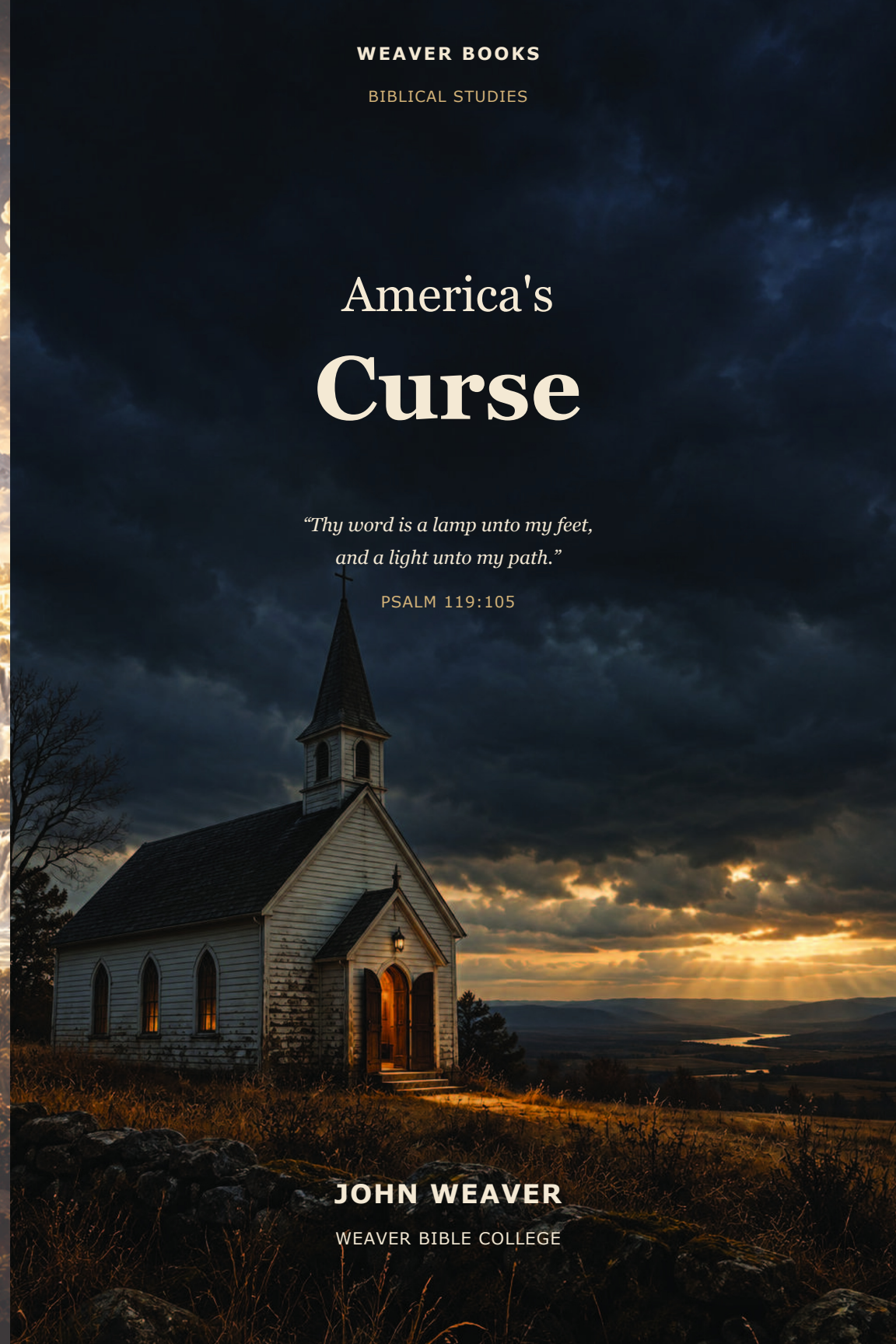
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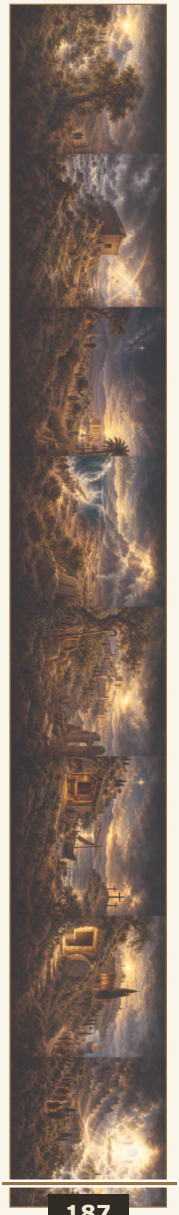
"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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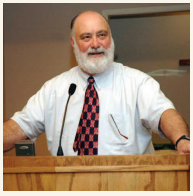
Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.

PSALM 33:12, EXCERPT

John Weaver locates national decline in spiritual unfaithfulness as well as public disorder. These messages examine the handling of God's Word, the influence of false teachers, and the responsibility of hearers to discern the truth. The volume presents its argument as a call to scriptural fidelity rather than confidence in outward religious appearance.

“We must know what God's Word teaches, and we must be able to discern when a man is preaching the truth and when he is not.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

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Contents

Chapter 1: America's Curse - Part One 5

Introduction: The Concept of Sanctions 7

The Root Problem: False and Foolish Preachers 8

God's Command to Reject False Prophets 9

Jeremiah's Shock and Grief 11

The Result: A Land Full of Wickedness 12

The Desecration of False Prophets 13

The Desecration of the Prophets 13

The Denunciation of the Prophets 17

The Devastation Caused by False Preachers 21

The Destruction of False Preachers 22

Applications: God's Sanctions and Our Response 24

Chapter 2: America's Curse - Part Two 27

Introduction and Review of America's Curse 28

The Nature of God's Sanctions 28

False Hopes in America 29

How False Preachers Lead People Astray 31

The Superiority of God's Word 34

The Superiority of God's Word Over Falsehood 35

The Supremacy of God's Power to Accomplish His Purpose 37

Applications for America's Hope 41

The Importance of Preaching the Word of God 42

Topical Index 47

Scripture Index 49

Study Guide Link 51

CHAPTER 1

America's Curse

Part One

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 23:9-32 (KJV)

My heart within me is broken because of the prophets. All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord and because of the words of His holiness.

For the land is full of adulterers, for because of swearing the land mourneth. The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane. Yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord. Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness, and they shall be driven on and fall therein. For I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation saith the Lord.

And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria. They have prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing. They commit adultery and walk in lies. They strengthen also the

hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness. And there all of them unto me is Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof is Gomorrah.

Therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts concerning the prophets, Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of Gaul. For from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets, that prophesy unto you. They make you vain. They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. 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. For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word? Who hath marked his word and heard it? The whole whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 23:19-32 (KJV)

It shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord shall not return until he has executed, until he has performed the thoughts of his heart. In the latter days you shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel and caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doing. Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?

I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. 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? Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh a rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words, every one from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, he saith. 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 their likeness.
>
> Yet I sent them not, nor commended them. Therefore, they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.
>
> The word is sanctions. We have heard that word and have understood its meaning politically and diplomatically. But when it comes to the biblical law, most of us do not understand what sanctions really are.

Introduction: The Concept of Sanctions

It is a foreign term to us. Legally speaking, sanctions refers to that part of the law designed to secure its enforcement, either by imposing a penalty for violating the law or by offering a reward or blessing for observing it. Simply stated, sanctions may be either negative or positive. When someone in a position of higher authority sanctions an act, conduct, or attitude, that means he approves it and puts his blessings upon it. On the other hand, when someone in higher authority sends sanctions against someone, that means he disapproves of that conduct, action, or attitude and therefore judges or chastises them.

