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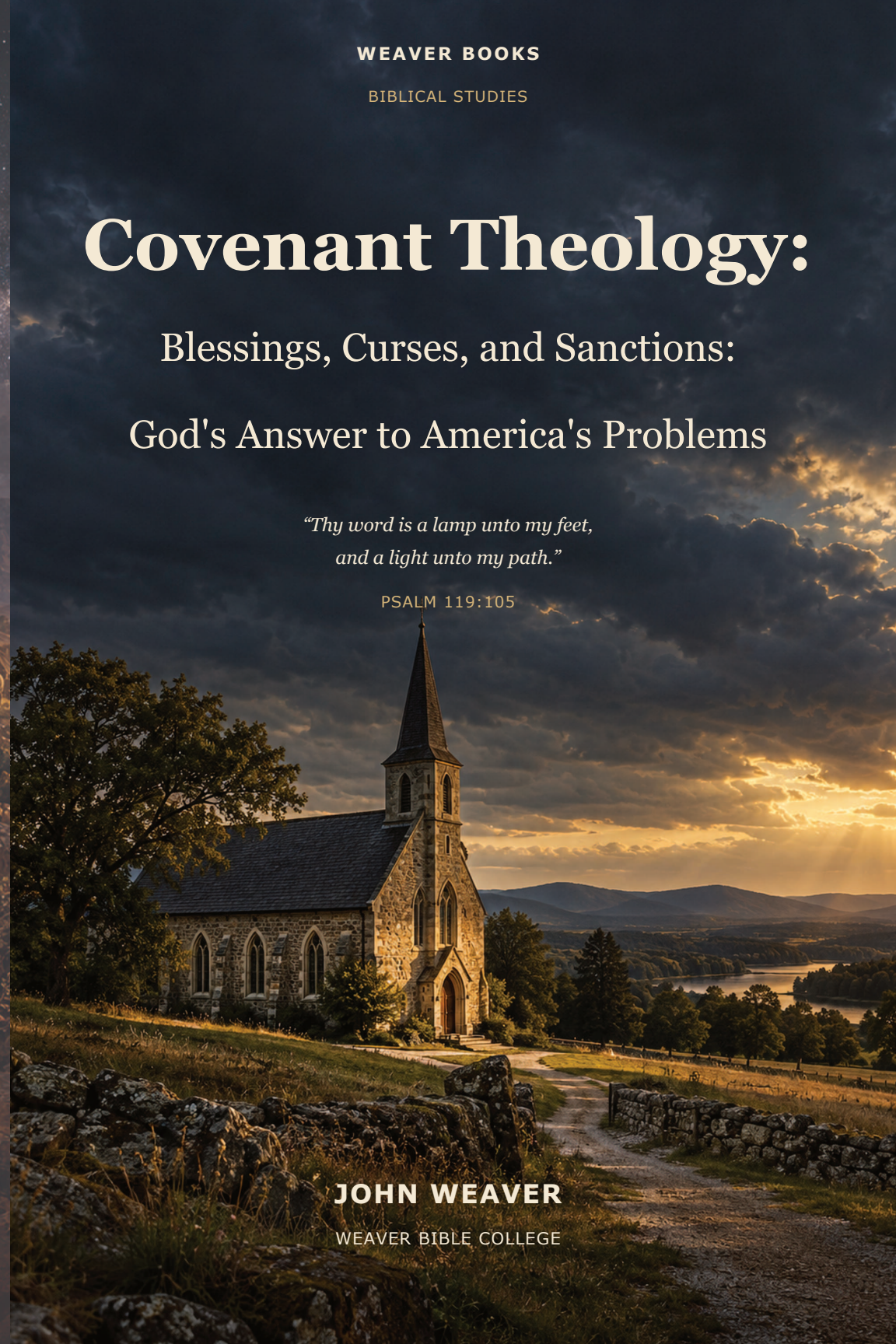
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Blessings, Curses, and Sanctions:

God's Answer to America's Problems

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

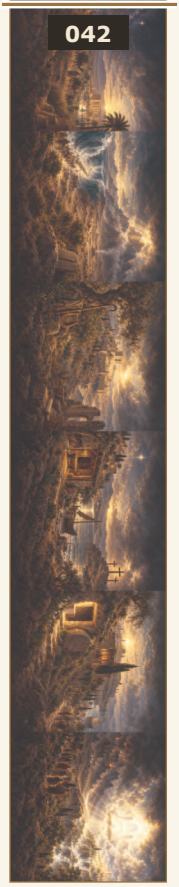
PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE





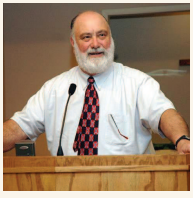
Righteousness exalteth a nation.

