided (Matt. 7:15-20; II Peter 2:1ff; II Cor. 4:3-4). By going back with the old prophet from Bethel, the man of God from Judah was not walking with the Lord (I Kings 13:26). Those

who befriend us are not always the best of friends!

The prophet of God out of Judah further reminds us that partial obedience is not enough. Who could deny that this prophet did a number of things admirably and uprightly? But partial obedience would not suffice! (Heb. 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21). Partial obedience brought about his destruction (I Kings 13:20-32). When one minimizes, neglects or partially obeys the will of God today, a similar consequence may well await. One can start well as a Christian only to have a tragic end. Such was true of Demas (Col. 4:14; Phile. 24; II Tim. 4:10). The church at Ephesus had left its first love even though it was extremely active religiously (Rev. 2:1-7). But obedience is to come from a heart of love and devotion (Rom. 6:16-18; Gal. 5:4). And a heart of love and devotion listens to what God says!

The man of God out of Judah is a sobering reminder that all do not live up to their potential in the Lord. Contrast the attitude of Paul in Philippians 3:12-21 with the attitude displayed by the prophet in I Kings 13. The fact is, for all of this prophet's wonderful characteristics, he failed the Lord and did not live up to what he could have accomplished. It is well worth asking, "Are we becoming what God desires us to be?" Far too much work in the kingdom of God goes undone due to brothers and sisters failing to live up to the potential they have in Christ. Other things will indeed threaten to pull us away, as they did the prophet out of Judah, but may we be like Paul and have the attitude of "one thing I do" (Phil. 3:13). May it be our consuming and insatiable desire to ever grow nearer the Lord and to glorify Him.

Conclusion

The Former Prophets are trail blazers in the highest and best sense of the term. They paved the way for great men of God like Isaiah, Jeremiah and others who would follow. They paved the way by having an important role in God’s unfolding scheme of redemption. And they pave the way for us today by causing us to remember the importance of speaking for God when it may not always be popular or easy to do.

Chapter 21

Courageous Preaching Of The Prophets

Ted J. Clarke

Cry aloud, spare not: Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins (Isa. 58:1; New King James Version).

The context of our passage is God giving commandment to His prophet Isaiah to strongly declare the sins of the southern kingdom of Judah to them, making known their ungodliness. The implication for their refusal to repent is God's continuing judgment, but there are explicit promises of great blessings if they obeyed (vs. 8-9,11, 12, 14). Their guarantee of this was, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken" (v. 14).

God's commission to Isaiah to "Cry aloud" (literally, "Cry with the throat"),¹ meant that he was to be bold in attracting the attention of Judah. This was not a matter to address in a casual monotone voice; the need was serious and urgent! Isaiah was to "lift up (his) voice like a trumpet," the instrument often used in sounding a warning. His cry was a calling out to proclaim, pronounce, and publish the people's common sins. In carrying out this activity the prophet was to "spare not;" that is, show no restraint, hold nothing back, omit nothing that was indicative of their sinfulness.² In

modern parlance he was to “lay it on the line, tell it like it is.” The fact that God would forgive them if they repented and changed their lives required them to know the scope of their transgressions. Holding back on telling them part of their sins would not lead them to make the corrections which God commanded.

What were their sins? The same as those committed by many of us today! They perverted the time and resources they should have used in worship and service to God for their own use and pleasure (vs. 3, 13), and they neglected their duties to their fellowman (vs. 6-7, 9-10). There was hypocrisy in their claims to truly seek God (vs. 2-3) and they had no compassion toward the weak and needy (vs. 3-4). In essence they were violating, in a multitude of ways, what our Lord called the “first” and “second” of all commandments, namely, to love God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:28-31).

Isaiah continues his crying aloud into our chapter 59, where he declares that God is able to save Judah, but their continuance in living sin-filled lives has caused the Lord to withdraw His powerful hand to turn away His face, refusing to hear their prayers (vs. 1-2). He proceeds to tell them more of their sins, but still promises them that the redeemer will come “to those who turn from transgression” (v. 20). While so much of this lesson deals with the negative side of preaching and the courage needed to face people with rebuke for their sins, we must never forget that God’s love and forgiveness is always held out to those who repent and change their lives to conform with God’s will.

Telling others of their sins against God and mankind is neither an easy nor a pleasant thing to do!

It takes great courage! Jesus, speaking seven hundred years after Isaiah, told the scribes and Pharisees who later murdered Him that they were “sons of those who murdered the prophets,” possessing the same kind of hypocrisy and lawlessness as their fathers (Matt. 23:27-32). Just before they stoned him Stephen asked the Jews, “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts 7:52). To be a true prophet of God required that one have the courage to put his life in jeopardy. There are few, if any, prophets of God who did not suffer physical and mental abuse from those to whom they ministered God’s Word. The thesis of this lesson is that elders, deacons, preachers, and other members of the Lord’s church must have the same courage to “Cry aloud and spare not!”

The Courageous Preaching Of The Prophets

Although we are confining the bulk of our study to the Major Prophets, the attribute of courage certainly applies to the Former Prophets like Elijah (I Kings 18:17-19:18) and Minor Prophets such as Amos (6:1-8; 7:12-17).

The process of courageous preaching required that the prophets confront every class of people with their sins. Like God, for Whom they spoke, they could show no respect of persons (Deut. 10:17; Prov. 24:23-25; Acts 10:34-35). Respect for God motivated these men, but it still takes courage to rebuke people who can persecute and kill you.

Foreign Nations

As the prophet Jonah was sent to the Pagan nation of Assyria (its capital city was Nineveh), God’s concern

for the Gentile nations is also seen in the prophecies to the nations in the Major Prophets. Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 46-51; and Ezekiel 25-32 contain specific oracles to and about these heathen peoples. Daniel’s ministry was almost exclusively to the kings of Babylon and Medo-Persia. In Jeremiah 1:9-10; 25:15-16, God specifically appointed Jeremiah as a prophet “over the nations and over the kingdoms.” While we do not know the extent of Jeremiah’s travels or the circulation of his oracles, it is not hard to conceive that the leaders of those nations would have been angered by his messages, primarily of their doom. Whatever threat these nations posed to the Major Prophets, God’s spokesmen did not allow themselves to be deterred from proclaiming His Word.

Daniel’s experiences were typical of what other prophets would suffer at the hands of foreign powers. His courage led him to refuse to obey the command to pray to none but King Darius, being thrown into a den of lions for his stand against pagan idolatry (6:1-28). Daniel always spoke the truth of God’s word, even when prophesying calamity against the kings he served, and God protected him for his faithfulness and courage (4:24-25; 5:22-29).

Leaders Of The Jews

It is sad to note, but much of the opposition the Major Prophets faced was from their own leaders of the Jewish people. Isaiah calls them “rulers of Sodom” (1:10) and their “princes ... rebellious ... companions of thieves” (1:23). In 9:16 the “leaders (of the people) ... cause them to err” and lead them to destruction. Jeremiah 1:17-19 declares that the prophet will come face to face with the

various leaders of Judah, as God assures him that they will fight against him but they will not prevail. The different categories of leaders are discussed below.

Kings—Isaiah had his confrontation with the wicked and hypocritical Ahaz (7:1-25). Jeremiah is set “against kings” (1:18); he styles them as idolaters (2:26-27; 8:1-2); Judah’s kings will all be destroyed (13:13-14); they are disobedient and violate the sabbath (17:19-23). King Jehoiakim, with contempt and arrogance, cut up and burned the Word of God which Jeremiah sent to him (36:1, 20-24). Ezekiel 43:7 denounces the harlotry of the pre-exilic kings’ idolatry.

Priests—Isaiah has the priests judged with everyone else (24:1-3); they are drunk with intoxicating wine and err in their judgment and service to God (28:7). Jeremiah, himself a priest (1:1), says the priests quit seeking God (2:8); “the priests rule by their own (corrupt) authority” (5:31) and “deal falsely,” being covetous (6:13). They are also profane and brought their wickedness into God’s house (23:11); they sought to murder Jeremiah (26:8,11); and they are covenant breakers whom God will punish (34:19-20). For Ezekiel, also a priest (1:3), the law will perish from the priests (7:26), and they have violated God’s law and sabbath, failing to distinguish between the clean and unclean (22:26). Therefore, they will experience God’s indignation and the “fire of (His) wrath” (22:31).

Prophets—There is much more said against the false prophets of Judah than any other group from the people in general. Isaiah says such prophets will be taken away from Jerusalem in judgment (3:1-2); the prophets to whom Judah will listen speak lies (9:15); they too are drunken and err in vision and judgment (28:7);

and Judah is gullible in listening to prophets who, because they do not teach the truth, the Lord has blinded (29:9-10). The false prophets cave in and cater to the people who ask for “smooth things (and) deceits” (30:10).

Jeremiah has the most to say about false prophets. They prophesy by the pagan god Baal (2:8, 26-27); they are nothing but wind, without substance (5:13), and what they do say they prophesy falsely (5:31; 14:14). They are covetous (6:13; 8:10) and they attack the true prophets of God with their tongues (18:18). Chapter 23 of Jeremiah is likely the fullest exposition on false prophets in the Old Testament. They have broken Jeremiah’s heart (v. 9); they are profane and wicked (v. 11), as full of folly as the northern prophets were (v. 13). They commit adultery, lie, promote evil, and are so wicked they remind Jeremiah of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 13). To listen to the false prophets makes one worthless (v. 16); they cater to those who despise God (v. 17); they make up dreams and palm them off as if from God (vs. 25-32); and God is against them since they steal His Words (vs. 30-32). God has not spoken to them, so if they claim to have a Word from Him they would have to be stolen words. The prophets are co-workers of iniquity with the priests in trying to murder Jeremiah (26:1-16). Jeremiah comes face to face with the false prophet Hananiah, exposes him and prophesies his death for his lies and rebellion against God (28:1-17).

Ezekiel was to be a true prophet among the captives in exile (2:5). Visions will fail among the false prophets (7:26), for God is against those “who prophesy out of their own heart” (13:2). They are foolish because they “follow their own spirit and have seen nothing” (13:2),

speaking “nonsense and ... lies” (13:8). The false prophets whitewashed (used “untempered mortar”) the real situation to make it look good, proclaiming “Peace” when all was not well (13:10-16). Ezekiel was also to expose the women who “prophesy out of their own heart,” since they also lied, profaned God and gave encouragement to the wicked not to repent (13:17-22).

Elders—These were men who were held in high esteem by the priests, prophets, and general population (Jer. 29:1). Because of their age and experience they should have given wise counsel to the people of Judah to obey the law and live faithfully before God. They could give plenty of examples of God’s retribution upon the disobedient and warn others to take note of certain punishment for ungodly rebellion. Instead, these men gave themselves over to idolatry like the rest of the people and God refused to answer them through His true prophet (14:1-11). They practiced their idolatry “in the dark” (8:11-12), defiled God’s sabbaths, and profaned His name before the Gentiles (20:1-32).

Shepherds—It may be that each of the categories discussed above would fall in some way under the condemnation placed upon the shepherds in Ezekiel 34. Israel was the flock and her shepherds were her kings, priests, prophets, and elders, who were to provide for her feeding, watchcare, and protection. However, the shepherds fed themselves, but not the flock (vs. 2-3); they did not nurture the weak and sickly, seeking those lost, but ruled “with force and cruelty” (v. 4). Without good shepherds the flock was scattered and ravaged by predators in the land (v. 5). Due to their failures these irresponsible men were forbidden by God to continue (vs. 7-10). God would take over and provide what the

wicked shepherds did not, judging those who abused their positions (vs. 17-19). See also Jeremiah 23:1-8.

The People

Ultimately, the blame for the sinful conditions which the Major Prophets faced fell upon the people of Judah. While the leaders mentioned in the section above were groups from the overall population, the masses themselves could have controlled those leaders by refusing to follow them in their wickedness. The prophets frequently speak of “the people” as separate from their leaders and responsible for many of the sins prevalent in their society. In Isaiah the people of Judah did not know or consider God as their Master (1:3) and they were “laden with iniquity” (1:4). Because the people did not retain a knowledge of God they were bound for captivity (5:13). They were a people of unclean lips, dull hearts, and heavy ears (6:5, 10); they did not seek God and they allowed themselves to be guided by evil leaders (9:13-16). As the people sinned, so did the priests (cf. Hos. 4:9; Jer. 5:30-31), and therefore judgment would come upon all classes (Isa. 24:2). Judah had a “mouth” religion before God, but not one of the “heart” (29:13); they were rebellious liars who did not want to hear the truth, but asked the prophets to “speak ... smooth things (and to) prophesy deceits” (30:9-10). Isaiah, chapters 58 and 59 comprise a major section on the people’s sins which are discussed in the introduction of this lesson. The people continually angered God by walking “according to their own thoughts” (65:2-5).

Jeremiah notes that Judah had changed gods, forsaking the true God for those “who are not gods” (2:11-13). They are wicked backsliders with no fear of God

(2:19; 8:4-6); plus they are “foolish, silly children” who know how to do evil but not good (4:22). Judah actually loved the false prophets and the corrupt rule of the priests, as astonishing and horrible as this was to God (5:30-31). The people were also covetous and not ashamed of their abominable sins (6:13-15). So ungodly and impenitent were these people that God told Jeremiah not to pray for them (7:16; 11:14; cf. I John 5:16). They would not receive correction and truth had perished from among them, even to the point where they sacrificed their children to pagan deities (7:28-31). Jeremiah’s heart was broken over their sinfulness (8:21-9:1). The faithful prophet was not to let the people influence him to turn to their ways. Rather, the people must yield to his God-given preaching (15:19-21). God would judge “the people” because they had become worse than their fathers who forsook God (16:10-12). The people initially joined with the priests and false prophets who wanted to kill Jeremiah (26:1-16). While the people claimed that they wanted to hear the Word of God, when it was preached unto them they rejected it (42:1-43:7; 44:15-22).

Ezekiel was to preach to the people whether or not they listened (3:11). Jerusalem had become more wicked than the nations around her, refusing God’s law and judgment (5:6). So severe would be God’s judgment upon them that “fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers” (5:10,11; cf. Jer. 19:9). The people mocked God by saying, “The days are prolonged, and every vision fails,” meaning that they thought that God would not come with harsh judgment as the true prophets said He would (12:22-25). The people were guilty en masse of oppression, robbery, and mistreating the poor, needy, and strangers (22:29). The

people cried out that God was unfair in His treatment of them, while in fact it was “their way which (was) not fair” (33:17). Judah was as those being entertained by the words of the true prophets, because she did not respond in obedience to the demands of God’s Word (33:31). The people could blame only themselves for the judgement of God which came upon them. Daniel’s prayer, while in captivity, recognized the terrible sins of the people in not obeying God and heeding the warnings of His prophets (Dan. 9:1-19; esp. vs. 5-6).

The Perils Of Courageous Preaching

To preach **as the Major Prophets preached** to these groups and the people in general took tremendous courage! If you do not believe that or know that it is true, it is because you have never done preaching or teaching like the Major Prophets did, or it is because you are like those to whom they ministered God’s Word. Although God promised that nothing nor anyone could destroy the ministry He commissioned for each prophet (cf. Jer. 1:17-19), that did not exempt the prophets from suffering persecution and in many cases death for what they preached.

No prophet’s life was his own to do as he pleased. He remained on call 24 hours a day, preaching the Word of God to generally rebellious and stubborn people (Isa. 6:9-11; Jer. 7:27-28; Ezek. 2:1-5). Isaiah was told what to name his children as a part of his ministry (8:1-4; possibly 7:3; cf. Hos. 1:4, 6, 9). Jeremiah was forbidden to marry (16:1-2); and Ezekiel was not to publicly mourn the death of his wife, as a sign to the Jews (24:15-19). Daniel lived his life apart from his own people in the court of pagan kings (1:1-5, 19-21).

There were plots to kill Jeremiah (chapter 26) and Daniel (chapters 2, 6). Jeremiah was imprisoned, placed in a miry dungeon, and kidnapped into Egypt (chapters 37-38, 42-44). The prophet Urijah, who had prophesied against Jerusalem and Judah “according to all the words of Jeremiah,” fled to Egypt to save his life, but was found by King Jehoiakim, brought back to Jerusalem and slain with the sword (26:20-23). Ezekiel was likely the object of some intense ridicule as he acted out some of his prophecies at the direction of God (chapters 4-6, 12). Tradition says that Isaiah was placed in a hollow tree and sawn in two by the wicked Manasseh.³ Likewise, it is traditionally claimed that Jeremiah was stoned to death by the Jews who took him into Egypt, because he continued to prophesy against them.⁴ Ezekiel is also supposed to have been put to death by the Jews in exile for his boldness in denouncing their idolatry.⁵ Daniel may have died of natural causes at an advanced age in Persia.⁶ Whether these traditions can be proven true regarding these specific prophets, these things happen to some, according to Hebrews 11:37. Christ’s and Stephen’s statements also show the risk of being a faithful and courageous spokesman for God (Matt. 23:29-35; Acts 7:51-52). Paul’s remark to Timothy claims that “**all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12). Surely this verse takes in every Christian who desires to be faithful.

Applying The Prophets’ Courageous Preaching

If we have properly demonstrated the courageous preaching of the prophets, how does this apply to us in the Christian Age? Is it merely an interesting insight as

to what preaching used to be, or does it have a valid application for all who are members of Christ’s body? Surely the latter is true. Two points need to be emphasized. First, whenever our situation is parallel to what the prophets faced, we have them for an example from which to pattern our actions (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:6,11; II Tim. 3:16,17). While we are not inspired as God’s prophets were, we do have God’s inspired Word to guide us in how to act and what to say (Psm. 119: 11, 24, 89, 105, 160, 172; I Cor. 14:37; I Pet. 4:11). Second, whether or not you are a preacher, elder, deacon, teacher, or any kind of leader in the Lord’s church, **you have the same responsibility to believe, in, live by, and to defend the Word of God as every other Christian has** (I Cor. 16:13; II Tim. 3:16,17; I Pet. 3:15; Jude 3). **All Christians** must take a stand equally for God’s truth, whether a housewife, a preacher, a plumber, an elder, a nurse, a deacon, a Bible teacher, a cook, an editor, a car salesman, a college president, a retiree, or whatever! Just because someone is not a preacher does not excuse that person from being obligated to take a stand for the truth revealed in God’s Word, whatever the issue might be, no matter how unpopular the truth may be (Prov. 23:23; John 8:31-32).

While we may not match perfectly with the groups to whom the prophets preached, we can make some practical applications for today regarding their courageous preaching and teaching.

Preaching To The World

As remarkable as it may seem, some Christians have concluded that it is improper to quote the Bible to unbelievers, since they have no respect for it. One former

college teacher who is still preaching said that he “wept” as he saw and heard a fellow preacher on a nationwide television program “answering technical, legal questions with biblical quotations taken from an out-of-date translation,”⁷ referring to the King James Version. I rejoiced over the same thing that made this preacher (?) cry! What made the difference in our reactions? Perhaps faith in the power of God’s Word (Heb. 4:12).

Even though the audience might be hostile toward God and His Word, that did not deter the prophets from preaching God’s message to the nations (Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32; Dan. 4:24-25; 5:22-29). Neither can we allow the attitude of the audience today to keep us from telling them the truth on church discipline, divorce and remarriage, premarital sex and adultery, homosexuality, the role of women in the church, or any of the other “hot” topics of our day (II Thess. 3:6; I Cor. 5:9-13; Matt. 19:1-9; Gal. 5:19-21; I Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 1:24-32, I Tim. 2:11-14 et al.). Non-Christians need to know what the scriptures say on these matters, whether they respect the Word of God or not. The Jews did not respect Christ and His word, but He told them that they would be judged by it (John 12:48-50).

Of course, we need to use whatever opportunities we have to teach atheists and skeptics reasons to believe in God and the Scriptures as His Word, but we can certainly quote the teaching of the Bible as we set out the nature of God, Christ, sin and salvation. If we cannot, there is not much we can say with any authority. Do not our brethren who object to quoting the Bible to the world believe in the **power** of that Word (Heb. 4:12)? That Word had the power to turn the Thessalonians from idols to serve the true and living God (I Thess. 1:8-

9; 2:13). It has that same power now, but there are many people coming into the church today who are not being taught to respect the authority of that Word! This is one reason for such a diversity of teaching and practice which plagues the church of Christ.

Surely the prophets did not sin when they delivered the Word to the nations as God told them to do. Why would it cause anyone who is a Christian to “weep” when God’s word is read or cited to unbelievers today? Are we wrong in trying to preach God’s word to the leaders of our country regarding respect for life versus abortion and in trying to raise the moral consciousness of our nation to a higher level (Gen. 1:26-27; Ezek. 18:4; Isa. 42:5; Zech. 12:1; Heb. 12:9; Psm. 9:17; Prov. 14:34; 11:11)?

Preaching To Preachers

Every Christian is a priest serving under the High Priesthood of Jesus, offering our spiritual sacrifices to God (Heb. 6:20; 7:20-27; I Pet. 2:4-5, 9). We do not have prophets today who are inspired and receiving revelations from God (I Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-16; Jude 3). However, since priests under the prophets were to know God’s Word and guide the people in worshipping and serving God, and since the prophets were spokesmen for God, calling people back to the Word and warning them of their sins, it may be seen that gospel preachers today are charged with many of the same responsibilities which these groups had under the Old Covenant system (I Tim. 1:5; 4:6, 11-16; 5:19-21; 6:11-12, 17-21; II Tim. 2:15; 3:16-4:5).

Do preachers need to be preached to? Indeed, they do! Some need it more than others. Thank God for every

faithful, courageous gospel preacher of the past and present who labor to be pleasing to God. Like the true prophets of old, true gospel preachers may be in a minority, but they are still holding forth the words of life and we pray for their numbers to increase. In this study we will note two types of preachers which need to hear some courageous preaching and teaching from every faithful Christian.

First, there is the preacher who preaches the truth in what he does preach, but he does not preach all of the truth that needs to be heard. This man is generally careful to preach on matters widely accepted, skirting the issues that may cause disagreement, such as divorce and remarriage, instrumental music in worship, women's roles, fellowshipping denominations, social drinking, dancing, and many other matters. Brethren, it is as sinful not to teach all of God's Word as it is to add to it! Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:18-19 and other passages warn about taking away from God's Word, but that is exactly what preachers do when they fail to preach it all. Jeremiah was told by God to "speak ... all the word that I command you ... **Diminish not a word**" (26:2). When he did what God said his life was threatened, but he did not back away from preaching the whole truth. Jeremiah did not rejoice in preaching hard, unpopular things, but when he was tempted to hold back from preaching he had more respect for God and His Word than his own personal feelings and fears.

Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in his name,' But his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not (Jer. 20:9).

Preachers who hold back from preaching all of God’s word do not have it in their hearts as a “burning fire.” They are not seriously committed to courageous preaching as the prophets were. Even if preachers become discouraged because people will not listen and obey, that is no reason to give up on the parts of God’s Word which people reject. When speaking to Jeremiah of such people, God said, “Let them return to you, but you must not return to them” (15:19).

Preachers who worry about pleasing men and scratching itching ears cannot be pleasing unto God (Gal. 1:10; II Tim. 4:3-5). All Christians must fear God more than men and financial security (Matt. 10:28; John 5:44; 12:42-43). Is this not a matter where our faith should come in? There is no reward for preachers who are covetous for popularity and security in place of faithfulness in preaching all of God’s word. Such men are insincere peddlers of the gospel (II Cor. 2:17; I Thess. 2:3-6). Paul noted that in his preaching he “kept nothing back that was helpful” and that he was “innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:20, 27). Every Christian has the right and obligation to confront such preachers with some courageous teaching on these matters (I John 4:1, 6; Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:19-20; II Tim. 4:1-2).

The second type of preacher who needs to be faced with some courageous preaching from others is the false teacher. The false preacher may be like the man who only preaches part of God’s Word out of cowardice, wanting to say, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace (cf. Jer. 6:14-16). However, the false preacher goes even further in adding to, taking from, or modifying God’s

Word. He does not just ignore some of God’s Word; he wants to make it teach something other than what it truly says. Their purpose may be to promote a doctrine or thought they have invented, or to deny a doctrine that the Scriptures teach which they do not want to follow (Jer. 14:13-14). Just as the false prophets taught their own thoughts in place of God’s, false preachers of today do the same thing. The major motivation of false teachers is to gain a following for themselves of those who will accept their unique teachings. Most often their peculiar doctrines offer freedom from what they and their followers consider obligations which are too strict and burdensome. Very popular today is the attempt to open the fellowship Christians can have with those in the denominational world. Sadly, instead of courageous preaching which demands that the religious denominations “return” to God’s Word, false teachers are preaching a return to the doctrines and commandments of men. This is exactly what God told Jeremiah **not** to do (Jer. 15:19; cf. Matt. 15:8-9). Paul warned that men would “rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). Christ cautioned that false teachers disguise themselves as harmless sheep, when in reality they are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). False teachers do not announce themselves as such, for they are hypocrites masquerading as preachers of truth (II Cor. 11:13-15).

A false teacher will always try to steer you away from the parts of Scripture which he knows are fatal to his false doctrines. The current emphasis on the gospel accounts, to the exclusion of the rest of the New Testament, is indicative of such attempts.⁸ However, the gospel of John 16:12-13 also sends us to Acts through

Revelation, claiming that all of that material is the Word of Christ too (cf. I Cor. 14:37; Eph. 3:3-5). It is also the case that most, if not all, false teachers of the day have become too sophisticated (?) to bother trying to prove themselves as faithful to the Word by discussing the Scriptures with those who disagree with them. They dodge their duty to discuss and give an answer for their hope, as set forth in I Peter 3:15, by considering themselves too spiritual to engage in debate. These men are “spiritual” somethings–spiritual cowards who shun the exposure of their doctrines in the brilliant light of God’s word (John 3:19-21). Those who preach the truth have nothing to fear and are willing to have the spotlight of God’s Word shine on them.

False teachers need their errors exposed openly so that those who seek the truth will have no fellowship with them (Eph. 5:11). Second John 9-11 requires that we neither partake with false teachers in their error, nor in any way bid them Godspeed, allowing them to continue to deceive others. Every Christian has the right and obligation to expose false teachers and to call on them to repent. If we do not follow the courageous preaching of the prophets in this way, we are making it possible for false teachers to mislead other.

Preaching To Elders/Shepherds

We have many godly elders in the Lord’s church who are dedicated to trying to fulfill their God-assigned duties (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). However, we could greatly curtail the spread of false teaching if every elder would

...hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine,

both to exhort and convict those who contradict
(Titus 1:9).

Elders, take a courageous stand for God's Word. Elders, you must take the initiative to keep abreast of what is going on in the brotherhood. This generally will enable you to avoid hiring a false teacher, or inviting one to speak to your flock, or in some way supporting a man whose work is contrary to God's word. If you are in any way currently involved in aiding a false teacher, you must have the courage to use your influence to silence his false teaching, try to correct his error, and if he will not repent, he should be fired, marked, and avoided, so that it will not be easy for him to influence others (Rom. 16:17).

Shepherds who do not look out for the spiritual health of the souls in their respective congregations are like the irresponsible shepherds in Ezekiel 34:1-5 (cf. Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:1-4). Elders, you must be courageous. You cannot duck your duties in this area, although it may be unpleasant, and expect to go to heaven. God promises the neglectful shepherds, "Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings" (Jer. 23:2).

Preaching To The People

Brethren, it is the people of a congregation who "make it or break it." Please do not take what follows to be an invitation to rebel against faithful elders or to rail against gospel preachers whom you may not personally care for. Not one of us is perfect, but that does not translate into making flawed elders and preachers into false teachers. Use the utmost of care in dealing with elders and preachers, being diligent to understand and to apply the Bible properly to each

situation. One should always make sure he/she understands the real position of another before going off half-cocked and creating an unnecessary problem. (I say to my own shame that I have not always done this, but I have learned some valuable lessons.)

The power of the faithful people in a congregation is greater than the power of a false teacher/preacher or an eldership of men who are leading the local body into error. You do not have to listen to men mock and ridicule God’s Word and the church for which Christ died!⁹ You do not have to allow yourselves to be led by men who do not take seriously God’s charge to them to rebuke and correct false teachers (Titus 1:9). If men are not “taking care of the church of God” as the Lord directs, they should step down or be removed (I Tim. 3:5; Acts 20:28-32). If you have a false teacher for a preacher, you should demand that the elders correct him and fire him if he does not repent. If the elders/shepherds are responsible for seeing that the congregation is fed with sound doctrine (literally, healthy teaching), then they must exercise their authority to see that the whole gospel is preached in truth (I Pet. 5:1-4). Neither the elders nor the members should fear facing up to the preacher who needs to be corrected and neither should the preacher nor the members fear standing up to elders who need admonished. It ought to be done always in kindness and love (Eph. 4:15), but it ought to be done (II Tim. 2:24-26; James 5:19-20).

The people of the congregation also have a right and the power to see that the local church is known for its godly moral character. If you know of sins among the members of the body of Christ that need to be disciplined, you need to bring such to the attention of

the elders or preacher (cf. I Cor. 5:1-13). If any of them balk at handling these matters biblically, you have a right to insist that God’s Word is obeyed. If leaders of the Lord’s church do not abide by the teaching of the Scriptures, they should be called to account for not doing so. “The people” of God have the power and authority of His Word behind them and need to be courageous in living it and teaching it with all who are in Christ’s church.

What is true about the members of the church making it what it ought to be can also be reversed. The people who want only “smooth things” taught and desire “deceit” over truth can destroy the church, just as the people were responsible for Judah’s fall (Isa. 30:10; II Thess. 2:10-12; II Tim. 4:3-4). Ungodly pressure from the people can cause elders to tolerate error in the pulpit and ungodly living by the members. “Like people, like priest” is from the Minor Prophets Hosea (4:9), but it is a major problem throughout the Major Prophets (Jer. 2:11-13; 5:30-31; Ezek. 33:31). Do not “gang up” on the elders or preacher merely because they do something you do not like, even though it is not contrary to God’s Word and is only your opinion. Do not show more concern to “pursue your own gain,” rather than to change your ways to comply with God’s Will (Jer. 6:16). Brethren, strive always to have the courage to seek the Lord’s Will above your own (Matt. 26:39). Hold up the hand of all the faithful and courageous people of God. Let all men know that you will take a stand, then stand!

Conclusion

Just as the courageous preaching of the prophets did not keep Israel and Judah from going into apostasy

and exile, your courageous preaching and teaching may not stop a wholesale falling away by the Lord's church. Why then call for such courage from all classes of Christians today? First, because being a courageous preacher/teacher will save your own soul, whether or not anyone else obeys (Ezek. 3:17-21). Second, not everyone who is presently unfaithful will stay that way. It may be that your courageous efforts will reach some good and honest hearts and cause them to turn from their wicked ways to God's way. Third, not everyone will be drawn into apostasy to begin with and you may stop the progress of some who are headed that way with your courageous intervention. Also, those who are trying hard to hold fast to the truth need the reminding and encouraging counsel of a brother or sister who is bold to stand for God's Truth (I Tim. 4:6). Finally, the Scriptures of the Major Prophets teach us patience to live a steadfast life, comfort us in our trials, and provide us with the hope of our eternal reward in heaven (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 15:58). Let us all “Cry aloud and spare not,” imitating the courageous preaching of the prophets of God!

Endnotes

1 Edward J. Young, **The Book of Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:415.

2 Ibid.

3 Herbert Lockyer, **All the Men of The Bible** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 158.

4 Ibid., 183-184.

5 Ibid., 117.

6 D. R. A. Hare, “The Lives of the Prophets,” in **The Old Testament Pseudepigraphs**, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:390.

7 James S. Woodroof, **The Church in Transition** (Searcy, AR: The Bible House, Inc., 1990), 48-49. This

disparaging reference by Woodroof was against Garland Elkins, who appeared on the Phil Donahue Show in defense of the church's right, according to the Scripture, to withdraw from disorderly members. Brother Elkins did a splendid job in showing the biblical mandate for such actions and in answering the objections of the host and audience against the church's right to so act.

8 Ibid., 25-42. Woodroof says, "Plugging into any part of the Scriptures, except the Gospels, expecting there to find power, is like plugging an electric motor into a reflection of a power outlet. A mirror is intended only to reflect where the real thing is. So does the Old Testament (and Acts and the Letters and Revelation) reflect where the power and glory of the Lord is" (34). Woodroof's observation is flawed. Acts through Revelation are written by the same kind of men who were inspired by the same Holy Spirit as the rest of the New Testament. In John 16:12-13, Christ points out that what the Holy Spirit revealed to these men was as much His Word as what was in the Gospel accounts. Therefore, we cannot know the fullness of Christ without knowing His revelation of His Will in all of the New Testament. Additionally, passages like Phil. 2; Col. 1 & 2; and the book of Revelation give marvelous insights into the nature and person of Christ. The only reason to steer people away from the rest of the NT is to get them away from the doctrine which it teaches. Woodroof does not really believe those doctrines are essential.