In light of sanctions, I want you to think for a moment about the desperate situation in America today. The majority of Americans do not comprehend the enormity of our situation. I could dwell on the political and judicial corruption that abounds, congressional fraud, spineless politicians, the Federal Reserve System, the economy, rampant immorality, the rebellion of an entire generation, and the

ignorance and obtuseness that exists not just among Americans in general, but among professing Christians specifically.

The Root Problem: False and Foolish Preachers

Instead of trying to deal with the symptoms, I want to deal with the real cause and root of the problem. There are some people who do not like apples, and yet there is an apple tree in their yard. If you do not like apples, it is vain and foolish to go out each year, pull the apples off, and curse them as you throw them to the ground, saying, "I don't like you." If you really do not want the apples around, all you have to do is take the axe and hew the tree down. That will take care of the problem.

If you do not like what America has become—if you do not like the corruption, filth, vileness, rudeness, wickedness, faithlessness, and rebellion—then you simply need to lay the axe to the root of the tree producing all of that fruit and all of those symptoms. Once you hew the tree down, the poisonous fruits will disappear. You are probably going to ask me, since I read this passage, what is the tree that has produced all the poisonous fruits in America? The answer is simple: false and foolish preachers. The problem we have in America today is exactly the same problem that Judah and Israel had in Jeremiah's time.

There were men who were preaching and prophesying in the name of God whom God had never called, sent, or sanctioned. Consequently, they were teaching error, falsehood, and outright lies. They denied God, God's Word, and God's truth, substituting their own whims, dreams, plans, and desires. They were false and foolish creatures who led the people astray.

God says in Jeremiah 23:14, "I have seen also the prophets of Jerusalem a 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."

Likewise today, if you look around at the preachers in America's pulpits, the vast majority are not scholars, exegetes, expositors, or expounders of the Word of God. No, not by far cry. In reality, the

vast majority are humanistic to the core, dealing with philosophies such as “I'm OK, you're OK,” the purpose-driven life, building self-esteem, and the power of positive thinking. Or, “God wants you to be rich now.” Above all, they want people to feel comfortable and included in their churches. To the vast majority of preachers today, it does not matter that much to speak about sin, repentance, reconciliation, regeneration, or conversion.

Their message is simply, “Come on in and join us just the way you are.” I read an article about several women who had a “ministry” going to strip joints in Vegas and elsewhere, asking women to give them lap dances. When a woman consented, they would say, “We don't really want the lap dance. You can do it if you want to. We just want to pay you and tell you about Christ.” Then, if she wanted to join their church, that was fine; she did not have to change her occupation or lifestyle. What about sin? What about repentance, regeneration, and conversion?

The truth of the matter is this: the average preacher in this country is more concerned with building a building or building a work than he is with building people. They would rather grow numerically than spiritually. This same attitude God condemned in Israel in Hosea chapter 8 and verse 14, where God said, “For Israel hath forgotten her maker, and buildeth temples.” That is what we have done in this country. We have forgotten God, and we are building churches on every corner of the street. Yet the truth of the matter is that there is very little preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

Now, let me give you a surprise today. It may surprise you to learn that God forbids you to listen to some preachers. Look in Jeremiah 23 and verse 16. Concerning the prophets, the Lord of hosts says, “Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision out of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord.” What did He say? “Hearken not to them.” Do not listen to them.

God's Command to Reject False Prophets

Look in verse 25: “I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart." So what does God say? Do not listen to these preachers.

You would be amazed at the people I meet who have had the craziest—and I am going to use this word, because it is correct—the stupidest and most unbiblical ideas imaginable, and they got them from a television preacher. What does God say? God says, "Do not listen to these preachers." You know what God calls these preachers? In Isaiah 56, verses 10 and 11, God says, "His watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs that cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving a slumper. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand."

They all look to their own way, every one for his own gain from his own quarter. What does God say about these prophets? He says they are dumb dogs that cannot bark. What good is a dog that will not bark and let you know when danger is approaching? He is worthless. God also calls him a greedy dog. These prophets are interested not in His word, not in His truth, not in His people, and not in His work, but in their own gain.

Here are preachers and prophets whom God calls dumb dogs and greedy dogs. Look in Jeremiah 23 at verses 30 and 32. Here are the prophets against whom God is specifically speaking. In Jeremiah 23 and verse 30, God says, "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets." In verse 31: "Behold, I am against the prophets." In verse 32: "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams." Three times God says, "I am against the prophets."

God does not simply forbid us to hear them. God specifically says, "I am against them." What does that mean? It means that God appears in arms against those preachers.

If you listen to those whom God is against, and follow those against whom God is in arms, where does that place you? In the ranks that God is going to fight against. God says, "Do not listen to them, do not follow them, and do not side with them." If you do, I will be against you as well as against them.

The curse of Israel in Jeremiah's time and the curse of America are exactly the same. We have listened to preachers who led us astray. We refuse the right way, the true way. What have Americans done? What have professing Christians in America done? They have followed the blind and have been led blindly into the ditch themselves.

Jeremiah's Shock and Grief

Jeremiah begins this passage in Jeremiah 23:9: "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness." Jeremiah begins this section by saying, "I have a broken heart. All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man whom wine has overcome."

What does that mean? It means you are stunned, senseless. Jeremiah said, "I am shocked beyond measure." Why? There are three reasons given in verse nine. First of all, he says, "Because of the prophets." That is because of their sin, the false doctrine they preached, and the wicked lives they lived. Especially, it filled him with horror that they were making use of God's name, claiming to be God's preachers, claiming to proclaim His word, and having received their instruction from Him. Jeremiah said that was the furthest from the truth. There had been none to abuse the Lord and abuse His truth like these prophets. They had abused His name and His holiness.

To dishonor God and dishonor His word, to profane His truth, should be the greatest grief imaginable to a gracious soul. Jeremiah said, "I cannot believe this. I am just stunned, senseless. I am shocked out of my wits." Look at the men who claim to be the prophets and preachers of God; look at their lives, what they are saying, and what they are doing. Does it not grieve you today that men ignore the truth of the Word of God? Does it not grieve you that Jesus Christ is dishonored? Does it not grieve and upset you that the true preachers of God are despised and counted as despicable individuals? Does it not upset you that our politicians, our civil leaders, and even our religious leaders do everything in their power to overlook and condemn the Word of God?

Anytime a preacher is used on television or in the movies, usually he is portrayed as an adulterer or as an ignorant, stupid individual who knows nothing and can do nothing. Jeremiah said, "I'm just shocked. I'm just stunned because of these prophets. I can't believe it." He gives a second reason in verse 9: he is shocked and stunned because of the Lord.

What does he mean by that? He means because of the Lord's judgments, which are going to fall like a flood. Jeremiah trembled to think of the desolation and judgment that were coming from the face of the Lord. He knew that just as surely as night followed day and evening followed morning, judgment was coming from God upon those who rebelled and were disobedient to Him. So he said, "I'm shocked because I know what's going to come."

Then he said, thirdly, because of the words of His holiness. In other words, he knew that God was absolutely holy. It was His power that would bring forth the judgment, but it was His holiness that would require the judgment. Thus he gives three reasons: he was shocked and stunned because of the prophets, because of the Lord, and because of His holiness.

The Result: A Land Full of Wickedness

Verse 10 gives an excellent summary of the result of the false and foolish preachers in the land: "For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth, and the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right." The result of these false and foolish preachers is that the land is full of adulterers—that is, it is full of sin and wickedness. Even nature itself is witness against the land. The land itself mourns and fights against men.

