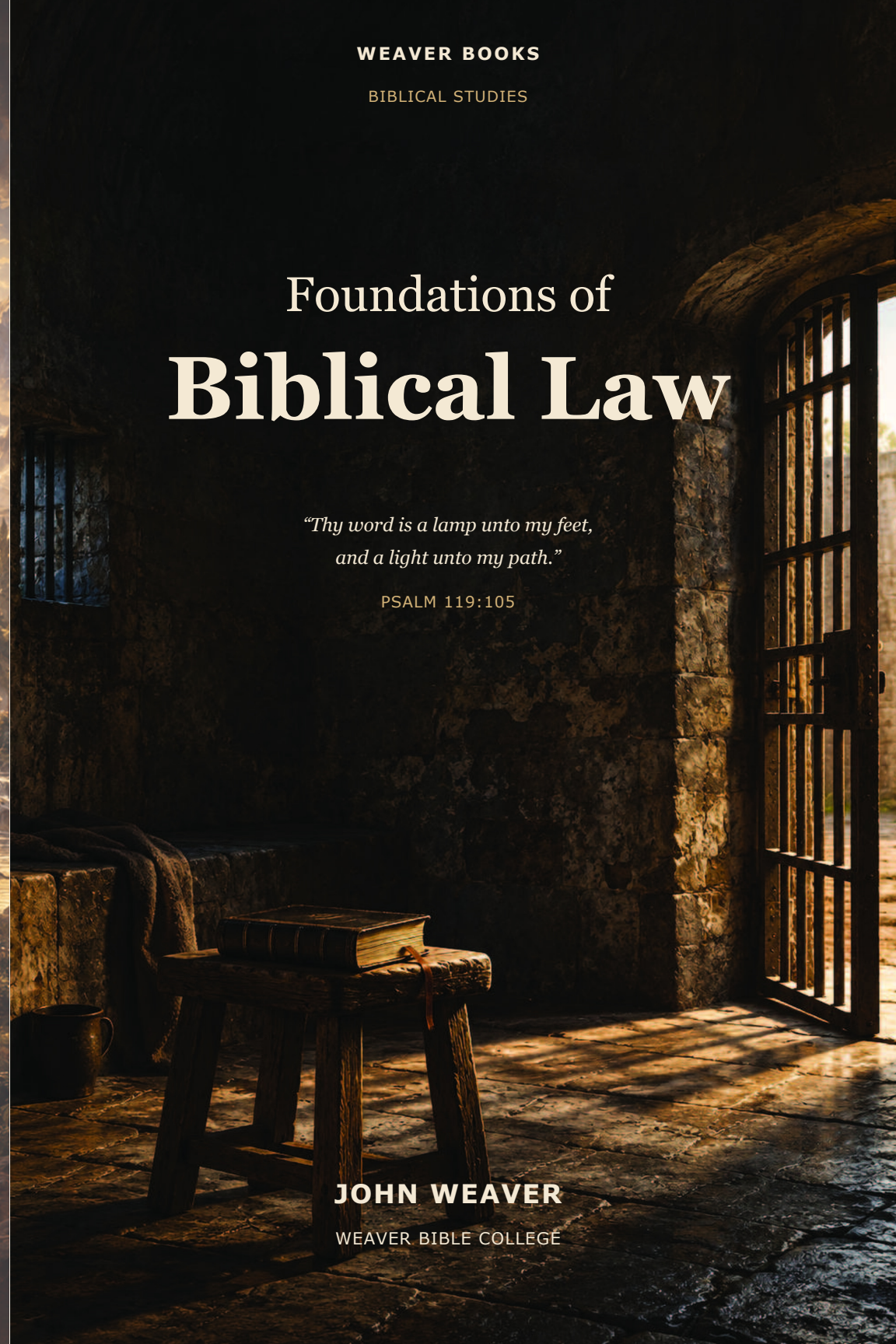
WEAVER BOOKS

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Foundations of Biblical Law

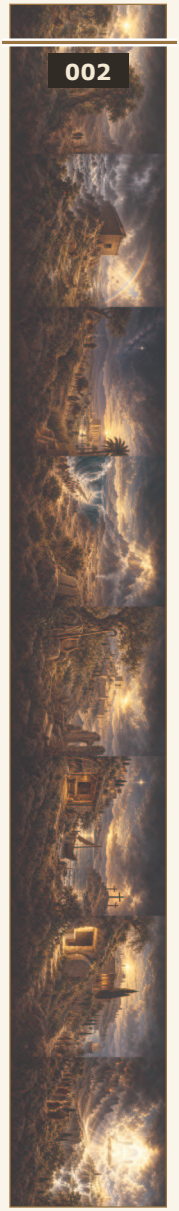
"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



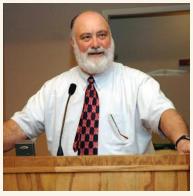
Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.