PROVERBS 14:34, EXCERPT

John Weaver considers public disorder within a covenantal account of blessing, judgment, and responsibility. These messages examine apostasy, authority, obedience, and the lessons drawn from Israel's history. The collection presents a sustained argument that national remedies must address spiritual loyalties and moral foundations rather than stop at political symptoms.

"You and I may expect mercy from God in the path of obedience and duty."

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.

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Covenant Theology: Blessings, Curses, and Sanctions: God's Answer to America's Problems

Covenant Theology

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

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Covenant Theology: Blessings, Curses, and Sanctions: God's Answer to America's Problems

John Weaver

Weaver Books
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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

Corrected review edition - October 4, 2026. Repeated full sermons have been consolidated; chapter numbers, contents, indexes, and study-guide reading ranges follow this corrected edition. Original transcript variants remain preserved in the editorial archive. Final editorial and publisher approval is still required.

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CHAPTER 1

How to Overcome or Overthrow Our Enemies

August 16, 2000

Introduction: The Promise of Victory

Proverbs 16, verse 7, says, “When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” This is a short verse, but it gives us a powerful truth: when a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even that man's enemies to be at peace with him.

It may surprise you to learn that one of the main prayers and one of the main desires of godly people down through the centuries has been to be delivered from their enemies. Let me give you just a smattering. For instance, in Psalm 13, verse 2, David asked, “How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” In Psalm 25, verse 2, David prayed, “Let not my enemy triumph over me.” In Psalm 59, verse 1, David prayed, “Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemy.” In Psalm 59, verse 12, he prayed, “Let me see my desire upon mine enemy.” In Psalm 143, verse 9, he prayed, “Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies.” And then in Psalm 143, verse 12, he prayed, “And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies.”

These prayers are just a sampling. I could take you through the Word of God and show you over and over where God's people have prayed to be delivered from their enemies. Throughout the Word of God, we find God's people praying to be delivered from their enemies. The desire to be delivered from enemies is not unusual or foreign to godly people; it has been one of their main prayers down through the centuries.

The amazing and astounding fact is that, whether we want to admit it or not, we have enemies. Sometimes we have enemies simply by virtue of the fact that we're Christian. You say, “What are you talking about, Brother Weaver?” Well, let me remind you of 2 Timothy 3, verse 12. The Apostle Paul said, “This know that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

You say, “Well, Brother Weaver, I haven't been suffering persecution.” Maybe you're not living godly enough. He said that if you live godly, you will suffer persecution. If you're suffering persecution, very clearly, you've got some enemies that are persecuting you.

We have enemies by virtue of the fact that we are Christians, that we belong to Jesus Christ. In John 15, beginning with verse 18, our Lord says, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I sent unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.”

Christ is very plain: if they hated Him, they are going to hate us; if they persecuted Him, they are going to persecute us. Part and parcel of our persecution rests upon the fact that the world hates Jesus Christ. Since the world hates Jesus Christ, the world will always persecute those who belong to Him.

It is true that we have enemies simply by virtue of the fact that we are Christians. But we also have enemies of our own making. I am

not merely talking about getting angry, losing my cool, and cussing Greg out, after which Greg might say, “If that is the way Brother Weaver is going to talk to me, I am never going to hear him again. I am never going to have anything to do with him again.” He thus distances himself from me and becomes my enemy. That is certainly a way to get an enemy, but that is not what I am talking about.

When I say that we have enemies of our own making, I am referring to enemies sovereignly raised up by God and sent against us because of our own sin, rebellion, and wickedness. The Bible says, “When a man’s ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” The opposite is also true: when a man’s ways displease the Lord, the Lord raises up enemies against him.

The Source of Our Enemies: Disobedience

One of the promises in the Bible, repeated over and over, is a promise of victory over our enemies. Look in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 22. Let me show you a Bible prophecy of blessing and victory. Genesis 22, beginning with verse 15: “And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.” Hold that phrase: “thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”

In Bible times, rulers and judges sat in the gates. If your seed possessed the gates of your enemies, that meant you had control and power over them. Their government, their existence, and everything they had was under your control. Here is this blessing: “thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”

Look in Genesis 24 and verse 60. Here is the blessing given to Rebekah as she went to become the wife of Isaac: “And they blessed Rebekah and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.” In other words, let your seed have victory over their enemies.