John Calvin said of this verse: "Whenever then God raises his hand to punish men for their sins, if they perceive it not, the very land, which is without sense and feeling, ought to fill them with shame for their madness. For mourning appears in the very land as though it knew that God was displeased with it. When, therefore, men sleep in their sins, and thus disregard God's vengeance, how monstrous must be their stupor"—their numbness, their insensibility.

The Desecration of False Prophets

If this be intolerable in the common people, what can be said of the prophets who ought to proclaim such words as these? “Cursed is he who transgresseth the precepts of this law, or cursed is he who has corrupted the worship of God, or cursed is he who deedeth unjustly with his neighbor,” and whatever else the law continues.

If men do not perceive the hand of God against them, the very land itself will cry out against them. Have you noticed the floods, the tornadoes, the hurricanes, the droughts, and the fires? What is the land doing? Crying out and saying, “Wake up, folks. God is highly displeased. God is judging you. Can’t you see?”

When we talk about the false prophets, the false preachers, first of all, consider their desecration. Look in verse 11: “For both prophet and priest are profane. Yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord.” Now skip down to verse 13: “I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria. They have prophesied in Baal and caused my people Israel to err.” So God says that they are profane. He has found wickedness and folly in them. Here is their desecration.

The Desecration of the Prophets

When I use the word desecration, I am using it as a synonym for profanation. They profane the name of the Lord; they profane or desecrate His word; and they lead the people astray. The word profane in verse 11 is the Hebrew word kanaf, which means to pollute, to defile, to desecrate, to become greatly corrupted and profane. God is saying that the false preachers then desecrate His ministry, His word, His calling, and His house. They desecrate not only Him, but His house, and their wickedness was found in His house.

They are representing themselves as God's preachers, but they are not preaching His Word. What are they preaching? A figment of their imagination. Look in verse 16: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you.” Why? “They make you vain. They speak a vision out of their own

heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord." In other words, they are preaching whatever they want to preach.

Look down in verses 25 and 26: "I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart." What are these men preaching if they are not preaching the Word of God? They are preaching lies, deceit, and the imaginations of their own hearts. Rather than following the Word of God, they are preaching their own whims, desires, vision, and dreams—anything and everything other than the Word of God.

Let me give you another quote, because Calvin states this so succinctly while commenting on the profanity of these false preachers: "He that is Jeremiah enhances what he said of their impiety, for they were not only infamous and wicked in common life in the duties of the second table, but they were also corrupted the whole service of God, and the true prophets were derided by them." They corrupted the whole worship of God, and the true prophets were derided by them.

I want to ask you a question. When it comes to politics and religious services, name the big-name preachers who are always put on television and placed in political circles. Now think about the true preachers and prophets of God who are put up there to say, "Here is what God really says." None of them.

Calvin goes further: "For what was found to be the priest's wickedness in the temple, except that they practiced a sort of merchandise under the cover of the priesthood, and then the prophets vitiated and adulterated God's worship, and what was religion to them but the means of filthy lucre or gain? When therefore the prophets thus trod underfoot the service of God, corrupted and perverted the law to make gain or to acquire power, their impiety was not only seen in the habits of daily life, but also in the very temple of God, that is, with regard to the priestly office."

They had corrupted everything in the worship and service of God for money, power, or both. Thus, in their rebellion, they desecrated God and His word. They desecrate the office of a minister, the

calling, and the work. You look in this country at the number of men who present themselves as the preachers of God, yet they never declare His word, enunciate His principles, stand against wickedness, or demand that sinners repent and believe. Yet they call themselves the preachers of God.

We have spawned a generation of so-called pastors who are sweet, effeminate, successful church administrators, whose desire is to build a big work and a name for themselves, to be praised and recognized by men, and who know absolutely nothing of the real calling and work of God. We have spawned men who labor mightily in preparing sermons just to make sure they do not upset, offend, or make anyone mad. While seeking the praise of man, they ignore the praise that comes from God only. Our Lord spoke of them in John 12:48: "For they love the praise of man more than the praise of God." In John 5:44, He asked the Pharisees, "How then can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" Desiring the recognition, praise, and honor of man makes faith impossible.

I cannot imagine how much work the average liberal or uncalled preacher does to make sure he does not teach the Word of God. Think of all the sob stories, anecdotes, and illustrations he must produce to entertain the people while saying absolutely nothing. Such men are a farce and a laughingstock to the world. They cast dispersions upon the true preachers of God because they desecrate the calling and office while profaning the name of the Lord.

What is the result of this desecration and profanation? Look at verse 15: "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of Gaul: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land." Where did it start? In the pulpits, in the preaching.

Because the preachers were profane, profaneness is scattered throughout the entire land. Let me say it very bluntly: most of the problems we are facing in our land have to be laid at the feet of preachers—many of them false and foolish preachers who refuse to teach the Word of God and, in doing so, promote a false and fictitious gospel.

Matthew Poole said this: “Those whose work was to reveal the mind of God to the people, and who pretended to that office, and those that were employed in offering sacrifices and other works which belonged to the priestly office, according to the law—the whole ecclesiastical order, all of their ministry—were profane; not merely hypocritical, but lewd, immoral, and debauched. Yea, they were grown to that impudence that they made the temple, which was the house of the Lord, a den of thieves, a place where they committed wickedness. Thus it was in the time of Eli and more generally afterwards. There is no more certain sign of the ruination of a nation than when God allows in it a lewd and a corrupt ministry.”

Isn’t that amazing? There is no surer sign of the ruination of a nation than when God allows in it a lewd and corrupt ministry.

If I were to begin naming names today, I could go a good while on the pastors who have been rightly charged with adultery, fornication, and pornography. When you have a lewd and corrupt ministry, you have a ruined nation. Why? Wickedness in the pulpit begets wickedness in the pew.

Now let me connect the charges that God lodges against the preachers with the result. Look at it. Let us go back to verse 13. He said, “I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria.” What was their folly? They prophesied in Baal. That is a false gospel, a false god. And they caused my people to err. “I have also seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing. They commit adultery. They walk in lies. They strengthen also the hands of evil doers.” And none doth return from his wickedness. They are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

Now watch verse 15, the latter part: “For from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.” Everything that God charged the preachers with was spread throughout the entire land. When those who are in positions of power and authority refuse to live holy, godly lives, they cannot expect those over whom they exercise power and authority to do otherwise than what they are doing. Interestingly, God says, “Do not listen to these men. I am against them. They desecrate my name. They desecrate my office, my calling, and my word.”

The Denunciation of the Prophets

Notice, secondly, their denunciation. You will find this in verse 14 again, where God denounces them. He calls them adulterers and liars. He calls them rebels and perverts. He says they are assaulting Gamara unto him. Verse 16, once again, He says they make you vain; they speak a vision out of their own heart. In verse 21 He says, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied."

"But if they had stood in my counsel and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doing." Notice how God denounces these false preachers. Calvin, again on verse 14, says that Jeremiah shows how these false preachers surpassed other prophets in impiety because they dissimulated—that is, they played the hypocrite—when they saw, on the one hand, adultery prevailing, and on the other, frauds, plunders, and perjuries.

They undertook the patronizing of the wicked, strengthened the hands of the ungodly, and added audacity to their madness. For as fear weakens the hands, so does shame. As these prophets removed shame as well as fear from the wicked and ungodly, they strengthened their hands; that is, they gave them more confidence, so that they rushed headlong into every evil more freely and with greater liberty.