HEBREWS 13:3, EXCERPT

This volume approaches biblical responsibility through the subject of imprisonment and ministry to prisoners. John Weaver considers compassion, stewardship, spiritual bondage, and the opportunities for gospel witness within difficult circumstances. The message asks how Christians can serve faithfully without confusing outward confinement with the loss of God's purpose or favor.

“I want you to contemplate this today: The Lord not only hears, but the Lord Himself is interested in prisoners.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

BOOK 002

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

weaverbiblecollege.com

WEAVER BOOKS

Foundations of Biblical Law

Biblical Law

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

LIBRARY BOOK 002

Foundations of Biblical Law

John Weaver

Weaver Books
Weaver Bible College

Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Contents

Chapter 1: The Prison Ministry 5

Introduction and Ministry Overview 5

Biblical Modes of Punishment vs. Modern Prisons 8

All People Are Prisoners Spiritually 11

The Lord Is Interested in Prisoners 12

God's Concern for Prisoners 13

Godly Saints in Prison 15

A Faithful Saint in Prison 17

Fruitfulness in Prison 18

The Command to Remember Prisoners 20

Practical Application and Call to Give 22

Topical Index 27

Scripture Index 29

Study Guide Link 31

CHAPTER 1

The Prison Ministry

Hebrews 13:3 says, “Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body.”

Introduction and Ministry Overview

Most of you know that we have supported a prison ministry in this assembly for years, ever since we have basically been here. We have supported pastors and their families who have been thrown into the prison system because of the faith’s sake. I could list numerous families that we have helped regularly until the men were out of prison. Even for a short time after they were released, we continued to help them. Sometimes both the husbands and wives were in prison, and we helped them not only while they were there, but for a brief time after they were out as well.

A couple of years ago, when Pastor Mooneyhan was in prison and conducting Bible studies there, one of the prisoners told him that he did not have a Bible. Brother Mooneyhan said, “If you write Brother John Weaver, he will send you a Bible.” The prisoner did, and I indeed sent him one. Thankfully, at that time I had two of those

large-print editions that Brother Roy was getting, so I sent one of them.

Only a week or two later, someone else wrote and wanted a Bible, and I sent him the second one. Then I prevailed upon Roy to start ordering those Bibles by the case so that I could have some to send around, and it simply continued to mushroom. It has mushroomed to the point that I certainly cannot handle it myself, and I do not think our small congregation could handle it financially. We have sent out literally hundreds of Bibles. They cost us fifteen dollars each, plus the envelope and shipping—literally about twenty dollars per Bible. I sent out fifty Bibles last week, and I have thirty to send out this coming week; I just got them in.

That is not anywhere near the need. If I can get my facts straight, it was like this: on Thursday, I received 27 letters requesting a Bible; on Friday, 36; and on Saturday, 17. So right now I probably have nearly 100 letters asking for Bibles for which I do not have Bibles to send them. If we could order 500 Bibles at one time, they would cost us $10 each instead of $15 each.

That means $5,000 plus the shipping, and it will still cost about another $2,000 to send those Bibles out. We are looking at basically $7,500 that we need. This past Wednesday night I spoke at a local church, and that church gave me about $1,700 toward that $7,500 need. If, over the next several weeks, I can raise another $4,000 or $5,000, that would help us get a number of these Bibles and hopefully not only fill these back orders, but have several hundred in advance as well.

I want to ask that you pray about that, and to that end I am bringing this message today. I want to designate, not this coming Sunday but Sunday week, that we take up a special offering here. Let us ask everyone to do what they can toward that Bible ministry and that prison ministry.

I am not asking you to give at the expense of the church's needs. I want you to do this in addition to that. If you are not going to be here on the 28th, leave a check. I always tell you, if you cannot come, send your tithe. Leave a check, send it to me in advance, or make clear that it is for the prison ministry and the Bibles.