9 Rubel Shelly's taped messages at the Missouri Street Church of Christ in West Memphis, AR are a notable example of this type of preaching. He is much more caustic and critical of the Lord's church and the Scriptures which give authority to our practices in these lessons than he and Randall Harris were in their book, **The Second Incarnation**. Sadly, the places where Shelly has delivered such messages had no one in them who would stand up with the courage of the prophets and try to silence him or stand against him. At least it seems that the places where he has delivered these lessons have made no drastic changes and they would likely invite him back.

Chapter 22

Woe Unto The Foolish Prophets (Ezekiel 13:3)

Kent Bailey

The writings of Ezekiel constitutes one of the major prophetic books of the Old Testament. It was divided into forty-eight chapters during the thirteenth century A.D. The first twenty-four chapters deal with Ezekiel's call as a prophet and with his prophecies regarding the fall of Jerusalem, which occurred in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign.

During the course of human events often times the question is raised, "Do men make the times, or do times make the men?" History is replete with ordinary men catapulted into prominence by circumstances over which they had no control. For Ezekiel such was accomplished when King Jehoiachin opened the gates of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The king, in addition to some ten thousand of his subjects, including Ezekiel, were carried away in captivity to Babylon.¹ James E. Smith correctly summarizes the times wherein Ezekiel lived:

...to evaluate the historical context of this man of God, one must look backward and then forward from the crucial date March 16, 597 B.C.²

To think rationally, one would assume that the fall

of Jerusalem in 597 would have brought to a swift end the sin and corruption that was practiced by God's people. However, such was not the case. In his excellent commentary, James E. Smith noted:

The inhabitants of Judah continued to be a rebellious and impudent people (Ezek. 2:4; 3:7). They had refused to walk in the statutes of God (Ezek. 5:6-7). They had defiled the sanctuary of the Lord with idolatrous paraphernalia (5:11) and practices (chap. 8). Pagan high places, altars and images were conspicuous "upon every high hill, and under every green tree" (Ezek. 6:13). In chapter 22 of Ezekiel the Lord recites against Judah a catalogue of abominations that would make a pagan people blush—idolatry, lewdness, oppression, sacrilege, and murder permeated all ranks of society. Perhaps Ezekiel 9:9 best summarizes the complete corruption of Jerusalem in its last decade:

The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great and the land is full of perverseness: for they say, the Lord has forsaken the earth, and the Lord does not see.³

It seems to this writer that there are those who falsely accuse preachers of exaggeration whenever sin has to be dealt with in very plain terms. Such is especially true when dealing with moral issues as well as false teaching in other areas, such as the new hermeneutic. Brethren, who do not like to face the facts, are known to say that those who love God's truth and stand ready for its defense are guilty of turning minor issues into major difficulties. Such was the case in August of 1984 with reference to the **Summit Conference** held on the campus of Ozark Bible College,

of the Independent Christian Church denomination in Joplin, Missouri between certain preachers among churches of Christ as well as Christian churches. While not all of those attending from churches of Christ were of the liberal mind-set, the planners of this gathering as well as the vast majority claiming to be members of the church in attendance at this gathering, made it very clear, both by word and deed, that they would be willing to accept those in the Christian church as faithful brethren in the Lord.

Upon forthright opposition to such a summit conference some brethren informed this writer that he was, in spite of good intentions, overreacting. Eleven years later, in light of the development of the **new unity movement** and **The Nashville Jubilee**, one by the process of casual observation logically deduces the fact that during 1984 one did not have to possess the IQ of a genius to see that the compromise with sin at Joplin, Missouri would lead to the present day apostasy we are now confronting. To put it plainly to some of our brethren, who are just now “pulling their heads out of the sand.” See, I told you so!

Such was the case with the prophet Ezekiel as individuals rejected his inspired preaching as nothing more than the ranting and ravings of some “right-wing, radical, neo-anti,” who had perhaps in spite of good intentions, overreacted to some minor issues. The fact is made clear that Ezekiel spoke the truth as it is painfully attested by Jeremiah, who also lived through those terrible days. By intellectual madness and spiritual sophistry the inhabitants of Judah had convinced themselves that they had special recognition from God by whom the land of Palestine had been given for a

possession (Jer. 11:5). They also assumed that their city could never be destroyed (Jer. 11:3). These delusions were encouraged by false prophets. In Zedekiah's fourth year, exactly one year prior to Ezekiel's work, one of these false prophets announced in the temple that God would shatter the yoke of Babylon within two years (Jer. 28:1-4). In vain, Jeremiah warned of the coming overthrow of Jerusalem and the final deportation of its population (Jer. 21:7; 24:8-10; 32:3-5; 34:2-3).⁴

Ezekiel's special task was to act as a watchman to the house of Israel (3:17; 33:7). He was to warn the wicked of the danger of persisting in sin and to encourage them in repentance to return to God. To be specific, Ezekiel's task can be seen as having a fourfold thrust:

(1) He was to demolish delusions—to refute the false teaching which deceived the people into thinking that Jerusalem could not be destroyed; to destroy the false notion that exile would soon end with the overthrow of Babylon. Ezekiel had a clear assessment of the total sinful situation.

(2) He was to expose apostasy, and thereby present God's purpose for the judgments which had already befallen Judah as well as those that additionally would come.

(3) He was to awaken repentance and thereby raise up from the ruins a new people, who might inherit the promises given to the old.

(4) He was to stimulate hope for a better tomorrow with the promise of restoration after seventy years of Babylonian captivity.⁵

One great obstacle faced by Ezekiel was that of false prophets. It seems as if humanity has always been successfully persuaded by error over that of truth. As

Ezekiel presented the truth of God, agents of Satan countered the essentials of God’s revelation with religious error. Within this particular context a **woe** is pronounced upon those false and foolish prophets. Obviously, the term **prophet** is used in an accommodative sense due to the case being that they did not speak on the behalf of Jehovah God. By the term **woe** we refer to grief, sorrow, misery; a curse. By the term **foolish** we refer to these false prophets being void of understanding and sound judgment. They were foolish for a number of reasons. Those of Ezekiel’s day entertained delusive hopes regarding the future welfare of their city and land. Observations today proves that time, insofar as attitudes, really exist in a non-changing situation. Where the gospel of Christ is preached, many hearers, whether they be alien or covenant sinners, trust in an unwarranted hope as to escape God’s judgment while continuing in their sin and rebellion.

In the context of Ezekiel, chapter 13, we note reasons as to why the woe was pronounced upon these foolish and false prophets:

I. False Concepts As To The Evil Of Sin

Ezekiel 13:1-7 describes the characteristics of these false and foolish prophets. The divine obligation placed upon Ezekiel was to prophesy to the prophets of Israel. They had the popular sympathy of Judah; however, the message they spoke was twisted and perverted. They were speaking their own desires rather than preaching the word of God. This is subjectivism at its worst. The false teacher in Ezekiel’s day was only concerned about what his hearers wanted to hear as it related to their “felt needs.”

This same fallacy is paramount in the minds of many both within and without of the church of the Lord. Those of this particular mind-set do not desire to hear what is truly needed; i.e., book, chapter, and verse preaching of the pure word of God. They only desire to hear a message that will increase their feeling of comfort while yet remaining in a state of condemnation. They laugh at logical reasoning and its proper relationship to Bible study as they advocate the heresy of agnosticism; i.e., that one really cannot know anything with certainty anyway. Irrationalism is destroying the faith of many. Thomas B. Warren has correctly stated:

It will be recalled that the Law of Rationality says that men should draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. This means that men's conclusions must be the conclusions of sound arguments: that is, men should draw only such conclusions as are part of arguments which are valid and have premises.

There are a number of reasons why students of the Bible should recognize and honor the Law of Rationality: (1) the way the Bible is written demands that such be the case, (2) specific instances of Bible characters using the Law of Rationality demand that such be the case, and (3) specific passages in the Bible (which teach in various ways) demand that such be the case.⁶

As we note the great concept of truth, Christ affirmed the objectivity of such in John 17:17 wherein he stated, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." We also note the ability for one to know truth due to the fact that the knowledge of truth makes one free (John 8:32). If truth makes one free then error

enslaves one in sin! Those of Ezekiel’s day were enslaved by the preaching and teaching of a false and ungodly no-pattern new hermeneutic that referred to evil as being good and good as being evil.

2. The Elevation Of Human Authority

Not only did God pronounce a woe upon those false and foolish prophets due to their affirmation of evil as being good, but we also note that they had elevated their own human authority over God’s. Ezekiel, in 13:3, identifies these false prophets as, “following their own spirit and having seen nothing.” They had rejected God’s divine revelation replacing such with their own individual opinions. They had forgotten that God was and is the supreme, self-existent Almighty and omniscient One. The God of Judah and Israel was no mere local or national deity. He was and is infinitely exalted above the earth, clothed with honor and majesty. Men and nations yield to his infinite decisions. Babylon and all heathen peoples were bound to obey Him. Why then had God’s covenant people rejected the pattern of living and worship given by God through Moses? They had elevated their own desires to being equal with God’s revelation.

When churches of Christ were thrust into open debate concerning the questions of missionary societies, use of mechanical instruments of music in worship unto God, open fellowship, and a host of additional problems in later years, there were no logical or scriptural arguments made in defense of these practices. The basic pseudo-argument took on this particular form: (A) I like it; (B) I want it; (C) Therefore, I am going to have it! Such has not only been the case regarding controversy

thrust upon the church, but also the same attitude permeated Ezekiel's day as well.

In order for the liberals among us to extend unauthorized fellowship to the sin of denominationalism a **new hermeneutic** had to be invented. The tried and tested means of ascertaining Bible authority will not permit such disobedience to the revealed and verbally inspired word of God. Such disobedience is found in the elevation of human authority over that of the divine.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son (II John 9).

3. The Elevation Of Personality Over Principle

A woe was pronounced upon the false and foolish prophets of Ezekiel's day due to not only the elevation of human authority over the divine, but also due to the elevation of human personality over divine principle.

Obviously, these false and foolish prophets were viewed as great and godly men, yet Ezekiel describes them in 13:4 as, "foxes in the deserts." He further stated:

Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord (Ezek. 13:5).

The worthlessness of their ungodly work is herein described:

They have seen vanity and lying divination saying the Lord hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain

vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, the Lord saith it; albeit I have not spoken (Ezek. 13:6-7).

Whenever one fails to sustain a false position (and one **can never** sustain any false view in the light of Biblical truth); then invariably the personality of the false teacher will be elevated over divine principle. A typical liberal retort to Biblical argumentation is: “Well, I’ve been misunderstood...” or “Brother ___ would never teach a false doctrine like that.” When the word of God is the standard by which all religious concepts are tried, false teachers, nor anyone else will ever be elevated to the same level of divine principle. It is interesting to note that those among us who are always “set for the defense” of personality over principle have no problem of rejecting Bible truth and accepting error when it is ascertained that brother ___ does indeed teach a false doctrine “like that.” May we always take seriously the inspired admonition of the apostle Paul as recorded in Romans 16:17-18 and Galatians 1:6-9 as we truly recognize the proper importance of divine principle over human personality.

4. The Results Of Being Misguided

The end result of being misguided is noted by the influence of self-originated doctrines. Ezekiel said:

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into

the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it (Ezek. 13:8-11).

According to the text these false and foolish prophets speak from their own hearts. They propound and defend views upon the basis of their own desires rather than drawing conclusions based upon divinely revealed truth. They promise smooth things to a person who has rejected God's only plan. They conceal the condemnation of sin under particular statements that excuse immoral conduct as well as additional unwarranted acts under explanations that impugn God's eternal justice. The reason that there are such false teachers is due to the fact that the people desire to have such rather than hearing and obeying the truth.

5. The Outcome Of The Situation

The outcome of the situation is noted by the words of inspiration:

Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it. So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so

that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 13:12-16)

All of the false teaching of the world combined will not change God's eternal truth. Judgment will come notwithstanding all false hopes of escaping it. Let us beware not to trust the false and foolish teachings of men, but rather accept only truth.

Endnotes

- 1 James E. Smith, **Bible Study Text Book Series: Ezekiel** (Joplin, Missouri, College Press, 1989), p. 1.
- 2 James E. Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 3 James E. Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 4 James E. Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 3,4.
- 5 James E. Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 6 Thomas B. Warren, **Logic And The Bible**, (Jonesboro, Arkansas: National Christian Press, Inc., 1982), p. 79.

Chapter 23

**Woe Be Unto The
Pastors That Destroy
And Scatter Sheep**

David B. Jones

It is an extreme honor to be asked to speak in this lectureship at Southaven. The church at Southaven has a special place in our hearts because of the great encouragement we received while we were members here. From this place we were able to go to the Memphis School of Preaching and on to our present work. To be able to cooperate with the fine elders, preachers, deacons and every member, is a tremendous blessing for us. We are so thankful to each person who made this invitation possible and for all that has been done for us in the past.

We face an uphill battle in the church of our Lord today because of the lack of leadership in so many places. Unfortunately, in many places where there are elders appointed, they are not being the shepherds of the flock as they should be. In too many places young men are not being exhorted to prepare themselves for the eldership. Many of those who are being exhorted are not heeding that exhortation. Worldliness and materialism have invaded our homes and many have bowed at their feet, rather than at the foot of the cross. Children are being sacrificed to the idols of this world

because of the lack of teaching and training by their parents. All in all, the church of our Lord is suffering and these things ought not so to be.

God has always had problems with the leaders of His people. The shepherds in the Old Testament did not watch the flock of God’s people as they should have. Again, materialism was a major problem. The leaders sought allegiance with the nations around them and not with Almighty God. Spiritual concerns gave way to carnal desires and they led God’s people away from God. For these and other causes, God allowed His people to be taken captive to purge them from their worldly ways. Only after the Babylonian captivity was the sin of idolatry finally purged from His people. We are going to notice the example from the Old Testament relative to God’s pastors and then notice some exhortations for us today.

Examples From The Past

Jeremiah was one of the prophets who begged God’s people to repent and return to God before they went into Babylonian captivity. He pleaded with them and he pronounced God’s curse upon them for not heeding the warnings of God. Notice the woe he pronounced relative to the pastors: “Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord” (Jer. 23:1). Imagine the facts that the pastors, who were supposed to be watching the flock, were actually destroying the heritage of God. God had accused His pastors of transgressing against Him (Jer. 2:8), because they had become brutish and had not sought the Lord (Jer. 10:21).

Who were these pastors of whom the Lord

disapproved? The Bible reveals that they were the kings, princes, priests and prophets. God made provisions in the Law of Moses for His people to have a king. God required certain things of the king as we read in Deuteronomy 17:18, 19:

And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of (that which is) before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:.

The king was to be one who trusted in the law of God and one who was familiar with it. He was to keep it himself and also he was to feed it to God's people:

Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel (II Sam. 5:2)

The people reminded David that God had given him a charge to feed the children of Israel. David was to feed them the words of the true King, God. Notice what David wrote in the psalms:

From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands (Psm. 78:71-72).

The majority of the kings had been slack in keeping the charge given by God which is why God's people were

scattered and destroyed.

The priests and prophets were also supposed to feed the children of Israel. Notice the words of Jeremiah:

A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love (to have it) so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:30-31).

The priests and prophets were to properly feed or tend the flock of God’s people, but instead they had begun to prophesy lies and to make financial gain from their positions. Satan has always sought to deter God’s people from following the Word of God and from faithfully feeding that Word to the others. Jeremiah also rebuked them in the next chapter:

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one (is) given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt (of the daughter) of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when (there is) no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time (that) I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where (is) the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk (therein) (Jer. 6:13-16).

The priests and prophets had pacified the people by telling them lies and because of this lack of feeding upon the Word of God, immorality had risen to such a point

the people had no more shame about them. God characterized them as people who could no longer blush about the things they were doing. When sound (healthy) doctrine is not taught, it is only a matter of time before the morals leave also. Jeremiah commented on all those responsible for the feeding of God's people and rebuked them:

And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, (that) the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder (Jer. 4:9).

God promised to visit (bring destruction and punishment upon) His leaders because they did not feed His people correctly.

Ezekiel was a prophet of the same time as Jeremiah and he likewise rebuked the shepherds of Israel:

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe (be) to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: (but) ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up (that which was) broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they scattered, because (there is) no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were

scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek (after them). Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; (As) I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because (there was) no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I (am) against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them (Ezek. 34:1-10).

God rebuked them for not strengthening, healing, mending, seeking the flock and for using force and cruelty as they dealt with them. They were in positions which could have been used to influence the children of Israel for good, but rather, they used their positions to exalt themselves and their causes. Their neglect of their duties and indifference toward the flock was going to be punished by the Great Shepherd.

Exhortations For The Present

The examples of the shepherds of Jeremiah's day serve as an exhortation for the shepherds of today. There are three main Greek words used to designate these duties. First, there is the word “presbuteros.” It and its various forms are translated “elders” or “presbytery.” The word means “a senior” or “older.” Paul called for

the “elders” of the church in Ephesus to meet him in Miletus (Acts 20:17). We see the term “elders” referring to those men who were appointed as the rulers of the local church in Ephesus. As the term would suggest, they were to be men who were older or more mature, especially in spiritual matters. Paul reminded Timothy: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophesy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (I Tim. 4:14). This term denotes maturity, a maturity both in physical age and also in spiritual matters. While a man must be one with some age, he does not need be aged in order to serve as an elder. He must be one who is not a novice (I Tim. 3:6), but rather one who has maturity when it comes to spiritual things.

Second, there is the Greek word, “episkopos.” This word means “a superintendent, one officially in charge.” This would denote a ruler or one who rules. This word is translated as the word bishop: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1). It is also translated “overseers:”

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

A bishop or overseer (with the other bishops or overseers in the local church) rules the local congregation as God has directed in His Word. They have authority to make decisions as to how to expedite the Word of God. Some people try and contend elders do not have any authority in expedient matters, but these people have not basis for their belief. The overseers or bishops have the

authority to expedite the Word of God. This involves deciding how to fulfill God’s commands. This must include deciding in expedient matters, because they have no authority to change the Word of God.

Third, the Greek word “poimen” is used in reference to the work of these men. This word means “shepherd.” The idea of a shepherd would be one who tended or fed the flock. This is translated “pastors” in Ephesians 4:11. A form of the Greek word is translated “feed” and used in reference to the work of elders. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

They were to “feed” the church of God. What were they to feed them? In Acts 20:32 Luke records that Paul commended them to God and to His Word. Thus, they were to feed them the Word of God. This involves their teaching the flock on occasion. It also involves making sure the preacher was declaring the whole counsel of God. The term is also used in I Peter 5:2 in reference to elders: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (thereof), not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;”

We can see from this short study that God expects His rulers today to be men of maturity, who take the rule and who are willing to feed the Word of God in its simplicity.

Duties Of The Pastors Today

Pastors have duties which must be filled in order

to please God. They must be careful to fill these duties with the proper attitude. We noticed that in the Old Testament, God condemned the pastors who became brutish in their feeding. Today there are elders who rule with a “highhand.” That is, they exalt themselves above others and sometimes even above the authority delegated them by the Word of God. This type of men drives members rather than leads them. God will repay them on judgment day for their insensitive care for the flock.

Pastors today are to **watch** the flock today. According to Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28), they are to watch themselves first. If pastors do not watch themselves, they are in no position to watch for the flock of God. The principle of I Timothy 4:16 applies here: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

Second they are to watch for the flock as they will give account:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that (is) unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Pastors have a great and grave responsibility to watch for the flock. Faithful pastors will enjoy their reward in heaven knowing they help the flock make it to heaven. What a great reward it will be for the pastor(s) to be approached in that day by one who was helped toward heaven by the pastor(s)! To hear someone say, “I made it because you loved me and helped me when I needed you,” should bring tears to the eyes of every faithful pastor.

In watching for the flock, God’s shepherd must watch what it is fed and where it is led. If we are fed poisonous food, we will die physically. The same principle is true when referring to spiritual food, the Word of God (I Peter 2:2). It is a pastor’s responsibility to know the Word of God and to be able to detect false doctrine: “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). Many of the present problems facing the church of our Lord would be avoided if pastors were faithful in their watching for the false teachers among us. Pastors are to watch for these men and their doctrines and when the wolves will not repent, they need to be marked and avoided.

In watching for the flock, the pastor’s work is compared to that of a father in the home. Several of the qualifications of a pastor (I Tim. 3:1-7), relate to his work as a father in the home. As a father he must watch each child and help each child individually. He must take into account the talent of that child and train him accordingly (Prov. 22:6). He must watch the temperament of each child. No two children are alike, so a father will have to watch without partiality. Likewise, a pastor will have to watch the flock in the same manner looking for the same things. He must watch the growth of each member. He must watch the talent of each member. He must help train them in the areas where they can serve. He must do all this by setting the proper example for them: “Neither as being lords over (God’s) heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (I Peter 5:3).

Not only are pastors to watch the flock, but they are to **warn** the flock of impending danger. Shepherds of physical sheep warn their animals when danger

appears. They do not keep silent or even invite the wolf or bear to come into the flock! God's pastors today must warn the souls of the congregations of impending danger. This warning will involve name-calling on occasions. Paul instructed the Romans:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17, 18).

These men are those who serve themselves and their own selfish desires. They teach things contrary to the doctrine received from the apostles. In order to mark them, one must be able to KNOW the doctrine of the apostles! These men would be termed as enemies of the cross of Christ:

(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, (that they are) the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end (is) destruction, whose God (is their) belly, and (whose) glory (is) in their shame, who mind earthly things) (Phil. 3:18-19).

Paul used almost the exact same wording as in Romans 16:17, 18. These two texts show that those who teach contrary to the doctrine are enemies of the cross and pastors must warn the flock of their presence and preaching.

Pastors also warn concerning things of a personal nature in the local church. Paul wrote:

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; (I Thess. 5:12).

The local pastors are to admonish the local members when they need it. The word “admonish” means, “to put in mind, to caution or reprove gently.” Many people do not want the elders knowing enough of their business to be able to make a righteous judgment and then admonish them. Members should be thankful to the wisdom of God for organizing a system by which good and godly men would watch and warn the brethren when they were in danger. Pastors who faithfully fill their charge will be concerned about the individual lives of each and every member. Members who have God first and heaven as their goal will appreciate men who are and watch for their souls. God’s pastors will know the flock and warn them when they need it.

The pastors are also to **withdraw** when necessary for the good of the individual and of the flock. Perhaps there is no greater example of this as is found in I Corinthians chapter five. One of the members had become so immoral that he was sleeping with his father’s wife (I Cor. 5:1, 2). The church should have “mourned,” but instead they were puffed up concerning him. They glorified in the fact that they could tolerate such a one, but Paul told them they should have mourned as if someone had died. We read Paul’s answer to them in verse five: “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” Paul instructed them to withdraw for his own good. The hope would be that he would realize his sin and miss the fellowship of the saints to such a point, he would repent of the sin and come back to the fellowship of God and the saints. Paul further instructs them that withdrawing would aid the whole congregation:

Your glorifying (is) not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: (I Cor. 5:6-7).

Sin works somewhat like cancer. Cancer usually begins in a small area and spreads over the whole body to such a point that it kills the body. Sin usually begins in small ways and if not stopped, it will kill spiritually, both the individual and the whole congregation. Gossip may seem somewhat innocent at first, but if it is not stopped, people's reputations and influences will be murdered. Harboring hard feelings can appear to be a small thing, but if they are not dealt with and released, they can kill the individual through hatred and variance.

Withdrawal can also be that which helps other people avoid danger. If a person will not repent and is dealt with correctly, the withdrawal can help others avoid this person, who might corrupt other lives. Particularly, a false teacher who is withdrawn from will not have the influence on others who heed the withdrawal.

Withdrawal is an act of love and is a command of God:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (II Thess. 3:6).

To disregard this command would be to violate a command of God and only those who obey the commands are going to heaven: "Blessed (are) they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of

life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

Diseases Of The Flock Which Will Be Avoided

First, a **corrupt message** will not go forth if the false teacher is checked in his false doctrine. Men who no longer teach in harmony with the doctrine need to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17). They do not need to be invited in, and if they are, those who invite him in need to repent. If they will not, they need to be marked and the work continue. A corrupt message will corrupt the hearers. Jesus said:

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruits; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither (can) a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:17-20).

If the message is corrupt, it will not produce fruit which is not corrupt.

Second, **corrupt marriages** would be avoided. Perhaps, one of the greatest hindrances to personal evangelism is the number of adulterous marriages one encounters as he tries to convert the lost. There are even a vast number in the church of our Lord. For the past couple of generations, pastors have been slack in their dealing with the corrupt marriages within the local body. When a new preacher begins to labor with a local church, one of the first problems he encounters is dealing with those who should have already been withdrawn from. Among these problems are those in adulterous

marriages. If an eldership would watch, warn and then withdraw from these, the problems would be cut drastically.

Third, **corrupt morals** would be purged from the local body. Those who persist in gambling need to be disciplined. Those who drink (“socially” or drunkards) need to be withdrawn from if they will not repent. Those who lie and cheat need to be rebuked and disciplined. Immorality is on a record climb in our society and even within the body of Christ. Pastors need to watch, warn against immorality and then withdraw from those who will not repent.

Conclusion

When Jesus appears, the reward for godly pastors will be given: “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (I Peter 5:4). What a great joy and blessing it will be on that day to have been a faithful pastor who watched, warned and withdrew when needed. We need so desperately today to have congregations which have strong leaderships. May God help us to prepare ourselves for this task. If we are not qualified, may He help us be prepared to follow those who are qualified!

Chapter 24

The Anger Of God In The Major Prophets

Thomas Eaves

Moses declared, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1) and the Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psm. 19:1). The testimony of God to Man, *GOD IS!*, and you can know that He is God by His creation. However, to know His characteristics or what kind of God our Eternal Father is, we must consult the Bible, His divinely inspired word for man (II Tim. 3:16–17).

In His Revelation to man Jehovah reveals Himself as being a God of unlimited existence, “Even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God” (Psm. 90:2b). Jehovah, the creating God is omnipotent, a God of unlimited power. He said to Abraham, “I am God almighty” (Gen. 17:1). Jehovah, the sustaining God is omniscient, possessing unlimited knowledge, “And there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). Jehovah, who provides salvation for all mankind is omnipresent, exhibiting unlimited presence, “Can any man hide in secret places so that I shall not see him? saith Jehovah.

Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith Jehovah” (Jer. 23:24). Jehovah, who gave His only begotten son for the salvation of a sinful world is omnibenevolent, manifesting unlimited love, “Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us, and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10, see also John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-10). The only limitation of the Great Jehovah is that He cannot act contrary to His divine nature. Titus and the writer of Hebrews both declare that it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus1:2). Truly the Jehovah God of the Bible is *THE GREAT LIVING GOD* (Heb. 10:31).

What Is God Like?

If the question, “What is your concept of God” is posed to the masses, the immediate reply most likely will be, “God is a God of love.” Of course this answer is true because God is a God of love. In his great chapter on love (1 John 4:), John, who is often referred to as the apostle of love, states that, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). The manifestation of God’s love is seen in the sacrifice of His only begotten son on the cross for the sins of the world. However, when seeking an answer to the question, “what is God like,” we must consider the total teaching of the Bible in order to obtain a correct picture of Jehovah. When looking at other passages of scripture Jehovah God is presented as: a God of justice (Rom. 3:26); a God of goodness (Rom. 11:22); a God of severity (Rom. 11:22) and a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

The Anger Of Jehovah

Turning to our study at hand, “The anger of God in the major prophets” we find that God possesses the

attribute of anger. Isaiah, the great Messianic prophet stated, “Therefore is the anger of Jehovah kindled against His people, and he hath stretched forth His hand against them, and hath smitten them; and the mountains tremble and their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” (Isa. 5:25). Five times in the book of Isaiah the phrase, “The Lord’s anger is not turned away” is used signifying that the judgment of God against His people would continue. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet of Israel declared, “And I will make them to pass with thine enemies into a land which thou knowest not; for a fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn upon you” (Jer. 15:14). Again from the pen of Jeremiah, “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He hath cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and hath not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger” (Lam. 2:1). Ezekiel, who viewed the valley of dry bones, wrote of the anger of Jehovah, “Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my wrath toward them to rest, and I shall be comforted: and they shall know that I, Jehovah, have spoken in my zeal, when I have accomplished my wrath upon them” (Ezek. 5:13). Daniel, whose prayers landed him in a den of lions, informs us of the anger of Jehovah, “O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, let thine anger and thy wrath, I pray thee, be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are round about us” (Dan. 6:16). Not only do the major prophets speak of the anger of Jehovah, they refer to “ the fierce anger of Jehovah”

(Isa.13:9; Jer. 4:8; Lam. 1:12; Ezek. 5:13; Dan. 9:16). Although Jehovah possesses the attribute of anger, the Psalmist informs us that, "Jehovah is gracious, and merciful; slow to anger, and of great loving-kindness" (Psm. 145:8).

The Anger Of Jehovah Is Provoked By Sin

The anger of Jehovah is expressed when He is provoked, "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger" (Jer. 7:18). Ezekiel addressed this when he wrote, "Then He said unto me, hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have turned again to provoke Me to anger..." (Ezek. 8:17).

Concerning Jehovah's anger, F. K. Farr states,

As a translation of words denoting God's "anger," the English word is unfortunate so far as it may seem to imply selfish, malicious or vindictive feelings. The anger of God is the response of His Holiness to outbreking sin. Particularly when it culminates in action is it rightly called his wrath."¹

There Is No Fellowship Between Sin And Righteousness

Jehovah God and sin are not compatible. Sin separated Adam and Eve from the tree of life (Gen.3:22-24), and separates man from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Sin separates man from the abundant life which is in Jesus Christ (John 10:10), and eternal life which comes by

grace through faith (Eph. 2:8; Rev. 21:27). Sin is a repudiation of God’s great love for man (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-9), and His desire for man’s salvation (II Peter 3:9). God hates sin (Psm. 97:10; Prov. 6:16-19; 8:13; Amos 5:15).

Sin is a rejection of God’s will for man, “Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (I John 3:4). Because of the sin of man, God sent His only begotten son to purchase salvation for all sinners (Isa. 53). Without the shedding of Christ’s blood there would be no remission of sins, “And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22; John 1:29; II Cor. 5:14-17). Christ died for all men, and the Hebrew writer tells us that Christ’s blood cleansed those who lived under Moses’ law as well as those living under the testament of Christ, “And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). Sin is a hideous, horrible, terrible life and soul destroying rebellion. It took the life of God’s son to provide man with an avenue of escape – *GOD HATES SIN!*

God’s Anger In The Book Of Isaiah

Isaiah, in the fifth chapter of his book, pronounced woes upon the wicked (Isa. 5:20-24), and concluded by saying, “Therefore is the anger of Jehovah kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them; and the mountains tremble, and their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all

this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” (Isa. 5:25). Why was God angry?

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for Jehovah hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly! They have forsaken Jehovah, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward. Why will ye be still stricken, that ye revolt more and more? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and fresh stripes: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil. Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except Jehovah of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah (Isa. 1:2-9).

What was Israel's attitude toward Jehovah's evaluation of their spiritual condition? “Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever. For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of Jehovah; that say to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things,

prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:8–10). How could Israel come to this extent of alienation? “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isa. 5:20). The world today is no different than it was in Isaiah’s time. Our society today calls evil good and good evil.

1. Abortion, the murder of the unborn, is called post conception birth control.
2. Drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, is referred to as living the good life or grabbing the “Gusto.”
3. Adultery is pictured as a trial marriage.
4. Fornication is described as a meaningful relationship.
5. Homosexuality becomes an alternate life style.
6. Cursing is only freedom of expression.
7. Drunkenness is respectfully referred to as alcoholism.

All of the nice terms and glowing terminology given to cover sin will not change the fact that sin is sin!

Jehovah will not tolerate sin in the lives of His children or in the lives of the wicked. Jehovah used Assyria to punish wicked Israel, “Ho Assyrian, the rod of my anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation! I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets” (Isa. 10:5–6). In this we see the providence of God (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). This same truth is taught in the New Testament (Rom. 13:4–6). After using Assyria in His providence God destroyed her because of her sins, “Wherefore it shall come to pass,

that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks” (Isa. 10:12).

The Anger Of God In The Book Of Jeremiah

The sins of God’s people during the days of Jeremiah were many, “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh truth; and I will spare her” (Jer. 5:1). They worshipped other gods and the works of their own hands (Jer. 1:16). The tragic spiritual state and the foolishness of Israel is graphically described by Jeremiah in chapter two.

As a thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets; who say to a stock, thou art my father; and to a stone, thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face; but in time of their trouble they will say, arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. (Jer. 2:26–28).

Judah’s sins were evident that they had forgotten God, “days without number” (Jer.2:32). Jeremiah refers to God’s people as “playing the harlot” and “backsliding” eight times in chapter three. The long suffering of Jehovah is seen as he admonishes His backslidden people again and again to, “Return, O backsliding children” (Jer. 3:14).