Matthew Poole says the great aggravation of the sin of those who occupy the place of spiritual guides is that they encourage profane men either by false doctrine, extenuating sin and putting a fair gloss upon it; by their mealy mouths, forbearing to tell sinners of their wicked courses; or by their wicked examples, most people thinking they may do what their teachers do. By this means, sinners, instead of being brought to a sense of their sins and repentance, are hardened in their wicked courses. Thus, says Poole, they become as Sodom and Gomorrah to the one true and living God. God despises them, God hates them, and God will destroy them.

In verse 16, God says, "Hearken not unto these prophets." Israel had been given the law of God. You would think that when these false preachers began spouting their false doctrines, the people

would say, “All that’s frothing nonsense. I’m not going to listen to that.” But Judah and Israel believed the false prophets. I am continually amazed at what people will believe.

There are people who believe in the lizard people because the lizard people exist. One man said that he fell over a ship and fell into a time warp, appearing forty years later while everyone else was forty years older. People believe that stuff. It seems people will believe everything and anything but the truth. Tell them the truth and they will not believe it; tell them a lie and they will believe it. You would think these people would have known better.

God says in verse 21, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.” What does God mean when He says this? Let me give you an illustration. Look back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 18.

You'll remember that Absalom had rebelled against his father and tried to kill him. There was a war. Joab took the men of Judah and fought against Absalom. Of course, you know how Absalom's hair became tangled in the oak tree, and Joab took darts, thrust them through his heart, and killed him. Word was then sent back to David. Notice 2 Samuel chapter 18, beginning at verse 19.

Then said Ahimeas, the son of Zadok, let me now run and bear the king tidings, how that the Lord have avenged him of his enemies. And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day. But this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead. Then said Joab to Cushi, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushiah bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. Then said Ahimeaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab. But howsoever let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushiah. Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing thou hast no tidings ready? But howsoever, he said, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimeaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushiah.

Notice verse 22. Ahimeaz wanted to run, and Joab said, How can you run when you have not been sent and have no tidings ready? Go back to Jeremiah and look at what he said in verse 21: “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they

prophesied." In other words, here were preachers who ran unsent. In running unsent, they had no message from God. Therefore, they had to make up their own message. According to verses 25 and 26, the only thing they could speak was a message from their own deceived and deceitful hearts. God denounced them as unsent, untaught, and ungodly.

This passage is very important. It teaches us that no one is worthy of being heard except as a true minister of God. There are at least three things necessary to prove a person a true minister of God. There are many others, but these are a minimum. First, he must have a divine call; God must actually call him to preach. Second, he must have faithfulness and integrity in his life.

You remember what our Lord said in John 8, in verse 36. He looked at those Pharisees and said, "Which of you convinced of me of sin?" A pastor, a preacher of God, ought to have a life that is above reproach, according to 1 Timothy, chapter 3. That does not mean that he is sinless, but generally and overall, he is a man of integrity, a man of his word, and a man of faithfulness. And, number three, he actually preaches and proclaims the Word of God.

So he must have a divine call. He must have faithfulness, integrity, and godliness in his life. And he must actually preach the Word of the Lord. All those who do not have a divine call, who do not have faithfulness, integrity, and godliness in their lives, and who do not proclaim the Word of God are not worthy to be heard, and they may be scripturally rejected.

God said, "I didn't send them, but they ran. I didn't give a message, yet they preached." What is He saying? Listen carefully. When God says, "I have not sent them," yet they ran, remember that running is arduous work. A false preacher may show a lot of zeal, diligence, and earnestness. He may indeed be a great orator and very successful as far as the world is concerned. But God said, "I never sent him." The proof is that he is not preaching My Word.

Now look at verse 22. He is talking about these false prophets: "I've not sent them, yet they ran. I've not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." But if they had stood in God's counsel and caused His people to hear His words, then the people would have turned from

their evil way and from the evil of their doings. How could they speak God's Word if they had not heard God?

The answer is very simple. God had already revealed His law to Moses, given it to the people, and given them His Word. Deuteronomy 30:12–15 says:

"It is not in heaven that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up to heaven to bring it down unto us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thine heart, that thou mayest do it. See, says God, I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil."

How did God set life and good, death and evil before them? He set them before them in His law.

You object and say, "But Brother Weaver, you have got to remember these men were unconverted and uncalled." I understand that. But do you realize that God can use a crooked stick to draw a straight line? If God can use a jackass to preach to a false preacher, He can use a false preacher to preach to someone else.

It is not the man that God would be honoring, but His Word. Psalm 138:2 says, "Thou hast magnified thy word above thy name." Psalm 119:89 says, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." What God is saying is this: If these false prophets had at least stood in His counsel and heard His words, what would they be doing? They would not really and truly be false prophets; they would be preaching and teaching His Word. The evidence that they were false prophets was that they were not teaching and preaching His Word. God therefore denounces them as unsent and untaught.

Thirdly, consider their devastation. This is found in verses 13, 15, 17, and 27—in fact, even verse 12: "Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them in the year of their visitation, saith the Lord." He also speaks of their being as Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 14. In verse 15, they make the people profane; in verse 16, they make the people vain; and in verse 27, the

ultimate result is that they make the people forget the one true and living God and follow Baal.

The Devastation Caused by False Preachers

With all the preachers we have in this country—and I mean the false and foolish preachers—one would think that at least they might help in some degree. After all, you would say that they are trying to do what is right; they just do not know what is right. Surely they cannot be all bad. Well, what did our Lord say? “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall in the ditch.” The Bible tells us in verse 13 that these false prophets cause God’s people Israel to err. In verse 15, they make the people profane; in verse 16, they make the people vain; in verse 17, they sue the wicked. They bless the wicked, assure them of peace and prosperity, and in verse 27 make them forget God.

How can anyone really, truly teach the will of God if he doesn't know what the will of God is? How can someone lead you to the One True and the Living God if you don't even know who the One True and the Living God is, or if he doesn't know who the One True and the Living God is? How can that happen? How can a false preacher really and truly preach the Word of God if he doesn't really believe the Word of God?

You talk about the devastation that these men wrought in Israel. Look at the devastation that's being wrought in America. Because of false and foolish preachers, like Israel of old, we have gone a whoring after the gods of pleasure, prosperity, political correctness, and tolerance. Profanation has issued forth from the pulpits in America. We have become a profane people. Where are the preachers of early America? Where are the preachers that call men and women to repentance, to faith, to holy and righteous living? Where are the preachers that expose sin, wickedness, rebellion, and unrighteousness? Where are the pastors who will lead the people in a holy war against corruption, fraud, wickedness, and tyranny? Where are they?

We have a few in this country, but I'm talking about as a whole. We have listened to false and foolish preachers in this country, and we basically destroyed ourselves. The average American—and I'm going to go further, the average professing Christian—knows nothing

of God's law, knows nothing of righteous and godly living, and knows nothing of how to make application of the Word of God to his life. The average professing Christian knows nothing of a Christian worldview, a biblical philosophy, or presuppositional thinking.

The truth is we've become a profane people, and we have been devastated. The devastation began in the pulpit, and from the pulpit, as God says, it went throughout all the land. Do you realize that when men think they know more than God, know better than God, and relegate God's Word and God's truth to the trash, eventually God will relegate them to the garbage dump himself?

The Destruction of False Preachers

The fourth and final point is their destruction. Back in verse 12, what does God say? “Wherefore, their ways shall be unto them as slippery ways of the darkness. They shall be driven on and fall therein, for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the Lord.” In verse 15, once again, He says, “Don’t listen to these men.” In verse 19, God says, “Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind. It shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked.”