Now look in Genesis chapter 49 and verse 8, the blessing Jacob gave to his children: “Judah, Thou art he whom my brethren shall praise. Watch, thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies. Thy father's children shall bow down before thee.” If you have your hand on your enemy’s neck, you have him under your control. Here, then, are blessings and promises of victory.

Let me clear up a little objection. Someone will say, “But, Brother Weaver, first of all, that’s in the Old Testament,” and I’ll cover that more tomorrow night. Then you say, “Secondly, all of these promises were given to the seed of Abraham.” That’s true. But you have to ask yourself this question: Who is the seed of Abraham?

I want you to look in your Bibles to the book of Romans, chapter 2. Let me show you several verses before we go any further, just to kind of set the stage tonight. Look in Romans, chapter 2, beginning there with verse 28. And by the way, the word Jew here is literally Judahite, which means someone of the tribe of Judah. Watch carefully what he says in Romans 2 and verse 28. "For he is not a Judahite who is one outwardly, neither is he that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Judahite who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of a heart in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God." So Paul says a real Judahite is not someone who is just simply a fleshly descendant who has been circumcised in a fleshly manner. He says the real Judahite is that one who has been circumcised in the heart, in the spirit, whose praise is not of man, but of God. Look in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Romans 9.

Now there are many passages. Let me just show you a couple of them. Look in Romans 9, beginning there with verse 6. And you need to ponder this very carefully. Romans 9, verse 6, Paul writes, "Not as though the word of God has taken none effect." But watch this next statement. "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel." You say, "Now, Brother Weaver, there are some folks that might can trace their ancestral line from Abraham. That doesn't matter." Paul says, "They're not all Israel who are of Israel." In other words, just because you have a direct ancestry doesn't mean a thing. Watch what he says in verse 6. "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel." Watch verse 7. "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are

they all children. But in Isaac, shall thy seed be called." Watch verse 8. If you don't understand verse 7, here it is. "That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

Now, what did Paul just get out of his mouth? He says, just because someone is a fleshly descendant does not mean that they're children of God. Why? Because the children are the children of promise. These are counted for the seed.

In Galatians 3, Paul makes this extremely explicit. Verse 6 says, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Then he says, “Know ye therefore that they who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” Who are the children of Abraham? They who are of faith. Verse 8 says, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached the gospel unto Abraham, saying, And thee shall all nations be blessed. So then, they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” Who, then, are the children of Abraham? Those who are of faith, those who are of the promise.

All of these promises in the Old Testament were given to Abraham and his seed. Have you ever noticed that the word seed is singular? The Apostle Paul tells us why. In Galatians 3:16 he says, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not unto seeds as of many, that is plural, but as of one and of thy seed, which is Christ.” Notice the distinction: he does not say seeds, as of many, that is, plural, but seed, as of one. Who is the true seed of Abraham? Jesus Christ. Therefore, all of those promises that were given to Abraham and his seed were given to Jesus Christ.

Now look at verse 29, still in Galatians 3: “If you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.” What does that mean? It means that all of those promises God gave to Abraham are ours in and through Jesus Christ. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. Do you see that? The promises belong to those who are in Christ because they belong first to Christ, the true seed of Abraham.

Having laid that groundwork, I want to take the Scripture and show you how we can overcome and overthrow all of our enemies,

including the oppression, persecution, and injustice they produce. Since those promises belong to Jesus Christ, and since those promises belong to us who are in Jesus Christ, they apply to us in Him.

What I am going to share with you is going to seem too good to be true, but it is a biblical fact. Before I show you these things from Scripture, I caution you about a Naaman complex. Do you know who Naaman was? He was that Syrian. The little maid said, "Would to God that my master Naaman was in the land of Israel, for then would the prophet cure him of his leprosy."

The king of Syria sent a letter to the king of Israel: "Here's my servant Naaman, and I want you to cure him of his leprosy." The king of Israel said, "You see how this man's trying to seek a war with me? Does he think I'm God? I can't cure anybody of his leprosy."

Elisha heard about it and sent a note to the king: "You send Naaman down to me and he'll find out there's a prophet of God in the land." So Naaman and his entourage came down to Elisha.

Elisha never even got out of the house. He sent his servant out there and told Naaman to go and dip seven times in the Jordan River, and he would come out clean. Naaman was enraged. He said, “Are not the rivers of Abana far, far greater and more pure and cleaner than this river Jordan?” He said, “I thought surely the man would at least come out and call upon his God and strut me and heal me.”