The attitude of God’s children during the time of Jeremiah is amazing. In their sinful condition, they maintained their innocence and thought surely that God’s anger would be turned away from them,

Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor: thou didst not find them breaking in; but it is because of all these things. Yet thou saidst, I am innocent; surely his anger is turned away for me. Behold, I will enter into judgment with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned (Jer. 2:34-35).

Jeremiah describes the condition of God’s people then weeps because they would not accept the word of God (Jer. 6:13-17).

Jehovah’s Reaction

Jehovah had made it abundantly clear that if His people would return to Him that, “I will not look in anger upon you; for I am merciful” (Jer. 3:12). God’s people would not harken to Him and the result of their disobedience provoked Jehovah to anger, “And thou, even of thyself, shalt discontinue from thy heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger which shall burn forever” (Jer. 17:4. See also: 4:8; 4:26; 7:18; 8:19; 25:6; 25:37; 32:29; 44:3; 44:8; 49:37). Jeremiah predicted seventy years of Babylonian captivity for the rebellious people (Jer. 29:10). The people were living in sin, would not repent and were driven out of Jerusalem into captivity because their sin provoked the anger, wrath and indignation of Jehovah, “Behold I will gather them out of all the countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger,

and in my wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely” (Jer.32:37).

Jeremiah was a prophet of Jehovah, a tool in His hands, but in spite of all his efforts to help the people of God, they proceeded “from evil to evil” (Jer. 9:3). Kyle Yates wrote of Jeremiah,

Tragically he stood in the main stream of rushing humanity warning the heedless throng of the certain destruction awaiting them. Madly they rushed on into death and exile over the struggling form of the faithful messenger of God.”²

The audience of Jeremiah, as the hearers of Isaiah’s message, sinned against God and then rejected His messengers who taught, warned, and pleaded with the people to repent. Their actions provoked Jehovah to anger.

The Anger Of God In The Book Of Ezekiel

In Ezekiel chapter five, the great prophet of God charges the people of God with:

1. “Rebelling against mine ordinances,”
2. “Doing wickedness more than the nations,”
3. “Rebelling against my statues more than the countries that are round about her,”
4. “Have not walked in my statues,”
5. “Have not kept my ordinances,”
6. “Kept the ordinances of the nations round about” (Ezek. 5:5-7).

The results are predictable,

Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my wrath toward them to rest, and I shall be

comforted: and they shall know that I, Jehovah, have spoken in my zeal, when I have accomplished my wrath upon them. Moreover I will make thee a desolation and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by. So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instructing and an astonishment, unto the nations that are around thee, when I shall execute judgments on thee in anger and in wrath, and in wrathful rebukes (I, Jehovah have spoken it) (Ezek. 5:13-15).

As Ezekiel continues to reveal God’s will to His people he becomes more specific in the charges. He charges them with:

1. Spiritual adultery (Ezek. 16:25-34).
2. Idolatry (Ezek. 20:8).
3. Profaning the Sabbath (Ezek. 20:21).
4. Defiling Jehovah’s holy name (Ezek. 43:8).

The result of their sin was as always before, their creator was provoked to anger.

The Anger Of God In The Book Of Daniel

The prayer of Daniel in chapter nine of the book which bears his name again reiterates what we have learned from each of the other prophets. The sins of the people of Daniel’s day.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed unto Jehovah my God, and made confession, and said, Oh, Lord, the great and dreadful God, who keepeth covenant and lovingkindness with them that love him and keep his commandments. We have sinned, and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even turning aside from thy precepts and from thine ordinances; neither have

we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, that spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land (Dan. 9:3-6, also Dan. 9:9-11).

Daniel states the result of the people's wickedness, "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, let thine anger and thy wrath, I pray thee, be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are round about us" (Daniel 9:16).

Application Of The Lessons Learned

The apostle Paul wrote, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom.15:4). As we have studied the anger of Jehovah God in the major prophets, surely we have learned that sin provokes Jehovah God to anger. The same is true today, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom.1:18, also Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6). Consider the works of the flesh which Paul enumerates in the book of Galatians,

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, (Gal. 5:19-21).

Paul points out that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

In the works of the flesh we have God’s condemnation of:

1. pornei/a (fornication) defined as, “Prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”³ The meaning of the word includes what we refer today as, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism and bestiality.

2. farmakei/a (sorcery, witchcraft) defined as, “The use of medicine or drugs, the use of drugs for magical purposes, magic, sorcery.”⁴ The recreational use of drugs fall within the scope of this definition.

3. me/qh (drunkenness), the use of alcohol. Study I Peter 4:3 where the apostle Peter uses winebibbings, revellings and carousings to describe all abuses of the drug alcohol, down in the gutter drunk, drinking parties and social drinking.

4. a)se/lgeia (lasciviousness) defined as, “Inclined to lechery (inordinate indulgence in sexual activity); lewd, lustful: tending to arouse sexual desires.”⁵ In his discussion of lasciviousness William Barclay states:

Aselgeia is one of the ugliest words in the Greek language. It does not describe only immorality; it describes the man who is lost to shame. Most people seek to conceal their evil deeds, and try to sin in secret; but the man in whose heart there is aselgeia is long past that. He does not care who sees him; he does not care how much of a public exhibition he makes of himself; he does not care what people think of him; reputation, and honor and decency, mean nothing to him. Aselgeia is the quality of the man who is so deeply in the grip of sheer lust that he dares publicly to do the things

which are unbecoming for any man to do.⁶

Chamber's Dictionary defines lascivious as, "lustful: tending to produce lustful emotions."⁷

When Christians study this word they need to consider immodest clothing, mixed swimming and dancing because these fall into the category of lasciviousness. These are the things which provoke Jehovah to anger today! What is the attitude of spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16) toward these verses in Galatians five? Isaiah stated it this way,

Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever. For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of Jehovah: that say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits (Isa. 30:8-10).

Jeremiah declared, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof" (Jer. 5:31)? In the year of our Lord, 1995, Jeremiah could have written, The preachers preach what the people enjoy hearing and elders rule under their guidance; and my people love to have it so: and what will you do in the end thereof?

May God help us to never forget or ignore a single attribute of God that we may never be guilty of creating God according to our own desired image.

Endnotes

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2 Kyle Yates, **Preaching From the Prophets**, Broadman Press, Nashville, TN, 1942, p. 128.

3 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature**, The University Press, Chicago, IL.

4 Fritz Rienecker, **Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament**, Zondervan Publishing House, 1976, p. 517.

5 Webster's **New Collegiate Dictionary**, 2nd ed. G & C Merriam Co, Springfield, MA

6 William Barclay, **The Letter to the Romans**, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, p. 194.

7 **Chamber's Etymological Dictionary**, p. 300.

Chapter 25

The Mercy Of God In The Major Prophets

Earl Edwards

What is the meaning of the word “mercy” as it is used in the Bible and especially in the Old Testament?

This word stands in the OT chiefly (148 times, two-thirds of them in the Psm.) for the Heb. **chesed**, the word which Coverdale frequently (23 times) rendered in the Psalms by loving-kindness (q.v.). It thus signifies that continued forbearance of God by which he ‘keepeth covenant’ (Deut. 7,9) with Israel, even when Israel is slow to keep his commandments and is wayward to a degree. It also represents, especially in such phrases as ‘show mercy,’ ‘have mercy,’ two other Hebrew roots, namely **racham** (34 times) and **chanan** (16 times). The former of these has to do with God’s tender compassion, that pity which he has for man in his weakness and misery and helplessness. The latter refers to God’s generous and kindly disposition.

The word ‘mercy,’ therefore, has nothing to do in the OT, except accidentally, with the question of the forgiveness of sin. The use of the word in the NT is similar, where the Gk. word is almost invariably **eleos** (pity, mercy).¹

So, the Hebrew words which are translated “mercy” or “pity” or “compassion” in our various English translations of the Old Testament have slightly different meanings. **Chanan** has to do with God’s “generous and kindly disposition” according to which He desires good for all creatures. **Racham** describes God’s “tender compassion” which He feels toward man because of man’s weakness. **Chesed** describes the “continued forbearance” of God by which He refrains from completely destroying man even when man violates His covenant with God. While the first two Hebrew words have to do with the **feelings** and disposition of our great God, the third (**chesed**) “is not primarily a manner of feeling but an **act** (of helping)” man which is “in keeping with the relationship which demands faithfulness.”² Thus, as the term mercy is used henceforth in this lecture it may have any of the slightly different meanings described above. It will be good to keep in mind that though “mercy” (or “pity” or “compassion”) does not normally mean forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament, the third term (**chesed**) which is described above is closely related to forgiveness in that it sometimes presupposes repentance on the part of man and forgiveness on the part of God.

Another thing worthy of note in the introduction of this lesson is that this “mercy” is so much a part of God that in one apocryphal work, Ecclesiastico or Sirach which is included in the Roman Catholic Old Testament, He is assigned the proper name “the Merciful One.” And though this exact terminology is never used in the inspired text yet there are passages in the inspired books that say virtually the same thing. Jeremiah tells us in 33:11 that God’s “mercy endures forever” and Daniel 9:9

affirms that “to the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness.” Further, in the New Testament at Hebrews 2:17 we are told that Christ is a “merciful and faithful High Priest.” Certainly mercy is a very prominent characteristic of our God.

Now having defined mercy and having noted that it is a prominent character of Jehovah God we pass on to study several lessons which the major prophets teach us that are related to “mercy.” The first is—

God Will Not Extend Mercy To Those Who Continue In Sin

As has been pointed out by other speakers in this series, God’s anger, not His mercy, will rest upon those who continue to do evil.

In Isaiah 9:17, probably dating to about 730 BC, God said of an idolatrous Israel:

The Lord will have no joy in their young men,
Nor have mercy on their fatherless and
widows;
For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer,
and every mouth speaks folly.
For all His anger is not turned away,
But His hand is stretched out still.

God’s hand was still “stretched out” to punish Israel because she continued to do evil and therefore God did not extend His mercy to her. In fact, because she failed to repent she was destroyed by Sargon II, king of Assyria, in 721 BC and many of her people were carried into exile. Indeed, God does not extend mercy to those still in rebellion.

In Isaiah 27 the prophet is probably speaking of Jerusalem⁵ in about the year 700 BC. Because of her sin “the fortified city will be desolate” (v. 10) and

according to another metaphor “its boughs are withered and will be broken off” (v. 11a) and then (11b):

The women come and set them on fire.
For it is a people of no understanding;
Therefore He who made them will **not**
have mercy on them,
And He who formed them will show no favor.

As long as His people have “no understanding” of the need to repent God does not extend His mercy.

About 100 years later (in about 600 BC) another prophet, Jeremiah, in chapter 13, speaks of Jerusalem as still being impenitent, still steeped in idolatry and so God, rather than extend her mercy, will ruin her like a sash which is buried in the earth for many days is “ruined” (v. 7). In fact, Jehovah says “I will not pity, nor spare **nor have mercy,** but will destroy them.” (v. 14). It is clear that God’s mercy is not for the still rebellious persons or nation. Rather the lot of the rebellious is to be the victim of God’s castigation or punishment. Just as mercy is an essential part of His character, just so justice is a part of His essential nature (cf. Psm. 89:14).

And it was not just the rebellious of Jeremiah’s or Isaiah’s day to which God refuses to extend His mercy; the same is true today. And unfortunately rebellion against God was not limited to Israel or Judah; there is plenty of it in our own United States of America. In a recent article called “Turned Off” by Dan Olmsted and Gigi Anders regarding sex, vulgarity and violence on television the two journalists reported that 97% of the 65,000 persons they surveyed were “very or somewhat concerned” about those aspects of television programming. But the journalists report that television programmers respond that what they show is okay

because it simply “reflects the climate we’re in.”⁷ But the truth is that for many years now it has been obvious that the persons controlling the media have had a more liberal view of morals than the average American. A study published in 1981 showed that, for example, “seventy-five percent disagreed that homosexuality is wrong; and only fifteen percent strongly agreed that extramarital affairs are immoral.”⁸ And it is evident that these influences in our society have had an effect on our morals. In 1993, according to the social scientists who keep our national statistics, 53% of American teenagers had “sexual intercourse” and 18.8% had “had sexual intercourse with four or more different partners.”⁹ Further, in Tennessee during 1990 “about 19 girls ages 10-17 became pregnant every single day. A total of 6,872 teenage pregnancies were reported that year.”¹⁰

As a nation we are continuing in sin and God will not have mercy on us because “Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). God help our nation to repent so that we can be the object of His great mercy. But even if our nation refuses, we as individual Christians must abstain from the evils just described and oppose them with all our might. Paul says to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11). Elders, preachers, parents, if we desire to be blessed by God’s great mercy we must turn from sin and teach members of the Lord’s body and our own family members to “abstain from every form of evil” (I Thess. 5:22).

God Will Have Mercy On Those Who Love Him And Repent

A second lesson which we learn about mercy from

the major prophets is that God will have mercy on those who decide to love Him and repent.

In the New Testament Jesus articulates an eternal principle as follows: “If anyone loves me he will keep my word” (John 14:23). In fact, in every age it has been true that when men learn to love God they will repent of their rebellion and obey Him and He will extend His great mercy not to punish or destroy.

In the early verses of Isaiah 30 God severely condemns Judah for seeking alliances with Egypt in the period 710-700 BC. Because of her disobedience she will be “broken in pieces” like “a breach” in a “wall” (vs. 13,14). But, God does not enjoy punishing His people. Rather He loves extending His mercy to them. Thus, “the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you, and therefore He will be exalted, that He may **have mercy** on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are those who wait for Him” (Isa. 30:18). This passage obviously looks on past the punishment threatened in the earlier verses (that is, Babylonian exile which took place in about 586 BC to 536 BC) and shows how God delights in re-embracing His people once they repent. He “will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may **have mercy on you.**” He does, indeed, extend mercy to those who love Him and repent.

Nearly two hundred years late, in about 540 BC, Daniel, who lived in exile in Babylon and in Persia, admitted the justice of God in exiling His people and also affirmed His mercy toward those who repent. He said,

O Lord, great and awesome God, who keep
His covenant **and mercy with those who**

love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity ... (Dan. 9:4-5).

Notice Daniel's admission of sin (repentance) and his recognition of God as a God of mercy "for those who love Him."

But not only does God bless His people with a restored physical kingdom, He also promises much more: a new spiritual kingdom in the future. In Isaiah 49 the prophet speaks of "an acceptable time" and of "the day of salvation" in which hope will be given to "those who are in darkness" (vs. 8-9). Then people will come into this new kingdom "from afar" (v. 12) and be immensely blessed. In fact, they

... shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them: for he who **has mercy** on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them. I will make each of My mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated (Isa. 49:10-11).

As Homer Hailey says, we are clearly dealing with "the gospel age" (cf. II Cor. 6:2).¹¹

In a similar way Isaiah continues describing God's great mercies which will be extended to His people in the new messianic kingdom. He says I once punished you and "hid my face" from you but in the future (when you repent) it will be different:

'With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will **have mercy** on you,' says, the Lord, your Redeemer ... 'For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, But my kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My

covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord who **has mercy** on you (Isa. 54:8,10).

God does extend mercy to the one who loves Him and repents.

Then in the very next chapter, in still another reference to the future messianic kingdom, the prophet says,

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

Again, the one who loves Him and “returns” to Him (=repents) will enjoy God’s mercy.

And one more time we read in Isaiah (chapter 60) that God will bless His people (almost certainly in the future-messianic (kingdom) and cause even foreigners to “build up your walls” (almost certainly spiritual walls: “for in my wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have **had mercy** on you.”) (60:10). Again, looking beyond the punishment of the exile, God foresees the time when not only Jews will “build up” God’s kingdom but “foreigners” will as well. And, again, God will have “mercy” on His people as they repent and learn to love Him.

And, today too, whether it be His own people who return to Him in repentance or the alien sinner who has never served God, He is anxious to extend His great mercy when such people repent. He says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). And in Isaiah’s time God said, “Come now, and let us reason together ... Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18a). The same assurance is valid for the sinner today

for God always extends mercy to the one who loves Him and repents. Have you been a thief or a liar or a murderer or a prostitute? It makes no difference if you are willing to come to Him repenting, and obeying. He will gladly cover you with His great mercy which causes Him to forgive your sins.

When People Repent God Confirms His Covenant With Them

To have a right relationship with God one must enter into that relationship by covenant (Hebrew=**berith**/Greek=**diatheke**). It is an agreement between two parties. Sometimes such an agreement was entered into by cutting sacrificial animals into two parts and the two parties passing between the pieces as Abram and God seem to have done to seal the land promises (cf. Gen. 15:7-21). In the New Testament we promise before witnesses to serve Him when we obey the gospel (I Tim. 1:12). God, of course, never breaks His end of a covenant because God “is faithful” (II Thess. 3:3) and He is “the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut. 7:9). But when men fail to love and obey Him, as they often do, then the covenant is voided. In fact, the Lord says,

But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all the commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My covenants, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart ... I will set My face against you ... (Lev. 26:14-17a).

So, when we disobey, the covenant is broken by us and God sets His “face” against us. But, if we then turn and repent, as seen earlier in this lesson, He will extend mercy to us again. But, beyond that, He will also establish His covenant with us once again.

In the Old Testament He promised to bring exiled Israel back into her own land: “For the Lord will **have mercy** on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land” (Isa. 14:1a). His covenant with them was to be re-established. Further, in a very probably reference to the future messianic kingdom, Isaiah promises that “**in mercy** the throne will be established; and one will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David” (Isa. 16:5a). If this is the right interpretation, it infers that the covenant will not only be confirmed but even upgraded to a spiritual kingdom with a perfect high priest. Reference is made to this spiritual kingdom also as God promises to “make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure **mercies** of David” (Isa. 55:3b).

In Jeremiah, too, the Lord assures His penitent people that “though I spoke against him (Israel), I earnestly remember him still; therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely **have mercy** on him” (Jer. 31:20). The implication is that He will once again have a covenant relationship with Israel.

Likewise in the exilic prophet Ezekiel who prophesies in about 580 BC God promises,

Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob,
and **have mercy** on the whole house of Israel
... after they have borne their shame, and all
their unfaithfulness in which they were
unfaithful to Me, when I have brought them

back ... and I am hallowed in the in the sight of many nations, then shall they know that I am the Lord ... and I will not hide my face from them anymore (Ezek. 39:25-29a).

His people's repentance and God's re-establishing of His covenant with them are implied in this passage in the statements "I am hallowed in them" and in His promise to not "hide" His face from them.

Today, too, it is reassuring to know that when we repent and come back to Him we are again in covenant relationship with the God who "is faithful and, who also will do it" (I Thess. 5:24). That is, He will do what He promises. To the alien sinner God says that he should "repent and turn to God and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). Thus he can enter into a covenant relationship with God and have hope of eternal life. To those who have become Christians and then violated God's will and broken their covenant with God, He says, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness and pray God" (Acts 8:22). By so doing we can again enter into a covenant with our loving and faithful God. He promised to re-establish a covenant relationship with us. He is under contract to save us if we keep our end of the bargain. And it is reassuring that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18).

Conclusion

Earlier in this lectureship other speakers have spoken about God's anger. And the scriptures confirm that His anger must be dealt with. The disobedient will fall victim to it. But there is a very great difference between God's anger and His mercy. As Heschel says,

In both its origin and duration, anger is distinguished from mercy. It is never a spontaneous outburst, but rather a state which is occasioned and conditioned by man. There is a biblical belief in divine grace, in a mercy which is bestowed upon man to a degree greater than he deserves. There is no belief in divine arbitrariness, in an anger which consumes and afflicts without moral justification. The pathos of anger is, further, a transient state. What is often proclaimed about love—‘For the Lord is good, for His steadfast love endures for ever’ (Jer. 33:11; Psm. 100:5; Ezra 3:11; I Chron. 16:34; II Chron. 5:13; 7:3)—is not said about anger. ‘Will He be angry for ever? Will he be indignant to the end?’ (Jer. 3:5) asked a horrified people. The answer is given in the prophet’s powerful predictions of redemption. ‘For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry’ (Isa. 57:16).

The normal and original pathos is love or mercy. Anger is preceded as well as followed by compassion (Jer. 12:15; 33:26). For punishment to be imposed upon the people, God’s ‘love and steadfast mercy’ must be suppressed (Jer. 16:5). These are the words spoken by Jeremiah, ‘I am merciful’ (Jer. 3:12), ‘I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight says the Lord’ (Jer. 9:23). Even in moments of indignation, His love remains alive.¹²

God help us to be found in covenant relationship with Him that we may not be victims of His anger, rather beneficiaries of His promised mercy. “For the Lord is good, for **His mercy endures forever**” (Jer. 33:11). And in the New Testament we are assured that He “is

long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9).

Endnotes

1 Snaith, N. H., “Mercy,” **A Theological Wordbook of the Bible**, Richardson, Alan, Ed. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 143.

2 Bultmann, Rudolph, “Eleos,” **Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento**, Kittel, Gerhard, Ed., Vol. III (Brescia, Italy: Paideia, 1967), Columns 403-404.

3 See Ecclesiastes 50:21 in **La Sacra Bibia** di Ricciotti, Giuseppe (Florence, Italy: Casa Editrice Salani, 1958).

4 All quotations from the Bible will be from **The Holy Bible, New King James Version** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1979) unless otherwise indicated.

5 Hailey, Homer, **A Commentary on Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 222.

6 Cf. Ash, Anthony, **Jeremiah and Lamentation** in the **Living Word Commentary**, Vol. 13 (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1987), p. 130.

7 Olmsted, Dan and Anders, Gigi, “Turned Off” **USA Weekend**, June 2-4, 1995, pp. 4-6.

8 Lichter, Robert and Rothman, Stanley, “Media and Business Ethics,” **Public Opinion** (October, November, 1981), pp. 42-45.

9 Whitmire, Richard, “U.S. Makes Headway on Teen Pregnancy,” **The Jackson Sun**, June 4, 95, p. 4E. The title regarding “headway” is due to the fact that the ‘91 figure for those who had “had sexual intercourse” at least once was 54.1%—slightly higher than the ‘93 figure. However, the figure of those having had sex with “four or more partners” was on up from 18.7% to 18.8% so the “headway” was not very significant.

10 Moore, Janeane, “The Tragedy of Teenage Pregnancy: When Babies Have Babies,” **The Chester County**

Independent, Aug. 11,1994, p. 1B.

11 Hailey, **A Commentary ...**, p. 409.

12 Heschel, Abraham, **The Prophets**, Vol. II (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 77.

Chapter 26

Ah, Sinful Nation Laden With Iniquity

Kevin D. Beard

Of all nations in the history of man, perhaps none approaches the heights and depths achieved by Israel. Her grand beginning in Jehovah's triumph over Egypt, her gods, and her pharaoh outshines the beginnings of all other nations. But the grandeur of that beginning soon waned as the people lost faith in the Lord as they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. The precedent they set would be followed throughout their history. Periods of great glory and success would be followed by periods of great misery and failure because of the faithlessness of the people.

It seems the most vivid picture of this rise and fall is seen in the division of the northern tribes from the southern. King David had brought Israel military success and respect from her enemies. Solomon built upon the successes of his father, expanding the borders of the kingdom to their greatest extent and building Israel into a fabulously wealthy nation. Yet the glory of those days was short-lived. Upon Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam ascended the throne and in his first opportunity as ruler, with one foolish decision, threw away all that his father and his grandfather had accomplished. The nation divided. Israel set out on a

road of rebellion with idolatrous Jeroboam and never turned back. But Judah continued the course traveled by her predecessors. Some kings followed Jehovah, some did not.

In this continual rise and fall of faithful and unfaithful leaders, the nation as a whole steadily declined in faithfulness. Idolatry invaded Judah's borders and established a firm hold on the devotion of the people. Their spiritual departure from God led to increasing iniquity in all walks of life. The nation became corrupt in every facet.

This was the nation Isaiah knew. His prophecy opens with a call to the heavens and earth to witness the Lord's complaint against Judah. Her actions were foreign to all that was logical. Her rebellion caused wonder and astonishment in those called to witness it, and divine wrath in the One who had called Judah into judgment. Thus, the divine proclamation of Judah's pitiable state:

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

This nation which had seen the glory of David's reign and the peace and prosperity of Solomon's reign, all given them by the Lord, now had fallen into the depths of depravity. What once was a nation exalted in glory, now was a nation laden with iniquity. The language pictures their sin as being so great and so burdensome that Barnes describes them as "...an entire people, bowed and crushed under the enormous weight of accumulated crimes."² Their arrogant disdain for God's way had heaped sin upon sin until finally the weight of that sin

had begun to crush them, and their destruction loomed imminent.

The Lord had called them His children (Deut. 14:1), but now He calls them “a seed of evildoers.” Was this because Jehovah was fickle and cast His people aside out of capricious whimsy? Certainly not. When Israel occupied Canaan originally, the Lord had commanded them to stand upon the Mounts Ebal and Gerazim, proclaiming the cursings and blessings of God. The Levites read the curses and all the people answered “amen” (Deut. 27:14-26). Of these curses, the first one read was,

Cursed be the man that maketh any graven image or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place (Deut. 27:15).

When the entire nation, from the king to the commoner had given themselves to idolatry as Judah had done, what else could they have expected but the curse of Jehovah? No, the Lord was not at fault; in fact, they had forsaken Him. Later, Jeremiah would show the folly of their actions:

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns which can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

The end of the verse describes their actions: “they are gone away backward.” According to Delitzsch, the language here “...indicates the deliberate character of their estrangement from God:...in all their actions they ought to have followed Jehovah; but they had turned their backs upon Him, and taken the way selected by

themselves.”³ It is no wonder that they had “provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger.”

How patient and loving the Lord had been with Judah! Years of rebellion and rejection had not yet completely turned Jehovah from His people. He loved them with the true love of a Father. Some today talk as if they have found something new in “tough love.” But the Lord demonstrated His love in “tough” ways with Judah. He imposed His disciplinary action upon them through enemies, natural disasters, and other ways, yet Judah continued to revolt. Such action disclosed their true condition. Barnes wrote,

Where the heart is right with God, the tendency of affliction is to humble it, and lead it more and more to God. Where it is evil, the tendency is to make the sinner more obstinate and rebellious.⁴

Truly Judah’s heart had become evil, for all the affliction God sent upon her served only to drive her further away from Him.

While we may look at a passage such as this and marvel at the longsuffering of God, let us not forget that He did reach a point at which He could take no more. The Lord is patient, but we should never view His longsuffering as license to rebel. Paul clearly taught this:

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Rom. 2:4).

God does not withhold judgment from His people simply for the sake of withholding it. By showing goodness and longsuffering in forbearing, God seeks to move His people

to repent. The same motive governed His action with Judah. He desired their return to Him.

Since Jehovah addressed Judah as a *nation* instead of individually, there is a very important principle that must be examined. The actions of individuals and groups of individuals greatly affect how a nation stands before God. “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). Judah was burdened with sin. She was like one who was covered from head to toe with “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isa. 1:6). The entire nation had been corrupted by the actions of her citizens.

This ought to be a sobering reminder to us. God will not look favorably upon any nation whose citizens do not honor Him and His way. Nebuchadnezzar learned that “...the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:25b), and we had better learn it too. Much of what corrupted Judah corrupts America today. Though separated by some 2,700 years, modern America appears to be very similar to ancient Judah. If Judah’s corruption brought divine anger, what will today’s corruption bring? Judah failed to heed the divine warnings and suffered ultimate humiliation at the hands of Babylon. In all of the parallels between the two, is there a lesson to be learned for modern America?

Religious Corruption

Judah had given herself to idols. During the reign of Uzziah, “the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places” (II Kings 15:4), and the same was true during Jotham’s reign (II Kings 15:35), though these two righteous kings followed the Lord. However, the

temple worship continued. Jehovah’s rebuke of Judah included a rebuke of their empty attempts at worship.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats (Isa. 1:11).

Who can say why Judah tried to hold on to the formal worship of the Lord, yet devote her heart to false gods? Perhaps they thought that by their token service they could appease the wrath of Jehovah, and still cling to their idolatry. It seems the Lord is flabbergasted with their actions too. “Who hath required this at your hand?” (Isa. 1:12) He asked. Certainly He did not desire their empty attempts at appeasing Him, for He commanded them to cease their hypocrisy. In fact, He told them He could no longer bear their action.

Many similarities can be seen today. With many religious groups, the main thrust of their teaching is the observance of formal ritual. Likely there is no other more noted for this than the Roman Catholic Church. Their expectations of their followers have been listed in six chief precepts:

The traditionally listed chief Precepts of the Church are the following six:

1. To assist at Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To confess our sins at least once a year.
4. To receive Holy Communion during the Easter time.

5. To contribute to the support of the Church.
6. To observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage.⁵

Such a view of service to God ignores the fact that God desires the entirety of man. When asked which was the first and great commandment, Jesus responded, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). This is what the Lord always has desired. Even under the old law, the Lord required the same; in fact, it was to this command that Jesus referred:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all
thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with
all thy might (Deut. 6:4-5).

Those who seek to reduce service to God to a few obligatory formalized actions actually show no desire to commit their entire lives to Him. Hailey explained well the mindset of seeking to appease God through formalism:

This has always been and continues to be a favorite refuge for those who are unfit to come before Jehovah in spirit and truth and who know not the true character of God.⁶

But let us not remove our sight so far from home that we focus only on those outside the body of Christ. Members of the Lord’s church may also fall prey to the idea that Christianity involves only a set of formalized practices.

From the actions of some, it seems there is the impression that observing the Lord’s Supper is the most important aspect of Christianity. How many members

of the church see no problem with leaving the assembly as soon as the Lord's Supper is complete, regardless of whether or not the entire worship period has ended? And what of attending the worship assembly itself? Pews in church buildings abound each Lord's day with people whose entire lives of service can be summed up in the fact that they occupy a particular space on the pew each Sunday morning. Certainly such half hearted approaches to Christianity rival the half hearted ritual keeping of Judah. If the Lord was disgusted with such acts 2,700 years ago, will He not also be disgusted with them today?

Another facet of Judah's religious corruption was that they wanted to please themselves. What else could account for the fact that while they continued the temple rituals, they worshipped idols in the high places and on every high hill? Without doubt, Judah thought she knew more about religion than did Jehovah. After all, the nations around them were so mighty, so successful, so powerful; certainly their religion was something to copy.

How sad it is to see members of the Lord's church developing the same kinds of thoughts. More and more the cry is heard throughout the brotherhood that we must change the church or it will die. And the change that is being advocated is not a healthy change, but a change to suit the personal desires of those who are unstable in the faith.

At one time, some were content to look to the denominations to copy their methods. “Children's church,” “bus ministries” (the kind which utilize denominational gimmickry), contemporary worship styles, and many other infiltrations from the denominations have seen, and are continuing to see their day in some congregations of the Lord's church. But

many now desire to take the next step.

Some have forgotten that the church is “a peculiar people” (I Peter 2:9) or “His own special people” (I Peter 2:9, NKJV), that we are to be “the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15), that we are to “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (II Cor. 6:17). All of these teach the distinct nature the Lord’s church must have. But some are bent upon casting this aside to join hands with the denominations. To do it, they have adopted a “new hermeneutic” which allows them to disregard the distinctive teachings about the identity of the church and to agree to have fellowship with all who merely believe in the deity of Christ. The result is that more and more congregations are opening their arms to the denominations, eager to accept them as brethren in Christ who simply come from a different “religious heritage.” Like Judah was long ago, these have become religiously corrupt, having forsaken the Lord to embrace the filth of the religions of the world around us.

Political Corruption

Much of Judah’s problem stemmed from the corruption of their political leadership. Earlier in their history, God pointed out what they actually were doing in requesting a king: “...they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (I Sam. 8:7b). But of course the Lord knew that the time would come when the people would want a king. For this reason, He had given strict guidelines for the one who would be king. Among many other specifications, the Lord demanded that the king remain faithful to the law of Jehovah. He was to keep

a copy of the law before him at all times, to read it all the days of his life, and to follow the statutes contained therein (Deut. 17:18-19). The obvious purpose for this was to ensure that the king would remain faithful to the Lord, the actual ruler of the people.

But the kings of Judah had not followed these commands. Consequently, the people were led astray. Now, instead of relying on Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, the people had come to rely on their military and political leaders. Chapter three of Isaiah opens with the Lord’s denunciation of this and His promise to take away those things on which they leaned for support:

...the mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the elder; the captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counsellor, and the expert artificer, and the skillful enhancer (Isa. 3:2-3, ASV).

Their reliance upon military leaders, political counsellors, even practitioners of sorcery and witchcraft had led Judah to a miserable state. The Lord described the condition which resulted:

As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths (Isa. 3:12).