What is God saying that He is going to do to these false and foolish preachers? He says He is going to make their way slippery in darkness. He is going to bring evil upon them. He speaks of the year of their visitation. The word visitation here means judgment—the year of their judgment. He is saying that He is going to deal with these wicked men. They cannot fight against God and escape.

Note, if you would please, in verse 15: “Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of Gaul.” Wormwood and Gaul are bitter, extremely bitter. What is God saying? Ultimately, He is going to give these false and foolish preachers a miserable, bitter, tragic end to their miserable, wicked lives. Then, in verse 19, like a whirlwind, once He makes them suffer so tragically, He will wipe them out.

Here is an illustration of how God has done this in times past. Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah 20, beginning in verse 1: “Now

Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashur smote Jeremiah," so you have the false preacher smiting the true preacher, "and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was in the house of the Lord. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib," which means terror on every side.

Thus said the Lord: "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 into Babylon, and shall slay them with a sword. Moreover, I will deliver all the strength of this city, and all the labors thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah, will I give them in the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them into Babylon. And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity, and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, thou shalt be buried there, thou and all thy friends whom thou hast prophesied lies."

What is God going to do? Kill him. In Jeremiah 29, beginning with verse 20: "Hear ye therefore the word of the Lord, all ye of the captivity whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon." Verse 21 says, "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 in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes." Read on, and you will find that God said He would destroy them, their families, and everything. Mark it down.

Sooner or later, the false and foolish preachers will be destroyed by God because they devastated His people. God has denounced them because they have desecrated His word and Himself.

Now let us make a couple of applications. First, God does impose sanctions. Sanctions may be negative or positive. God imposes sanctions against individuals, families, churches, nations, and

preachers. He places all who rebel against Him under a negative sanction.

Applications: God's Sanctions and Our Response

Read Numbers chapter 16 and consider Dathan, Abiram, and Korah. What did God do to them? He destroyed them. What about the 250 princes of the congregation who supported them? God destroyed them; fire from heaven consumed them. God does impose sanctions. Those sanctions may be negative or positive, and that includes sanctions on preachers.

I've often said that I'm more afraid of the Lord than anyone else. God can clean your clock quicker than anyone else. Just mark it down, folks: God does impose sanctions.

The second thing is this: you've got to understand that there are preachers God forbids us to listen to. You say, “What preachers are those?” Any and all of them that do not preach and teach His Word. You say, “How do I know whether I'm preaching His Word or not?” Oh, isn't that interesting? That means you've got to know His Word yourself. You've got to have some biblical discernment.

Do you remember what Paul said about the Bereans in Acts 17? These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the Word of God daily as to whether or not these things were so. When they heard the Apostle Paul preach, they didn't just take Paul's word; they searched the Scripture. If we're going to obey God and not listen to false and foolish preachers, we must know the Word of God ourselves. We must know what God's Word teaches, and we must be able to discern when a man is preaching the truth and when he is not.

What is the curse of America? An uncalled, unsent, and untaught ministry. Look at the founding of our country. It was the preachers who led in the American Revolution, taught, and confronted the civil rulers. No civil ruler could take office without an election sermon. He was called before the people, and the preachers preached an election sermon to that ruler. Where are God's preachers today? Now, there are some. But as a whole, we've destroyed ourselves,

because, like Israel of old, we listen to false and foolish preachers and are under the curse, the sanction of God.

Our very land cries out against us, saying, “Wake up, wake up. You better listen. If you don't, it's going to get an awful lot worse.” We will never regain our nation until we regain God-called preachers in the pulpits, preaching and teaching obedience to the Word of God.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We ask You to help us, to teach us, to make us know Your Word, and to give us, Lord, understanding and discernment. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

America's Curse

Part Two

Jeremiah chapter 23. We are going to begin reading in verse 25, Jeremiah 23, verse 25.

I've heard what the prophets said that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea, there are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. 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? Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh a rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say he saith. 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 likeness. Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them. Therefore, they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.

Introduction and Review of America's Curse

Now you remember, last week before last, I brought a message entitled America's Curse. The message today is the second part, and it is entitled America's Hope. When I dealt with America's Curse, I pointed out the fact that America's curse basically, based upon Jeremiah 23, was false and foolish preachers. And we looked at four points under this. Very quickly, we looked at number one, their desecration: how they desecrated the name of the Lord, the office, and the calling of a preacher as well.

We look secondly at their denunciation, how God denounced them over and over in this passage. Thirdly, we look at their devastation: how they destroyed the people of God by making them believe lies, leading them astray and away from the one true and living God. Fourthly, we look at their destruction, where God said that He would indeed destroy these prophets. Remember, God does indeed impose sanctions. There are negative sanctions, which are curses, and positive sanctions, which are blessings.

The Nature of God's Sanctions

The truth of the matter is this: there is no neutrality. You are either under God's positive sanction, His blessings, or under God's negative sanctions, His curses. Our Lord said it like this in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 30: “He that is not with me is against me. And he that gathereth not scattered abroad.” In reality, there's no king's ex. There's no neutrality, no middle ground, and no timeouts. You are either under God's blessing or under God's curses. This truth applies personally, familially, ecclesiastically, nationally, and even magisterially or ministerially.

This thought hit me the other day: even preachers are either for Christ or against Christ. Isn't that amazing? Not just nations, churches, families, and individuals, but even preachers are either for Christ or against Christ.

False Hopes in America

America's hope is the positive side of sanctions, a hope given to us in the Word of God. One of our problems in America is that many Americans, and many people generally, have placed their hopes in men, people, documents, parties, and political systems. They place their hope in anything and everything but the one true and living God and His Word.

I consider myself a strict constitutionalist; that is, I believe the Constitution should be interpreted very strictly and narrowly. But I have a confession to make: even if the Constitution is interpreted as strictly as it should be, it will not save us. No political party will save us—not the Republicans, the Democrats, or a third party. Man cannot save and will not save, for a very simple reason: the Bible teaches that salvation is of the Lord.

Whether you are speaking of spiritual, economic, governmental, military, or personal salvation, salvation is not in man. Jonah 2:9 says, “Salvation is of the Lord.” Salvation of any kind, shape, or form must be from God and God alone. All salvation is from God; therefore, man cannot save us.

It was the noted Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, who was attributed to saying this. De Tocqueville visited America in the 1830s and wrote a book entitled Democracy in America. Listen to his observations:

"Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention. And the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things. In the United States, the sovereign authority is religious. There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power."

Isn't that amazing? He said there was no other country in the world where Christianity retained such an influence. When he went into the churches and heard their pulpits aflame with righteousness, he understood the secret of America's genius and power.

He went on to say at a later time, "The Americans combine notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to conceive the one without the other." The Americans took Christianity and liberty and tied them together so completely that it was impossible to have one without the other.

Certainly, that truth should not need any explanation. You remember that Jesus Christ said in John 8 and verse 36, "If the Son therefore sets you free, then you shall be free indeed." In other words, real liberty and real freedom come from Christ and His Word. Once we begin to deny Christ and His Word, we place upon ourselves the shackles of sin, slavery, and imprisonment.

That is true not only personally but nationally. The more we turn from God's Word, the more we become recipients of God's negative sanctions, His curses. Before showing you in Scripture America's hope, I want to show you further how false and foolish preachers become the objects of God's negative sanctions, His curses. As you look in Jeremiah 23—and we covered some of this last week—note that God indicts these false and foolish preachers.

He charges them in verse 11 with preaching profanity, the same charge He gives against them in verse 15. In verse 13, He charges them with causing His people to err. In verse 16, He charges them with preaching a vision based upon their own hearts. In verse 17, He charges them with conjuring up things from their own vain imagination. Then, in verses 25 and 26, He charges them with speaking lies and deceits, which lead His people astray and, as He says in verse 27, lead them to follow Baal.