I am not going to take time to read many of these letters today. I have read numerous letters to you. I will simply remind you about a letter I received from a gentleman who is 80 years old and incarcerated. This week I received, to my surprise, another letter from a preacher in prison. I do not know why he was in prison, but he told me that he had preached for 30 years and somehow had become involved in things that landed him in prison.

He did not indicate that he was in there for the faith's sake. I received another letter from a man whose wife and son are also in prison in the Florida system. He asked me to send not only him a Bible, but his wife and son a Bible as well; he was from New York.

He said, "I shall be out within a period of time. I should have already been out, but due to government foul-ups, I'm still in. When I get out, I'll do everything in my power to not only pay for those Bibles, but to help in the Bible ministry as well."

I received another letter from a prisoner who told me, "I do not have any money. But I could send you stamps. Or, if you like, I would write my parents and ask them to please pay for the Bible for me." I wrote on the bottom of his letter that these Bibles basically cost us about 20 bucks each. Any help that he wanted to give would be appreciated, whether it was stamps or his parents sending money. This letter came from a prisoner to whom we did indeed send the Bible.

I've gotten numerous thank-you letters from these men, and letters demonstrating that they are indeed using their Bibles. Other men see them in Bible studies, covet them, and want them as well. May I remind you, these are not just any Bibles. These are large-print Bibles, and they have a tremendous amount of study material in the back, probably about an inch, inch and a half thick.

Here's the letter from Larry Napier: "Dear Freedom Baptist Ministries, I'm writing this letter to you in regards of the Bible, the King James Special. I did receive the Bible, and it is a very nice Bible, and God will bless you forever for sending me such a precious gift. I'm in the Bible, and I read the Bible every chance I get. I couldn't have a better gift given or sent to me than that special Bible."

"I will see that it is a part of my life, and it shall remain with me to the end. I just wanted to drop you a line to say that I really appreciate the Bible very much. I will always remember the Freedom Baptist Ministries in all my prayers. Thank you so much. And once again, I really do appreciate the Bible. Thank you so much. May God bless all of you and be with you. Respectfully submitted, Larry Napier."

There are letters like this coming from men who receive the Bible. It is not just the fact that it is a cheap, insignificant Bible. It is indeed, I think, a special Bible, and I believe that those men deeply appreciated and will use those Bibles.

With that in mind, let us look at Hebrews chapter 13 and very quickly look at verse 3 again. God says, "Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them." I am going to come back to this verse, but when I said today that I was going to preach on the prison ministry, I knew it was an unusual topic.

We do not usually think often or much about prisoners. When we do think about prisoners, we usually think they are too leniently treated, or that, if they are in prison, they are at least getting exactly what they deserve.

It is very surprising and revealing to go through the Bible and find out what the Bible actually says about prisoners. It is not my intention today to deal with the fact that prisons are unbiblical. The whole prison system as we know it today is really anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-Bible. There were no prisons in ancient Israel.

Biblical Modes of Punishment vs. Modern Prisons

It is true that the pagans, the heathen, had prisons, but there were no prisons given under biblical law. Under biblical law there were only five modes of punishment. The very first punishment was what you and I would know as the death penalty. When an individual committed a crime worthy of death, he was merely taken out and executed. He did not spend twenty years on death row or ten years on death row. If he was given the death penalty, he was taken out and executed, and it was over.

And, dear friend, I do not believe for the life of me the argument from the government and the powers that be that it costs more to execute a criminal than to keep him in prison for life. Ten minutes' worth of electricity is pretty cheap. We can get lethal drugs from veterinarian supplies; it cannot be that expensive. If drugs and electricity are expensive, a bullet is pretty cheap itself. That is hogwash.

The truth of the matter is this: in the Bible, when a man was guilty of death and received the death penalty, he was simply taken out and executed.

The second mode of punishment in the Bible was whipping. Men and women were publicly whipped; in fact, an individual could receive up to forty lashes. It may surprise you to know that, in the founding of this country, there were people who were publicly whipped. It cut down on crime because, when people saw individuals publicly whipped, they understood that this was exactly what would happen to them if they committed the same offense.

The third mode of biblical punishment was restitution. If a person stole or took that which was not his, then he had to make restitution. This involved twenty-percent restitution, fourfold restitution, fivefold restitution, and, in some instances, sevenfold restitution. Thus, there was the death penalty, whipping, and restitution. The fourth mode of punishment was bondservitude.