The individuals in Judah were not freed from responsibility because of the corruption of their leaders. After all, they were the ones who chose to follow those leaders into corruption. But certainly the influence of the leaders encouraged the people to continue in their apostasy. If the leaders had remained strong and faithful to the Lord, then the people probably would have

remained faithful, too.

In one sense, the situation of America today is different from that of Judah. Religious and civil law and leadership are not intertwined as they were then. Our governmental leaders are not required by law to be constant students of the Word of God, as the kings of Judah were. However, it continues to be a true principle that corruption in governmental leaders brings corruption to the nation. When laws are enacted that promote ungodliness, what can be expected but that ungodliness will flourish? The righteous will always be in the minority (Matt. 7:13-14), so how can a nation keep the general principles of morality and godliness when its government promotes the opposite?

In recent years, some political leaders of this nation have been hard at work to reduce the influence of godly principles and morality. We have seen such programs as the National Endowment for the Arts funded with federal money. This organization has become notorious for its funding of radical anti-religious and vulgar “art.” Legislation is being passed in many of our states which grants increased legal protection for the “rights” of homosexuals. The murder of unborn babies has been protected by the United States government since January of 1973. And the examples could be continued *ad nauseam*.

But what are Christians to do? One thing Christians have at their disposal as a result of being American citizens is the right to vote. The time has come for Christians to realize that Christianity must be first in their lives even in the election booth. We may hold differing political ideas regarding such things as fiscal policy, foreign affairs, national defense, etc., but when it

comes to matters of morality, decency, and godliness, there ought to be no disagreement. We must realize that only those men who support the principles of morality and decency are men who will be fit to govern the nation. It is time that we quit going to the polls as Republicans and Democrats, and start going to the polls as Christian. If a man runs for office and supports the kind of ungodliness which plagues our nation and which the government supports, not a single Christian's vote ought to be cast for him, regardless of his political affiliation. No, we cannot elect Christians to every office, but we can do our part to try to elect men who will govern with respect for the principles of godliness.

Another available avenue of action is communication. The men who are elected to office have the responsibility of representing those who elected them. This government is no tyranny, but rather, as Abraham Lincoln described it, a "...government of the people, by the people, for the people..." Thus, the elected officials have the responsibility to listen to their constituents. If Christians want to have an impact on how this nation is governed, they can be aware of what happens in it. They can communicate with their government leaders to encourage them to discharge their duties in a manner which will promote godliness and not godlessness.

And most of all there is prayer. Paul said we must pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:2). If we desire our leaders to govern in such a way that right principles are supported, then we ought to pray to that end. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16b).

Social Corruption

With the religious corruption and political corruption that plagued Judah, there was nothing to stop the social corruption that flourished as well. Judah's social condition was deplorable. What once had been God's people were now a people filled with vice. Greed governed their actions. They wanted more and more and would not be satisfied until they had done all they could to increase what they had (Isa. 5:8). They were kindred spirits with the rich fool in the parable told by our Lord:

...I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry (Luke 12:18-19).

But, as the rich fool learned, so Judah was to learn that such a lifestyle has only misery at its end. The Lord promised that their fine houses would be desolate and the fields they relied upon to bring them more wealth would be unfruitful (Isa. 5:9-10).

Pleasure permeated their lives.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! (Isa. 5:11).

These people really knew how to "grab the gusto!" Their main goal was to have fun while they could. They made great efforts to enjoy the wine and the parties that went with it, yet they gave no thought of serving Jehovah. But the price they would pay for their revelling would be great.

Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and

opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it (Isa. 5:14).

Iniquity infected their judgment. “Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope” (Isa. 5:18). No longer were they desirous of learning the ways of God, now they wanted everything evil to abound. They even had lost all sense of what right and wrong was.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isa. 5:20).

How sad a commentary this is! Their judgment was so warped that they considered good things to be evil and evil things to be good. What choice did Jehovah have but to take serious action against them?

In America today the same kind of social corruption grows. Like Judah, greed has infested the American culture. Its children (fraud, deceit, corruption, and cheating) virtually fill the marketplace in some places. Many are willing to do whatever it takes to get ahead, whether it be cheating in business, embezzling from the company, or downright stealing from the unsuspecting. “Keeping up with the Joneses” has evolved into “staying ahead of the Joneses.” But the people of God must guard themselves against such an attitude. The heaping up of treasure in this world is fruitless. While the treasures of this world may bring some pleasure now, they have no lasting value (Matt. 6:19-21). As Paul has instructed,

But godliness with contentment is great gain.
For we brought nothing into this world, and it

is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content (I Tim. 6:6-8).

One of the things which characterized Judah's condition seems to sum up the social corruption seen in America today: "live for pleasure." The narcissistic, hedonistic mindset has truly permeated many portions of this society. Paul described the reprobate Gentiles in a comprehensive list of characteristics that included "inventors of evil things" (Rom. 1:30). That seems to describe some today. They are not content to revel in the evil things already known to man, they must seek out new and more crude forms of evil things to bring them pleasure. For example, think of all the illegal drugs that are in the world now. How did it come to be that so many exist? Is it not because someone sought a new "high," and experimented with different chemicals, plants, and other substances until he found it? Thousands of examples could be added, but they all possess one common denominator: pleasure. The mindset is that the highest calling in life is to find pleasure, and pleasure, no matter from what source, is inherently good.

So what has resulted? The same thing that resulted in Judah: corrupt judgment. In Judah there were those who called evil good and good evil. Is that not something we witness nearly every day in America? To teach that God is a myth and that the world came about purely as an accident is called "good." But for a teacher to read from the Bible in a classroom is "evil." To teach "safe sex" to teenagers (i.e., that anything they want to do is good as long as they have the proper "protection") is "good." But to teach that the sexual relationship between a man and women is intended only for the marriage

relationship is “evil.” The disgusting perversion of homosexuality now is just an “alternate lifestyle,” something that consenting adults choose for themselves, and the expression of a beautiful and loving relationship. But should anyone call this perversion the unnatural thing that it is (Rom. 1:24-27), they are branded as bigots and “homophobes.” What possibly can lie in store for a nation which views teaching God’s word in public schools as dangerous, and instructing teenagers, barely into puberty why, when, and how to use birth control devices and even encouraging them to do so as wholesome and responsible?

The Answer

Where then lies the answer to the problem? The answer for Judah was given:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18).

Jehovah holds the answer. Whether it was Judah, seven hundred years before Christ, or whether it is modern America, the Lord holds the solution to the problem. If we will turn to His wisdom and follow His word, every sin stain can be cleansed.

Judah chose to ignore the Lord’s loving request. They chose not to return to Jehovah and roughly 150 years after Isaiah began his prophecy, the armies of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and carried the people away captive. There Judah endured God’s discipline for seventy years.

What will America’s future hold? This writer claims to be no prophet, but are the signs not easily read?

America has been blessed greatly. The freedoms and blessings we enjoy have brought great prosperity and have made this the greatest nation on the face of the earth. Who knows but what God's hand was not involved in preparing a nation such as this for the restoration of the church and the spread of the gospel. Yet now it seems that America has spurned the gracious gifts of the Almighty. Judah's downfall came as a result of such spurning; what about America?

The remedy lies in the Proverb quoted before: "Righteousness exalteth a nation." But must we convert every citizen to bring about a change? No, God never holds those who teach His word responsible for whether or not the hearers accept it. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (I Cor. 3:6). But we must teach that word to those who are not in harmony with it. And we ourselves must maintain our righteousness. Remember, Sodom and Gomorrah would have been spared if as few as ten righteous people could have been found there (Gen. 18:32).

We have been greatly blessed in America. But America is not the supreme concern. All great civilizations have fallen, and one day, if time continues, America may fall too. But God's people will never fall. We are citizens in that kingdom which shall never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). If America should fall tomorrow, Christians still would continue in the hollow of God's hand, and that is one thing which will never change. Whether we live in a democracy or in a dictatorship, no one ever will be able to separate us from the love of God.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor
life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,

nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James version, unless otherwise noted.

2 Albert Barnes, “Isaiah, vol. 1,” in **Notes on the Old Testament Explanatory and Practical**, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1955), 60.

3 F. Delitzsch, “Isaiah,” in **Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes**, vol. VII, transl. James Martin (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 81-82.

4 Barnes, “Isaiah, vol. 1,” in **Notes on the Old Testament**, 61.

5 Lawrence G. Lovasik, **Saint Joseph New American Catechism** (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1977), 233.

6 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on Isaiah**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 39.

Chapter 27

“Woe Unto Them That Follow Strong Drink”

(Isa. 5:11)

Rod Rutherford

Since the days of Noah when a righteous man was first overcome by strong drink, alcohol has been a blight on human society (Gen. 9:20-27). The nation of Judah in Isaiah's day was no exception. For most of Isaiah's nearly half century of prophetic activity, Judah was prosperous. There arose an extremely wealthy class who lived in luxury and idleness. They were completely indifferent to the needs of the masses of the people who were poor and oppressed. The rich consumed strong drink in revellings and carousing. The poor drank to forget their troubles. The rich added misery to their worthless and debauched lives by their drinking. The poor multiplied their miseries and suffering by their consumption of alcohol.¹

In chapter five of his prophetic volume, Isaiah describes the ingratitude and worthlessness of God's covenant people in his parable of the vineyard. He then denounces their cardinal sins in a series of six “woes.” The second woe depicts their self-imposed slavery to strong drink:

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink;

that continue until night, till wine inflame them! (Isa. 5:11).

Generally, people get up early in the morning to go to work and earn an honest living in an honorable occupation. But this was not so with many in Judah. They were addicted to alcohol. So great was their lust for it that they began “hitting the bottle” as early as possible. This was not an occasional thing, but a way of life with them!²

Burton Coffman sees a parallel between these foolish folk of Isaiah’s day and the drug crazed citizens of our country:

This is a perfect picture of the revelling, drunken, irresponsibility of countless persons in our own society today; and the ultimate consequences of it shall not be any less serious than those which overtook ancient Israel... America seems intent upon drowning themselves in alcohol.³

But even worse than this was the fact that the religious leaders, the very people who bore the sober responsibility for the spiritual training and oversight of God’s people, had also been seduced by the evil allure of alcohol. Isaiah described the drunken priests and prophets as follows:

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean (Isa. 28:7-8).

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, Israel’s first high

priest, had committed the grievous sin of substituting strange fire for that which God had commanded. They had paid for their error with their lives (Lev. 10:1-2). It is likely that Nadab and Abihu made this deadly mistake because their senses had been dulled by the consumption of alcohol. Immediately following the account of their death, the following instruction was given to Aaron:

Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses (Lev. 10:9-11).

A priest had to have complete control of his senses so that he would be able to carry out the Lord's instructions as God had given them. He also needed a clear mind in order to be able to teach God's word. Since it has long been known that alcohol dulls the senses and hinders the thought processes, a priest could not function in his God-given duties under the influence of alcohol.⁴

The prophetic warnings in Isaiah against the consumption of alcoholic beverages and the vivid picture of the consequences of imbibing them should be sufficient to tell the conscientious Christian today that he has no business indulging in drinking in any amount! However, alcohol not only is a major curse on our nation, but its use is becoming more common and accepted among those who claim membership in the Lord's church, the body of Christ. There are now Christians, including elders and preachers, who not only condone social drinking, but

will argue that it is acceptable behavior for the saints of God.

Arguments Against Alcoholic Consumption

Alcohol is a poison!⁵ By definition, alcohol is a “mind altering drug which is the intoxicating agent in fermented and distilled liquors, beer, wine, and whiskey”⁶ One becomes “intoxicated” by consuming alcoholic beverages. W. Lee Lewis, a chemist, has pointed out that:

Toxic means poison, and to intoxicate means to poison. An intoxicating drink is a poisonous drink. Therefore when a man is (or was) intoxicated, he is (or was) poisoned. Not all persons die who are poisoned as it depends upon the extent of the intoxication. Some poisons are instantly fatal, others slower, and still others cumulatively so.⁷

Why would any intelligent person in his right mind deliberately take anything into his body which would poison it? Yet, drinkers of alcoholic beverages take poison regularly! Eventually, they will pay the price for their foolishness (Gal. 6:7-8).

Alcohol is addictive! There are an estimated nine million alcoholics in America.⁸ These are people who are “hooked.” They are completely enslaved to strong drink. They do not think they can live without it and will go to almost any length to satisfy their craze. In addition to the hard core alcoholics, the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reports that there are an estimated ten million problem drinkers in our nation. These drinkers are not yet alcoholics, but are well along the road to becoming such.⁹ It is estimated that the number of problem drinkers who become alcoholics every

year stands at 200,000.¹⁰ According to Willard Alls, a Pharmacist, 65 to 75% of all Americans drink alcoholic beverages. This makes alcohol America's number one drug problem!¹¹

Alcohol is harmful to our bodies. Paul, by inspiration, wrote:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (I Cor. 6:19-20).

Because our bodies belong to God, and His Spirit dwells within us, we must not abuse our bodies. We will not knowingly take anything into our bodies which will be harmful to them. Alcohol, tobacco, and all other non-prescribed drugs should be avoided by all children of God!

Doctor E. Mansell Pattison and Doctor Edward Kaufman, both professors of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, state that "alcoholism is the third most prevalent public health problem in our society."¹² The first and second greatest killers in America are heart disease and cancer. Alcohol is a **major** contributor to **both** of them.

Not only does alcohol affect the body, but it also destroys the brain. At the 28th International Congress on Alcoholism in the United States, Dr. Melvin H. Knisely, then Professor of Anatomy at the Medical College of South Carolina, said that alcohol kills brain cells. As little as one beer damages the brain. Once brain cells are killed, they are never replaced.¹³

Women who drink heavily (more than three ounces

of alcohol or two mixed drinks in a day) during pregnancy are more likely to give birth to babies having physical or mental defects.¹⁴ Approximately 6,000 babies are born every year in the United States with serious birth defects which were caused by their mother’s consumption of alcohol during pregnancy.¹⁵

The heart, though a tough and powerful organ, is greatly influenced by alcohol. According to medical researchers, just three ounces of alcohol increases the fatty substance in the blood of those who drink. This fatty substance is linked with every artery disease, heart attacks, and strokes. Some researchers have suggested that a moderate consumption of alcohol, perhaps two glasses of wine a day, actually guard against heart attacks. However, a panel of doctors including Dr. William P. Castelli of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, state that the risk of drinking alcohol is too great to ever justify recommending it to anyone.¹⁶ Leroy Creasy, a research scientist at Cornell University, found that purple grape juice contains resveratrol, a cholesterol lowering substance. Larger amounts are present in grape juice than in fermented wine. Therefore, one should drink unfermented, not fermented, wine if he wants to lower his cholesterol and reduce his chances of a heart attack.¹⁷

Alcohol, used as a beverage, for social and recreational purposes, is condemned by the word of God! Of dozens of passage which could be quoted, we will notice just three, two from the Old Testament and one from the New:

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise (Prov. 20:1).

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder (Prov. 23:29-32).

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

The verb form translated “be not drunk” in Ephesians 5:18 is “methusko.” It means “to make drunk, or to grow drunk.” It is an inceptive verb which marks the process of becoming intoxicated.¹⁸ Therefore, Paul is, in effect, commanding the Ephesians not even to begin the process of getting drunk! Since the process of getting drunk begins with the first drink, Christians are commanded **NOT** even to take that first drink! One in every fifteen (some sources say one in every ten) persons who take the first drink will eventually become a problem drinker.¹⁹ If that first drink is never taken, one will never face this tragic addiction.

There are many other warnings in the Bible of the danger of drinking intoxicating beverages:

1. It defiles the drinker (Dan. 1:8).
2. It causes nakedness (Gen. 9:20-21).
3. It causes one to engage in incestuous sex (Gen. 19:30-35).
4. It makes one unable to discriminate between what is holy and what is common (Lev. 10:8-10).
5. It is a mocker and deceiver (Prov. 20:1).
6. It makes one forgetful and causes him to pervert judgment (Prov. 31:4).

7. It brings sorrow, babbling, and wounds without cause (Prov. 23:29-32).
8. It causes one to abuse his neighbor and it makes his neighbor vulnerable to such abuse (Hab. 2:15).
9. It takes away the heart (mind) (Hosea. 4:11).
10. It causes errors in judgment (Isa. 28:7).

Alcohol is also responsible for many social and moral evils in society. Drunk drivers murder 26,000 people every year on the streets and highways in the United States. That is an average of about 70 people per day. In addition, 500,000 are injured every year in automobile accidents caused by drinking drivers.²¹ More than ten times as many Americans are killed each year by drunken drivers as are killed by guns.

But please notice these shocking statistics of tragedies which are caused wholly, or in part, by the consumption of alcohol.

1. 66% of all fatal accidents.
2. 70% of all murders.
3. 41% of all assaults.
4. 53% of all fire deaths.
5. 50% of all rapes.
6. 60% of all assaults on children.
7. 56% of all domestic violence.
8. 36% of traffic accidents involving pedestrians.
9. 45% of drownings.
10. More admissions to mental hospitals than any other cause.²²
11. The break-up of over half the marriages in the United States.²³
12. One in three suicides are alcohol related.²⁴

Common Arguments For Social Drinking

There are many members of the church today who argue for drinking “in moderation.” They agree that alcohol contributes to many moral and social problems, but they believe that the problems come from an abuse of alcohol, not from an “intelligent,” moderate use of it. They also will argue that the Bible forbids drunkenness, not drinking, thereby making a distinction between the two. What about drinking in moderation or “social drinking?” Is it sanctioned by the Scriptures?

Advocates of social consumption of alcohol will often argue that there is not a single passage in the Bible which explicitly says: “Thou shalt not drink alcoholic beverages.” While it is true that there is no such passage, it must be pointed out to those who thus argue that they are using poor hermeneutics. The Bible authorizes by what it says, **not** by what it does not say. The Bible does not say, “Thou shalt not” do any of the following, but all thinking people will agree they are wrong and are condemned by Scriptural principles:

1. Thou shalt not smoke pot.
2. Thou shalt not sniff glue.
3. Thou shalt not inject heroin in your veins.
4. Thou shalt not watch pornographic movies.²⁵

Other advocates of social drinking will actually go to the Bible to seek passages which they believe will support their case for social drinking. These people commonly make two fundamental, but very serious, mistakes: (1) They assume that the word “wine” in the Bible means the fermented juice of the grape, therefore, an alcoholic beverage which intoxicates; (2) They argue that this had to be the case because no means of preventing fermentation of grape juice was available in

the first century; therefore, it would be inevitable that early Christians drank intoxicated wine. Brother E. M. Zerr, in his commentary, although not an advocate of social drinking, makes this very argument:

In those days people did not have any process of preserving grape juice unfermented, hence the various passages on the subject only rule against drinking enough of the wine to become drunk.²⁶

Brother Burton Coffman in his commentary on John 2 makes the same serious blunder.²⁷ David Lipscomb, in the usually dependable **Gospel Advocate Commentaries**, in his comments on John 2, appears also to believe Jesus made fermented wine because he says it was not possible in those days to keep grape juice from fermenting.²⁸

That these esteemed brethren are wrong on this crucial point is shown by ancient writings which speak of the making and preserving of wine. William Patton mentions at least four methods of preventing the pure juice from fermenting:

1. Boiling: the water evaporates and such a large portion of sugar is left that fermentation can not occur. Grape juice will last for years in this state without spoiling. One has only to add the water that was boiled away to reconstitute the grape juice.²⁹
2. Sulphur would be added to the fresh grape juice or it would be exposed to the fumes of sulphuric acid for sometime. The juice would be kept sealed and cool until ready for use.³⁰
3. The juice of the grape would be kept at a temperature below 45 degrees. At this temp-

ature, the juice will not ferment. It might be placed in airtight jars in caves or springs or submerged in ponds or lakes.³¹

4. Filtration was another means which was used in ancient times to prevent fermentation which would produce alcoholic wine if not retarded. The gluten or yeast in the grape juice would be filtered out. Plutarch, who was born in the first century, refers to this practice: "Wine is rendered old or feeble when it is frequently filtered. The strength or the spirit being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink."³²

Patton quotes Professor Moses Stuart who said that:

Facts show that the ancients not only preserved their wine unfermented, but regarded it as of a higher flavor and finer quality than fermented wine.³³

As far as the assumption that the word translated "wine" in the Bible always meant "fermented" or "that which intoxicates," we can now see it is untrue because there were ways to prevent grape juice from spoiling. The word "wine" in the Bible is actually a generic word. It simply means "the juice of the grape." Whether it has reference to fermented wine which intoxicates or merely the juice of the grape has to be determined by the context. When the Bible speaks of wine in a bad sense, it likely means fermented wine. When wine is spoken of in a good sense, then it refers to the juice of the grape which has no ability to produce a case of intoxication.³⁴ Brother Otis Gatewood points out that no fewer than thirteen different Hebrew and Greek words are all

translated as “wine.” Only by studying the context can we determine how the word is being used in any given passage.³⁵

Advocates of social drinking who try to justify their practice by the New Testament commonly use two passages to make their case. We shall notice each of them briefly. The first of these passages is John, chapter two. This is the account of Jesus turning water to wine, the beginning of His miracles. It is alleged by advocates of social or moderate drinking that the wine mentioned here was alcoholic wine, that which had the capacity to make drunk if imbibed in large enough quantities. A number of commentators support the contention of social drinking advocates on this passage. We have already made reference to the positions of Burton Coffman, David Lipscomb and E. M. Zerr who argue that Jesus made alcoholic wine.

Those who contend that our Lord made that which could cause drunkenness must prove that the wine Jesus made was in fact alcoholic. We have already seen that the word “wine” in the Bible is generic. It simply refers to the juice of the grape. The alcoholic content or lack of it must be determined from the context. Patton correctly states:

...it is begging the question to assert it is intoxicating. As the narrative is silent on this point, the character of the wine can only be determined by the attendant circumstances—by the occasion, the material used, the person making the wine, and the moral influence of the miracle.³⁶

Are we not casting reflection upon the stainless character of our Lord to assert that He used His

miraculous power to produce somewhere between 120 and 160 gallons of wine, which had the power to intoxicate? Given the additional fact that the guests had already “well drunk” (or “drunk freely”-ASV), He certainly was creating, even encouraging, the possibility of drunkenness! Would He have made that which is so often and so strongly denounced in the Old Testament as a “mocker” and “deceiver?” Surely, no one would be so sacrilegious as to so blaspheme the Son of God?!³⁷

The second passage most commonly used by advocates of moderate or social drinking is I Timothy 5:23: “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” This passage is clearly speaking about wine for medicinal purposes. I know of no one who would contend that alcohol as a drug could not be prescribed by a doctor for medicinal purposes. This is **very different**, however, from using it for pleasurable, social, or recreational purposes.³⁸

Please note that Timothy was a non-drinker: “Be no longer a drinker of water (only).” It took a command from an inspired apostle to change that. Please note also that Paul said “use.” Does that not indicate it was not for social purposes? Further, he said “a little wine.” It was not to be drunk freely or often. Further, it was only “for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” But when all is said and done, the social drinking advocate must prove that the wine commanded by Paul was fermented in order for him to prove his case. Such can not be done!

Conclusion

Several years ago I came across a UPI press release which clearly, graphically drives home the evils of

alcohol. In Bradenton, Florida on September 12, 1964, Wilson Thomas stopped at a bar for a drink on his way home from work. It had been a hard day and Thomas was anxious to relax and to spend the evening with his son, Randall. After a few drinks, Thomas bought a bottle to carry home with him. As he neared his home, suddenly a small boy on a bicycle flew out from a side street directly in front of Thomas' car. Thomas attempted to swerve to keep from hitting the boy, but his senses were dulled and his reactions slowed by the alcohol in his body. His car struck the bicycle whose rider was killed instantly. Thomas panicked. He did not stop, but sped straight home.

Later, when the police came to arrest him, they found Wilson Thomas in his attic weeping and drinking. Only then did he learn the identity of the boy he had killed. It was his own son, Randall! Truly, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov. 20:1).

Endnotes

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31 Ibid., pp. 36,37.

32 Ibid., pp. 33,34

33 Ibid., p. 53.

34 Ibid., p. 132.

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Chapter 28

“Woe Unto Them That Are Wise In Their Own Eyes” (Isaiah 5:21)

Gary McDade

Wisdom is a quality related to knowledge, insight, and judgment. It is defined as “accumulated philosophy or scientific learning ... ability to discern inner qualities and relationships ... good sense” (Webster’s, p. 1335). Five books out of the sixty-six given by the inspiration of God are known as books of “Wisdom Literature.” They are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. The English word “wisdom” translates into ten Hebrew words and two Greek words. The Hebrew words are: **Binah** which means “understanding, intelligence,” **chakam** which means “to make wise, teach,” **chokmah** and **chokmoth** which mean “wisdom, skill,” **teem** which means “taste, reason, discretion,” **leb** which means “heart,” **ormah** which means “craftiness, subtilty, prudence,” **sakal** which means “to become wise or intelligent,” **sekul** which means “understanding, wisdom, meaning,” **tebunah** which means “understanding, skillfulness, reason,” and **tushiyyah** meaning “substance, wisdom.” The Greek words $\phi\rho\nu\eta\sigma\iota\zeta$ mean “thoughtfulness” and $\sigma\omicron\phi\iota\alpha$ means “wisdom, skill” (*Young’s Concordance*, pp. 1059,1060).

The Word of God in its entirety establishes the pure source of wisdom. The Psalmist declared:

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments, for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way (Psm. 119:97-104).

In a familiar teaching of Jesus on the wise and foolish builders, again the Word of God as the pure source of wisdom receives emphasis. The Savior said:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:24-27).

Wisdom is clearly a principal virtue in the Word of God. The Proverbs say, “Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all the getting get

understanding” (Prov. 4:7).

In the eighth century BC, Isaiah urged Israel to seek God’s Word as the pure source of wisdom in the place of trusting in themselves. The prophet Isaiah had a message from God for sinful Israel. It was a message of woe. He wrote,

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isa. 5:20-21).

Again, he wrote, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). In his commentary on Isaiah, Homer Hailey astutely observed,

The distinction between good and evil is clearly fixed in the moral character of God and is made known in His revelation to man; therefore, calling good evil, and evil good, does not make it so or alter eternal principles. The confusing of light and darkness in the mind of man leads to moral chaos; in the end the darkness cannot overcome the light; light will be the victor (John 1:5). However hard men may try to avoid the consequences, the momentary sweetness of sin must inevitably bear the bitter fruit of remorse and grief (p. 69).

Additionally, merely doing lip service to the Word of God could not cloak the sophistry of ancient Israel. Isaiah said,

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed

their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid (Isa. 29:13,14).

Homer Hailey discussed how similar present day conditions are to those depicted in the Book of Isaiah,

Today the general reaction to moral sins has been so toned down that there is no distinction between good and evil in the average mind. The conditions condemned by Isaiah's fourth woe seem to be the expression of our society today. Drinking is equated with a good time; as in pagan cultures adultery and fornication are considered simply the gratification of a natural or normal urge; rebellion against constituted authority (including the destruction of property) is looked upon as a normal phase through which one passes. But it is ever true that sin is defiance against God, rebellion against His will, and an effort to overthrow His moral standards; it is the substitution of the will of man, motivated by lust, the desires of the flesh and mind (p. 69).

Isaiah's task was to faithfully proclaim the Word of God. Gospel preachers who are loyal to their calling today being confronted with the same basic challenge as Isaiah will “preach the Word” (II Tim. 4:2). The late H. Leo Boles once wrote about “The Kind Of Preaching Needed Today.” He said,

There is need at the present time for preaching that will correct all the evils in the church and point sinners 'to the Lamb of God, that

take away the sin of the world.' The preaching needed today should encourage the cultivation of personal holiness and consecration to God. It should encourage all church member to be earnest, prayerful students of the Bible and willing to sacrifice and serve in the name of Christ as opportunity is offered them. The preaching that is needed today should stimulate liberal giving and freewill offering to support the work of the church. No preacher of the gospel should hold back the stern and stubborn truths of the gospel which teach God's people to be liberal with their means and to 'honor Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase.' (Prov. 3:9). The preaching needed today should teach God's people to present their bodies a living sacrifice unto God and to keep themselves unspotted from the world. If such preaching is done, there will be a revival in church activities and a larger increase in additions to the church (**Gospel Advocate**, March 31, 1932, p. 402).

More recently, Lindell Mitchell wrote in the **Firm Foundation**,

The forces of evil must never be allowed to drive truth into a defensive position. We must take the battle to the enemy. We must assault the citadel of his strength. We must never surrender.

The early disciples were as aggressive in correcting false brethren as they were in confronting Jews and pagans. Elymus withstood the preaching of the gospel so brazenly that Paul struck him blind (Acts 13:6-11). Then Luke wrote it down in a gospel paper and told everybody about it. Everyone who

reads Acts knows that Elymus committed this dark deed and what happened to him as a result. Why did Luke have to write it down? Why not be content with saying, ‘A certain brother in a certain city was struck blind for committing a certain offense’?

Paul recorded the delivery of Hymaneus and Alexander to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme (I Tim. 1:18-20). Why not report the sin and refrain from naming the sinners? No! Paul recorded the incident, preserving the names of the offenders in an eternal letter.

Paul urged brethren to reject Hymaneus and Philetus who erred concerning the resurrection (II Tim. 2:16-18). Did Paul sin? No! It was necessary that brethren be warned of this error. It was imperative that they know who was pushing it and where it was being pushed. Demas was forever marked as a worldling by the apostle Paul (II Tim. 4:10). Was that wrong? Was it legitimate to reveal this error so that brethren could be warned not to follow this bad example?

Paul named Alexander the coppersmith a false teacher who was hurtful to an apostle of Christ (II Tim. 4:14-17).

Diotrephes was publicly cited for his overbearing attitude (III John 9). Was that evil? Did John sin in naming this erring brother? Should he have tiptoed around Diotrephes?

Not even an apostle of Christ was above a rebuke when he involved himself in sinful conduct (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul recorded Peter’s transgression, after they had settled the matter locally. Was it necessary to record the event and tell everybody in the world about Peter’s mistake?

Race prejudice threatened to destroy the early church; Paul had to deal with the issue. The universal church had to know that not even an apostle could practice such a thing without an immediate rebuke.

Are you willing to follow Christ and his apostles? Paul says that we are to take decisive action to contain divisive error (Rom. 16:17). Specifically, he says we are to mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to biblical teaching and avoid them. Those who take the non-naming approach rebel against God's expressed will.

We rebuke sinners that others may fear (I Tim. 5:20). In the immediate content of this verse, Paul is instructing Timothy not to be hesitant to rebuke an elder who sins.

Christians are to withdraw themselves from disorderly brethren (II Thess. 3:6). Cancer cannot be allowed to progress unchecked without resulting in physical death. Nor can the cancer of sin be allowed to progress undisturbed in a congregation without causing spiritual death. Paul reminded the Corinthians that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (I Cor. 5:6). The only thing sin does when left to itself is get worse. Before you know it, the wicked will outnumber the righteous and throw them out of their own building! We better set for the defense of the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:17). Soldiers of Christ, Arise! (April, 1995, p. 18).

Edmund Burke, eighteenth century British statesman and orator, had been credited with the saying, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." The Word of God must be boldly and plainly declared to this generation. The truth of God

concerning the unique nature of the church of Christ must be preached in love so as to allow the distinctive nature of the Lord's body, the church, to be known to a lost and dying world. The ecumenical movement of the sixties has today produced widespread compromise among religious people that has virtually erased the protests of the Protestants against the Catholics and seen the rise in popularity of the so called Community Church with its grace alone creed. The late, lamented G.K. Wallace wrote in his **Autobiography And Retirement Sermons**,

Ecumenical fervor blurs important doctrinal distinctions which were once evident in all denominations, and, thereby, facilitates a closer cooperation on the surface. This movement has led to the adoption of an inclusive policy that embraces other religions on the basis of equality. Seeing all denominations worshipping together (including Hindus and Catholics) is regarded by many as a sign of progress, tolerance, and mutual love. Is this God's program or is it Satan's policy to plead for an indefinite and boundless toleration? Those of us who know the truth and have fought for it are unwilling to share enthusiasm about placing the mantle of charity over false doctrine, even though we find ourselves charged with sub-Christian conduct (p. 152).

If brother Wallace's observation of being "charged with sub-Christian conduct" for refusing to ignore false teaching seemed dramatic in the early eighties when that statement was published, then the nineties have seen even greater display of emotion against those who would oppose false teaching. A review of Douglas A. Foster's new book, **Will The Cycle Be Unbroken:**

Churches of Christ Face The 21st Century, which appeared in the February 1995 edition of **The Christian Chronicle**, told of the fabrication by Foster of six groups within churches of Christ. Among them are a group he called “the evangelicals.” These are members of the church of Christ who “...tend to identify strongly with the larger evangelical movement in the United States, and often with such mega-churches as Willow Creek in Chicago.” Should any voice of objection be raised concerning these brethren’s practices, which constitutes a departure from the apostle’s doctrine, Foster chides, “The biblical imperative to contend for the faith cannot be understood as a charter to destroy fellow Christians” (p. 20). According to Jim Baird, the reviewer of Foster’s new book, T. B. Larimore is offered as a case study in regard to restraint and kindness in compromising with these wayward members of the church.