The Bible says he turned and went away in anger and rage. Finally, one of his men said, “Captain, if the prophet had bid you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?” He said, “Well, of course I would have.” His servant said, “How much easier it is to do something simple and be clean.” Naaman decided to do it, and he dipped seven times. He came out just as whole, clean, and pure.

What we want is something complex and complicated—on the one hand, so we can have excuses; on the other hand, so we can pride ourselves that we really figured this one out. No. It is so simple. Any seven-year-old child can figure it out. How are we to have victory over our enemies? First, look at Proverbs 16:7 and the source of our enemies before considering success over them: “When a man’s ways

please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Remember that every positive has a negative, and every negative has a positive. When the Bible says that when a man's ways please the Lord, the Lord makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, the opposite is that when a man's ways displease the Lord, God sovereignly raises up enemies and sends them against us.

This is not an isolated text or truth. A multitude of Scriptures teaches exactly the same thing. Let us look in Judges 2, beginning with verse 14, and consider this principle.

The children of Israel sinned against God. In fact, Judges 2:13 says that they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtoreth. Judges 2:14 says, "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of the spoilers that spoil them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies."

Who raised up the enemies? God did. Who set the enemies against His people? God did. Who delivered His people unto those enemies? God did. Why did He do it? Because of their sin and rebellion.

Look in Judges 3, beginning with verse 7. The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore, the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. The children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He, God, sold them into the hands of their enemies.

Then, in Judges 3:12, the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord. The Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. What was God doing? He was putting strength in the enemies of God's people. He strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, so that he could come over and defeat the Israelites.

Judges 4 begins by saying that the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord when Ehud was dead. The Lord sold them

into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. Once again, God was strengthening His enemies, weakening His people, and giving the enemies victory over His people.

Look in Judges 6:1: the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. The Lord delivered them. God gave them over into the hands of their enemies.

Let me show you another passage in 1 Kings 11. Everyone knows about Solomon, how he had defied God by marrying all of these strange women. The Bible says, “But King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites, of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, You shall not go unto them, neither shall they come in unto you. For surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave unto these in love.”

Now skip down to verse nine: “And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice.” Let us see how God judged Solomon. In verse fourteen, “And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon.” Hadad, the Edomite, was of the king’s seed in Edom.

What did God do? God raised up an adversary. In verse twenty-three, “And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon, the son of Eliada, who fled from his lord Hadadezer, king of Zobah.” Verse twenty-five says that “he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon beside the mischief that Hadad did, and he abhorred Israel and reigned over Syria.”

Every time the people sinned against God, rebelled, and disobeyed Him, God raised up an adversary. God exalted and empowered an enemy to chastise His people. Part and parcel of obedience to God and His Word comes the promise of victory; part and parcel of disobedience comes the promise of defeat and being delivered into the hand of our enemies.

In Exodus 23, beginning with verse 22, God says, “But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice,” referring to the angel of the Lord, “and do all that I speak.” God is telling His people, “If you will obey me, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies and an adversary unto thine adversaries.” His angel will go before them and bring them into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and He will cut them off.

God further commands, “Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works.” Instead, Israel shall utterly overthrow them and quite break down their images. They shall serve the Lord their God, and He will bless their bread and their water and take sickness away from the midst of them. Nothing shall cast their young, nor be barren in the land; the number of their days He will fulfill. He will send His fear before them, destroy all the people whom they encounter, and make all their enemies turn their backs unto them.

What did God say? God said, “Look, if you obey Me, I promise you something. I promise you that I’m going to be an enemy to your enemies. I’m going to be an adversary to your adversary.” If you will obey Me, if you will honor Me, and if you will do what I tell you, everyone who comes against you will turn his back, if you obey. It is just that simple.

But now the opposite is true. If we disobey, God will raise up those enemies against us. In Leviticus 26, beginning with verse 3, He says, “If you will walk in My statutes and My commandments to do them.” What is He asking? He is asking obedience. If you walk in His statutes and commandments and do them, He will give rain in due season; the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. The threshing shall reach into the vintage, and the vintage shall reach into the sowing time. You shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land safely. “And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.”

God said, "Now I will rid the evil beast out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land." He continued, "...and you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight, and your enemies shall fall before you by the

sword." If you will obey Him, five can take care of a hundred, and a hundred can put ten thousand to flight. You will chase them, they will fall by the sword, and you will lie down in peace.

But if you will not hearken unto Him and will not do all these commandments; if you despise His statutes and abhor His judgments, so that you will not do all His commandments, but break His covenant, He said, "I also will do this unto you. I will appoint over you the terror, the consumption, and the burning ague that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart."