If a man did not have the money to pay restitution, he had to become a slave or bondservant until he worked out that restitution. The fifth mode of punishment was confinement in a city of refuge.

If anyone committed an accidental killing, he was not put to death. He had to flee to that city of refuge and remain there until the death of the high priest. It was a city, not a prison. The cities were walled about, and in that sense it was a prison of some sort: he was not to venture beyond the city walls, because the avenger of blood could find and kill him, and nothing would be done. It would be a just killing, because he had taken his life into his own hands. Yet he was confined in the city and could have his family and friends there.

That cut down on sodomy. The only thing he suffered was economic loss, since he could not use his farm or land. He therefore

had to make a living for his family within that city. This was simply confinement in a city of refuge.

Those are the only five modes of punishment given to us in the Bible. The fact remains that our Christ-denying, Bible-law-forsaken land does have prisons. Consequently, we have prisoners.

Some are imprisoned wrongly and unjustly. If you have never visited a prison, you need to do so. You ought to hear some of the horrendous reasons men are in prison. Some are there simply because of paperwork slip-ups. Doctors are in prison. Sign the wrong form in some Medicare and Medicaid dealings, and—though there is fraud, I understand that—doing paperwork incorrectly can land you in prison. Remember Congressman George Hansen, who was put in prison because he did not file and sign a certain paper congressmen were required to file and sign?

That was the excuse they gave. Hansen was put in prison because he wrote a book to harass our people against the IRS and the federal government. Edwin Meese, the Attorney General who prosecuted George Hansen, had not filed the form himself, nor had most other congressmen.

Now I know how simple it is for someone to get in prison unjustly. But I could also say that there are a lot of people who are in prison that are escaping the just punishment of their crime, because now they are doing "quote-unquote life in prison" instead of being executed the way God demands that they should be. So, the fact is, we do have prisons and therefore we have prisoners.

Now, let me lay down several biblical propositions for you today. Here is the very first one, and I want you to think about this. You have probably never even thought about it, but here is a fact: all of us are prisoners, even though we are not in a prison house. How can I say that all of us are prisoners, even though we are not in a prison house? I am going to show you from the Bible. The Scripture speaks of the fact that we are either prisoners of Jesus Christ or prisoners of Satan.

All People Are Prisoners Spiritually

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 69 to begin with, and verse 33. Here is a very important verse, and I want you to note one word particularly in this verse. The Bible says in Psalm 69, verse 33, “The Lord heareth the poor and despiseth not his prisoners.” The Lord hears the poor and despises not his prisoners—that is, those prisoners who belong to the Lord.

Turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of Ephesians, chapter 3. You will note that the Apostle Paul referred to himself over and over as the prisoner of the Lord. Look in Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 1. Paul writes, “For this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.” So he calls himself the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Now, it is not the fact that Paul was in prison, therefore he was called the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Yes, he was in prison, but he was still the prisoner of Jesus Christ in the fact that he was a bondservant to Jesus Christ.

Look in Ephesians 4 and verse 1. He says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” Look in Ephesians 6 and verse 20. Here he says it a little differently: “For which I am an ambassador in bonds.” What is he saying? I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I have bonds put upon me. I belong to Jesus Christ. I am therefore His prisoner.

When Paul wrote the book of Philemon, the little book right before Hebrews, he was in prison. Notice what he says in verse 1: “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow laborer.” Then, in verse 9, he beseeches Philemon, saying, “Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Paul then relentlessly refers to himself as a prisoner of Christ. He identifies himself not simply as a man who happens to be imprisoned, but as a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Here is a passage that you and I need to learn. In 2 Timothy 1, verse 8, Paul writes to Timothy: “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” Paul says, “Timothy, don't be ashamed of the testimony of our

Lord," and then he adds, "nor of me his prisoner." This is the advice and counsel that Paul gives young Timothy.

There are many men in prison who should be ashamed. By that, I mean they have done wicked and ungodly things to get there. But if we have a man or woman in prison for righteousness' sake, for the faith's sake, number one, they have nothing to be ashamed about, and Paul tells us we had better not be ashamed of them. Paul had not committed any wickedness. Paul had not violated God's law. Yet he was in prison. So he tells Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner."