The Willow Creek Church in Chicago with its 17,000 members that Foster mentions uses the term “church” ever so loosely. Plays, orchestrations, and even “light” rock music are characteristic of their services. A PBS broadcast of the Willow Creek phenomenon told of a concerted effort to downplay the traditional sermon because “sermons are not what the people want.” Teaching members of the church of Christ about such practices and warning them against such heresy is, according to Foster’s new book, “... To destroy a fellow Christian.” It seems like the apostle Peter hesitated not to warn fellow Christians, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Pet. 5:8). The destroying of fellow Christians is not done by endeavoring to turn them from apostate practices but

by the Devil in whose presence Foster and others are dozing.

Additionally, brother Wallace observed,

We must now look at the Bible to discover our attitude toward other religions. A sophist will accuse us of being traditionalists when we appeal to revelation. However, he himself appeals to revelation when it so suits him. If I am a traditionalist because I accept the entire Bible, he is a traditionalist because he accepts any portion of the Bible. How could a man accept one part of God’s revelation and reject the other unless he is determined to do as he pleases? (p. 154)

A significant book has come from the pen of Thomas B. Warren in recent years (1986) which deals with the problem of compromise which seems to be engulfing the church. The title is **The Bible Only Makes Christians Only and The Only Christians**. The subtitle reads, “The blood-bought church of Christ—and the unity which is in harmony with the eternal purpose of God—studied in the light of the prayer of Jesus (John 17:20,21).” A couple of years ago brother Warren told me that of the books he has written this one clearly is the most important. He said, “Many people in the church will agree with the first part of the title, ‘The Bible only makes Christians only’ but not with the second part of the title, ‘And the only Christians.’” As shown already from the statement of Douglas Foster, one item on the agenda of the new unity movement is the promotion of the view that “we are Christians only but not the only Christians.” In a chapter entitled, “The Insidious Error Of Agnosticism,” brother Warren wrote,

Within the past few years, I have become no

little disturbed by some of the statements which I have been hearing and reading. The statements go something like this: 'None of us is infallible. Every man makes mistakes. Therefore, none of us can ever be certain that he is right about anything. No one can ever be certain that what he believes is the truth. Therefore, it is clear that none of us ought ever to say that anything which he himself believes is right or that anything which any one else believes and teaches is wrong. Since none of us is infallible, we all, for all any of us know, may be 100% wrong about everything. The main thing is that we be loving and kind to one another. Let us remember that great men differ as to what the Bible teaches, so none of us should demonstrate that he is so arrogant, presumptuous, hypocritical, and divisive as to declare emphatically that one doctrine is true and that another is false. What each man should do is to say, 'I think or believe that what I teach is true, but I do not know that it is true. Since other men—who are just as sincere and intelligent as I am—strongly differ with what I believe and teach, it seems clear that I should not say that I am right and that they are wrong. Rather, I must realize that, in a sense, we 'live and let live.' We must love one another and fellowship one another even though we differ in our views as to what the Bible teaches' (p. 14).

In summarizing the chapter in which the preceding comments appeared, brother Warren wrote,

... It seems clear to us that, of all the errors which are currently wreaking such havoc in the Lord's church, the error which is involved in agnosticism is doing the greatest harm of

any error presently espoused by members of the church. This is because the matter of knowledge is so fundamental. If no one can know that God exists, that the Bible is the word of God, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that men must believe in, love and obey the gospel in order to be saved, then nothing else really matters (p. 18).

In a recent **Spiritual Sword**, Alan Highers wrote,

In this day, of course, it is not uncommon to hear about members leaving the church and uniting with a denomination. The change may be because of business interest, social advantage, marital harmony, or life style. In any case, their action represents a lack of understanding about the nature and identity of the church. We are reaping the harvest of twenty-five years of non-distinctive preaching. Many of our young people no longer know the difference between the church of the New Testament and the ecclesiastical kingdoms built by men (October 1994, p. 1).

In the review of Foster's book from the **Christian Chronicle** mentioned earlier, the name of T. B. Larimore appeared in a context that would suggest that brother Larimore's extremely kind demeanor would prohibit him from ever taking issue with denominationalism. "Contending for the faith" was placed right alongside of "destroying fellow Christians." One posing as a church historian expert in all matters concerning T. B. Larimore should actually read one of his sermons. He has a very excellent sermon preserved in a book called **Letters And Sermons Of T. B. Larimore** which was edited by F. D. Srygley and published in 1950 entitled interestingly enough in light

of the present discussion, “Contending For The Faith” (pp. 261-272). In that sermon after very persuasively urging men in service to God, especially preachers, to be gentle, brother Larimore wrote,

We must contend for what? Not for Campbellism, nor for Mormonism; for it was seventeen hundred years after Jude wrote this before Campbellism and Mormonism was known in the world or had an existence, Not for Judaism, for Judaism had already been abolished. Jesus took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. ‘Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.’ (Col. 2:14). ‘Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace’ (Eph. 2:15). Not for our personal preferences, our opinions, our hobbies, our whims, our systems, our fancies, or our fads, because, if that had been the case, that would necessarily have led to confusion and strife, which God condemns. Not that. What was it? Not for any creeds, discipline, confessions of faith; they had not so much as been dreamed of, but ‘for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.’ The Revised Version throws a little light on that, ‘for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.’ That for which they had to contend had, once for all, been delivered unto them; therefore nothing more modern than God’s revelation to man. Man may contend for his own personal preferences, his fancies, or his fads; he may contend for Campbellism or Mormonism; he may contend for any creed or all the creeds in

Christendom since God's revelation to man has been made, and spend threescore years and ten earnestly contending for these things, and never have the right to quote this language from Jude in justification of his course; and why? There is nothing in that to justify him to contend for these things. We should all earnestly contend 'for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.' Certainly this is so simple that every soul beneath the stars responsible in the sight of God ought to be able to understand it in a moment, and we can tell whether we are in line with this demand of Heaven by the way we are living, by the way we are pleading, earnestly contending for the faith that had been, once for all, delivered unto the saints, standing fast in one spirit and with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, then, leaning upon the strong arm of Providence, we may rest our souls on this book for authority for what we are doing; but if we get away from that, be in any other state, contending for anything else, any system more modern than the book of Jude, any party or system raised or established on earth subsequent to the day when Jude wrote this book, then we are out of harmony, out of line, with these things, and there is no authority coming from high Heaven for one word we utter, for one syllable we write (pp. 269-271).

No Christian faithful to the Lord's will would set out to “destroy fellow Christians” by making a pretense of “earnestly contending for the faith.” And, it is inconceivable that a Christian faithful to the Lord's will would compromise his convictions by deadly silence on such a vital matter of faith as the unity of believers in

contrast with denominationalism and its insuperable divisions. Using the kind and gentle character of T. B. Larimore to suggest that opposition to denominationalism at the close of the twentieth century is to “destroy fellow Christians,” expresses colossal ignorance of what T. B. Larimore did in an effort to rid the world of denominationalism at the close of the nineteenth century.

In 1889, F. D. Srygley summarized the labors of **Larimore And His Boys** in a book published by the Gospel Advocate Publishing Company. The summary shows that unlike Foster and others now making up the unity-in-diversity movement, Larimore and his boys made no compromises with denominationalism. Srygley wrote,

Larimore and his boys, with others who cooperated with them, caught the spirit of the contest and carried the revolution into Alabama. This idea of exalting the Scriptures as the only authoritative guide and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice in religious matters, was what did the work. To the extent men accepted this idea they modified their excesses and turned away from their superstitious dreams and vague fancies in religion. This idea was fundamental to all religion and revolutionary in its tendency. It permeated all churches, and affected, more or less, all society outside of the churches. Those who grasped its full import saw at once that it could never be harmonized with existing religious creeds and denominations, and therefore they carried it to its logical and inevitable consequences at once, in rejecting all creeds and declining to unite with any denomination. They stood aloof from all

denominational organizations, preached the gospel, baptized believers, assembled every Lord's day for prayers, exhortations, reading the scriptures and breaking bread in holy communion. They were not Baptists, Presbyterians, or Methodists; but Christians—disciples of Christ—brethren in Christ. They did not belong to any church in the denominational sense, and yet they assembled, to observe the appointments of the New Testament, there they constituted a church of Christ in the New Testament sense (pp. 307,308).

Isaiah's warning, “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes,” must be heeded in the churches of Christ today because there are powerful and influential “change agents,” as William Woodson calls them, in the church who are adamantly bent on changing, redefining, and restructuring the churches of Christ. In the past ten years these “change agents” have not been swayed from their course of changing the church by earnest, loving pleas to go “back to the Bible.” Many faithful members of the church know something is going on that is different than what they have been accustomed to in the past. But, so many preachers they once knew to be able and faithful proclaimers of the word of God have been implicated as false teachers now, and the changes are coming so fast and furiously that unless a full-time effort is made to keep up with them it seems nigh unto impossible to stay informed. Four books that have been published in recent years that are scholarly and thoroughly documented and will help preachers, elders, teachers, and members be informed are: **Behold The Pattern** by Goebel Music (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991), **The Restoration: The Winds Of**

Change edited by Jim Laws (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993), **Change Agents And Churches of Christ** by William Woodson (Athens, AL: School of Bible Emphasis, 1994), and **Shall We Restructure The Church** edited by Curtis Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School Of Preaching, 1995).

Many are looking for a way to prepare the churches of Christ for the twenty-first century. Many are being led away from the Word of God by those who are “wise in their own eyes.” God is never pleased when men depart from His will. Isaiah wrote,

Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble,
and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their
root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom
shall go up as dust: because they have cast
away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised
the word of the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 5:24).

Abstracts of four timely articles should provide an overview of what the church is facing today by those within it who are unashamedly “wise in their own eyes” and are setting out to depart from “the faith once delivered unto all the saints.” (An “abstract” is “a summary of points presented in skeletal form”). The articles will be presented as they appeared chronologically. The first is from **The Spiritual Sword** (October 1993). The theme of the issue was “The Winds of Change,” and it contains many valuable articles. The editorial by Alan Highers lists five areas those “wise in their own eyes” are out to change: Change of the role of women in the public assembly, change in the emphasis on baptism for the remission of sins, change in our opposition to instrumental music in worship, change in the way we view the undenominational nature of the

church, and change in regard to the nature of Bible authority (pp. 4,5). Secondly, William Woodson lists four areas “change agents” are eager to invade: (1) The false charge is being made that the church is “sectarian to the core; and this sectarianism must change!” (2) A sweeping redefinition of the church that may fairly be characterized as open fellowship with the denominations. (3) Restyling of worship so as to include a full spectrum of innovations from dancing to absolution. (4) Belief in a “God-given vision” for change that urges members to change or begin new congregations (**Change Agents**, pp. 92-105).

Thirdly, Wayne Jackson wrote about “The Church Under Seige–From Within” in the **Christian Courier**. He mentions five things he calls “false ideologies that are driving wedges into the body of Christ.” They are: (1) “A growing tendency toward genuine modernism within the church of God.” (2) “A novel philosophy of biblical interpretation, commonly referred to as a ‘new hermeneutic.’” (3) “A newly discovered enchantment with denominationalism.” (4) Ridicule of any form of worship that conforms to the biblical pattern and replacing it with “a jazzed-up, entertainment-oriented worship format that is more attractive to the world.” (5) The feminist movement in the church–“some have openly stated that they are not bothered by the prospect of women elders, or ladies occupying the pulpits (or otherwise leading the worship) in our assemblies” (October 1994, p. 1). Fourth, and finally, there is Tom Holland’s article, “Liabilities Of Liberalism” which originally appeared in **Vigil** in January of 1995. His article deals with five items: (1) Limiting God by emphasizing His grace and neglecting His wrath. (2) A distorted view of man which insists

that “God should cater to man, meet his needs, make him happy, isolate him from pain, and help him to feel good about himself.” (3) “A subjective and relativistic view of Scripture” known as the new hermeneutic. (4) “A narrow view of salvation” where “man’s salvation is viewed as an unconditional act of God” or salvation by grace alone. (5) “A denominational view of the church” (pp. 7,8).

Therefore, the evidence is strong and comes from reliable and respected sources that presently there continue to be those who are “wise in their own eyes” that are making a concerted effort to “call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20). The word “woe” means “deep sorrow, grief, or affliction.” In the Bible the word woe is often used, particularly by the Old Testament prophets, as an exclamation expressing dismay or misfortune (Isa. 3:9-11; Jer. 10:19; Amos 5:18). In the New Testament Jesus pronounced woes on the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt. 11:21), on the scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers (Luke 11:24-44), and on the one who betrayed Him (Mark 14:21) (**Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary**, p. 1105). A major lesson from the major prophets for the church today is do not betray the Son of man.

Chapter 29

Woe Unto Him That Striveth Against His Maker

Barry Gilreath, Jr.

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!
Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of
the earth. Shall the clay say to him that
fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work,
He hath no hands? (Isa. 45:9)

I am delighted to be here today and to have this opportunity to deliver a message to you on this timely topic. I am very pleased with the subject matter that the speakers have been asked to address. “Major Lessons of the Major Prophets” is an important and needed study. No doubt the lectureship book will be a tremendous asset for many years to elders, preachers, teachers, and other Christians in their preparation to teach God’s word.

The Setting Of The Message

The theme I have been assigned to discuss comes from the writings of Isaiah. The setting of Isaiah’s prophecy precedes both the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. The divine origin of Isaiah’s message is manifested in part by the numerous prophecies that were uttered regarding these future superpowers. These prophecies had a direct influence on the Lord’s people. Not only would the Jews be carried away into captivity, but in time they would be restored to their native land

and the temple of Jehovah would be rebuilt.

The passage we will be examining in detail is located in the forty-fifth chapter of the prophet's book. Although several purposes could be noted for the composition of this section, it seems clear that the inspired writer's purpose was two-fold. He is seeking to pronounce judgment upon those who strive against Jehovah and at the same time prepare God's people for the trials they would soon experience. The writer accomplishes his goals by intertwining the dreaded promises of judgment with the glorious assurance of restoration. Although the end result of the Lord's plan was for the benefit of His people, He met with strong opposition from Isaiah's audience.

The actions God would soon take were not because of any single event or act demonstrated by His people. Rather, they were the result of Judah's overall spiritual decay. The Lord's children had become rebellious in a number of ways. Their hearts were hardened with pride. They had placed themselves in a position above God Himself. As the Lord revealed His plans, they questioned and ridiculed His judgment. In doing such they were placing their trust in human wisdom as opposed to divine enlightenment. Thus, the Lord would punish His ungrateful people. They would fall prey to the aggressors of Assyria and then to Babylon. God's justice would bring judgment to His children, but His grace would offer restoration. God would raise up a savior by the name of Cyrus (45:1), who would later return the Jews to Judah and rebuild the temple of God (II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1,2).

Warning Of Woe

Apparently from the prophet's rebuke (45:9), God's

people were complaining or he was anticipating their murmuring over what would soon befall them and the means by which they would be redeemed. This prompted the prophet to warn,

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!
Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of
the earth. Shall the clay say to him that
fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work,
He hath no hands?

It is this text that is the focal point for our discussion. This prolific passage introduces us to one of the great truths revealed in Isaiah’s prophetic message. The truth I speak of is the folly of opposing God. A careful examination of the verse will help to bring a greater understanding of the prophet’s book, as well as offer valuable application to modern-day readers.

The Significance Of Striveth

The Hebrew word **raab** (striveth-KJV), can be defined as “to contend, strive, or quarrel.” Rarely is the word used when describing physical combat. More often it describes those who battle with words.¹ In Genesis 26:19-20, **raab** is used to describe the behavior of the servants of Isaac and the herdsmen of Gerar. They strove with one another over water. The imagery of men wrangling with one another is unpleasant to say the least. However, the accusation of the prophet Isaiah is more serious. To strive against mankind is one thing. To strive against the Creator of mankind is unthinkable!

The employment of the word **raab** in Isaiah 45:9 implies that the Jews were voicing strong opposition to Jehovah regarding His future plans. Edward J. Young suggests that Judah was arguing with the Lord to prove

that what he had promised would not come to pass.² One can just picture God's people murmuring and arguing, "What is Jehovah thinking by sending a heathen named Cyrus to redeem the people of God?" A.R. Fausset suggests that not only were the Jews objecting to their captivity and the means by which redemption would be achieved, but ultimately they were objecting to God's adoption of the whole gentile world as His spiritual Israel.³ This seems very plausible. It was bad enough that they would be forced into captivity and redeemed by a pagan king, but to have their special status with God diminished was unthinkable to the Jews.

The consequences of God's pronounced judgment prompted Judah to respond in debate with Almighty God. Such attempts were foolish (Isa. 55:8-9; 2:3), and were evidence of their arrogance. God's people needed to reconsider their position in respect to Deity (Isa. 6:5; 64:6). Man is only a finite and fallible creation who is dependent upon the Lord for his very existence (Isa. 45:12). God's children had lost sight of that truth.

Foolishness Of Striving With God

The prophet illustrated the foolishness of contending with the Lord by offering two similar analogies. First, Judah is described as a mere potsherd among potsherds. All men are made of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). Judah was no different. Although their heritage pointed to God, their righteousness often pointed to themselves. Thus, the God who made them would break them. In fact, this could suggest why the inspired writer referred to them as broken pieces of pottery. Their destruction was inevitable. What the Lord said would come to pass! Judah had been created as a beautiful

earthen vessel for the purpose of glorifying God, but in their current state of rebellion they were marred by sin and useless to the Potter. Thus, they would be broken and reduced to a mere potsherd.

The prophet then offered a similar illustration of a piece of clay and a potter. The clay is pictured as arguing with the maker regarding its circumstances. “Why did you make me as such? Why are you going about your work in such a way?” The clay had no basis for argument with the potter since it was he who gave it form to begin with. By arguing with the potter the clay demonstrated an unthankful and haughty spirit. This was the attitude of the Jews to whom Isaiah wrote. It was as if Judah thought they knew better than the Lord Himself.⁴ By questioning the wisdom of the Lord they were in essence casting doubt upon the very nature of deity. Their humanistic reasoning and haughty spirit prompted Isaiah to utter his warning of woe.

Ridiculing God’s Divine Plan

The phrase, “He hath no hands,” is an absurdity being hurled toward God. Not only were they questioning Jehovah, but they were also ridiculing His divine plan. They were arguing that the Almighty was acting as if He had no hands, bungling the job.⁵ The very thing created was asserting the inability of the Heavenly Potter to fashion His work.⁶ How foolish for the clay to deny the ability of the Maker. The clay (man) is totally indebted and dependent upon the Potter (God). Even reduced as a mere potsherd, thanks and praise should have been given to the Maker. It was only by grace of the Maker that the clay had been molded into an earthen vessel to begin with. Humility would have produced a

response of gratitude and repentance. The pride of Isaiah's audience was reflected in their ungrateful and contentious rebuke of the Creator.

Mankind's History Of Striving With God

Mankind has had a history of striving or wrangling with the Lord. The father and mother of us all strove first in opposition to Jehovah by ignoring His prohibition regarding the Tree of Life, an act which ushered sin into the world (Gen. 3). Consider humanity during the life of Noah. People were so perverse and wicked that they had to be destroyed from the face of the earth. Because mankind strove against the Lord, God said His spirit would not always strive with man (Gen. 6:5). One would think that the Jews would eventually learn vicariously the lessons that were taught to their forefathers, but such was not the case. Consider Jeremiah who described the flagrant rebellion of God's people. Their sin was similar to their ancestors who had gone before. They were presented with the way of the Lord and refused to walk according to righteousness (Jer. 6:16-19). Example after example could be given to illustrate humanity's persistent striving against God. In fact the preaching of the prophets as a whole is evidence to man's contentious and rebellious ways. It should not come as any surprise that Isaiah's audience was any different (Isa. 42:24). Even though they could read in the scriptures of the folly of questioning or striving against the Lord, every generation seemingly must receive its own stripes of punishment. Such was the case with those whom Isaiah addressed.

Murmuring And Striving Go Hand In Hand

In almost every incidence where God's people strove

against Him, there is the evidence of murmuring and questioning of Jehovah’s divine will. Consider the account of Moses and the Children of Israel as they wandered in the desert Zin (Num. 20:1-13). Water was scarce. No doubt they were hot, thirsty and tired. However, rather than relying on the Lord in faith to overcome this obstacle, they did what many do today and complained to the messenger, Moses, regarding God’s divine will. They expressed remorse over the fact that God had not allowed them to die earlier and even suggested that they would have been better off had God left them in Egypt. How ungrateful they were. How arrogant they were in assuming that they knew more about the “clay” than the “potter” Himself. Despite the great miracle of the parting of waters which earlier had enabled their escape from the Egyptians, they, like so many of their predecessors and descendants were lacking in faith regarding God’s divine plan. Once again the Lord was “bungling” the job. He was going about his plan as if he had no hands.

Isaiah addressed the descendants of these murmurers. The prophet’s audience was not any different in their attitude toward God than their predecessors. They murmured over the Lord’s revealed will, questioning His divine wisdom. Although God would punish His people for their rebellious ways, he would send a redeemer by the name of Cyrus to bring restoration. Rather than demonstrating a heart of repentance and rejoicing in the gracious gift of the future savior, their response was to argue, murmur, and insult the Lord of heaven.

How foolish it is to strive in opposition to the Lord. We will produce no change in His divine plan simply

because do not see the rationale behind His will (James 1:17). The mandates He gives will not be changed by our frail reasoning which is founded upon human ignorance (Isa. 55:8-9). To argue with the will of Jehovah demonstrates a lack of faith in the Potter of humanity. It reveals a heart of pride. It is only when we are filled with pride that we tend to murmur, complain, argue and strive against the Lord.⁷

Modern-Day Wranglers

One can readily see the application of Isaiah's inspired words to our generation today. The problem of people wrangling with the Lord over his plans is still a problem that must be dealt with today. Though we are far removed from the prophet's original audience by hundreds of years, his message is just as relevant and applicable to us as it was to Judah. Whether the subject is some aspect of morality or a specific doctrinal teaching regarding the church, the Lord has His opponents He must contend with.

If mankind would only begin to see himself for what he truly is, a hunk of clay with a neck tie, many of the challenges that the church faces today would vanish. If man would only remember who he is in respect to the Potter, there would be quibbling over issues that the Creator has already settled. If men would simply swallow their pride and walk humbly there would not be the challenges by modern-day wranglers over marriage, divorce and remarriage, worship, fellowship, reverence, modesty, and other areas that men desire to argue about with the Lord. If every baptized believer would only reverence Jehovah as the prophets did in the long ago, there would be no attempts from within to

welcome change agents into the body of Christ today. If men would only learn vicariously from their forefathers' foolish endeavors to strive against the Lord, many of the destructive consequences could be avoided.

Conclusion

The message of Isaiah needs to be sounded from the roof tops, “Woe unto him who striveth with his maker.” People need to see the folly of attempting to thwart or redesign the Lord’s divine plans. They need to understand the foolishness of demeaning divine mandates. Rather than attempting to justify their own code of righteousness, men need to accept the Lord’s way of righteousness. Man never has nor ever will enter the arena of debate with the Lord and come out triumphant. Every foe He has encountered has utterly fallen in defeat. This is why Isaiah could so boldly warn, “Woe!” Woe is expressed because of their inevitable defeat and horrid consequences for engaging the Lord in battle.

How foolish it is to oppose the Lord. The Lord’s enemies will ultimately be shamed for their feeble efforts (Isa. 45:24). Faithful children of God will not strive against the Lord’s revealed will. To do so is to find oneself under the condemnation of the prophet’s warning of woe. Those who are of spiritual Israel will heed the warning of Isaiah and walk in the Lord’s way (Isa. 2:3).

Endnotes

1 William Wilson, **Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies**, (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.): 424.

2 Edward J. Young, **The Book Of Isaiah**, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972) 3; 203.

3 A.R. Fausset, **Job-Isaiah**, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Publishing, 1866) 2: 707.

4 H.C. Leupold, **Exposition of Isaiah**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968): 124-5.

5 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on Isaiah**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985): 381.

6 Young, **Isaiah**, 203-4.

7 G. Rawlinson, **Isaiah**, The Pulpit Commentary, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers), 10:175.

Chapter 30

**Women In The Major
Prophets (Isa. 3:16–4:4)**

Terry Joe Kee

From the beginning of time God has expected all His creation to do the work which He has given it to do. From the smallest insect to the largest dinosaur everything has a purpose. God has not placed the sun in the heavens, the grass and trees upon the earth, the waters in the seas, or anything else in its place without purpose. Of all God's creation only man has disappointed Him.

Only once during the six days of creation did God ever say something was not good. It was not good that man should be alone (Gen. 2:18). God determined to make a "help meet" for the man. Man needed one who was suited for him. Everything about the woman formed a complement to the man. No man is totally complete without a woman.

Eve was taken from the side of Adam. She must remain by his side for the home and family to be what it ought to be. Neither the home, the civil government nor the church will ever be all that it can and should be without women accepting their role and doing the work they have been given to do.

Many of the great and notable characters of the Old Testament are women. Noah's wife stood by his side

while he prepared the ark, preached to a rebellious world, gathered the animals, entered the ark, and finally enjoyed seeing herself and her children saved from the ravages of the flood (Gen. 6-8). These same characteristics are seen in the wives of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is so great and notable an Old Testament character that she is mentioned in the great faith chapter in the New Testament (Heb. 11:11). Peter encourages Christian women married to unbelievers to follow the example of Sarah's love and respect for Abraham in order to reach their husbands with the gospel (I Peter 3:6).

We would all do well to remember all the godly women who accepted their role and work and fulfilled the purpose which God gave them. Rebekah, Jochebed, Hannah, Ruth, Vashti, Esther, and many others in the days leading up to the time of the major prophets, have distinguished themselves in the service of the Lord.

How Are Women Described By The Major Prophets?

The words of Isaiah in our text are typical of how the major prophets describe women. Isaiah says they are "haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet" (Isa. 3:16). Later Isaiah says they are "at ease" and "careless" (Isa. 32:9-11). Ezekiel said they were "lewd" (Ezek. 23:44).

These "daughters of Zion" were haughty. They were proud and arrogant. The kings and princes have already been described by Isaiah as proud and arrogant, but when this reaches down to the woman, it shows just how wicked and corrupt a nation has become. Whenever

a nation's women have become wholly proud, vain, self-centered and arrogant, that nation is languishing in moral decay. The heart of every nation is its mothers and wives. They are the threads which are woven together to hold a society in fact. Solomon's words refer to women equally as to men when he says, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Their “stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet” describes one whose concern is the adorning of the outer woman. These things describe the ways they adorned themselves to attract their lovers. This is not the adorning which our heavenly Father desires. Such may attract the world, but not the Father. Our Father looks for the adorning of the heart. Peter said that a wife who is seeking to reach her husband with the gospel must not try to win him by adorning the outside (I Peter 3:3). Paul's instruction to Timothy is to teach women to adorn themselves in modest apparel (I Tim. 2:9). If we would have the attractive power we need we must adorn ourselves in the doctrine of Christ (Titus 2:10).

Women during the days of the major prophets had turned themselves from godliness, shamefacedness, and sobriety. They were anointing themselves with eye-shadows, rings on their fingers, and bells about their ankles. All these things were their way of attracting the world.

The women of Isaiah's day had become “careless” (Isa. 32:9-11). They were sitting at ease and giving little concern or care for the lives they were living or the destruction that was before them. They sat at ease

because they refused to listen to the instruction of the Lord (Isa. 32:9). Their problems did not arise from not having the word of God heralded in the land, but their refusal to listen. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others were crying out for them to repent, but they would not listen.

Their vineyards were drying up (Isa. 32:10). The singing and merriment they had been enjoying at the expense of godliness and righteousness was soon to turn to desolation, poverty, and waste. They had enjoyed wine, mirth, and song. Their vintage would spoil. Their cows would not give milk. Their fields would not produce its bounty (cf. Ezek. 16:48-49). They did not understand or see that they were dying!

These women were “lewd” (Ezek. 23:44). This Hebrew word denotes having a plan or scheme to engage in wickedness, mischievousness, and heinous crimes. The idea of lewdness is more than the act. It is the thought that leads to the action. Women during this time had filled their minds with every kind of vile, wicked, corrupt, vain sin imaginable. Their minds were as those of Noah’s day, whose “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). They had become the basest and vilest offenders standing before God.

The Sinfulness Of These Women

No one can read through the pages of God’s word and find more heinous wickedness and ungodliness than can be found in the “daughters of Zion” described by the major prophets. They were proud, arrogant, haughty, immodest, careless, and lewd. They were not satisfied with destroying themselves. They were determined to take others with them.

Women had begun to rule (Isa. 3:12). They had left the home, their children and husbands and had taken over a nation. They had forgotten the role God had given them in the beginning. They did not heed all the admonitions of Solomon in the Proverbs. They caused the people to err and destroyed the way of safe passage through this world (Isa. 3:12). The people perished having forgotten the wise man’s words, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Prov. 29:18).

These women had a vision for the land, but their vision did not include God. They prophesied to the people, but they were false prophets. Ezekiel says,

...set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart... (Ezek. 13:17).

Some women have proven themselves to be faithful prophetesses of the Lord. Deborah, who judged Israel and saved them from the Canaanites, was a faithful prophetess (Judg. 4:4). Anna was the prophetess who pointed the Jews to Jesus at His birth (Luke 2:36-38). These women were neither descendants of Deborah nor ancestors of Anna. They were lewd women who followed in the steps of the false prophets who cried out, “Peace, Peace” when there was no peace.

A true prophet is one who speaks for God. These women spoke for themselves. They worked, not to save Israel, but to satisfy their own desires and lusts. They played the harlot. What could be more disturbing to a husband than to have his wife committing fornication with anyone and everyone?

The labors they expended were not to glorify the God of heaven and earth, but to glorify their man-made

gods. The closest thing to domestic labors these women did was kneading dough. This effort was not for a husband, children, or even for themselves, but to feed and appease their idols. Here Jeremiah describes the family working together in evil. He said,

The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger (Jer. 7:18).

Rather than mothers loving and caring for their children, they were boiling and eating them (Lam. 4:10). There is no more pleasant sight than a loving mother with her child. What can be more unsightly than mothers who destroy their little ones? This certainly is despicable, criminal, corrupt, and ruthless. But is it more vile than child abuse which has become so rampant in our civilized “Christian” nation? The vilest offense imaginable today is the murdering of innocent little ones in abortion. Do the daughters of Zion still live today? Do we have a nation of lewd women who kill their own to please themselves?

The burning of incense was never mentioned until the giving of the law of Moses. Incense was burned before the throne of God and typified the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8). The women of the major prophets burned their incense to their idols (Jer. 44:15). Their adoration, praise, and glory was directed to idols.

Vows which their forefathers had taken to follow Jehovah had been forsaken to follow the inventions of their own making. The only vows which they considered sacred were those they made to their gods (Jer. 44:25). These rash vows they determined to keep and forsook

the true and living God.

In all their sins and abominations they were not ashamed. Jeremiah said,

Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers (Jer. 44:9-10).

The sins of these women were not committed in a dark corner, but openly. They were not ashamed of their sins. They did not mourn over their wickedness. They had so seared their hearts that they could not even blush (Jer. 6:15; 8:12).

They were so deeply mired in sins that they could not retain God in their knowledge. They did not forget God, because they had never known Him. They had lost any knowledge of God they had. This is Isaiah’s bewildering question of how such a thing can happen:

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee (Isa. 49:15).

What Will Happen To Such Women?

When a nation is consumed with wives and mothers who are proud, arrogant, self-serving, vile, wicked, idolatrous, careless, whorish, and forgetful, what is ahead? What can such a nation expect in days to come?

When God brings His judgment upon them what will be their end? What does God say will happen to such women?

God pleads with them to listen (Isa. 32:9). He has always cried out, seeking to save the lost. Our heavenly Father does not want anyone to be lost (I Tim. 2:4; II Peter 3:9). As vile as these women were, God plead for them to open their ears and hearts to His word. At any point in their villainy, had they returned to God, He would have forgiven them.

What lesson was He crying out for these people to hear?

Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women,
and let your ear receive the word of his mouth,
and teach your daughters wailing, and every
one her neighbour lamentation (Jer. 9:20).

When Jesus described those who would prepare themselves for the coming kingdom, He said, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). This is the mourning and lamentation God is calling for the women to teach. They needed to mourn and weep over their sinful, wretched condition. Later Jeremiah calls for them to gird themselves with sackcloth and “cry ye daughters of Rabbah” (Jer. 49:3). Godly sorrow is not repentance (II Cor. 7:10), but it works repentance. No soul has repented who was not filled with godly sorrow over his miserable sinful condition.