"And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies. They that hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when none pursueth. And if you will not yet for all this hearken to Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." In verse 25, He says, "...and I will bring a sword upon you that shall avenge the quarrel of My covenant. And when you are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

Isn't that plain? If you obey God, He will take care of all your enemies. You do not have to worry about them. But if you disobey Him, God will judge you, and one of His judgments is that you will be delivered into the hand of your enemy.

The Blessings of Obedience and Curses of Disobedience

Read Deuteronomy 28 when you get home. It is the passage of the blessings and the curses. Most people are not aware of this, but for years, up until just recent times, the presidents of the United States always took their oath of office with their hand upon Deuteronomy 28. They realized it was a covenantal relationship, and that God could either bless or curse this country, depending upon our obedience.

Deuteronomy chapter 28, verse 1: “And it shall come to pass, if thou wilt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments, which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations,

or all the earth." Verse 2 says, "And all these blessings shall come on you and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God."

Now God said, if you will hearken unto Me, if you will listen to Me, all I want is your obedience. That is all. If you will obey Me, all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee.

Let me explain the word overtake. Here you are obeying God, bringing your life into conformity to His Word. Here you are running down Whitehaven Boulevard as fast as you can, trying to escape the blessings of God, trying to get away from them. God said, "I've got news for you. As long as you obey Me, My blessings will chase you down, bowl you over, fall all over you, and you cannot stop them. They will overtake you. They will outrun you." Now let us look at what some of these blessings are.

Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, the fruit of thy ground, the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kind, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face. They shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand to do.

One of the peculiar blessings, if we obey God, is that God will smite all our enemies. If they come out against us one way, God said they will flee seven ways. Through verse 14, you have blessings. But verse 15 says, "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, then all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee."

The word "overtake" in verse 15 is exactly the same as in verse 2. Here you are sinning against God, living in rebellion and wickedness, running down Whitehaven Boulevard trying to escape the curse and judgment of God. God says, My curses will chase you down and bowl you over and fall all over you, and you cannot stop them.

Let us see what some of these curses are. Of course, they are just the opposite: “Cursed shalt thou be in the sitting, Cursed shalt thou be in the field, Cursed shall be thy basket, my store, Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kind.” He goes on: Cursed, cursed, cursed.

In verse 25, he says, “The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies, Thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them, and shalt be removed all the kingdoms of the earth.” If you disobey Me, God says, one of the curses is this: you are going to be smitten before your enemies, taken into captivity, and enslaved.

You say, “That was just Old Testament Israel.” Are you free today? Try building a house without a license, putting in a septic tank without a license, working in the city without a license, getting married without a license, or driving without a license. Try going to the bathroom without a license. You think I am joking about that last one, but a few years ago, in a city where I lived, they were going to fine a man or put him in jail for going to the bathroom on his own land, and he had fifteen acres. I am not making that up. That is a fact.

Now look in your Bibles at Deuteronomy 28:43. God says, “The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high, and thou shalt come down very low.” Are Christians in charge in this country? No. Verse 44 says, “He that is the enemy shall lend to thee. Thou shalt not lend to him. He shall be the head and thou shalt be the tail.” Who are the people thought least of in this country? Christians. Are we in control? Are we in charge? No. We are the tail. Why? Because of our disobedience to God.

Verse 45 says, “Moreover, all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed. Why? Because thou hearkest not unto the voice of the Lord thy God to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded thee.” Verse 47 explains why: “Because thou servest not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things. Therefore, thou shalt serve thine enemies.”

Do you realize that God's people, whether Old Testament or New Testament people, have been ordained to be servants? God says the choice is simple: you may serve Him with joy and gladness of heart, or you may serve your enemies. But you are going to serve one way or the other.

You cannot get away from service. We are ordained to be servants. God said, “You will either serve me or you will serve your enemies, one of the other.”

Deuteronomy 33:27 says, “The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.” I quote this passage every time I get on an airplane, and you will understand why. It continues, “And he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee and shall say, Destroy them.” Who is thrusting out the enemy? It is God. Who is saying, “Destroy them”? It is God. God said, “If you obey me, then I’ll thrust out your enemies.”

In Joshua, chapter seven, Jericho had been cursed by God. God said everything in Jericho was under the ban. It was Hormah, dedicated to destruction. God told the people to be careful that they did not touch anything. A man named Achan had stolen a goodly Babylonian garment, a wedge of gold, and some silver, and had taken them and hidden them under his tent.