You don't have to do anything wicked or wrong to end up in prison today. All you have to do is stand for righteousness, and pretty soon you're going to end up there. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul gives a comparison. He calls himself a prisoner of the Lord and says he is an ambassador in bonds. Paul is writing Timothy and telling Timothy his only hope for success in the gospel. Beginning with verse 24, he says: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

The Lord Is Interested in Prisoners

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; now here's the hope, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Timothy, your only hope of success in the gospel is this: keep on preaching and trust God to give individuals repentance so that they may acknowledge the truth. Look in verse 26: "And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." If the devil can take unconverted men captive at his will, they are his prisoners. It is just that simple. When do men recover themselves out of the snare of the devil? According to Scripture, it is when they acknowledge the truth. When do they acknowledge the truth? It is when God gives them repentance. So the truth of the matter is this.

We are really and truly all prisoners, although we are not in a prison house, because we are either prisoners of Christ or prisoners of Satan. Let me give you another verse. You do not have to turn there, but write it down: 2 Peter 2:19. You know what Peter says? "Know ye not of whom a man is overcome, the same is he brought

into bondage." Know ye not of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. So if we have been overcome by Christ, we are brought into bondage to Christ.

That is what he said in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. But if we have been overcome by Satan, we are in bondage to Satan. So in one sense of the word, we are all prisoners—in one sense. That is, we are the prisoners of Christ or the prisoners of Satan. Here is my second principle. I want you to contemplate this today: The Lord not only hears, but the Lord Himself is interested in prisoners. Think about that. The Lord Himself not only hears, but He is interested in prisoners.

God's Concern for Prisoners

Let us go back to Psalm 79 and look at verse 11. We are going to look at several passages in Psalms. Psalm 79, verse 11: "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee, according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die." Is that not amazing? Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee, and then he prays that according to God's power He would preserve those that are appointed to die—that is, He would preserve those who have been wrongfully and wickedly appointed to die.

Because God is for the death penalty, because God gave that penalty Himself, the prayer here is that God would hear the sighing and groaning of the prisoners and those who have been wrongly and wickedly appointed to death, and that God Himself would preserve them by His power.

Psalm 102:19–20 says, "For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary, from heaven did the Lord behold the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death." God looked down from His sanctuary in heaven to hear the groaning of the prisoner.

Psalm 146:5–7 says, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is, which keepeth truth forever, which executeth judgment for the oppressed, which giveth food to the hungry, The Lord looseth the prisoners." Of course, God

certainly not only does that spiritually; sometimes He does it physically, as He did in Acts chapter 16 and numerous other passages in the Bible.

Why was the Messiah sent? You say, “Well, Brother Weaver, I know the answer to that. The Messiah was sent to save us from our sins.” That is true. But notice how that picture was given in the Old Testament. Isaiah 42 reveals this in Scripture. Beginning with verse 1, so that we will see that this is in reference to Jesus Christ: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.” All of this is Christ, and all of it is applied in the New Testament to Christ.

“Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out, he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it, he hath given breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.” Look what God says to the Messiah: “I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles.” Why is God going to send Messiah? “To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” One of the reasons the Messiah came was that He might not only open our eyes, but bring out the prisoners from the prison house. Of course those would be His prisoners.

“Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time I have heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pasture shall be in all high places.” Here is another passage concerning the Messiah. What is the Messiah to say? He says, “Say to the prisoners, Go forth.”

Here is a passage that is quoted directly in the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ: “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." The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because He is anointing me to preach—to the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus Christ enters into the synagogue of Nazareth. He calls for the scroll of Isaiah, opens it particularly to Isaiah 61 in verse 1, and reads that passage. Then He closes the scroll and says to the audience, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

He came to set the prisoners free. In Zechariah 9:10–11 we read, "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace unto the heathen, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water."

By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit. Is that not amazing? All of us are referred to as prisoners in one sense of the word, and one of the reasons the Messiah came was to set the prisoners free. The first point is that all of us are prisoners in one sense of the word, even though we are not in a prison house.

Godly Saints in Prison

Secondly, the Lord Himself not only hears prisoners but is interested in them. Thirdly, some of the choicest and most godly saints have been in prison. I will give you examples from the Bible, although many godly individuals have been in prison outside of the Bible.

Everyone knows Joseph's story in Genesis chapter 39. Joseph was wrongly thrown into prison; he did absolutely nothing wrong. There are only two men in the Bible, outside of Christ, about whom absolutely nothing negative is said: Joseph and Daniel. Yet Joseph was imprisoned and remained there for years.