If false and foolish preachers are doing all these things and leading God's people astray, away from Him and into Baalism—which would be any false god, though in reality Baalism is statism and tyranny once you study it out—you have to ask yourself: How do they do that? How in the world do they lead the people astray? You would surely think that somehow, some way, we would be wise enough to detect their wiles and smart enough to see their subtleties.

How False Preachers Lead People Astray

Look at how God denounces them. In verse 30: “Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets.” Verse 31: “Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord.” Verse 32: “Behold, I am against them.” Three times God says, “I am against these false and foolish prophets.”

In these three verses, where God pronounces that He is against them, He shows us how, through their lies, deceits, and vain imaginations, they lead the people astray. In verse 30: “Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbor.” The first way false prophets lead the people away is by stealing God's words. How do they steal God's words? They may steal them in any number of ways. First, they can steal the Word of God by denying certain books or passages of the Bible. Plenty of preachers today do not believe in the inspiration and infallibility of God's Word, or say, “That's not really the Word of God.” They bring everything to the standard of their own thinking and rationalism. Another way is by misinterpreting and misapplying Scripture. But the easiest way, and the way most do it, is simply not to preach it or teach it. They totally ignore it.

Let me ask you a question. When the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16, when he said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” how much did he mean? All of it. If all Scripture is God-breathed, then he goes on to say that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

In other words, all you have to do to steal God's Word is not preach it. Do not teach it. Do not explain it. You will be guilty of stealing God's words from His people. Look around today at the multitude of preachers who preach but never explain or expound the Word of God. They are stealing the words of God.

Deuteronomy 4:2 says it plainly: “You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish aught from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you.” God said, “You shall not add to the word of God,”

but there is another side to it: “You shall not diminish aught from it.” If you are not preaching and teaching it, you are diminishing aught from it.

Revelation 22:19 repeats the same thing in the New Testament: “And if any man shall take away from the words of this book of the prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city from the things which are written in this book.”

Once again, God condemns those who steal His Word. I want to give you two quotes on this. I like to read these old commentators because they are so pointed. Their attitude was this: If the shoe fits, wear it. If you do not like it, that is just your hard luck. Listen to what John Calvin said on verse 30 here concerning stealing God's Word.

Jeremiah calls this act stealing because the false prophets secretly consulted and then declared to the people what they had agreed upon among themselves, as though everyone had received his oracle from heaven. Instead of presenting the truth, they were guilty of stealing it because they hid it and would not declare it. Old John Trapp said that the false prophets filch it—that is, steal it—either by hiding it from others, as the popish doctors do from the common people; by wresting it to the defense of their false doctrines, as Marcion the heretic did; or by fraudulently imitating God's true prophets. Tertullian therefore fittingly called Marcion Murrum Pontucum, that is, the Rat of Pontus, because he gnawed and tawed the Scriptures to bring them to his purpose. They took up the prophets' parables and used their expressions, such as, “Thus saith the Lord” and “Grace be to you and peace.”

Also have their combs as well as bees, and apes will be doing as they see men do. Isn't that amazing? He called the heretic the Rat of Pontus because he gnawed and tawed the Scripture. He says the false prophets are nothing more than apes, aping the true, using some biblical words that the true prophets use. But instead of being bees and making honey, they are nothing more than wasps.

The first way they do this is by stealing God's words. Look in verse 31, and you will see the second way: "Behold, I'm against the prophets of the Lord that use their tongues and say he saith." They

are not taking away from the Word of God; now they are adding to the Word of God.

Go back to Deuteronomy 4. You do not have to turn there, but remember what God said: You shall not add to nor diminish from. Look across the country today at all the so-called inspired books teaching contrary to the Word of God, yet claiming inequality with the Scripture. Watch a Mormon commercial: Yes, you know the Bible, but have you heard of the Other Testament, the Book of Mormon? They take the Book of Mormon and put it on a par with, equal to, or above the Word of God. Look at Judge Rutherford's writings, which they claim to be above the Word of God. Look at all the modern versions of the so-called Bible that either take from, add to, or at least confuse and confound so thoroughly that no one can understand them. God condemns them for stealing His words and adding to His words. Then, in verse 32, here is the third way.

"Behold, I'm 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 likeness. Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them. Therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord."

What are they doing in verse 32? They are not necessarily taking from or adding to; they are substituting for. Instead of preaching and teaching the Word of God, they preach and teach a lie. Instead of giving forth the Word of God, they give their own ideas, opinions, errors, and vain thoughts. They pretend to give you the real Word of God, when in reality they are giving you nothing.

There is no faithful exposition of Scripture. They are only presenting a false gospel, a fallacious presentation of some new theory or method of entertainment. That is all. How do these false and foolish prophets do it? They either add to, take from, or substitute for God's Word. God certainly admonishes these false and foolish preachers who wish to substitute their dreams for His truth.

He says in verse 25, “I have heard what the prophet said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.” I have heard all my life of preachers who preach based upon a dream or some so-called vision. It is absolutely ridiculous, as well as blasphemous, to equate your dreams or visions with the Word of

God. Do you realize that anyone can have a dream? The Bible says in Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and verse 3 that “a dream cometh through the multitude of business.” All you have to do is stay busy about something, keep it on your mind, and you are going to have a dream.

You can have a dream based upon your own worry or concern. You can also have a dream by eating a barbecue, mayonnaise, peanut butter, pickle, and jelly sandwich right before you go to bed. You will have dreams, but your dreams are not inspired, and they are not on a par with the Word of God.

It is foolish and ridiculous to put your faith and your stock in dreams and visions, yet there are people who do it. Whenever anyone places faith or hope in a vision or dream, he is placing it in that which is above or beyond the Word of God. He has gone beyond the Word of God and is saying, “I do not need the Word of God.” When you preach and put your hope and faith in dreams, you are denying the sufficiency and completeness of Holy Scripture. You are saying, “I need something more. I need a vision. I need a dream.” Yet multitudes of preachers and people do that. I have demonstrated that America's curse is indeed false and foolish preachers, and I have continued that point until now. But the message today is basically on America's hope.

The Superiority of God's Word

A legitimate question should be asked at this point. In light of the multitude of false and foolish preachers—and, if you are honest, you must admit they are everywhere—what hope do we have? Stop and think about this: for every true preacher of God, it seems as if there are a hundred or a thousand false preachers. For everyone who will preach the truth, there are a multitude who will not preach the truth. What in the world is our hope?

If you and I only looked at circumstances, we would certainly tend to be discouraged. But there are two things that we must forever keep in our minds. The first is the superiority of God's Word over falsehood. The second is the supremacy of God's power to accomplish His purpose.

The Superiority of God's Word Over Falsehood

Now let us consider this first point, the superiority of God's Word over falsehood. Look at verse 28. God says, "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?"

If a prophet has a dream, let him tell it. He should not claim that it was from God, because it is not from God. He should not claim divine inspiration. If he wants to tell a lie, let him tell a lie; let him tell his dream. It does not matter. He must not pretend that his dream is from God, because it is not.

On the one hand, you have a false prophet telling a dream. On the other hand, you have the true preacher preaching the Word of God faithfully. Here is the contrast: let the prophet who has a dream tell a dream, but let God's true preacher be faithful in preaching and teaching His Word. Then God asks, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" You have one man preaching a lie and one man preaching the truth.

The one thing that must be done by every true preacher, no matter the circumstances, no matter the situation, no matter the persecution, and no matter the prosecution, is that he must persevere in preaching the word of God. Why? Because God asked this question: What is the chaff to the wheat? What is false doctrine as compared to the truth?