After the fall of Jericho, there was a little town called Ai. The men came to Joshua and said, “Look, there’s a little town up there. It’s not very big, and there aren’t many people there. Don’t make all the people go up and fight. Just a few of us will go up. We will be able to take it.” Joshua never checked with God. Joshua never prayed about anything. He said, “All right, go ahead.”

A few hundred of the men went up to Ai, but the men of Ai came out against them and killed thirty-six Israelites. The men turned and ran back to Joshua. They said, “Thirty-six of them were killed. That little village just whipped the socks off us.” Old Joshua fell on his face and said, “What in the world is going to happen? All of our enemies are going to hear that we’ve turned our backs. They will environ around us, and they’ll cut us off.”

So Joshua was praying to God. The Lord said, “Get thee up. Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Why are you laying there crying, Joshua?”

God told Joshua, "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff." Therefore, "the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were cursed." Neither would God be with them any more, "except you destroy the accursed from among you." Do you hear what God said? God said the reason they could not whip their enemies was that they had sinned and rebelled against Him. If they wanted His presence, His blessings, and His victory, they had to deal with the evil. They had to repent, get rid of the wickedness and sin, and then they would have His blessing and His victory—but not until then.

Look in your Bibles to Joshua chapter 10, verses 24 and 25. I like these two verses. These ten kings had been caught; they had been fighting against Israel and had hidden themselves in the cave. Joshua 10 gives a striking picture of victory. When they were brought out, Joshua called the men of Israel and the captains of the men of war, saying, "Come near, and put your feet upon the necks of these kings." They did so, and Joshua said, "Fear not, nor be dismayed. Be strong and of good courage. For thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

What is the significance of Joshua bringing out these kings, making them bow down, and telling his men to put their feet upon their necks? What's the significance? The foot upon the neck of the enemy means that he is defeated and under absolute control. With a quick, well-placed kick, a person could break the neck; it takes about ten pounds of pressure. That is the picture Joshua gave them: their enemies were defeated beneath them.

I remember when I was a boy, times were hard. Old-timers went possum hunting and had to eat them to live. Do you know how you killed a possum? You put your foot on his neck, pulled his tail, and broke his neck. Do you realize how easy it is to destroy almost anything at the neck?

I taught my wife years ago about dogs. I told her, “Sugar, you never turn your back on a dog. If a dog comes up to you, just take your foot, do a snap kick, and break his neck. It’s just that simple.”

We had a pastor friend whose little dog was named Abraham. That little dog was just about that high. My wife did not know it, but Abraham’s food had been stolen by bigger dogs in the community. Alice walked up to their house, went through the garage toward the back door, and found Abraham eating.

She never paid any attention to him; we had been there plenty of times before. But Abraham evidently did not hear her until she got right on him. I guess he thought some dog was trying to steal his food. He turned around and began eating her ankle. The next thing I knew, I received a call at the office: “The dog’s attacked your wife. You need to get out there.” I went, and her skin had barely been broken. She was more frightened than anything else because she was holding our baby.

Finally, I looked at Alice and said, “Why didn’t you do as I asked? Why didn’t you just give a snap kick and break his neck?” She said, “I tried, but every time I put my foot somewhere, his mouth was there.” Usually it works. But here is what Joshua was saying: “You have your foot on their necks.” This is what God will do to all your enemies if you obey.

Now let me make some applications. I could give you Scripture after Scripture, but these are sufficient for you to see the principle. God said, “If you obey Me, I’m going to give you blessings.” One of those blessings is victory. God said, “If you disobey Me, I’m going to curse you.” One of those curses is being delivered into the hands of our enemies. This should be emphasized and understood: when God sovereignly raises up an enemy against us and sits him on us, only God can call him off.

God Alone Can Call Off the Enemies He Raises

I used to have a bulldog by the name of Jughead. One of the best dogs I've ever had. If you came to my house and I looked at old Jughead and said, “You had been God,” I can assure you, you could

scream and holler all you wanted, and I was the only one who could call him off.

And let me tell you something: you and I can scream and cry about all the oppression, injustice, lack of morality, lack of integrity, and lack of everything that's right and good, but the truth is, until we repent of our sins and turn back to God, God will not call Him off. All our griping and bellyaching will do no good. If God has raised Him up to whip us, if God has raised Him up to chastise us, I can assure you, God will not call him off until the business is done.

This ought also to answer another question: "Brother Weaver, our country's in a bad state. What can I do?" Look in Proverbs 28:4: "They that forsake the law, praise the wicked, but such as keep the law, contend with them."