In Judges chapter 16, Samson was in prison. In 1 Kings chapter 16, Micaiah was in prison. This occurred when Ahab and Jezebel were on the throne and Jehoshaphat had come down to see Ahab.

Ahab said, “Know ye not that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we sit still and take it not?” Jehoshaphat said, “Well, inquire of the Lord as to whether or not we should go up.” Then all these false prophets of Ahab began prophesying, “Go up! Go up! Go up!”

"The Lord has surely given it into your hand." Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, the one true and the living God, that we may hear from him?" Ahab replied, "There is one, but I hate him. He never says anything good about me." Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." He sent for Micaiah. When the man went after Micaiah, he told him, "All these other prophets have spoken well. Let your word blend with theirs." Micaiah answered, "As the Lord liveth, I can only say what He tells me."

When Micaiah arrived, they asked, "Shall we go up, or shall we forbear?" Sarcastically, Micaiah said, "Go up, O king, go up." Ahab caught his tone and said, "How many times must I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" Micaiah replied, "You want the truth? I'll give you the truth."

“God has sent a lying spirit in your prophets, and He sent that spirit to get you up to Ramoth Gilead so He can kill you, and you will die.” Ahab looked at Jehoshaphat and said, “Did I not tell you he would prophesy no good concerning me?” Then he commanded, “Take Micaiah, listen, and feed him with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction till I return in peace. Take him back into prison.” You know how he knew where Micaiah was? Because he had put him there. He said, “Take him back and put him into prison until I return in peace.” Micaiah answered, “If thou return in peace at all, then the Lord hath not spoken by me.” Here is Micaiah in prison. In 2 Chronicles 16, Hanani the prophet is thrown into prison. In Jeremiah 29–32, Jeremiah is thrown into prison.

Although there were no prison houses as such, they were actually dungeons in the king's palaces. Jeremiah was thrown into one, where he sank into mud and muck up to his armpits. In Matthew chapter 4, John the Baptist was thrown into prison. In Acts chapter 5, Peter and the other disciples were thrown into prison. Acts chapter 8, verse 3, says: "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house and hailing men and women, committed them to prison." Saul was throwing them in left and right. In Acts

chapter 12, Peter was back in prison again. In Acts chapter 16, Paul and Silas were in prison. In Philemon, Paul and Onesimus were in prison. Innumerable godly individuals were in prison. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 36, says: "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment." They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with a sword. The testimony of Scripture is unmistakable: God's people have repeatedly suffered bonds and imprisonment. Jeremiah suffered in a dungeon; John the Baptist, Peter, the other disciples, Paul, Silas, Onesimus, and countless others endured confinement. Saul entered every house, seized men and women, and committed them to prison. The examples extend from the Old Testament through the New Testament and include apostles, prophets, and ordinary believers. Imprisonment was not an unusual experience for the faithful, but one of the cruel trials recorded among those who endured for God.

A Faithful Saint in Prison

"They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and the dens and the caves of the earth." Did you hear God's verdict on those in prison? The world was not worthy to have them in it.

There are bad people in the prison system, but also good folks. These Christians had been imprisoned, and God said the world was not worthy of them. Did you know that even Jesus Christ Himself was in prison?

He was arrested. Read Isaiah 53:8, for the Bible says He was taken from prison and from judgment. So the palace where they arrested Him and kept Him was the prison. There have been numerous godly people in prison. Martin Luther was imprisoned. Most of the reformers were in prison. There have been numerous godly and saintly individuals in prison.

If you get thrown into prison for Christ's sake, you're in good company. Some of the most eminent and godly folks before you have been there. Here's my fourth point, talking about the prison ministry: Much can be accomplished by a faithful saint in prison.

Fruitfulness in Prison

Most of us, especially when a preacher is involved in some trial and it looks as though he is going to jail, want to pray, “Lord, keep him out of prison. Lord, we need him to serve Thee.” The truth is that we are obligated to serve Christ whether we are out or in. If we are thrown into prison, it is not the end of our service; it is only a change in mission fields. That is all it is. Paul won Onesimus to the Lord in prison.