When you ask what the chaff is to the wheat, you need to ask yourself, What is chaff? Chaff is the husk, or the dry covering, that is over the grain. The chaff denotes that which is refuse, trash, and worthless matter. In the Bible, the word chaff is used to represent false doctrine, hypocrites, and ungodly men.

But in this instance, here is what God is saying: What comparison is there between my word and the chaff? What comparison is there between wheat and that which is absolutely empty, worthless, and lifeless? The wheat gives life. The chaff is incapable of giving life. The wheat not only gives, but sustains life.

Listen to what our Lord said in John 6 and verse 63: “It is the spirit that quickeneth. The flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I

speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." That is wheat. That is not chaff.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 10 and verse 17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It does not come by chaff. It comes by the word of God. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1 and verse 23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." David wrote in Psalm 19 and verse 7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, making wise the simple." The chaff cannot do that. Only God's Word can do that.

What can chaff do? Absolutely nothing. You may eat a good bowl of chaff and have the sensation of being full, but you will die of malnutrition if that is all you eat. I find it interesting that in the book of Jude and in the book of Peter, both of those talk about the false prophets using great, swelling words.

What does chaff do? It makes you bloated and gives you the appearance of being full when, in reality, you are not. It is like I used to tell people when I wanted to tease them: "When I was a boy, we were so poor. We ate dried peas for breakfast, drank water for dinner, and swelled up for supper." That is what chaff will do. It will swell you up.

But you cannot be sustained by it because it is absolutely lifeless. Have you not run into people who say, "Bless God, I tried Christianity, and it just doesn't work"? You have heard people say that. You know what they tried? They tried a bowl of chaff. They never got the wheat; all they got was chaff. There is a great difference between chaff and wheat.

Do you realize that truth, like food, is addictive? By the time Henry got here this morning, the first thing he did after hugging my neck was say, "Boy, I'm hungry." I am sure he ate yesterday. But he is addicted to food because he needs it to sustain his life. Truth is exactly the same way. Once you get truth, you become addicted to it, and you cannot live without it. God is saying in this verse that the superiority of His Word over vanity and error is that His Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is life itself. You cannot have life apart from God the Holy Spirit and from God's Word. His Word gives life.

You remember how Rachel cried to Jacob, “Give me children, or I die.” Once you have been converted by the grace of God, that is what you say: “Give me truth, or I die.” You do not want the chaff anymore; you want truth. That is why some of you drive two and three hours one way, so you can have truth. Truth is addictive. What comparison is there between chaff and wheat? None whatsoever. Once you get started on the wheat, you never, ever want the husk and chaff of this world again.

First, you see the superiority of God’s Word over falsehood and error. That is why we, as true preachers and real Christians, must persevere in teaching and preaching the whole Word of God. Secondly, I want you to see the supremacy of God’s power to accomplish His purpose. Look in verse 29: “Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh rock in pieces?”

The Supremacy of God's Power to Accomplish His Purpose

I want you to note that verse follows His question, “What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?” Consider Isaiah 55 and Isaiah 46. In fact, I am going to be dealing with two of these verses next week, Lord willing. Isaiah 55, verse 8: God says this—watch carefully: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

“For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, watch now, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it.”

What does God say about His Word? He is going to make it prosper in that mission to which He sends it. It will always accomplish His will.

Isaiah 46:10 declares, “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done,” and then gives

God's promise: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." God is declaring what will be done and promising that His counsel shall stand. Did you hear that? How much of God's counsel is going to stand? All of it. How much of His pleasure is He going to do? All of it.

You must understand not only the superiority of His Word over falsehood, but also the supremacy of His power to accomplish His purpose. Think of Jeremiah's time and how hard-headed and hard-hearted the people were, just as they are today. Hard-headed, hard-hearted. They were stubborn and rebellious and did not want to bow to God's Word. Yet God's Word is more powerful than the lies of the false prophet, and His power is greater than theirs.

When God asks, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" He also says, "Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that will break the rock in pieces?" What is God saying? He is saying that He will have His people and accomplish His will. He will have His people; He will have His will. Those who will not respond to the food aspect of the Word of God will respond to its fire and hammer aspect. "Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord?"

Fire is one of the most active elements. It purges, purifies, and demonstrates power. Fire enlivens, enlightens, warms, purges, and consumes. When God sends His Word as a fire, it melts the heart, purges the conscience, consumes hesitation and chaff, and burns away objections, so that people understand they have been set on fire by God Himself.

Remember the two disciples on the Emmaus road in Luke 24, when Christ joined Himself to them and taught them? After He left, they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us as he taught us by the way?" Listen to Calvin's comment on this verse: "Is not my word like as a fire saith the Lord?"

The legal part of the Word is a fire, called a fiery law in Deuteronomy 33:2. Like fire, it is quick, piercing, and penetrating into the hearts and consciences of men; it works wrath there and raises a fearful expectation of fiery indignation. It threatens everlasting fire, sentences men to the fires of hell, and the righteous Judge, in executing it, will be a consuming fire to wicked men.

The gospel part of the Word is like fire because of the light its entrance gives sinners, by which they see their impurity, impotence, and the insufficiency of their own righteousness, as well as the way of life and salvation by Christ. By this light, saints are directed in their walk and conversation, and immoralities, errors, and superstitions are detected. Its heat gives vital warmth to sinners and is the Savior of life to them. It warms and comforts saints, causes their hearts to burn within them, and inflames them with love to God, Christ, and one another, and with zeal for truth and the Redeemer's interest. Yet it has a scorching, tormenting heat to wicked men, filling them with burning malice and envy.

Moreover, the Word may be compared to fire for its purifying, separating, and trying nature. As fire purifies gold and silver, separates dross, and tries the metal, so the gospel tries men's principles, discovers what they are, and separates one from another. It consumes the worst in man—his lusts and corruptions—which it teaches him to deny—and the best in man, all the holiness and righteousness upon which he depends. It also burns up the chaff of false doctrine and human inventions previously mentioned.

Calvin basically said this: when God says, “My word is like a fire,” He is saying that fire will either convert you or consume you. It will either break and purify you, or condemn and consume you. There is none who can resist the fire of God successfully. God says, “What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire?”

Old John Trapp says it plainly: “Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” He continues, “The rockiest hearts and the sturdiest stomachs are tamed and terrified by the Word when God once takes them to do. It, the Word, is as His plow to break up their fallow ground, Jeremiah 4 verse 3, and His sword to run them through, Hebrews 4 verse 12, and to lay them for dead, Romans 7 verse 9.”

“As like the hardest ice is broken with hot waters, so also with hammers is the hardest heart with the gospel as well as the law broken.” The hammer can break the heart, and the fire can melt the heart. In the Bible, man’s heart is often compared to a rock or stone because of its hardness, its insensibility, and its resistance to impressions.

In Zechariah 7:12, God says, “Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came great wrath from the Lord of hosts.” They made their hearts as an adamant stone, like hard rock, so they could not and would not hear His words. But God says, My Word is not just food, and it is not just like fire; it is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.

Let me ask you a question. I have two 10-pound sledgehammers in my barn. How many rocks are those 10-pound sledgehammers going to break today by themselves? None. In other words, if a hammer is used to break a rock, there must be a hand that picks up that hammer. When God said, “Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” guess what? It is God who picks up the hammer. It is God who uses His Word. A hammer is nothing more than an instrument. The Word of God is an instrument in the hands of God, the Holy Spirit. When He picks it up and when He wills it, He will either send food to the soul, fire to the heart, or use the hammer to break it and crush it to pieces. That is why I said none can flee Him successfully. You may resist for a while, and you may flee for a while.