I could tell you very piously, "What you need to do is write your congressman." But that does not work. Most of the time, they will not even answer you. When they do, it is amazing how much they can say without ever answering your questions. What really frosts my cake is receiving a letter saying, "I appreciate your views on this matter, but I've got to vote my own conscience." I did not send him up there to vote his own conscience. I sent him up there to represent me. I do not care what he thinks; he is to represent us.

I could tell you to take the matter to court. If you have not been in court lately, you are in for a big surprise. I am not a communist, and I do not sympathize with communism, but Gus Hall, a communist, made one statement concerning our judicial system that I agree with: "The reason we refer to our judicial system as the halls of justice is because the only place you can get any justice is out in the halls." That is about the truth.

I could tell you to vote. But if you vote for Socialist A or Socialist B, you are still getting socialism. It really does not matter. You may say, "I'm going to vote for the lesser of two evils." You are still getting evil. What can you do?

One of the most important things you can do, by God's grace, is to be as obedient, holy, and godly as you can. You may ask, "What good would that do?" Have you ever stopped to think that, as wicked as

Sodom and Gomorrah were, God was willing to spare those cities if He found only ten righteous people? Just ten.

If we obey God, we are not praising the wicked. If we disobey God, we are holding them up; we are praising them and giving them what they want.

The Source and Defeat of Our Enemies

Here is the source of our enemies: God sovereignly raises them up against us because of our sin and rebellion. I hope somebody has already thought about 2 Chronicles 7:14. The problem in this country is really not our Congress. It is really not our President, nor is it our judicial system. It really is not. It is not even the Sodomites. The problem in this country is God's people. God said, "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways and seek My face, then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land." The problem is not with the wicked. The problem is God's people who are living wickedly.

The Success Over Our Enemies: Pleasing the Lord

Secondly, I want to show you the success over our enemies. In Proverbs 16:7, the Bible says, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Do you realize that the only thing we really have to do to win is to please the Lord and be obedient? It is just that simple.

God can get rid of our enemies in one of three ways. First, He can get rid of our enemies by converting them. Then they would no longer be our enemies; they would be our friends, one of us. Secondly, He can get rid of our enemies by subduing them—that is, breaking their power. God put them up; God can take them down. It is just that simple. What do you think it means when David prays in those imprecatory prayers, saying, "Break their arm, O God. Smite their teeth out of their cheek"? If your arm is broken, you have lost your power. If your cheek is broken, you have lost your power.

So God may convert them if He pleases. God may subdue them if He pleases. Or, thirdly, God may eradicate them if He pleases. He

may kill them. That is up to Him. He may do any one of those three things, or use all three of them.

I want you to see something in Proverbs 21 and Exodus chapter 34. We will read Proverbs 21 first, and then go to Exodus chapter 34, where I will show you a good, clear illustration. Look at Proverbs 21, verse 1: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord."

"As the rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will." Do you realize God can turn a civil ruler's heart either to us or against us? I'm really glad to know Bill Clinton is not in charge in this country. I'm really glad to know Congress is not in charge in this country. God is in control and is able to turn the heart of the king, or the civil ruler, any way He pleases.

Let me show you a good illustration. God not only has that control over the king and the civil rulers; He has that control over anyone and everyone. Look in Exodus chapter 34.

Remember, God demanded that all the men children of the children of Israel appear before Him in Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate those seven annual feasts. The women did not have to, although usually they did, but the men had to be there.

Remember also that when the children of Israel went into the land, they took their swords and bows and killed the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Hivites, and all the otherites. Those they did not kill, they made their slaves. They took their property and their farms.

When all these men were in Jerusalem worshiping God, what would stop the remaining slaves from rebelling, arming themselves, killing the women and children left behind, and taking their farms back? What would stop them? Watch. Exodus chapter 34, beginning at verse 23: "Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel." Three times a year, they had to be there. Verse 24 says, "...for I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders," and, "...neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord God thrice in the year."

God said, I am in such sovereign control that not only will there be no uprising or rebellion, they will not even want their farms back.

They will not desire to have their land back. If you obey Me and worship Me, I will take care of your enemies.

In 2 Kings 2, Elijah is going to be translated, taken up into heaven. His servant is Elisha, although Elisha was not yet a prophet. Elisha was known as the one who poured water upon the hands of Elijah. Elijah asked Elisha, “Ask what thou wilt before I be taken up.” Elisha said, “Here’s what I want. I want a double portion of the Spirit that's upon thee.” Elijah said, “If you see me when I'm taken up, it's going to be done. But if not, you're not going to have it.” Elisha stayed with Elijah the whole time. Finally, when God translated Elijah, Elisha saw it. Look at what Elisha cried: “And Elisha saw it and he cried, My Father, My Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.”