God promises He,

...shall have washed away the filth of the
daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the
blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by
the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of
burning (Isa. 4:4).

God one day will bring judgment on all these vile women. Those who are filthy in sin will be burned as one would destroy a filthy rag.

Does this mean they were without hope? Were there any good and faithful women who would be blessed by God? Certainly so! Not all the women of the land were vile and wicked. Ezekiel said that when God brought His punishment upon Israel and Jerusalem for her sins, there would be a “remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters” (Ezek. 14:22).

Isaiah pointed to a day when God’s children would be given a name better than that of sons and daughters (Isa. 56:5). This name would be given in the house of God. It would be an everlasting name. The name worn by God’s children in His everlasting kingdom is “Christian,” a name far superior to “daughter.”

This good name would come as the result of a woman. In Jeremiah 31:22 Jeremiah portrays the virgin birth of Christ. He says, “The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.” This is not a reference to any man, but to a man of power and might. This points to Jesus. The hope of the “daughters of Zion” could only be truly realized in the virgin born Son of God.

Their hope of a better land, a better name, and bountiful blessings rested upon the One born of a woman.

What Lessons Should We Learn From These Women?

One of the highest compliments Jesus ever paid to anyone was when He said of the woman who anointed His feet, “She hath done what she could” (Mark 14:3-9).

Women have so many talents and abilities which need to be used in the work of the Lord. Elders who allow those talents to stand idly by while the work suffers are not wise shepherds (cf. Matt. 20:1-16).

These “daughters of Zion” set forth the dangers women continue to face in the house of God. We must learn the lessons and be admonished by the corrupt lives of the women of the major prophets (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11).

Women of any age who leave the work and role God has given them work to destroy the work of the Lord. The family of God cannot exist and function without godly women. The church needs women who will teach, not publicly in the presence of men, usurping authority over the man (I Tim. 2:12; I Cor. 14:34-35), but in every area and circumstance where she can. Do not forget Philip’s four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). There is a realm where women can and even must teach. Women must be working to teach and mold the hearts and minds of little ones to love the Lord. Women ought to be working to convert other women to the cause of Christ. Older Christian women ought to be teaching younger Christian women to be good wives and mothers (Titus 2:3-5). Christian wives ought to be working with their husbands to reach the lost of our communities just like Aquila and Priscilla labored together (Acts 18:24-26). Christian mothers and grandmothers need to be teaching their children the way of the Lord (II Tim. 1:5). Commonly there are many more opportunities for women to teach within the realm, role and purpose God has given, than there are women who will teach.

Let not even one Christian wife and mother follow

the example of the “daughters of Zion” and leave the role and highly elevated plain upon which God has placed them, to usurp authority from the man and rule over him (Isa. 3:12). May there not be one “daughter of Zion” to arise teaching things which do not originate in the mind of God, but in the hearts of wickedness (Ezek. 13:17). Let every Christian woman be a descendant of Deborah and Anna. Let them all speak where God has spoken and be silent where He is silent.

Give us Christian wives and mothers who seek to glorify God and not self. Let every Christian woman adorn herself in the doctrine of Christ and not in the attire of spiritual harlotry. What can be more beautiful than a Christian woman draped in the ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit in all holiness and chastity (I Peter 3:1-6)?

Dear Father, give us Christian women who are not given to idolatry. Give us wives and mothers who glorify and beautify our homes with their labors. Give us mothers who work to build up and strengthen our children, not those who will devour our little ones (Lam. 4:10). May we find women who keep the vows they make to their husbands and more importantly to the God of heaven and earth. Give us those who mourn over their sins and never become so hardened they cannot blush (Jer. 6:15). Give us those who will always and forever retain God in knowledge and remembrance.

Finally, may the careless be made careful; the haughty, humble; the wicked, wise; the lewd, renewed; and those attracting the world, adorning themselves in the doctrine of Christ.

Chapter 31

“O Earth, Earth, Earth, Hear The Word Of The Lord” (Jer. 22:29).

Jim Dearman

The weeping prophet Jeremiah cried, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.” It was an impassioned cry from a heart filled to overflowing with sorrow for the sins of his people. It was a cry of condemnation upon Judah because she had forsaken the Lord and gone after other gods, other “lovers,” who could not sustain or save her. It was a cry which might never have been uttered if God’s people had responded to His earlier cries of compassion and pardon for the penitent.

The prophet’s words in Jeremiah 2:13 describe the problem:

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

Failing to learn from the folly of her sister Israel, the southern kingdom had gone after their gods. Yet, despite her repeated rebellion, God offered to Judah the promise of reconciliation if she would return to Him.

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall

find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein (Jer. 6:16).

Because they would not respond to God’s mercy and goodness, the people of Judah would soon feel His wrath. Chapter 22, in which the urgent cry under consideration is found, deals with the last kings of Judah and with their responsibility for the coming destruction. Jeremiah calls upon them to execute judgment and righteousness. God then swears by Himself, since there is none higher, that Judah shall become a desolation if the warning goes unheeded. The destruction will come at the hands of the divinely-appointed destroyer. Babylon, and all the nations, will know that the Lord has done this thing. The people will ask why, and the answer shall be given:

...Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

“Weep not for the dead,” says the prophet, referring to the slain righteous king, Josiah. “But weep sore for him that goeth away,” a reference to Jehoahaz, also called Shallum in Scripture. Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, reigned but a short time before going into Babylonian captivity, a captivity from which he never returned. The prophet’s point here is that there are some things worse than death. Josiah, a righteous king, did not live to see the destruction of Judah and the punishment of his descendants. Death saved him from the sorrow of seeing the judgment of God upon the people. Nor did Josiah witness the cruelty and oppression of Jehoiakim, another of his sons, who succeeded Jehoahaz on the throne.

Jeremiah’s woe upon the wicked king, Jehoiakim, begins in verse 13 and describes one who was consumed

by covetousness, with total disregard for the welfare of his subjects. Jehoiakim built ornate buildings using laborers he refused to pay. In contrast to his father Josiah, he was characterized by violence and oppression. His end would be one of dishonor, buried beyond the gates of the city like an animal. What a contrast to the honor and respect paid to his father, Josiah, upon his death!

The prophet speaks of Judah's "lovers" in verse 20, a likely reference to her false gods and allies who could not save her from God's punishment. Then, in verse 21, God reminds His people of the former days:

I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice.

What a tragic indictment! Throughout the history of both Israel and Judah, God had been the source of prosperity for His people. God had delivered them from their enemies. He had led them through the wilderness, and He had warned them about forgetting Him in times of prosperity.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 6:10-12).

Yet, the people did not hear the word of warning, and now the word of woe is upon them! It will be as the pain of a woman in travail, the prophet declares.

The final verses of the chapter predict the doom of Coniah, also known as Jeconiah and Jehoiachin. This son of Jehoiakim would be the last of the rulers of Judah, and his prosperity would never prosper, “sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.” This prophecy was fulfilled, as no descendant of Coniah ever reigned upon David’s throne. Though he was as a signet ring upon God’s right hand, Coniah’s position could not save him. His punishment for his sins was certain, and his seed would never return to reign in Judah. All the earth was to hear the word of the Lord regarding God’s judgment.

Only with the coming of the Messiah would a descendant of David once again reign over God’s people. However, his would not be an earthly kingdom. God would raise up Jesus to reign upon the throne in heaven, ruling over His kingdom, the church. That reign began following the Lord’s ascension to the Father when the kingdom was initiated on the following Pentecost day. The terms of admission into the kingdom of Christ were then announced. Some 3,000 souls obeyed the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ on that day, and the reign of Jesus was a reality. It will continue until His return to judge the world.

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power (I Cor. 15:24).

The prophecy of Jeremiah in verse 30 deals the pernicious doctrine of dispensational premillennialism a

fatal blow. Jesus was of Coniah's seed. Yet none of Coniah's seed would ever reign on a literal throne in Judah. Therefore, Christ could never reign in Jerusalem as king. One would have to deny the accuracy of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Coniah to have Christ reigning on a literal throne in Judah. If one of God's inspired prophets were wrong, the Bible would have to be discounted and discarded. However, Jeremiah was not wrong. The Bible is inspired, and Jesus reigns in heaven! He will never set foot on earth again! Listen to Paul's words concerning the Lord's second coming.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:16-17).

Now the prophet's plaintive cry to the earth to hear the word of the Lord has new significance. The "word of the Lord" which must be heard is the word of the existing kingdom. It must be heard in view of the coming judgment. Paul declared,

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The future judgment of all men is certain. Unless the earth hears the word of the Lord, untold billions will go

into eternity untold and unsaved!

As members of the Lord’s kingdom, the church, do we really believe this to be true? Do we really believe in the unchanging power of the gospel to change lives? Do we really believe it is our responsibility to take the gospel to the world? These are questions which must be answered in every generation. If we answer with committed lives, not simply with lipservice to soul-saving, every generation will be one in which every creature on earth hears the word of the Lord.

Why does the earth need to hear the word of the Lord? The answer may be given in a single word—“sin.”

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

The problem is sin, and sin has affected us all. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Since sin separates, and all have sinned, all have been separated from God. However, God in His infinite mercy, has made reconciliation possible through Jesus Christ.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Spiritual death, or separation from God, may be avoided only through Jesus Christ. His death, burial, and resurrection have made possible eternal life for all who will hear and believe the gospel. Therefore, men are lost because of sin, but the gospel is the only means of saving them.

The illustration of a drowning man is a familiar one which reinforces this point. A man is in the water drowning and another man is on the shore holding a rope, which can be thrown to the victim to save him. Why is the man in the water drowning? He is drowning because he is in the water, not because the man on the shore has not thrown him the rope. However, the man with the rope is the only hope the drowning man has for salvation. This is true of all men spiritually. Men are lost because they are in sin, but the only hope they have for salvation is the gospel which must be taken to them by those on the shores of safety.

Think of the end awaiting those who have not obeyed the gospel. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians,

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (II Thess. 1:7-9).

Now notice II Thessalonians 1:10, the next verse, in which Paul speaks of the saints' reaction to Christ's coming.

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (II Thess. 1:10).

Paul identifies the second coming of Christ as a time of tragedy for the lost and triumph for the saved. But who will be among the saved? They will be those who believed the testimony, those who obeyed the gospel.

They will be the ones who believed Jesus when He said, “...he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” But they will also be the ones who believed Jesus when He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The saved will be those who took seriously the Saviour’s charge to “teach all nations.” Yes, to be saved by the light of the gospel, we must send the light. Not every saint can go, but every saint must be involved in some way in spreading the light of God’s word to the world. Each Christian’s talents must be employed in the service of God, and the ultimate end of our service is the salvation of souls.

Does the gospel have the power to change men in today’s wicked world? Let Paul answer:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4).

In Romans 1:16, Paul writes,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The gospel is for all, for all time. Jude wrote,

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that

ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

“The faith” is the gospel. There is no distinction between the two. The idea of “once delivered” is “once for all.” There will be no other gospel because no other gospel is needed. If the gospel is not obeyed, the problem is man, not the power of the gospel.

Notice Paul’s words concerning the gospel in II Corinthians 4:3-4:

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (II Cor. 4:3-4).

Satan, the god of this world, is powerful. However, his power cannot overcome us without our consent. How does the god of this world blind the minds of men?

Emotions may blind men’s minds with a “better felt than told” religious practice. Traditions blind many as they cling to the creeds and doctrines of men, while rejecting the commandment of God. Relations, both living and dead, may blind men to the gospel of Christ. Many allow family to determine their course in religion, rather than doing the will of the Father in heaven. Education, improperly used, may blind many, even gospel preachers, as they imbibe the teachings of denominational theologians in their inordinate desire for degrees which they equate with “true scholarship.” Preachers must be careful to imitate Paul’s example in their preaching and living. He declared,

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake (II Cor. 4:5).

No, we do not need a new gospel for a new age. We need the same old gospel in every age, preached with power and compassion for the souls of hearers.

How are we doing as the people of God in helping the earth hear the word of the Lord? Tragically, we must admit that we have not yet covered the globe with the gospel in this generation. The statistics stagger the mind. There are almost six billion precious souls on the earth, but we have fewer than six hundred faithful families doing mission work among the churches of Christ.

Those who have committed themselves to the spread of the gospel are to be commended. We pray that more men will go into the mission field. However, the challenge dictates that we need to consider carefully the effective use of the media as a way to get the gospel to the billions before they go into eternity untold and unprepared. The broadcast and print media provide God's people with the means to reach the masses with the distinctive message of salvation now! The urgency of world evangelism demands that we use these tools which God, in His providence, has made available to us.

Jesus said:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

“Go” is a generic command which does not limit us to one specific mode of travel. It has been said that we may go by airplane, boat, car, or in any other expedient way, as long as we go. But are we limited to one method of teaching? Is it possible to go by radio? Can we teach

by television? Can the lost learn the truth through literature? Clearly these are scriptural and expedient means by which the gospel may be disseminated to “make disciples” among all nations. Jesus commanded us to “go into all the world.” This is a sobering challenge for the church. Yes, we need men, but we also need the media. Given the present circumstances, it is the only realistic and practical means of closing the gap between a burgeoning population and a small missionary force.

But as we go persistently into all the world, we must go distinctively. Jesus said, “preach the gospel.” It is the gospel which must be heard by all the earth. The message must be presented in love, but it must not be compromised. As has been noted earlier, we do not need a new gospel for a new age. Those who hear our radio programs, view our television broadcasts, and read our literature, must see the difference between the denominations and the Lord’s church. The whole counsel of God must be proclaimed with compassion and concern. Only the gospel can transform the lives of men and give them the promise of eternal life.

We must also go realistically. Jesus said,

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Our Lord knew and taught that not all who heard the gospel would obey it. In fact, He stated that few would enter the strait gate and follow the narrow way leading to eternal life. Nonetheless, His desire, and that of the Father, is that all men hear the truth. The parable of the sower teaches that the hearts of the hearers differ.

The sower’s responsibility is to give those hearts an opportunity to believe and bring forth fruit unto God through Jesus Christ.

Thus, the Lord’s commission, as recorded in Mark, reminds us of four important principles. We may “go” **generically**, by any scriptural method that will get the message to the world. But the fact that all the world, every creature, must hear the word, reminds us that we must go **persistently**. We must keep pace with the population. And it is “the gospel” they must hear, which reminds us to go **distinctively**, never compromising the message to make it more appealing to the masses. Finally, we must go **realistically**, with an understanding that the majority will not respond to the gospel, but with the knowledge that all must have the opportunity.

When will all the earth hear the word of the Lord? Some might say it will be achieved when there are more missionaries to go. Others might say it will occur when brethren give enough money to make it possible. Still others might contend that the media will have to be fully utilized if the earth is ever to hear the word of the Lord. Actually, all these responses are correct. It will take missionaries of the long and short-term variety, and money to send them. Realistically, it will require the media to keep pace with a growing population. But without the proper motivation in God’s people, the earth will never hear the word of the Lord, because we will not take the word to them.

God seeks to motivate us to go because we are grateful, and not because we are guilty. Realization of the goodness of God in our lives as Christians, and overflowing gratitude for what that goodness has done,

will motivate as nothing else can or should. Listen to the psalmist of old:

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good:
for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the
redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath
redeemed from the hand of the enemy (Psm.
107:1-2).

How should the redeemed respond to forgiveness? They should reach out to others to give them the opportunity to know the joy of salvation, the peace that passes understanding, and the hope of eternal life.

In Psalm 107, verses 8, 15, 21, and 31 are identical. They read:

Oh that men would praise the Lord for his
goodness, and for his wonderful works to the
children of men!

Here is a worthy wish for the world! But how can the world praise the Lord for His goodness and wonderful works unless they hear of His goodness through the gospel? Christians should praise God for His deliverance from sin and for His providential care and guidance. Such gratitude will motivate the redeemed to reach out to the unsaved.

The day is coming in which all the earth will hear the word of the Lord as God's people heard it through Jeremiah. It will be the announcement of judgment. Jesus declared:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in
the which all that are in the graves shall hear
his voice, And shall come forth; they that have
done good, unto the resurrection of life; and
they that have done evil, unto the resurrection
of damnation (John 5:28-29).

“...Hear The Word Of The Lord”

Where we spend eternity after hearing that word depends upon how we hear the word of the Lord now! As God’s people, let us cry, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!”

Chapter 32

The Righteous Remnant: Few There Be That Find It

Tom Holland

Statistics can be both impressive and persuasive. Men quantify information for immediate mental assimilation. Statistics with large numbers, such as five billion plus people presently on earth, can let us know that the earth's population is extremely large.

The Scriptures use statistics. Who has not been excited by the statistical information given by Luke in describing the growth of the Lord's church in the first century? The first time that the gospel was preached in it's fullness some 3,000 people "gladly received the word and were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Then in chapter four Luke declared that the number of men was about 5,000. In chapter six of Acts he said that the number of disciples was "multiplied" (v. 1).

Today when the media reports the salaries of corporate heads we observe some men making several million dollars per year. The criterion for success seems to be, who is paid the most money. The larger the salary the more important the position and the person.

The financial criterion seems to be applied in professional sports. The person whose lawyer or agent can demand and get the largest salary seems to be the athlete who is most important to the game.

But the crucial question for us: is religion any different? How significantly has the Lord’s church been affected by impressive statistics? How often are dedicated, godly, preachers terminated from a work because “the church isn’t growing?” Is growth ever analyzed from the standpoint of the number of people growing spiritually? or, is the growth numerical?

The Lord’s church has felt the impact of the church growth movement which adopts the sales strategies of the market place and, therefore, places much emphasis on numbers. So what is the criterion for success? Large numbers. The “mega church” approach to religion is, according to the **Wall Street Journal**, one of the most significant forces on the current religious scene (May 13, 1991). Unfortunately, this approach opens the door for compromise in the name of giving people what they “need,” but more accurately applied means, “what they want.”

However, when one turns to God’s word he sees that many times God’s people were the minority. God doesn’t seem to equate bigness with greatness.

In this lesson we will consider times in the Old Testament when the genuine people of God were actually a remnant, a remnant of the faithful few. Then we will look to our New Testament and see how important it is to be among God’s meaningful minority.

Some Old Testament Examples

From a Christian perspective the Old Testament was written for “our learning” (Rom. 15:4). Old Testament events are recorded for “our admonition” (I Cor. 10:6,11).

Who was in the majority during Noah’s life? Remember how mankind generally had corrupted his way on the earth to the degree that man’s sinfulness

grieved God's heart (Gen. 6:6)? God decided to destroy humanity from the face of the earth.

However, in the midst of human depravity there was a godly man with a godly family. God was not going to destroy the godly with the ungodly. Therefore, the Lord informed Noah of the plan to destroy sinful man from the earth and the Lord gave Noah instructions for the building of an ark whereby he and his family would be delivered from the deluge (Heb. 11:7). Noah's faith in God caused him to obey God. God's longsuffering waited while the ark was prepared, "wherein **few**, that is eight souls were saved by water" (I Peter 3:20-21).

There is no way to accurately ascertain the number of people living on earth during Noah's day. But we know that only a few were saved from the destructive deluge. Man's minority was God's majority.

Later in Old Testament history we read of the time when God's chosen people, the Israelites, "did evil in the sight of the Lord" and thereby suffered the loss of God's providential protection. Consequently, the Midianites oppressed Israel for seven years (Judg. 6:1).

Fortunately, God did not completely reject and abandon His chosen people. So He sent them a deliverer, Gideon. However, Gideon's credentials were not too impressive, from man's perspective. Gideon said his family was poor and that he was the least in his father's house (Judg. 6:15).

When Gideon asked God for a sign of verification God responded with the fleece test. First, Gideon wanted the fleece wet but the ground dry. It happened. Then he requested that the fleece be dry and the ground wet with dew. God responded.

Gideon gathered an army of thirty two thousand men who would fight the Midianites who were "like grasshoppers for multitude" (Judg. 7:12). But God told

Gideon that he had too many in his army! The fearful were instructed to depart for their homes (Judg. 7:3). The majority left. Gideon was left with only ten thousand. But God said, “you have too many” (Judg. 7:4). So he gave Gideon a way by which he could select the men for his army. The result of this test was, only three hundred were chosen. Gideon’s army was reduced from 32,000 to 300! However, the people could not say that by their might in numbers they had won the victory over the Midianites. They depended on God for the victory.

Elijah was a great man of God. His name connects him to God because the name Elijah means “God is Jehovah or God Himself.” He is indeed one of the prominent persons in both Old and New Testaments. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah. Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-5).

Elijah courageously withstood the sinful acts of Ahab and his ungodly wife, Jezebel. Elijah confronted Baalism and put the prophets of Baal to the test. Elijah’s challenge to Israel was: “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him” (I Kings 18:21). The true God revealed His reality by responding to Elijah’s request to send fire from heaven to consume both Elijah’s sacrifice and the water in the trench about the altar.

However, following this great victory, Elijah, under a death threat from Jezebel, fled for his life and became so discouraged that he wanted to die (I Kings 19:4).

Eventually he sought refuge in a cave at Mount Horeb. When God came and asked Elijah what he was doing there, the prophet said,

...the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant
...and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life
to take it (I Kings 19:10).

But Elijah was mistaken. His evaluation did not coincide with God's estimation. God told Elijah,

Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him (I Kings 19:18).

When apostasy is popular it is easy to imagine that all people have forsaken God. In fact, it is good psychology for apostates to assert that the crowd is going with them. But time vindicates the virtue of fidelity and steadfastness.

The New Testament Examples

When our Lord talked about the numbers who would travel the road that leads to life in contrast with those who travel the road to destruction, He said, "...few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

Why is this so? Review Old Testament history and you will see the crowd, the majority, is usually choosing the devil's way; only a remnant is faithful.

In the context of His prediction that few would travel the road to life, Jesus gives some insights as to why people choose the broad way. One reason is because it has a "wide gate." It is easy, perhaps even pleasurable, to enter the broad way and go with the crowd. On the other hand, the way of life has a strait or difficult gate and it is a narrow way which demands great faith and a willingness to sacrifice (Matt. 16:24-26). While we may cross into the broad way with ease and pleasure, those who travel the narrow way must bear the cross.

Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets" (Matt. 7:15). They may "call evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20). They may assert that "one way is as good as another"; that one cannot know the truth; that it really doesn't matter what one believes; that people who seem sure in a

conviction of faith are in reality “narrow-minded, traditionalists, relics of the past, and legalists.”

Indeed the crowd may “go with the flow.” They may find comfort in their company. But Jesus warned, “Enter ye in at the strait gate” (Matt. 7:13).

Our Lord in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13; Luke 8), further emphasized the fact that few people, comparatively speaking, would be saved.

This parable is not only an accurate analysis of the way people in the first century would react to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, the parable is a type of prophecy. There is a profound psychological analysis of humanity in this parable. It is also a type of apologetic. If all people embraced the gospel of Christ and lived for Him then we could not have confidence in Him as all-wise.

According to Jesus, only 25% of the teaching was and would be effective. The majority would either reject the word, fall away after receiving it, or have the influence of the word choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of this life.

Then, let us consider Paul’s inspired declaration that the gospel of Christ would not appeal to many people. The Jews wanted some type of miraculous manifestation as verification of the gospel and the Gentiles were looking to human wisdom or philosophy to guide them in life (I Cor. 1:20-25). Then the apostle said,

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called (I Cor. 1:26).

There are many people to whom the gospel does not appeal. This has always been true. The majority reject the gospel of Christ.

What about the Jewish remnant? Jewish people

were the first ones to “gladly receive” God’s word about Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22-41). Even Jewish priests became “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

When severe persecution scattered the Jerusalem church the disciples went everywhere “preaching the word” (Acts 8:4), first to the Jews only (Acts 11:19).

However, when one keeps reading the book of Acts he sees that in many places, such as Antioch of Pisidia, Gentiles were more receptive to the gospel than were Jews (Acts 13:39). Eventually the main enemy of the church was converted and he began to “preach the faith that he once destroyed” (Gal. 1:22).

Paul continued to love his Jewish brethren. He deeply desired their salvation (Rom. 10:1-3). Paul knew that his Jewish brethren could not be made righteous by the law of Moses. Their only hope was to submit to God’s way of making men righteous by and in His Son, and this way was revealed in the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17).

Although the Jewish people generally rejected Christ as the Messiah, there were some, a remnant, who believed the gospel. Paul is our example.

God indeed had a remnant among the Jews. Paul quoted both Elijah’s inaccurate evaluation and God’s accurate estimation (Rom. 11:1-4). Indeed God had a “remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:1-5).

Hope For The Present

If many people today turn away from undenominational Christianity and embrace a new denomination which seems to be in the process of formation, let us not give up. Colleges, large congregations, magazines, and entire elderships may surrender the ground that sacrificial brethren fought to

win, but the cause of Christ is not lost.

When the Holy Spirit declared the reality of a forthcoming apostasy in the first century he said through Paul’s inspired pen, “some shall depart from the faith” (I Tim. 4:1). Not all, but “some” would depart.

It is easy to get discouraged when apostasy is running at high tide. But the Lord’s church will survive! As long as we have His word we have the “seed of the kingdom” (Luke 8:12), and there are people with “honest and good hearts” that will believe and obey the word.

Truth crushed to the earth shall rise again.
The eternal years of God are her’s.
But error wounded writhes in pain
And dies among his worshippers.

So when it seems that all of God’s people are willing to forsake His ways let us remember: not all are going to compromise God’s morals and ethics to satisfy the culture, not all are going to reject the dignity of true worship and embrace the entertainment approach in an appeal to the world, and not all will reject God’s plan of salvation and the true nature and identity of His church, in an appeasement of denominationalism.

God’s faithful people will meet anyone, anytime at the cross of Christ, but we will not and we dare not meet the culture and denominationalism on the “plains of Ono.”

Even if the majority of members of the Lord’s church decide to compromise with the culture in the name of “change” and if they reject the Lord’s church for a restructured church with a “new hermeneutic,” not all of God’s people are going to turn away from His church in a union movement of men, by men, and for men. God will have His remnant. His remnant will continue to demand Biblical authority for what they

believe and practice in religion. His remnant will continue to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

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Some Special Studies In The Major Prophets

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Chapter 33

A Study Of The Captivity In The Major Prophets

Dub McClish

The captivity of God's covenant people of the Old Testament is one of the saddest chapters of all history. Never was an obscure race of men so marvelously blessed of God, and never did one squander it all on such an equally grandiose scale. Israel had every imaginable advantage. Its destiny was rooted in God's promises made to the patriarch, Abram, years before Isaac, the father of their ancestral father, Jacob, was even conceived (Gen. 12:2,7; 13:15-17; 17:8). God would give them a land and be their provider, protector, and preserver. He would vanquish and drive out their enemies before them. Lush Canaan, the land of "milk and honey," filled with vineyards they had not planted and cities they had not built, would be theirs to enjoy. He would give them health, peace, and prosperity unprecedented (Exod. 3:8; 23:20-33; Deut. 4:32-40; 6:1-3, 10-12; 8:6-16; et al.).

All of this was theirs to claim if only they would obey Him and serve Him (Deut. 6:10-19; et al.). But alas, those wretched ingrates were hardly out of sight of their Egyptian slave-hovels before they began murmuring and complaining against God and begging to go back

(Exod. 15:23–24; 16:2–3)! He finally could bear their repeated acts of infidelity no more. In the rebellion at Kadesh He decreed that all of the generation who had come out of Egypt, except Joshua and Caleb who had shown themselves faithful, would never enter Canaan, but must perish in the wilderness (Num. 14:26–35). We still marvel at His longsuffering in bringing even the second generation of such an ungrateful and unbelieving people into the land of promise! The tendency to rebel against God and apostatize from His way that is seen in the wilderness-wanderers proved to be a trait which the sons of Jacob never outgrew.

God’s first warnings that Israel’s apostasy would result in devastation of Canaan and captivity in a strange land were delivered seven centuries before Isaiah issued his warning. They came through Moses in the wilderness:

And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but will walk contrary unto me; ...I will bring the land into desolation; and your enemies that dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And you will I scatter among the nations, and I will draw out the sword after you: and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste (Lev. 26:27, 32–33; Deut. 4:27; 28:64; 32:26).

Israel proved to be as faithless concerning the warnings of God’s retribution for rebellion against His law and consequent apostasy as she was concerning the unprecedented displays of His power and protection. When the Hebrew parents failed to teach their children constantly, as God had prescribed (Deut. 6:4–9, 20–25), the people forgot both God and His law. In the place of parental failure, God sent prophet after prophet to alert

the people to their transgressions and corruptions, calling them to repentance: “And Jehovah hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them (but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear)” (Jer. 25:4; note: this is but one of eleven such statements made by Jeremiah).

Long before Isaiah, the first of the major prophets, lived, the once-united nation of Israel had sundered into the separate kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Both nations were overrun by enemy nations and scattered into captivity. Each of the four major prophets was related to these captivities. We will study these captivities as they relate to the major prophets under the following topics: (1) Israel’s captivity and the major prophets; (2) Judah’s captivity and the major prophets; (3) causes of the captivity; (4) conditions in the captivity; (5) the return of Israel and Judah from captivity; and (6) lessons and observations from the captivity experiences.

Israel’s Captivity And The Major Prophets ***The Captivity Prophesied***

The only “major” prophet to live before the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians was Isaiah. God revealed to him when He commissioned him for his prophetic work that the rebellion against Him by His people would continue “Until cities be waste without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the land become utterly waste, and Jehovah have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land” (6:11-12). What a graphic description of the devastation and deportation God would bring upon these people! Although he was a prophet to Judah who lived in Jerusalem, he also cried out against the corruptions in Israel and

pronounced God’s judgment upon her. God instructed the prophet to name his son “Maher-shalal-hash-baz,” which means, “the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteneth.” This was symbolic of the swift destruction and looting of Damascus and Samaria by Assyria, which would be the beginning of Israel’s dispersion into captivity (Isa. 8:3-4). He later spoke of Israel’s impending calamity again. Of the ungodly citizens of Israel he asked:

And what will ye do in the day of visitation,
and in the desolation which shall come from
far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where
will ye leave your glory? ...Ho Assyrian, the
rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is
mine indignation! I will send him against a
profane nation, and against the people of my
wrath will I give him a charge, to take the
spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them
down like the mire of the streets (103.5,6).

Isaiah made a remarkably specific prophecy to Ahaz, king of Judah, concerning Israel’s ultimate fate: “...Within threescore and five years shall Ephraim [Israel] be broken in pieces so that it shall not be a people” (7:8). At least indirectly, this prophecy also relates to Israel’s captivity. The crushing blow that God would bring upon Israel through the Assyrians would be as a hail storm or a flood; she would be trampled under foot and gobbled up as a ripe fig (Isa. 28:1-4; cf. 10:5-6). The prophet also uses the strong figure of harvesters who gather the corn, the grapes, or the olives, but who leave a few gleanings behind, to depict the overthrow of Israel and the displacement of all but a few stragglers (17:3-6). None can gainsay that Isaiah prophesied the captivity of Israel!

The Prophecies Fulfilled

Isaiah's prophecies concerning the demise of Israel began to be fulfilled in the ever-widening power and sweep of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians came into Israel first under Tiglath-Pileser ("Pul," II Kings 15:19) in about 738 B.C. and exacted a huge tribute from Israel before returning home (v. 20). In this initial subjection there is no indication that captives were taken. A few years later Pekah of Israel conspired with Damascus against Assyria and Tiglath-Pileser returned (733 B.C.). This time he overran all of the northern part of Israel (from Galilee northward) "and he carried them captive to Assyria" (II Kings 15:29). In 727 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser died and was succeeded by Shalmaneser. Hoshea, who had killed Pekah and seized his throne, also revolted against Assyria and refused to pay the annual tribute (II Kings 17:4). Shalmaneser promptly imprisoned Hoshea and laid siege to Samaria in 725 B.C. He died before Samaria fell and was succeeded by Sargon (cf. Isa. 20:1) who completed the conquest in 722 B.C.² A much fuller exile attended this campaign: "In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away unto Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (II Kings 17:6; cf. 18:10-12). In the Assyrian annals of Sargon, he recorded the deportation of 27,290 from Samaria alone on this occasion.³ There was more than one stage of Israel's captivity, even as we shall soon discover there was of Judah's.