There was a poem written years ago by, I believe, Francis Thompson. I used to know the poem. It is about ten minutes long, and it is called “The Hound of Heaven.” It went something like this: “I fled him down the days, I fled him down the years. I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of mine, and in the midst of tears I hid from him, and under running laughter I hid.” Then it goes like this: “but his feet came on and on and on.” The whole poem is about the Holy Spirit tracking down a sinner and staying on him until he is converted by the grace of God. So God, then, is the one who wields the hammer.

In Ezekiel 36 and verse 26, God says, “A new heart will I give you. And a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” What does God mean when He says, “I’m going to take away the stony heart out of you, and I’m going to give you a heart of flesh”? Hebrews 8 and verse 10 explains it: “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." What does God do when He takes that hammer and breaks that hard, stony heart? He gives a heart of flesh, and He writes His Word and His law on that heart.

America's hope lies only in God and His Word. America's hope must have God and His Word as its foundation. It is that Word God uses in conversion, repentance, reconciliation, restoration, and reconstruction. We cannot be changed individually apart from the Word of God. We cannot be converted, know right from wrong, or know what righteousness is apart from the Word of God. That is true individually, familially, and ecclesiastically, but it is also true nationally. How do we know what is right and wrong? God tells us. Our only hope is that God's true preachers will keep preaching that Word, and that God will be pleased to take up that hammer and break the hard hearts of the people in this country.

Applications for America's Hope

We must seek God. To pick up the hammer and place His hand upon it, over and over in Scripture you will find David praying, "Arise, O Lord." We need to ask God to arise and take up that hammer. We must seek Him to set our nation on fire with righteousness, holiness, godliness, and submission.

We must remember that He is the potter and we are the clay. It is God who must overthrow the wickedness and tyranny in this country. He may use us, and we may be instruments, but it is still God's power that must overthrow it.

When God said, "Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh rock in pieces," my mind went back to Judges chapter 5. There was a woman named Jael and a tyrant named Sisera. Barak was chasing him, and Sisera went to Jael's tent. She gave him milk and rocked him to sleep in her lap. Then, with a hammer and a spike through his temple, she killed him and removed his head.

What is that telling me? Tyranny cannot be overcome but by the hammer of God's Word, the truth, and the power of His Spirit. If we want true liberty and freedom in this country, it will have to come from Jesus Christ. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, Scripture says, there is liberty. If the Son shall make you free, then you shall be free indeed.

The Importance of Preaching the Word of God

The second application is this: We must understand the importance of preaching the Word of God. We must persevere in preaching and teaching the Word of God.

I get criticism. I got criticism this week. When someone does not like one of the messages I preach, I say, “Lord, You take care of that.” I do not have time to mess with those people. You know what David said? “My defense is of the Lord.” If I spent my time trying to defend myself and what I teach, how much time would I have left to study and preach the truth? Very little. David said, “My defense is of the Lord.” I am not going to waste my time defending myself. I will certainly defend the Word of God, but my time is going to be spent teaching and preaching the Word of God.

That is where our hope lies. We have to remember that the Apostle Paul said we must be instant, in season and out of season. God says He will honor His Word: “Them that honor Me will honor, saith the Lord.”

Some of my greatest enemies in times past have become my closest and best friends when God saved them. God is my witness; this is the truth. I have gone in a number of houses in the front door while the men were exiting the back door. I have had men cross the street to keep from speaking to me. But when God saved him, it would be midnight, and I would say, “Look, I am so tired. Would you please get up and go home? I will teach you tomorrow.” They cannot get enough of it after God saves them.

The importance is that you have to persevere in season and out of season. There will be a time when folks curse you and hate you and do not like you. That is out of season. But keep going, because pretty

soon it is going to come in season. As the Word of God says, we shall reap, if we faint not. So, if we want to reap, we have to keep going.

There is a vast difference between the preaching and teaching of true preachers and false and foolish preaching. True preachers always give exposition and explanation of the Word of God, and its food for the soul. False and foolish preachers give the husk. They give assurance of salvation while you are in your sin, while true preachers demand repentance from sin. The foolish preacher says, "I'm okay, you're okay, just come on in." The true preacher says, "God demands that you live a holy, godly, and righteous life. Be holy, saith the Lord, as I am holy."

We must pray for, support, and encourage every true preacher of the gospel to keep on keeping on, because America's hope is only in Christ and His Word.

Let's pray. Father, we're so thankful today for Jesus Christ. We're thankful for the Word of God and for the answers in the Word of God. We pray, Lord, that You would give us food for our souls and send the fire and hammer of Your Word in our nation. We pray that Thou, by Thy sovereign and supernatural power, will lay Thine hand upon the hammer, break our hard, cold hearts, and bring us back to the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to bow to Thee and worship Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

Source Notes

Chapter 1: America's Curse - Part 1
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Chapter 2: America's Curse - Part 2
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Topical Index

Chapter titles and section headings are listed with the pages on which they begin.

A

America's Curse p. 5

America's Curse - Part 1 p. 5

America's Curse - Part 2 p. 27

Applications for America's Hope p. 41

Applications: God's Sanctions and Our Response p. 24

F

False Hopes in America p. 29

G

God's Command to Reject False Prophets p. 9

H

How False Preachers Lead People Astray p. 31

I

Introduction and Review of America's Curse p. 28

Introduction: The Concept of Sanctions p. 7

J

Jeremiah's Shock and Grief p. 11

T

The Denunciation of the Prophets p. 17

The Desecration of False Prophets p. 13

The Desecration of the Prophets p. 13

The Destruction of False Preachers p. 22

The Devastation Caused by False Preachers p. 21

The Importance of Preaching the Word of God p. 42

The Nature of God's Sanctions p. 28

The Result: A Land Full of Wickedness p. 12

The Root Problem: False and Foolish Preachers p. 8

The Superiority of God's Word p. 34
The Superiority of God's Word Over Falsehood p. 35
The Supremacy of God's Power to Accomplish His Purpose p. 37

Scripture Index

Scripture references identified in chapter readings, headings, and manuscript text are listed with their page locations.

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 4 p. 33

Deuteronomy 4:2 p. 31, p. 32

Deuteronomy 30:12-15 p. 20

Deuteronomy 33:2 p. 38

Psalm

Psalm 19 p. 36

Psalm 119:89 p. 20

Psalm 138:2 p. 20

Isaiah

Isaiah 46 p. 37

Isaiah 46:10 p. 37, p. 38

Isaiah 55 p. 37

Isaiah 56 p. 10

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 4 p. 39

Jeremiah 20 p. 22, p. 23

Jeremiah 23 p. 9, p. 10, p. 27, p. 28, p. 30

Jeremiah 23:14 p. 8

Jeremiah 23:19-32 p. 6

Jeremiah 23:9 p. 11

Jeremiah 23:9-32 p. 5

Jeremiah 29 p. 23

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 36 p. 40, p. 41

Jonah

Jonah 2:9 p. 29

Zechariah

Zechariah 7:12 p. 40

Luke

Luke 24 p. 38

John

John 5:44 p. 15

John 6 p. 35, p. 36

John 8 p. 19, p. 30

John 12:48 p. 15

Acts

Acts 17 p. 24

Romans

Romans 7 p. 39

Romans 10 p. 36

2 Timothy

2 Timothy 3:16 p. 31

Hebrews

Hebrews 4 p. 39

Hebrews 8 p. 40, p. 41

1 Peter

1 Peter 1 p. 36

Revelation

Revelation 22:19 p. 32

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