In Philemon 1:10, Paul says, “I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.” Onesimus was won to Christ while Paul was in prison. Someone may say, “Ah, Brother Weaver, I know about these jailhouse conversions.” I know, and you know, that some prisoners make professions of faith that are no more genuine or sincere than those of many hypocrites and Pharisees in the church. I understand that some are like that, but Onesimus was converted in prison. Turn back to Colossians, chapter 4, and notice what Paul wrote about this jailed bird who was converted. In Colossians 4:8, Paul writes concerning him, “Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.” Onesimus evidently had a real, genuine conversion, because he is counted here as a faithful and beloved brother.

Remember the Philippian jailer in Acts chapter 16 was saved because Paul and Silas were thrown in prison. Since you are close to Philippians chapter 1, turn there and begin reading at verse 12. Paul had been thrown into prison, once again a dungeon in the palace, because the Apostle Paul was thrown into prison, and I want you to see what he writes. He writes to these Philippian Christians: “But I would that you should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me”—that is, his arrest and being thrown into the prison—“that things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” Did you hear what Paul just said? Paul said, “My arrest and my incarceration has happened for the furtherance of the gospel.” Look in verse 13: “So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.”

Paul said, “My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace.” What does that mean? When they kept a prisoner in the palace, they kept a guard with him, usually chained to the prisoner. The guard had a four-hour duty, and, as far as the Apostle Paul was concerned, that was a four-hour preaching and witnessing opportunity. Every four hours Paul received a new guard to witness to. Evidently he was quite proficient, because many of these guards were converted, and he said that the whole palace heard the gospel.

In another passage, Paul sends regards to someone and says, “So and so says to tell you hello, but chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.” In other words, the whole palace was basically converted. Paul was thrown in prison. Let me show you what can be accomplished with a prison ministry.

The Apostle Paul wrote either thirteen or fourteen books of the New Testament. I say thirteen or fourteen because there is a debate as to whether Paul actually wrote Hebrews. Some say he did; some say he did not. I do not know. If he did write Hebrews, he wrote fourteen books; if he did not, he wrote thirteen. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon are known as the prison epistles. Nearly a fourth of the New Testament was written while Paul was in prison.

We would never have had that infamous and very beautiful book, Pilgrim's Progress, had John Bunyan not been imprisoned. Much can be accomplished by prison ministry.

Let me show you the mentality we have today. Maybe this will shock you into an awareness of how brainwashed we've become. Here is a letter from a man who was seeking to fill the pulpit of a church. The church needed a pastor. OK, and so he wrote the church. And this letter was being presented by a man to the church board so that this candidate would be considered for pastor. Here's the letter: "Gentlemen, understanding your pulpit is vacant,

I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. I've been a preacher with much success and also had some good success as a writer. Some say I'm a good organizer. I've been a leader most places I've been. I'm over 50 years of age. I've never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places, I have left

town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must admit that I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any real wrongdoing on my part. My health is not too good, though I still get a great deal done. The churches I've preached in have been small, though located in several large cities. I've not gotten along well with religious leaders in towns where I've preached either.

In fact, some have threatened me and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records, and I have even been known to forget those whom I have baptized. However, if you can use me, I shall do my best for you.

The board member looked at the committee and said, “Well, what do you think? Shall we call him in?” The people responded, “Call in an unhealthy, troublemaking, absent-minded ex-jailbird? Are you crazy?” The board member said, “Sirs, you have just turned down the Apostle Paul.”

The truth is that just because someone is in prison does not mean that he is a wicked, ungodly individual. Just because someone has been in jail does not mean that God will never use him or cannot use him. God has used some of the most eminent men while they were in prison.

The Command to Remember Prisoners

One last thing: a definite command has been left us concerning the prison ministry. Hebrews 13:3 says, “Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body.”

Verse 3, like verse 1, is an imperative, which means it is a command. Literally, verse 3 could be read this way: “I command you to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body.” God literally commands us to suffer with those who suffer. You remember a passage in Ezekiel—I believe it is Ezekiel chapter 3—where Ezekiel said, “I came down to the river Chebar and I sat where they sat.” That is what it means to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them: remember them as if you were in bonds

yourself. Suffer with them as they are suffering. Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 25.