I now call attention once more to Isaiah's prophecy that Ephraim would be "broken in pieces" and "shall not be a people" in sixty-five years (7:8). The supposed date for the time of this prophecy is 733 B.C.⁴ The

siege and fall of Samaria occurred only eleven years later, as previously indicated. To what, then, was Isaiah referring in his prediction of sixty-five years? While most of the populace was in exile from 722 B.C., Israel was still not utterly broken and had not ceased to be a people. When we project sixty-five years from 733 B.C. we arrive at 669 B.C. At that time God sent Esar-haddon, the Assyrian monarch (II Kings 19:37), to Palestine, particularly for the purpose of taking the Judean king, Manasseh, to Babylon as a captive as punishment for his multiplied evils (II Chron. 33:10-11). It is likely that Esar-haddon also repopulated the largely depopulated area of Israel with immigrants from the East on this journey (Ezra 4:2, 9-10). The introduction of these foreigners to the former territory of Israel spelled its utter and final doom. As these intermarried with the few Israelites left behind, they produced the mongrel Samaritans. The northern kingdom of Israel was shattered to pieces, never to rise again—it was no longer a people! Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled.

JUDAH’S CAPTIVITY AND THE MAJOR PROPHETS

The Captivity Prophesied

Two of these prophets did all or most of their prophetic work before the captivity of Judah in Babylon began; Isaiah and Jeremiah. Although Isaiah lived over a century before Judah’s captivity, he frequently foretold its coming. Numerous passages apparently have the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar and the captivity of the people in Babylon in view (e.g., 3:25-26; 5:13; 24:1; 32:9-14; 43:14; et al.). While Moses was the first to prophesy captivity as retribution for apostasy, Isaiah was the first

to name Babylon as the captor. In Isaiah's rebuke of Hezekiah's arrogant display of all of his treasures to the Babylonian emissaries, he said: "Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in thy house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith Jehovah" (39:6).

Jeremiah lived in the very closing years of the kingdom of Judah and he saw the captivity which he prophesied become a reality. The first thirty-nine chapters of his message relate almost totally to Judah's corruption and to warnings that they would reap subjugation and captivity if they did not repent. He was God's last desperate voice to effect the repentance of Judah and thus prevent the disaster that was looming. Instead of repenting at his message, the foolish Jews rejected and ridiculed him, accused him of treason, threw him in a miry pit, and sought to kill him.

Lack of space permits reference only to representative portions of Jeremiah's warnings. They begin in the opening chapter in which Jeremiah declared his vision of the "boiling caldron" from the north, which depicted the coming of the Babylonians against Jerusalem (1:13-16). God would bring evil and great destruction upon Judah and Jerusalem from the north (4:5-6; cf. 6:1, 22), Jerusalem would be besieged by a mighty nation of a strange language (5:14-18), and God's people would be scattered among the nations (9:16). These elements are the major theme of his preaching (13:19; 18:16-17; et al.). One of the most forthright prophecies of the captivity is found in the words of Jeremiah to Pashur, the wicked chief officer of the temple who had placed Jeremiah in the stocks:

For thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself and to all thy friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold it; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. Moreover I will give all the riches of this city...into the hand of their enemies; and they shall make them a prey, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. And thou Pashur, and all that dwell in thy house shall go into captivity; and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and there shalt thou be buried, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied falsely (20:4-6).

The Prophecies Fulfilled

The Assyrian Empire that destroyed Israel in the days of Isaiah was itself vanquished by the ascendant Chaldeans of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C in the decisive battle at Carchemish. As there had been more than one stage of deportation of Israel by the Assyrians, so there would be of Judah by the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar first besieged Jerusalem in the reign of Jehoiakim in 606 B.C. Apparently, only a few Jews were taken to Babylon at this time, including perhaps Jehoiakim (II Chron. 36:6) and certainly some of the royal seed and nobles, among them Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Dan. 1:1-7), along with some of the temple vessels (II Chron. 36:7).

Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiachin on the throne in place of his father, Jehoiakim. The new young king displeased Nebuchadnezzar and, after only three months,

the Babylonians again laid siege to Jerusalem (II Kings 24:8-10). Jehoiachin surrendered, along with his family and servants, and they, along with the richest and most talented citizens, were deported to Babylon—ten thousand in all—in about 598 B.C. (II Kings 24:12-16). Among this contingency of captives were Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:2) and Shimei, the grandfather of Mordecai (Esther 2:5-6).

Nebuchadnezzar replaced Jehoiachin with Zedekiah, destined to be Israel's last king. When he rebelled against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar determined to put an end to Judah's rebellion for all time. The Chaldean army once more besieged Jerusalem and it fell in 586 B. C. The city, including the temple and the palaces, was burned and the walls were broken down (II Kings 25:8-10). Nebuchadnezzar first executed Zedekiah's sons in the presence of their father, then blinded him before taking him to Babylon in chains (II Kings 25:6-7). This fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy from Babylon against Zedekiah that God would bring the king to Babylon, yet he would not see it (Ezek. 12:13). Seventy-three temple and military officers were also executed (II Kings 25:18-21) and another group of Jerusalem's citizens was taken into captivity (vs. 11-12, 21b). Jeremiah gives the number of 4,600 that were carried away after the final destruction of Jerusalem over the next few years (Jer. 52:28-30).

CAUSES OF THE CAPTIVITY

A survey of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel provides far more material than can even be mentioned in this essay concerning the reasons that God gave Israel and Judah into captivity. Both kingdoms had reached the depths of corruption by the time of Isaiah. These may

be summarized under four factors: (1) The people forgot God and His law. (2) The people adopted idolatry and all of its abominable practices. (3) The people lapsed into the destructive traits of pride, materialism, ingratitude, dishonesty, injustice, drunkenness, and various crimes. (4) The people refused to repent at the preaching of God’s prophets. We can offer only a smattering of illustrations of these calamitous causes. All of these are actually another stanza of the warnings Moses delivered to Israel in the Wilderness and the plains of Moab (Lev.. 26:27, 32-33; Deut. 6:1-9, 16-25). ***They Forgot God and His Law***

Isaiah began his book with this harsh condemnation: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for Jehovah hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider” (1:2-3). God’s judgment against such rebellion is certain: “But the destruction of transgressors and sinners shall be together, and they that forsake Jehovah shall be consumed” (v. 28). Inexcusable ignorance was a factor in their downfall (5:13). The prophet summed up their disobedience in one simple indictment: “Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not Jehovah? he against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient unto his law” (42:24). Isaiah described this sad condition in several additional passages (e.g., 48:18; 59:12-13; 65:1-2; et al.).

The following denunciation of God’s people by Jeremiah for casting Him and His law aside is unmistakably plain: “Thine own wickedness shall correct

thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken Jehovah thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts” (2:19; cf. 3:20-21; et al.). Between the second and final deportations of Jews to Babylon, Ezekiel explained to the exiles why Jerusalem must be destroyed: “And she hath rebelled against my ordinances... [You] have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my ordinances, ...therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold I, even I, am against thee” (5:6-8).

Even Daniel pointed to this root cause of Israel’s misfortunes in his moving confessional prayer: “Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even turning aside, that they should not obey thy voice: therefore hath the curse been poured out upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God; for we have sinned against him” (cf. 9:11; cf. vs. 5-10, 12-15).

They Adopted Idolatry and All of Its Abominable Practices

One reason they became so susceptible to idolatry is that they first forgot God and His holy covenant. The first commandment of the ten was, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Moses had warned repeatedly both of the danger that Israel would be infected by the idolatry of her neighbors and of the consequences if they were (Exod. 23:33; 34:15-17; Deut. 7:25; 8:19; et al.). Nevertheless, the religions of the heathen had overwhelmed first Israel, and then Judah. Isaiah cried out against the idolaters of his day: “They shall be turned back, they shall be utterly put to shame, that trust in graven images, that say unto molten

images, Ye are our gods” (42:17). He reduced to absurdity the man who would take a piece of wood and use part of it for cooking, another part for warmth, and yet another part for fashioning a god before which he would worship and pray for deliverance. Yet, it never entered the fool’s mind to ask, “Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?” or, “Is there not a lie in my right hand” (44:14-20; see also 41:21-24, 29; 57:5-8; 65:3-4, 7)?

In spite of heroic campaigns to rid Judah of idolatry by the kings Joash, Hezekiah, a finally-penitent Manasseh, and Josiah, the nation seemed to be addicted to it beyond reclamation. It took the drastic measure of national disaster to break its hold. Jeremiah almost began his book by lifting up his voice against it: “And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, in that they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands” (1:16). He declared the direct connection between Jerusalem’s devastation and her idolatry: “And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbor, Wherefore hath Jehovah done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they forsook the covenant of Jehovah their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them” (22:8-9). The weeping prophet lashed out against the idolatry he saw in God’s people dozens of times.

Ezekiel 6:3-4 is representative of several other outcries against the idolatry that had helped precipitate the captivity: “Thus saith the Lord Jehovah to the mountains and to the hills, to the watercourses and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars

shall become desolate, and your sun-images shall be broken; and I will cast down your slain men before your idols.” Despite the fact that corruptions and apostasy overtook Israel again after the return from exile, at least they never succumbed to idolatry again.

***They Had Lapsed Into General Wickedness
And Debauchery***

Just as forgetting God and His law formed the matrix for widespread idolatry, both of these elements were the seeds from which the general wickedness and debauchery of the people sprang. God’s law compelled pure and honorable behavior, but they abandoned that law. On the other hand, the idolatry of the Canaanites was filled with various immoralities, including child sacrifice (Deut. 12:31). Little wonder the children of Jacob became corrupt to the core! It is revealing to notice how thoroughly Isaiah attacks their wickedness in the opening chapter of his book: “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly! they have forsaken Jehovah, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward” (v. 4). Jerusalem was so corrupt that Isaiah sarcastically called her “Sodom” and “Gomorrah” (v. 10). He urges his fellow-citizens to wash themselves clean of their evil and replace it with good, because in their present condition they make of the city a harlot, full of murderers (vs. 16–17, 21).

Jeremiah pleaded with his people: “O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thine evil thoughts lodge within thee” (Jer. 4:14)? Moral conditions were so rotten in Jerusalem that God challenged the prophet to find just

one righteous man: “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh truth; and I will pardon her. And though they say, As Jehovah liveth; surely they swear falsely” (5:1-2). God, through Jeremiah, connected their evil behavior with their idolatry: “Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods that ye have not known, and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered; that ye may do all these abominations” (7:9-10)?

Ezekiel declared that the wickedness of his people was greater than that of the heathen (5:6). God told them that when he had returned them to their own land after their captivity they would not be able to forget the judgment they brought unnecessarily upon themselves: “And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein, ye have polluted yourselves; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed” (20:43). From these glimpses we must almost say that the depth of debauchery among the descendants of Jacob leading up to their sore punishment was all but indescribable!

They Were Impenitent

God did not suddenly, at their first sign of apostasy, bring His ultimate retribution and chastisement upon Israel. As I indicated in introducing this essay, we must marvel at the longsuffering of God for His people of old! He bore with them for centuries, going all the way back to the wilderness wanderings, trying to teach them He meant what he promised and warned about faithfully

following His law. Through the period of the judges we see the cycle of apostasy, retribution, repentance, and deliverance repeated several times, but still Israel did not learn. There were various temporary, although at times, sore, judgments brought upon the nation during the reigns of some of the kings. And then there were the prophets He sent (including the ones included in this study, but multiplied others as well), calling for repentance, but, alas, it was not to be found in the nation of adamant hearts!

When God commissioned Isaiah for his work and the prophet volunteered to do it, he was warned as follows: “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed” (6:9-10; cf. 42:18-23). (The Christ used this very statement to describe the hard hearts of the religious leaders of God’s people in His own time [Mat. 13:14-15].) Although God had repeatedly reminded Israel of His mighty acts and blessings upon them, yet still He had to say to them: “Thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass” (48:3-4).

One great passage from Jeremiah will suffice to say what he repeated many times about the abject impotence of Israel as a whole:

Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel:...
This thing I commanded them [your fathers that I brought out of Egypt], saying, Harken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the way that I

command you, that it may be well with you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of the evil heart, and went backward and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff: they did worse than their fathers (7:21–26).

God warned Ezekiel of the kind of reception his message would receive among the sojourners in Babylon:

Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel,... and the children are impudent and stiff-hearted: I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. (2:3–5).

Israel had not changed since the days of Isaiah, more than a century before: “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of the rebellious house, that have eyes to see, and see not, that have ears to hear, and hear not; for they are a rebellious house” (12:3). Although not a “major” prophet and, although he was among those who returned from the exile, Zechariah knew well the national character of his people that had brought doom upon them:

But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear. Yea, they made their hearts

as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which Jehovah of hosts had sent by his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore there came great wrath from Jehovah of hosts (7:11-12).

They were still possessed of “hardness and impenitent heart” in the time of Paul, which stubbornness would haunt them in the final Judgment (Rom. 2:5)!

The four great prophets thus painted a graphic picture of consummate corruption and wickedness in Israel, even less excusable in them than in the nations because they had the revealed law of God and were the people of God, the very point Paul made in the early chapters of Romans. After listing the abominations of the Gentiles (1:18-32), he then turned to the Jews with the piercing indictment: “Wherefore thou art without excuse,...for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest practise the same things” (2:1). Moreover, they were the more guilty because they had been “entrusted with the oracles of God” (3:1-2). While it appears that Paul was addressing the proud, self-righteous Jews of his time, he described to a “T” their national attitude and behavior that brought God’s judgment of the captivity upon them!

There can never be a question concerning the reason the calamities occurred that eventuated in the captivity of both Israel and Judah.

CONDITIONS IN THE CAPTIVITY

We have no certain information concerning the way the exiles from Israel behaved in their new homes, nor under what conditions they may have lived. Given their

long history of idolatry under an unbroken chain of evil monarchs for 250 years, it is not hard to imagine that many or even most of them adopted the idols of the Assyrians. Likely many of them lost their Hebrew identity by intermarriage, even as many of their brethren did who were allowed to remain in the homeland. Yet, it is certain that some preserved their Hebrew heritage and had found their Judean brethren before the time of the return from captivity (Ezra 2:2).⁵ Indeed, it appears certain that Ezekiel was commissioned to go among the weary exiles of both Israel and Judah, for they were all exiled to the same general area.

In God’s commission to Ezekiel, he is sent “...to the children of Israel, to **nations** that are rebellious” (Ezek. 2:3; emp., DM). To whom could “nations” refer but to both Judah and Israel under the revived name, “Israel,” thus embracing all of the remnant of Jacob’s descendants? Relevant to this reunion theme in Ezekiel’s message is the fact that “Judah” is mentioned only 15 times, while “Israel” is addressed or referred to some 177 times by the prophet. Surely, we are not to conclude that this displaced prophet of Judah is primarily addressing the former ten-tribe nation of Israel in the exile.... Rather, we are to understand the use of “Israel” by Ezekiel to be directed toward the strangers and pilgrims of both Jacobean nations.⁶

Further, in the dramatic object lesson of the two sticks, God revealed beyond doubt His plan once more to make of Israel and Judah one nation during the captivity (37:15–23). The foregoing passages and their implications are quite sufficient in my mind to account

for the fate of the northern Kingdom of Israel in their captivity. Those who expect to find those ten tribes elsewhere look in vain. Thus the hypotheses that they may have become the Anglo-Saxon race (Armstrongism) or that they may have become the American Indians (Mormonism) are both only wild guesses concocted in order to serve wild and heretical systems of theology.

Ezekiel and Daniel (along with some passages in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) give us considerable insight into the circumstances of the Judean exiles because they themselves were exiles. As earlier stated, Daniel and his three friends were among the first to arrive in Babylon. They were of royal blood and were kept by Nebuchadnezzar as part of his court in the capital city. They were uncompromisingly loyal to Jehovah, even in the face of great peril, and Daniel rose to a place of great power and influence as God's prophet in a Gentile court. Eight years later, Ezekiel arrived as a part of the second deportation which numbered ten thousand and which settled near Babylon by the River Chebar at Tel-abib (Ezek. 1:3; 3:15). It is clear that Ezekiel was at least acquainted with the name and fame of Daniel, if not with him personally (14:14, 20; 28:3).

He began his prophetic work in the fifth year of his captivity (1:2; cir. 593 B.C.). While Daniel and his three faithful friends upheld God's name and honor in Nebuchadnezzar's court, Ezekiel was God's prophet to the disconsolate exiles themselves. We are told little of the physical circumstances of the Jews, but if the "Exile Psalm" (Psm. 137) is any indication, their emotional state was one of depression and sorrow unbounded. Lamentations, Jeremiah's great book of pathos over the disasters that befell his people, gives additional insight

to the degree of grief the Jews experienced during the exile period, whether in Babylon or still in Judea. Ezekiel spent the first seven years of his prophetic work telling the people why tragedy overtook them and refuting false hopes that Jerusalem would be spared and they would soon be restored to their homeland (Ezek. 13:8-19).

In a long letter, Jeremiah also rebuked the false prophets in Babylon and countered the false expectations they aroused in the people (Jer. 29:1-32). He told them to settle into a normal routine of life (i.e., building their houses, planting their gardens, and raising their families) because the captivity would be long—seventy years (vs. 4-10). After the destruction of Jerusalem, the overwhelming need of the exiles was a message of hope to offset that unspeakable and unimaginable tragedy. The last half of Ezekiel’s book (25-48) was just such a message. While he made mention of the restoration to Palestine even before Jerusalem fell (11:17), the restoration and revival of Israel was the burden of his message afterward (28:25; 34:11f; 37:1-14, 21; et al.).

THE RETURN OF ISRAEL FROM CAPTIVITY⁷

The Return Prophesied

As we have seen, the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah are rife with prophecies of the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem and the captivity of Israel and Judah if they failed to repent. Likewise, all of the “major prophets” preached hope. This message of hope promised that they would be restored to their beloved Canaan. Moreover, these apply (sometimes by explicit statement) also to the exiles from Israel who mingled with the Jews and returned to Canaan with them (see comments above on

God's commission to Ezekiel).

Isaiah wrote many words of hope which those disheartened captives could (and likely did) read and by which they were surely cheered. The prophecy in which Isaiah named Cyrus, the great Medo-Persian king, is nothing short of amazing and spectacular. Isaiah uttered this oracle during the apex of what appeared to be an invincible Assyrian Empire. He spoke eighty-five years before Nebuchadnezzar secured his Babylonian Empire which would enslave Israel and almost one hundred fifty years before Cyrus would appear and conquer Babylon, thus beginning the Medo-Persian Empire! No man could know the name, much less the place and work of such a one, long before he was conceived or his empire imagined, except God gave the information. What a mighty proof of Isaiah's inspiration this is! As God's servant, Cyrus would order the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. He would also open the doors and smooth the rough places for His servant Jacob's sake (44:28-45:7). His extensive descriptions of the doom of Babylon (13:1-14:27; et al.) relate to the return from captivity in that they would furnish hope to the exiles that the power that bound them would be broken.

Not only did Jeremiah graphically and repeatedly prophesy the captivity, but he also forcefully prophesied the return. He was very specific not only about the return, but about the fact that Israel and Judah together would return (as previously discussed): "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I gave for an inheritance unto your fathers" (3:18). He explicitly prophesied that the duration would be seventy years, after which Babylon would be

decimated and all Israel would be returned to their homeland (25:10-11; 29:10). He prophesied the return many other times as well (e.g., 16:14-15; 30:3; 50:1-5; et al.).

While Ezekiel was explicit in his warnings to the exiles that Jerusalem was to be destroyed and the captivity prolonged, he also offered his weary people hope by predicting their eventual release and return:

For in my holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah, there shall **all the house of Israel, all of them**, serve me in the land;...As a sweet savor will I accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the midst of the nations (20:40-41; emp, DM—note again the emphasis by Ezekiel upon the gathering of **all** Israel, per my previous comments).

The renowned vision of the dry bones was an object lesson designed to teach the revival and restoration of “the whole house of Israel” to their own land (37:1-14; cf. vs. 15-23). Ezekiel, as Isaiah and Jeremiah, made this promise several times (e.g.; 20:34, 38;28:25-26; 34:13, 27; 36:24; et al.). Through the angel Gabriel God revealed to Daniel that the beginning of the seventy weeks of the famous vision revealed to him would be from the “...commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.... it shall be built again....” (9:25). To whichever rebuilding decree this referred, it nonetheless plainly declared that Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, which itself is a prophecy that Israel would be returned from captivity.⁸ Daniel was well aware of the prophecy of Jeremiah which stated

that the captivity would last only seventy years (Dan. 9:2; cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). Each of the major prophets foretold glorious and wonderful days in the future for and through Israel, that involved far more than mere fleshly Israel and her political kingdom and kings (e.g., the coming of Emmanuel, the giving of a new covenant, the building of a new house in Jerusalem that would attract and admit all nations, the setting up of an everlasting kingdom, et al.). All of these and related promises themselves imply the return of the captives from their captivity.

The Return Enacted

None of the major prophets was a part of the return. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and apparently Ezekiel had all died before the decree of Cyrus which sent the first group of Israelites home (Ezra 1:1; 2:1-2). Since this occurred in the first year of the reign of Cyrus over Babylon and since Daniel was still prophesying in the third year of Cyrus (Dan. 10:1), we know he lived to see the return begin. We are not told why he elected to stay in Babylon, but all of the exiles were given that option (Ezra 1:4). He gives us no information on the return itself.

We must move outside of the four prophets, to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, for information on the return of the people to Canaan. As there had been three groups of exiles, so there were three distinct groups of returnees, beginning in 536 B.C. The first group, numbering almost 50,000, was led by Zerubbabel, who was charged with rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1:3; 2:64-65). It was no small task to lead this number in a trek of some nine hundred or more miles. Ezra, an influential man in the court of Artaxerxes of Persia, a descendant of Aaron and a scribe in the law, was commissioned and

provisioned to take a second group back (7:11-26). This occurred in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, or about 457 B.C. (7:7) and the people numbered near two thousand men (8:1-20). The third and final return of exiles returned under the leadership of Nehemiah, the cup-bearer of Artaxerxes, in the twentieth year of the king (444 B.C.; Neh. 2:1). We are not told who or how many may have accompanied him.

LESSONS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAPTIVITY

God’s promises are conditional. Israel was promised the blessing of God only as long as she continued in His law. Their apostasy brought tragedy upon them. His promises have always had an “if clause.” He has never promised, indiscriminately and universally, to provide spiritual blessing to men apart from His own conditions. It is still so. One can enter the kingdom of God **if and only if** he is willing to be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Christ is the author of eternal salvation **only** for those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9). **Only if** we abide in the Word of Christ are we truly His disciples (John 8:31). Universalism teaches that God will save regardless of what we believe and how we behave. The liberalism which is so popular among so many prominent brethren is at least a near cousin to universalism in that it no longer believes in the conditional nature of God’s promises. Baptism for remission of sins, Scriptural worship, Biblical morality, God’s law on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and several other things are negotiable to them. In their view, men may do what they will about them and God will still give them eternal life! They would do well to

step inside the walls of Jerusalem in the siege of 586 B. C. and then join the shocked exiles on their pilgrimage to Babylon, and learn better!

God is true to His Word. He not only fulfills His promises of blessing for loyalty, but He also remembers His promises of judgment for rebellion. Israel apparently decided He had forgotten His many warnings of doom if they did not obey Him, but how painfully they learned otherwise. Men have generally relieved themselves of the threat of judgment and accountability for their beliefs and behavior by denying that the Bible is the Word of God. This includes millions of rank and file human beings and tens of thousands of theologians. Sad to say, there are probably thousands of members of the church of Christ who are not very far from this position in their theology. They have bought a “make-me-feel-good” philosophy that forbids any “negative” preaching that might contain correction or reproof, which, in turn, might induce guilt and require repentance. How like the people of Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah are so many brethren today! They do not want to be bothered with the Truth that will save them if they will give heed. They only want words to cheer them up, even if they are a perverted and mutilated “gospel” that will lead to their destruction. Never forget: “If we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself” (II Tim. 2:13).

Faithful preachers preach the Truth regardless of the reaction to it. All four of the “great prophets” understood this. In some cases, God warned them in advance that they would meet with obstinance and opposition. Nevertheless, they went on delivering the message God gave them. Not only did they meet with

unwillingness to listen, but Jeremiah and Daniel faced persecution and the threat of death if they continued to preach and/or live as God commanded. Especially were Jeremiah and Ezekiel commissioned to preach a most unpopular message. There are few better places for the preacher to go to learn faithfulness and perseverance in the Truth in the face of hostility than from these prophets. It is a consistent trait of compromising preachers through the centuries to provide what the people **want** to hear, rather than what they **need** to hear. You can fill a church building with such preaching, but you have nothing when you get through. Like these prophets of old, let us be determined to preach the Truth that makes men free, regardless of how many times we may be ridiculed, challenged, ignored, mistreated, or run off! Even if they will not hear, they must know that “there hath been a prophet among them” (Ezek. 2:5).

When God’s leaders fail, His people go astray. The very ones who were charged with keeping God’s people faithful to Him (kings and priests) were themselves corrupt for the most part. While the people themselves were responsible for their own behavior (Ezek. 18:20), their leaders who led the people astray bore the greater guilt. The kings adopted the idols and taught the people to worship them. The priests tolerated the desecration of not only the holy city, but of the temple itself with idol worship. Immorality, injustice, bloodshed, greed, and hypocrisy eventually pervaded the general populace by means of “trickle-down” corruption—it came from the top down.

The parallel picture in the church at present explains much of the apostasy that is abroad among us. There have always been some in every congregation who

wanted to push doctrine and practice to the limit and beyond. However, they were generally kept in check by faithful elders and preachers until several years ago. Likewise, there were smart-aleck students in some of my Bible classes in college who thought they knew more than the Bible, but faithful teachers restrained them. However, now it is elders and preachers who are leading and have led many congregations away from the Truth with some of their members pleading with them to repent and stand firm. Now we have professors in our schools who no longer stand for the Truth themselves, but they openly ridicule it and teach their students to despise it as well. These professors know that they have administrators who will protect them while they do their mayhem. It is no wonder that the church has digressed when one looks at so much of its compromising leadership over the past twenty-five years.

I remain firmly convinced that elders have done more to encourage and allow this apostasy than any other one group. The local congregations will be lost or retained for the Truth one by one and elders are God's overseers in them. They could empty every pulpit that has a double-tongued, Gospel-perverting preacher in it before next Lord's day if they would. They could purge every liberal, compromising Bible class teacher and get rid of all of the denominational class material overnight if they cared to. They could write the president and chairman of the board of each of our colleges, universities, and graduate schools and tell them they are going to (1) cease to announce any school functions, (2) refuse to invite any faculty members to speak, (3) discourage any students from enrolling or attending, and (4) discourage members from sending any financial

support unless and until they cleanse their faculties of false teachers and openly declare their allegiance to the Gospel Truth. And if they loved the Truth, this they would do. The fruitcake liberal preachers that are having a field day in the church would dry up overnight if elders did not hire them and keep them and keep inviting them to preaching in meetings. Brethren, when leaders fail, all of God’s people fail with them!

Conclusion

Men seem to never learn the lessons of history. Those who constitute the Lord’s church are no exception. From the tragic captivity that God allowed Israel to suffer, only a remnant was preserved. From the tragic apostasy that overwhelmed the church in the past century, only a remnant of fifteen percent remained faithful. The digression that has fastened itself on so many of the Lord’s people today appears certain to take a large percentage of them into the foreign wastelands of denominational heresy. Those of us who have not been captured by it must strive to prevent as many as possible from falling prey to it. Let us recommit ourselves to remaining steadfast as the great prophets did, even if we are part of a very small remnant. From our remnant God can rebuild His people today just as He did those of twenty-five centuries ago.

Endnotes

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

2 H. I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1969 revision), p. 220.

3 F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983 reprint), p. 66.

4 George Rawlinson in *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), 10:125–26.

5 George Rawlinson in *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), 7:17.

6 Dub McClish, “Ezekiel: the Prophet of the Exile,” in *Living Lessons from the Prophets*, ed. John Waddey (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1985), p. 202, but the entire chapter is recommended.

7 We will use the name “Israel” henceforth in reference to all of God’s Old Testament chosen nation because after the return from captivity the national distinctions of “Judah” and “Israel” never again existed. All of the descendants of Jacob became one again. In fact, there is evidence that this occurred during the exile. Doubtless, the memory of their common ancestral heritage and the shared misery of the captivity outweighed all former partisan and political loyalties.

8 For a good discussion of which decree to rebuild Jerusalem is in view in Daniel 9:25, see Bill Lockwood, “Daniel 9,” in *The Book of Daniel*, ed. Gary Colley (Austin, TX: Southwest Pub., 1984), pp. 176–77.

Chapter 34

The Major Prophets vs. Premillennialism

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

It is a joy supreme to speak on this third Power Lectureship as I did on the earlier two in 1989 and 1990. Ardency of appreciation is expressed to B. J. Clarke, the elders and all the great Southaven congregation for this esteemed privilege and golden opportunity.

No part of the Bible is safe in the hands of millennial militants of our era. Their theological system is saturated with uncontrolled mania in our day. Their deceitful handling of Sacred Scripture is surely evident with the major prophets of the Old Testament – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. They make no effort to see these books in their Old Testament context and with a New Testament fulfillment clearly evident. In II Corinthians 4:2 Paul referred to such people as those who handled Scripture deceitfully. Premillennial proponents in our day are notorious with such devilish devices (II Cor. 2:11). There are three senses in our world – inspired sense (the Bible), common sense (what a Gracious Creator has bequeathed to bless us in the spiritual and mundane affairs of life) and nonsense. Premillennialism is not derived from inspired sense; it bats out promptly and permanently in the second

category; it originated in the third category and has stayed there all its infamous life as religious falsehood.

An Overview Of Premillennialism

Historic premillennialism goes back to some of the patristic or early church fathers but not to the Christ, the apostles and prophets of the New Testament era. It flourished for awhile and then faded the scene as far as a major religious movement was concerned.

Dispensational premillennialism is on today's front burner. John N. Darby (1800-1882) is the father of this system of pernicious propaganda. C. I. Scofield, in **Scofield Reference Bible** in fanciful footnotes, popularized it to a great extent. Hal Lindsey, in more recent times, has written best-selling books relative to it. He is a master with religious fiction and fancy. Facts have a hard time making their way into his books; they are just not his literary cup of tea. John F. Walvoord, Jerry Falwell, John R. Rice, Billy Graham and countless others have played major roles in the popular rise of this devilish dogma. Perhaps 70 to 80 percent of so-called Christendom ascribe to such in our day.

Defined, the term calls for a thousand year reign of Christ on earth. The "pre" means before; "millennial" refers to a thousand years; "ism" refers to its teaching aspects or its system of developed thought. More accurately the "ism" part has been described as "it ain't so!" And it is not so!

Basic to the fanciful theory are the following: (1) Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament predicted the sure coming of the kingdom. (2) God sent Jesus Christ to affect and fulfill these Old Testament prophecies. This was His intent in coming. (3) Jewish obstinacy caught

the Godhead off guard. Father and Son conferred hurriedly, tabled indefinitely kingdom establishment plans and hastily conceived a quick makeshift – the church. (4) Kingdom and church are not synonymous in their theological system at all. (5) We are currently in the church age but the kingdom is still future. (6) It will not be established till the Lord’s second advent. What will happen if Jewish obstinacy is still in high gear and has not subsided by the time of the second coming? Modern Jews, with but few exceptions, are a counterpart to infidelic Jews of the first century who hated Jesus with a passion – a passion that recognized no restraint at all. (7) Jesus Christ is not NOW king since He has no kingdom and is not NOW on David’s throne. This flies in the face of Peter in Acts 2:30 who affirmed that God raised “up Christ to sit on the throne.” Did He do what God raised Him up to do? The Bible answers affirmatively; premillennialism answers negatively. Any person who has difficulty deciding which is right and which is wrong is in deep trouble spiritually. (8) There will be a long interval between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked. Older premillennialism said 1,000 years; the newer brand has to get in the Rapture and thus adds another seven years to the 1,000 years. (9) Christ will rule here on earth for a thousand years. (10) It will be a period of unparalleled peace and prosperity. (11) Dispensational premillennialism has added the Rapture, the great tribulation period, the Anti-Christ, Battle of Armageddon, etc., to the overall movement. (12) This newer brand is adamant in contending for seven periods – innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace and kingdom. They claim we are in the sixth

period with the seventh, the kingdom period, to come subsequent to the Lord's second advent. (13) The National Israel mania sweeps the premillennial world and influences politics at work in Washington, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other prominent cities and countries of the world. Jews, they allege, are still God's holy people regardless of the fact that most of them hate Christ and Christianity with a passion. (14) The system contends that Abrahamic promises relative to Jews, the land of Palestine, their inheriting it and the restoration promises of Hebrew prophets yet await fulfillment out there in the future. (15) The system is infidelic to the nth degree. It calls for a rewriting or revision of the whole Bible – from Genesis to Revelation. The whole world of fiction owes them credit for what incredulous fancy can contrive and make countless millions swallow hook, line and sinker.

Isaiah Vs. Premillennialism

It is a serious slap in the face of Isaiah and the three major prophets who came subsequent to him to connect them with the pernicious propaganda put out by malicious millennialists of our era. Could this quartet of spiritual warriors come back, they would stand in holy horror at what premillennial mania has done to their prophetic products of truth and truth only.