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 25:33-46 (KJV)

Matthew 25:33: "And he shall set the sheep on the right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" And the King shall answer and say unto them, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, ye visited me not." Then shall they also answer and say, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" Lord, if we had seen you, surely we would have done it. "Then shall he answer them and say, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

The way to minister to Christ is to minister to His people wherever they are. One last passage is in Acts chapter 9. I hope this sinks very deeply into your consciousness. I get tickled because not only here at this assembly, but in other assemblies wherever I go, I hear people say, "Well, pray for our rulers," you know, "pray for our leaders, pray for these judges." I hear people say, "Man, I'd like to tell a judge such and such, and I'd

like to tell the congressman such and such." Well, look at this. Acts chapter 9, verse 15.

Here is the Apostle Paul's conversion. Ananias had been sent by God to lay his hands upon Saul so that he might receive his sight. The Lord told him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

God says that Paul is a chosen vessel. He will bear His name before the Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel. The important thing is that the only time the Apostle Paul ever witnessed or preached to kings was when he was arrested, facing trial, and in prison—the only time. So keep praying for those judges. You may really get to witness to them, because you may be facing the same thing the Apostle Paul faced.

Practical Application and Call to Give

The truth is, we must serve Jesus Christ either in prison or out of prison. We must serve Him. It does indeed cost us to send these Bibles. It costs us financially, and it costs me time. Alice and I spend as much as an hour to two hours addressing the envelopes and packing the Bibles. That does not count taking them down to the post office. It costs us money and time.

But I would still rather send them Bibles than have them sending me a Bible. We reap what we sow. If I am ever in prison, I want someone taking care of my family. I want someone sending me a Bible and remembering me.

So God says, "Remember those that are in bonds as bound with them."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You today to speak to our hearts. We pray concerning the prison ministry that Thou wouldst send in the money necessary to send these Bibles out. I have told Thee, and I repeat it here, that I will send them out as long as You send the money in. Help us understand that it is indeed a ministry. There are needs that only You can fulfill, not just financially, but spiritually as well. Enable us to do everything that we

can do by Your grace and Your mercy. If You would move upon the hearts of others who hear this tape to help with this ministry, I pray that Thou wouldst do so in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We have sent literally thousands of Bibles into the prison system. We get letters and requests daily. I trust that you will consider supporting this ministry and helping provide Bibles for those who are indeed in prison. It certainly would be a blessing not only to you, but to them as well. Remember the words of our Lord, “I was in prison and you visited me.” And then He said, “Inasmuch as you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you've done it unto me.” Please pray for the prison ministry, and please give, and may the Lord bless you, is our prayer. Remember to write to Pastor John Weaver, P.O. Box 394, Fitzgerald, Georgia 31750.

Source Notes

Chapter 1: The Prison Ministry
JW01077 | SermonAudio

Topical Index

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

A

A Faithful Saint in Prison p. 17

All People Are Prisoners Spiritually p. 11

B

Biblical Modes of Punishment vs. Modern Prisons p. 8

F

Fruitfulness in Prison p. 18

G

God's Concern for Prisoners p. 13

Godly Saints in Prison p. 15

I

Introduction and Ministry Overview p. 5

P

Practical Application and Call to Give p. 22

T

The Command to Remember Prisoners p. 20

The Lord Is Interested in Prisoners p. 12

The Prison Ministry p. 5

Scripture Index

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

2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles 16 p. 16

Psalm

Psalm 69 p. 11

Psalm 79 p. 13

Psalm 102:19-20 p. 13

Psalm 146:5-7 p. 13, p. 14

Isaiah

Isaiah 42 p. 14

Isaiah 53:8 p. 17

Isaiah 61 p. 14, p. 15

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 29 p. 16

Zechariah

Zechariah 9:10-11 p. 15

Matthew

Matthew 25:33 p. 21

Matthew 25:33-46 p. 21

Ephesians

Ephesians 4 p. 11

Ephesians 6 p. 11

Colossians

Colossians 4:8 p. 18

2 Timothy

2 Timothy 1 p. 11, p. 12

2 Timothy 2 p. 12

Philemon

Philemon 1:10 p. 18

Hebrews

Hebrews 13:3 p. 5, p. 20

2 Peter

2 Peter 2:19 p. 12, p. 13

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

Your companion study guide

Foundations of Biblical Law

Follow the Scripture references, reflect on each lesson, and use the written-response space to apply what you learn.



Scan to open the matching study guide

Downloadable PDF | 8.5 x 11 inches
No sign-in required

studyguides.weaverbiblecollege.com

If you cannot scan the code, visit the address above and search for this book by title.