Isaiah was NOT a foretelling or prophetic premillennialism in any sense of the term. Yet they claim him for their corner. They really latch on to Isaiah 2:1ff contending for it a millennial fulfillment. They twist it beyond all Scriptural recognition. Kenneth Taylor's **Living Bible Paraphrased** really doctors up this precious passage with a premillennial prescription. I am

glad he is not filling my spiritual prescription! He surely has not done anything worthwhile to enhance the Taylor name in this perverted product he called a Bible but which is not a forty-second cousin to God's real Book Divine. He has Jerusalem serving as the Ruling Center of the world in this period of the millennium. As per his colossal claims the Lord will settle international disputes, all nations will trash their war weaponry, wars will cease and all military training will be but a relic of the past.¹ To him it will be a Golden Utopia.

The last days refer to the Christian Dispensation. This is when Christ serves as our Prophet (Heb. 1:1). The mountain of the Lord's house being established refers to the beautiful beginning of Christ's church in Acts 2. Great will be its exaltation. Comprehensive will be its membership composition as all nations flow into it. Provisions will be made for all. Receptive ones to this gospel provision will invite others to accompany them. It will be a religion of persuasion – not one of coercion. Teaching precedes membership entrance. A circumspect walk is demanded subsequent to entrance. The beginning will be in Jerusalem. Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8 and all of Acts 2 corroborate this. It will be a law. Isaiah knew this long before its culmination in Christianity. Now we have preachers en masse, even among us, who deny Christ has a law (Cf. Rom. 13:8-10; I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; James 1:25; 2:7, 12). Those receptive and obedient to this life-giving Word are the ones who will pursue peace, transforming weapons of war into implements of agricultural helpfulness. Unregenerate men and the nations they head will war just as they have done for countless centuries of the past. Isaiah 2:1-4 is NOT a premillennial sugar stick by any stretch of the

imagination.

Isaiah 11:6-9 is another of their sugar sticks, their claimed texts. They claim in the Messianic millennial era animal animosity will cease with wolf and lamb in perfect unison, leopard and lamb lying side by side in peaceful fellowship, calf and lion in the fellowship of felicity with a little child at the helm of leadership, cow and bear enjoying close proximity with calves and cubs lying side by side and children playing harmlessly with poisonous vipers! Fancy and fiction take on a new dimension when they finish their revision work on this passage. Animal husbandry is not Isaiah's point at all! God's glorious gospel is not designed to change the fundamental nature of wolves, leopards, lions, bears and poisonous snakes. The Messiah and His life-changing gospel is designed to change the jungle in men - not the animals in the jungle. This language, highly figurative as it is most assuredly, is not more literal in application than a literal rod protruding from Jesse's stem or that the Messiah is a literal Branch in Isaiah 11:1 or Jeremiah 33:15. Men formerly at enmity with each other will live peacefully and joyfully when under the life-changing influence of Christ and His leaven of truth. Such will be as amazing as if vicious animals actually changed their voracious ways toward victims like little children, cows, lambs, etc. Premillennialists are adept at eisegesis (reading into a passage what is not there) and totally lacking in exegesis (extracting from a passage what the Spirit of truth and Biblical scribe placed there). Militant millennialists bat out (way out) on Isaiah 11:6-9.

Another sugar stick passage in Isaiah claimed by misguided millennialists is Isaiah 55:3. It and the

subsequent verse read,

Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

When was the everlasting covenant to be made? When were the sure mercies of David to materialize? Not in some fanciful millennium but in Christianity beginning in Acts 2. This is the same covenant alluded to in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and which Jeremiah styles new. It was the covenant wherein God’s word was written in hearts – not tables of stone – and fullness of pardon would be theirs. Such began to transpire in Acts 2 and is not delayed until some so-called millennial era on earth.

On Paul’s first missionary journey he preached at Antioch in Pisidia. In Acts 13:34 his inspired eye is riveted on Isaiah 55:3 and he quoted it, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” In verse 34 Paul affirmed its fulfillment in the resurrected Redeemer and the blessings now ours by the marvelous means of God’s glorious gospel. As surely as Paul was standing in their very midst that day, they could experience the sure mercies of David. In that very context Paul declared that pardon of sins could be their bequeathed blessing of beauty that very day! It was NOT an evasive blessing reserved for people who would live in some sort of millennial utopia way out there in the future. Of what benefit would that have been for his Antiochian auditors that day in their synagogue?

Premillennialism bats out in a hurry in the divine

document known as Isaiah. He was NO premillennial foreteller – period!

Jeremiah Vs. Premillennialism

Judah's weeping prophet from Anathoth had a message of doom for his apostate peers and a twofold message of hope for their future. (1) Chaldean captivity would be seventy years in duration but restoration to their beloved homeland would be a rich reward of reality. (2) Greater and far more glorious blessings lay in their far-flung future with the coming of the new covenant and its Divine Executor – the Marvelous Messiah. There is not a tiny particle of proof in Jeremiah for the poison of premillennialism, the mania of millennialism. Yet the prophets of premillennialism claim the priestly prophet for their corner.

Perhaps no prophet of the Old Testament said more relative to their return from Captivity than did Jeremiah. He was in a unique position to do so. He was an eyewitness to the three deportations – one in 605 B. C. when choice young men such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were taken, in 597 B. C. when several thousand, including Ezekiel, were taken and in 586 B. C. when the city fell, the temple was destroyed and countless others, including Judah's final king, Zedekiah, were moved to Babylon. He knew the full duration would be seventy years or from 605 B. C. to 536 B. C. (Jer. 25:12ff). As their prophet of hope he prophesied of their return. Jeremiah 32, 33 are chapters filled with Restoration prophecies. A couple of verses from these chapters depict the return,

Behold, I will gather them out of all countries,
whither I have driven them in mine anger,

and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely ... And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return and will build them as at the first (Jer. 32:37; 33:7).

What can be said of these Restoration prophecies among the Hebrew prophets in general and in Jeremiah in particular? They declare, on their very surface, that Israel had been given the land, possessed it, and dwelt in it from Joshua’s era to Jeremiah’s day – a period of nearly 900 years. Yet died-in-the-wool premillennialists adamantly deny they received the land. Joshua 21:43-45 lays the sin of falsehood on every militant millennialists who so contends. The land could not be restored to them at a future date if there had never been any past possession of it. In the second place these Restoration prophecies were fulfilled when the captives returned more than 500 years prior to the birth of Bethlehem’s famed Babe. Jeremiah’s prophecies of a restoration are not now awaiting a future fulfillment. They were fulfilled more than 25 centuries ago. Near the close of II Chronicles we read,

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his

people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up (II Chron. 36:22, 23).

The opening verses in Ezra, the very next Biblical book in our current arrangement of the Scriptures, read the same. Incidentally, this is the only place in all the Sacred Scriptures where the ending verses of one book are duplicated in the opening verses of the book that subsequently follows. Unless the restoration of the Jews actually materialized, there is no literary purpose at all served by the twin books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In fact, the kingly keynote of both of these post-exilic books is Restoration.

Premillennialists should take up the restoration of antique pieces of furniture rather than dealing with Restoration prophecies of the Old Testament! At least they would not mislead so many people as they currently do. Purported exegetes of Scripture who cannot tell the difference between prophecies fulfilled 2,500 years ago and prophecies they maintain are yet future do not deserve ANY kind of hearing from today's religious society.

It is nothing short of amazing what they can do with five short words in Jeremiah 30:7, "the time of Jacob's trouble." Only a few days ago I heard a premillennial preacher in our county in West Tennessee, Lauderdale, quote these very words on his radio program and give them a premillennial twist. Jeremiah would stand in utter amazement if he could come back and view the sophisticated arguments they have made from these words applying them to the great tribulation just prior to the Lord's reign of a thousand years. Jacob's trouble is in their captivity and up to the threshold of their deliverance during the time of Cyrus. It has

positively NO reference to a so-called tribulation period of three and one-half years preceding the so-called millennial reign of Christ as envisioned by the fanciful folks that compose the camp of dispensational premillennialism. This is a classic case of lifting a text out of its context. It thus becomes a mere pretext. Jacob is promised salvation from the same. It has been fulfilled for thousands of years and they think it is yet future!

Biblical anticipation of error is one of the most fascinating fields of thought. The Spirit of truth has anticipated EVERY error that would ever be taught by the disciples of the devil and has given us the ammunition to meet it when it emerges. In Jeremiah's inspired product there is a death knell to premillennialism. It is located in the closing part of Jeremiah 22 wherein we read:

Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah (Jer. 22:28-30).

Comments on verse 30 are appropriate for our study. Into the official register, Coniah was to be written childless. This does not mean he was minus offspring for some eight sons of his are enumerated by the Chronicler (I Chron. 3:17-18). Furthermore, his seed is mentioned in this very context (vs. 28,30). It simply means that no son or descendant of his will ever reign in ANY type of prosperity upon David's throne situated

in Judah. This is a balloon-bursting passage for the millennial devotees who think Jesus, who is of Coniah's genealogical line as per Matthew 1:11, 12, will one day reign in prosperity in Jerusalem of Judah. Jechonias of Matthew 1:11, 12 is the same as Coniah. Yet is in Jerusalem of Judah where they have a descendant of Coniah, the Christ, to rule for a thousand years. Premillennialists do not mind demoting the Lord; they have been doing it for a long, long time. Here is further demotion of the Lord of glory. Therefore, they have His reign for a full millennium with no degree of prosperity characterizing His rule for this lengthy period. Put Christ on David's throne in heaven, where it has been for nearly 2,000 years, and the problem vanishes. He has not ruled a single second of this period from a throne situated in Jerusalem of Judah. His prosperity as Reigning Prince is on a throne in heaven – not on earth. It is not a future reign from our vantage point, either, but one now nearly twenty centuries in tenure and one destined to continue till His second coming at which time His reign ends – not commences as per I Corinthians 15:24ff.

Ezekiel Vs. Premillennialism

Ezekiel was an Israelite deported to Babylon around 597 B. C. This was eight years subsequent to Daniel's deportation and some eleven years prior to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B. C. Jehovah God employed him mightily in helping Israelite captives during the early part of their stay in the Chaldean country. He began to prophesy around 592 B. C. He held out hope for their Restoration back to their beloved land but also became a Messianic foreteller as well. Ezekiel was a prophet of truth. This is why WE KNOW

that he was NOT a foreteller of ANYTHING that smacks of premillennialism – a system of materialism, infidelity and false hope. Yet these millennial mania advocates think they really have a sure-fire spokesman for their cause in the “Star Figure of the Exile” as he has been called with attractive aptness. They are especially fond of the last fifteen chapters of this prophetic product – 34-48. Not a single one of these chapters or all of them in aggregate produce any hint of approval relative to pernicious premillennialism.

In chapter 34:11ff God made promise of their return to their land. It was written just a few years after Ezekiel was removed to pagan Babylon and around the time the city fell in 586 B. C. Fulfillment, entire and complete, materialized under Cyrus the Persian and Zerubbabel, the leader of the returned Jews in 536 B. C. In no sense of the term was he predicting a return of Jews to Palestine in 1948 or years subsequent to a United Nations mandate pertaining to Jews and Palestine.

In chapter 34:23ff God promised them one shepherd. He was to be David. Even die-hard premillennialists have to concede this as figurative language since their system does not call for a resurrected David, Jesse’s son, to be their millennial ruler. The Messiah or the Second David was the object of this prophecy. This Shepherd will be a prince or king over them. When? In the millennium or the gospel dispensation? Both answers cannot be right. The latter is the answer of accuracy beyond any shadow of doubt. He is Lord and Christ in Acts 2:36; He is Prince and Savior in Acts 5:31. A covenant of peace will be made with them as per Old Testament prophecy here. Christianity is that covenant made by Him who is

“Prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6; Eph. 2:17). Evil beasts ceasing out of the land is reminiscent of Isaiah 11:6-9 and pictures the peaceful nature of those under the dominion of the Prince of peace. The latter part of chapter 34 depicts the great blessings enjoyed during the Messianic Age. These verses know nothing of fabled felicity associated with some sort of Millennial Utopia, a religious Alice in Wonderland.

Chapter 36 again makes promise of their return from Captivity and the provisions made for their cleansing from defilement. The sprinkling of clean water has its background in Numbers 19 and how the waters of purification were made. It has NO allusion to baptism by sprinkling or pouring as adamant affusion has been long contended. If this context refers to a millennial period, then Jews will have to be in all lands and worshipping idols at the time they are summoned to Palestine. Now just where are there any Jews in the twentieth century who are worshipping idols and what idols are they worshipping? Idolatry has not been one of their sins since the Captivity ended more than twenty-five centuries ago.

Adamant millennialists have a heyday with chapter 37 and the valley of dry bones coming together and experiencing life again. The dry bones represent Jews while they were in the grave of Chaldean Captivity. The opening of these graves and their coming to life again referred to their deliverance from captivity and their restoration to their own land. The joining of the two sticks, one with Judah’s name inscribed and one with Israel’s name inscribed, signified in vivid fashion the uniting of the nation and their coming back as one nation or as one people. This reached fruition in Cyrus and

Zerubbabel as depicted in the closing part of II Chronicles 36 and the initial chapter of Ezra. This chapter of Ezekiel also depicts the Messianic era further down the stream of time.

Chapters 38, 39 are also sugar sticks among premillennialists. If applicable to modern times and the advent of some kind of so-called millennium, will war weaponry be shields, bucklers, bows, arrows, handstaves, spears with military transportation by horses and chariots? Sound ridiculous? Read on! Harry Rimmer, many years ago, put out a little volume in which he predicted there would be war between Israel and Russia with a number of allies. He surmised that Israel will have such military technology that they can melt guns, tanks, planes, etc. Military strategy will have to devise means to meet such. What better way than to turn to wooden clubs which would serve well as non-conductors of energy! Rimmer could have made a fortune in writing fiction for a surety! Another problem emerges from these two chapters in Ezekiel. So complete will be the victory of Israel over the confederation that seven months will be required to bury just the corpses. Jamieson, Fausett and Brown showed how totally absurd such will be if it literally occurs,

And ALL Israel were to take seven months in burying the dead! Supposing a million of Israelites to bury each two corpses a day, the aggregate buried in the 180 working days of the seven months would be 360 millions of corpses! Then the pestilential vapors from such masses of victims before they were all buried! What Israelite could live in such an atmosphere?²

But such is no more absurd than what their literal golden

calf of hermeneutics calls for in Isaiah 66. Near the end of this concluding chapter of his prophetic product the Messianic penman wrote,

And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord ... And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord (Isa. 66:20, 23).

Since the premillennialists contend for a literal restoration of Mosaic ordinances in the millennium with a rebuilt temple on Moriah and all flesh coming to Jerusalem to worship, some problems surely emerge. These will have to come to Jerusalem. They will have to do it monthly or from one new moon to the other. They will have to do it weekly and be there for the sabbath observance. People who live thousands of miles from Jerusalem will face quite a gigantic problem of transportation. Visionary millennialists say plane travel can make such feasible. But remember that they insist such passages as these are to be interpreted literally. No mention is made of planes. Quite to the contrary, horses, chariots and mules are portrayed. They must be swift indeed to transport such enormous amounts of people and have them punctual for sabbath observance. All flesh is included. That would get more than 5 billion of us. They think we are on the very threshold of such. Having visited the small confines of old Jerusalem with its narrow streets and compressed area, I would say the

city will be a bit crowded each new moon and each sabbath with horses, chariots, mules, swift beasts and all the people they will have transported! New York, Chicago and LA traffic at rush hours will surely seem mild by comparison! Within recent days I heard a premillennial preacher on radio who tried to place Ezekiel 38, 39 in a millennial setting. Isaiah 66 also has to be included. The truth of the matter is that Ezekiel 38, 39, like the preceding ones we have noted, find fulfillment in their release from captivity and their return to Palestine under Zerubbabel. The verses in Isaiah 66 likewise are not to be understood literally!³

Chapters 40-48 are highly figurative and describe the marvelous blessings of the gospel dispensation. In no sense of the term do they describe some type of millennial temple replacing the Dome of the Rock – long a fixture on this Jerusalem Mount.

It is vastly important to keep in mind that God fulfilled the land promise in the time of Joshua, the restoration promise in the era of Cyrus and Zerubbabel and the Messianic promise in Christ beginning with Pentecost in Acts 2. In the New Testament there are no land promises, restoration promises to physical Jews or a future kingdom establishment format in some sort of a fictional, fanciful millennial utopia – not a single one.

Daniel Vs. Premillennialism

Youthful Daniel was taken to Babylon in the deportation of 605 B. C. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were removed the same time. They were in their youthful prime and were considered as great potential aid to flourishing Chaldea. Daniel was strong in youth and unbending in his sunset years. He was God’s prophet in

the Babylonian Court and later in the Meso-Persian Court as well. Hence, he spanned two world-wide empires of might and majesty in his exciting era on earth.

He and his book likewise are claimed to be in the corner of premillennialists. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel he never uttered word one or even a syllable of prophetic support for the untenable dogmas of materialistic millennialism. He could not have done so and remained a prophet of truth.

The book of Daniel is a death knell to the whole nefarious system of infidelic premillennialism. In Daniel 2 the youthful prophet, with Jehovah's help, interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great metallic image. That image with diverse elements or constituent parts represented the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman Empires and in that exacting order. One would rise and flourish only to wane and fade. Another would take its place only to repeat the same rise and fall order. Daniel 2:44 states,

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

This passage has been a real thorn in the side of premillennialists. They realize the time identifying expression, "in the days of these kings," has to experience fulfillment when Roman kings ruled. But they deny the kingdom came in the days of the Roman Caesars. Leaving all rhyme, rhythm and reason they seek to create the Roman ruler atmosphere in a more modern setting. They thought Mussolini during World War II

was their answer but he left them high and dry. If not so serious, their efforts to produce such an atmosphere from the European Common Market would be ludicrous to the nth degree.

Daniel did not have his prophetic eye on a twentieth century setting. Roman Emperors ruled when Christ was born and when he and John began to preach the nearness of this coming kingdom in Mark 1:15 and Matthew 4:17. In fact, John said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The fulfillment of what time? That prophesied of by men like the Hebrew prophets in general and Daniel in particular. Did that kingdom actually come when Roman rulers swayed the scepter in the city of seven hills? Most assuredly! The Colossians had been translated INTO it. Nero, a Roman Emperor, was on the throne when Paul wrote that epistle. The Hebrews had received a kingdom which could not be shaken (Heb. 12:28). Nero was still on the throne when Paul penned Hebrews sometime in the decade of the sixties. John the apostle was a member of it (Rev. 1:9). So were Christians on the Asiatic mainland who composed the churches of Asia (Rev. 1-3). Daniel 2 cannot ever be made to fit into a millennial mold.

Daniel 7:13, 14 is another thorn in the side of materialistic millennialists. This duet of declarations reads,

And I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, and all peoples, nations, and

languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

He ascended in a cloud as per Acts 1:9-11. He came to the Ancient of days, the First Person of the Godhead, in clouds. He was given sovereign dominion, glory and kingly sway over all people, nations and languages. His kingdom would be everlasting, would not pass away and would be indestructible.

Premillennialism does not have His receiving any of the foregoing at His ascension. In fact, this egregious system of rank heresy has His returning to heavenly habitations as a dismal failure with a pathetic track record left on earth. They contend He will come to the earth to receive such a kingdom where as Daniel said such would be conferred subsequent to His arrival back in the Palace of the Universe. Daniel 7:13, 14 is in perfect harmony with the Lord's parable of the pounds in Luke 19:12ff. Jesus had to go into a far country (heaven) to receive His kingdom. Be it recalled that premillennialists have His coming to Palestine to receive His millennial kingdom. Jesus spoke that parable not far from Jerusalem. The far country alluded to by Jesus could not have been Palestine for He was in Palestine when he spoke this parable!

Premillennialists do not do a whit better when they get to Daniel's seventy weeks in 9:24-27. They rewrite that passage like they do so many other passages which refute in thorough fashion this ridiculous system of error. In conclusion the four major prophets refute pernicious premillennialism coming and going!

Endnotes

1 Kenneth Taylor, **The Living Bible Paraphrased** (Wheaton, Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), p. 535.

2 Jamieson, Faussett and Brown, **Commentary On The Whole Bible** (London, Edinburgh, Oliphants, LTD, 1961), p. 721.

3 For a fuller discussion see Guy N. Woods, **Questions and Answers Open Forum Freed-Hardeman College Lectureships** (Nashville, William Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 32, 33.

Chapter 35

The Ten Lost Tribes Of Israel: Fact Or Fiction?

Curtis Cates

Central to the materialistic, man-made doctrine of premillennialism is the supposition that the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, are to be restored to Jerusalem at the time of Christ's so-called thousand year reign. This is to be the beginning of Christ's everlasting kingdom. Those who hold the theory try to use prophecies which clearly refer to Israel's return from Babylonian captivity. They postpone then some 2,500 years, which is sheer nonsense. They allow for Judah's return from captivity; however, they reject the idea that the Jews who returned included the ten northern tribes. And, many affirm that Anglo-Saxons are included among the ten tribes.

Another aspect of the restoration theory is the assertion that the land promises made to Abraham were not fulfilled; thus, the original twelve tribes will be restored and will dwell safely in their land, the nation will be restored, the temple will be rebuilt, and the Gentiles, with their wealth, will flow with them. But, they seem not to notice that the land promise was conditional, dependent upon their continued obedience (Josh. 23:14-16; Exod. 19:5).

Joshua stated,

And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein ... There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass (Josh. 21:43-45).

All was fulfilled (Josh. 23:14-16). The very fact that they were warned not to become disobedient lest they “perish quickly from off the good land” is undeniable evidence that the land promise had been granted (Josh. 23:16). Moses had earlier warned that disobedience would cause them to be consumed “from off the land” by Jehovah (Deut. 28:21). Eventually, because of rebellion and idolatry, Israel went into Assyrian captivity, and Judah was carried into Babylonian captivity.

Restoration Of The Ten Tribes: Background Consideration

In determining whether the 10 tribes were restored, several things should be considered. First, in order to be restored from the nations where the Lord had scattered them, the captives would have to “return unto the Lord thy God, and ... obey his voice according to all I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity” (Deut. 30:1-3).

Second, one should remember that the prophecies of the restoration make clear that only a remnant would be restored. Isaiah prophesied,

For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return (Isa. 10:22).

Jeremiah likewise prophesied,

I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries whither I have driven them (Jer. 23:3).

Paul reminded the Jewish Christians in Rome that “a remnant shall be saved” (Rom. 9:27). Because of the influence of sin and idolatry in their lives, only a remnant would be restored to Palestine, choosing to return to God. God even pleaded through Zechariah for more of the Israelites to return home. He cried out some 20 years after the return under Cyrus,

Ho, ho, come forth and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon (Zech. 2:6,7).

However, most would not give heed and chose not to return.

Third, some of all of the 10 tribes remained in Judah when the northern kingdom was taken into captivity. Even when the kingdom was divided during the reigns of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, many of the 10 tribes joined the southern kingdom; in fact, many of the people were ambushed as they attempted to escape to Judah. They were motivated by both religious and economic reasons to do so. II Chronicles 11:1-17, especially verses 16 and 17, records that,

And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah.

Fourth, not all the people of the 10 tribes were

taken to Assyria (Amos 5:1-3). For example, some years after Samaria fell,

Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel (II Chron. 30:1).

The messengers were to cover all the area of the original Israel—from Dan to Beersheba, inviting Israel and Judah (II Chron. 30:10, 11, 18, 25; 31:1; 35:17, 18; 34:9; I Kings 12:23; esp. II Chron. 30:5,6). During Asa’s time, and we may say constantly, there was a gathering of people from all the 10 tribes who rallied to Judah.

And he gathered all Judah an Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him (II Chron. 15:9).

Fifth, the restoration of the 10 tribes was clearly prophesied. Amos said that the captivity of Israel—the remnant—would return to Palestine and would rebuild the destroyed cities and live in them. Ezekiel prophesied also of this restoration (Ezek. 37:15-23). The question is “Has the restoration taken place, or is it still in the future?”

Sixth, the evidence that the 10 tribes were restored to Palestine after the time of the Babylonian captivity is abundant! The words of Moses regarding God’s promise to restore his people were quoted by Nehemiah, who said,

Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, if ye

transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: but if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them ... yet will I gather them from thence ... (Neh. 1:8-10).

Nehemiah affirmed that this prophecy was fulfilled in their returning from Babylon.

Relative to the fall of Babylon, Isaiah prophesied,

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 13:19).

Cyrus the Persian, king of Medo-Persia, is named by Jehovah (Isa. 44 and 45); Jehovah said of Cyrus,

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have called thee by thy name ... I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price or reward, said the Lord of hosts (Isa. 45:4, 13).

The prophecy of Ezra that Jehovah would return to Jerusalem—and that

There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof (Zech. 8:4,5).

—was fulfilled during and shortly after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. When one understands that the territory of Assyria, which carried Israel into captivity, was conquered by and became a part of the Babylonian Empire, he can understand why Ezekiel 3:1-15 refers to the “House of Israel” being in captivity with Judah in Babylon. When Babylon took over Assyria, the exiles

had been there over 100 years. Thus, the “house of Israel” would be brought back in to “the land of Israel.” God said, “I will place you in your own land” (Ezek. 37:11-14). This would fulfill Jeremiah’s promise,

But, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their land (Jer. 23:8).

During the reign of Cyrus, the restoration of Israel—the 10 tribes—as well as that of Judah took place. It is a clear matter of history. For a first thing, Ezra recorded what took place during the first year of Cyrus as follows:

The Lord God of heaven hath given me all of the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (Ezra 1:2,3).

This scripture, as well as others in Ezra, sounds the death knell to premillennialism. Verse 1 states that this fulfilled all the prophecies of Jeremiah relative to Israel’s restoration to their land (cf. Jer. 25:11-13; II Chron. 36:22). Since the decree of Cyrus was proclaimed throughout “all the kingdoms of the earth,” every Jew on earth was included in the restoration proclamation (Ezra 1:4). Yes! “All the words” which Jeremiah wrote relative to Israel’s exile and return had been “accomplished.” That “all his people” is the whole nation of Israel, not just Judah, is absolutely evident. Even their heathen neighbors—Gentiles—and even the government (Ezra 6:4,8) assisted the Jews financially

as they returned. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence which corroborates the Bible's pictures of Cyrus as a humanitarian. The Cyrus Cylinder, for instance, quotes Cyrus thus,

All the peoples I assembled and restored to
their own dwelling places,

thereby reversing the attitudes of Assyria and Babylon, whose lands he had conquered (see Joseph P. Free, G.E. Wright, G.A. Barton, et al.). Furthermore, if Cyrus' proclamation did not include the 10 tribes, they were not the children of God nor were they in Cyrus' realm, which included Assyria (II Kings 18:9-11)—thus, God's word and Cyrus' record are in error!

For a second thing, Ezra recorded that all 12 tribes returned. Those who

came with Zerubbabel: Joshua, Nehemiah,
Azariah, Raamiah, Nahammani, Mordecai,
Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.
The number I say, of the men of the people of
Israel ...

These twelve men were representatives—probably the actual heads—of the 12 original tribes of Israel, the omission of Nahamani in Ezra possibly resulted from a copyist's error or from the death of Nahamani.

For a third thing, Ezra revealed that all of the tribes resettled their own native land.

So the priests, and the Levites, and some of
the people, and the singers, and the porters,
and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and
all Israel in their cities (Ezra 2:70).

The law governing the inheritance in Leviticus 25:12-23 stated specifically that the land “shall not be sold for

ever” but must be inherited only through family estate. Jeremiah affirmed that when they returned to Palestine from captivity, they would return “every man to his heritage, and every man to his land” (Jer. 12:14,15). Since Herod the Great and the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) caused the genealogies to be destroyed, God made clear the fact that the prophecies were fulfilled at the time of Ezra, and that the 10 tribes are not yet to be restored. Such would be impossible! Also, after a short length of time, Israel could remember their cities, but what about after no less than 2,500 years? (cf. I Chron. 9:1-3, where a distinction is made between Israel and Judah, and where each returned to his own possession according to the genealogies).

For a fourth thing, the 10 tribes joined in with Judah in worshipping God. When

the children of Israel were in their cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem ... and builded the altar of the God of Israel (Ezra 3:1,2).

The Jews and Israel were “one man.”

For a fifth thing, sacrifices were made in Jerusalem for each of the 12 tribes. Ezekiel had earlier prophesied,

Thus saith the Lord God: This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another (Ezek. 47:13,14).

Ezra confirmed the fulfillment thus,

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity ... offered ... for a sin offering for all of Israel (Ezra 6:16,17).

One does wonder why 12 he goats were offered if 10 tribes had not returned from captivity.

The children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering; all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord (Ezra 8:35).

It does not take a “Solomon” to figure out that the offerings were made by 12-tribed Israel!

For a sixth thing, during the second commission to return, the king, Artaxerxes, told Ezra the scribe,

I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee (Ezra 7:13).

The king sent also his “silver and gold” with Ezra, as Cyrus and Darius had done (Ezra 7:15; 1:4; 6:8).

There went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king (Ezra 7:7).

This number thus included representatives of those who had been carried to Assyria in 721 BC, the 10 tribes.

For a seventh thing, all of the tribes were recognized in Israel.

Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord (Ezra 8:29; cf. 9:1).

Further, Ezra calls God’s people “Jews” eight times and “Israel” 22 times. The interchangeable use of these terms shows that he is speaking of “all Israel,” for all the tribes. Still further, one does wonder how Ephraim and Manasseh were in Jerusalem if the 20 tribes were lost (I Chron. 9:1-3).

Restoration Of The Ten Tribes: Fulfilled Prophecy

Among the principles which must be respected in understanding Biblical prophecy are the following. First, if an inspired writer states that a particular prophecy is fulfilled in a particular manner, then it is fulfilled that way. Second, if an inspired writer states that certain events have already been fulfilled, then no person has a right to insist on a later fulfillment. Third no person can postpone a prophecy’s fulfillment, referring it to some circumstances foreign to the originally intended fulfillment. Such make the prophet false and places the prophecies on the level of Jeanne Dixon’s predictions. Such is utter nonsense! The return of the 10 tribes, as mentioned above, was imperative in light of many prophecies. One, Ezekiel pictured the return of all Israel from bondage when he stated,

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

The prophets affirmed that God would “cause you (all Israel) to come out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezek. 37:11,12). The rejoicing upon the occasion of being restored to Jerusalem would be similar to being raised from the dead.

Two, Ezekiel pictured the destiny of Israel and of Judah as being inseparably linked or joined. He stated that one stick is Judah and one stick is Israel. Jehovah commanded that Ezekiel “join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand” (Ezek. 37:15-19). God would unify them thus:

Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation ... and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all ... And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd (Ezek. 37:21, 22, 24; cf. Zech. 8:13; 10:6; Jer. 3:18).

Numerous New Testament passages, including John 10:11,16 prove that the return joined Judah and Israel, in preparation for Christ to rule over them when He assumed the right hand of God at the time of the establishment of His kingdom on the day of Pentecost of Acts 2.

Three, Ezekiel spoke of the “house of Israel” in captivity in Babylon by the river Chebar and to this house only (Ezek. 3:1, 5, 11, 15). He stated: “Thus saith the Lord God: This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions” (Ezek. 47:13). This was fulfilled through the return at the time of Cyrus, else the 10 tribes are not a part of “all his people” the “twelve tribes.” A person would have to be deceived by a “grievous wolf” in order to misunderstand this.

Four, Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would “Make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with

the house of Judah.” He further quoted Jehovah,

If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever (Jer. 31:31-36).

Paul proved conclusively that the prophecy of Jeremiah had been fulfilled (Heb. 8:8-10). In addition, brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. affirmed that since the ordinances had departed (Heb. 9; Col. 2:14-16; Rom. 7:1-4), then Israel had also ceased as a nation forever. Too, unless the erroists can find a fault in the second covenant, they cannot defend a third covenant for the “millennium.”

Five, Isaiah prophesied that after a branch would rise out of Jesse’s roots and bear fruit,

... the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

At the same time would God

... recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and the Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

The Gentiles would also seek the Lord, as well as “the outcasts of Israel and ... the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:1-12). This prophecy was literally fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost of Acts 2. The Holy Spirit revealed, “Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5; cf., verses 8-11). Indeed, the mountain of Jehovah—the kingdom—was established on Pentecost when Israel was gathered from every nation

(cf. Acts 13:22-24; 13:46,47).

Six, preparation was made for the kingdom's beginning in Acts 2 by Christ's having sent the apostles to "go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," not to the Samaritans or the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5,6). Thus, the 12 tribes were in Judea. When a Gentile woman asked Christ to heal her daughter, Christ replied, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24f). Unless Christ was able to go to those "lost sheep of the house of Israel," his mission was a failure! Did he spend more than three years of ministry among the wrong people?