What an amazing and odd thing to cry when the prophet is taken up: “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.” Look in your Bible at 2 Kings 13:14. When Elisha dies, Joash the king says the same thing about Elisha: “Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness, wherewith he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over him, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.” Why in the world would Elisha say, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof”? Why would Joash say that when Elisha died?

They were telling us that our protection is not in our armies, our congressmen, our military might, or our readiness. Our protection is in our God. Why were they calling the preacher of God, “My Father, My Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof”? Remember, a chariot was a defensive weapon, and horses were defensive weapons. Here the preacher is called the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof because the preacher preached and taught the Word of God. The people realized that as long as they obeyed God's Word, they were defended and protected.

But when they disobeyed, they were judged. That is why both Elijah and Elisha were referred to as “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” The Bible says in Psalm 33:17, “A horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.” You could paraphrase that by saying, “An A1 tank is a vain thing for

safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength." An F-14 is a vain thing for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great firepower. Proverbs 21:31 says, "The horse is prepared for the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD."

You could have in your home twenty M-14s, one hundred M-16s, hand grenades, and pistols coming out your ears, but if God does not protect you, you are not protected. We could have the largest standing army in the world; that is nothing. If God does not protect us, we are not protected. We have to understand that our protection is in God.

Victory Through Christ's First Coming

Now, let me show you a passage that I hope will challenge your thinking and even blow your mind. Look in your Bibles to the book of Luke, chapter 1. Every time you begin to talk about victory, someone says, "Well, Brother Weaver, we're going to have the victory when our Lord returns."

May I remind you that we do not have to wait until our Lord returns to have victory? We may have victory now. It is true that we will have perfect victory only when He returns. But the first coming of Christ—the very first coming—was for one main reason specified here: to give us victory. You do not have to wait until the second coming. He came the first time.

Look at Luke chapter 1, beginning with verse 67. This is called the Benedictus, the song of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. Luke 1:67 says, "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying," Here is a man prophesying under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people," and verse 69, "And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." Now he is talking about the Lord Jesus. Watch verse 70.

"...as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began, His way came the first time, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all them that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to

remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore unto our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

What is Zacharias saying? Jesus Christ is coming. Why has He come? That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all them that hate us, and that, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. Christ came the first time to give us victory.

Let me challenge you to read some of these passages. In Luke 20:43; Acts 2:34–35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; and Hebrews 10:13, the Bible says that He is seated at the right hand of God the Father till all of His enemies are made His footstool. In every one of these passages, that is what it says. All of Christ's enemies shall be made His footstool. If you have your feet on your enemies, they are defeated.

Look in your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of Hebrews, chapter 2, beginning with verse 14. Let me give you an argument from the Bible. This is called an argument from the greater to the lesser. Hebrews 2:14 says, "For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he that is Christ, also himself likewise took part of the same, that he, that is, that Christ, through death, he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject unto bondage."

Now, what were our two greatest enemies? The devil and death. The devil has already been defeated. It is a done deal. Death has already been defeated. It is a done deal. That is why the Apostle Paul can cry, "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" Because Christ has already delivered us from the devil and delivered us from death.

The Bible says in Romans 16:20 that "the God of all peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." How can He bruise him under our feet?

Everyone knows that Christ is the head and we are the body, right? Suppose, just for illustration, that Mark is the newest, weakest Christian in the world. He has just been converted; he is the newest one and the weakest. Suppose that God sovereignly placed him in the body as the bottom of the foot. You cannot get any lower down than that, can you? Yet do you realize that even the bottom of the foot has authority over Satan and over death? If we are in the body of Christ's head and we are the body, and God is going to bring Satan under our feet, then no matter how weak we are, we still have power and authority over the worst and strongest of our enemies.

If Christ has delivered us from our two greatest enemies, shall He not deliver us from lesser enemies? You could give the same argument that Paul did in Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son for us, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" If God has given us His Son, Christ, to die in our place on the cross, and if Christ has suffered and purchased the greatest, is God not going to give us the lesser through Christ?

Of course He is. He came the first time that we would have victory over our enemies. Through Him, we have victory over the devil, victory over death, and victory even over our political enemies. Our problem is not insufficient strength, because we have the omnipotence, the all-powerfulness of God behind us. Our problem is not lack of wisdom, for we have the Word of God. What, then, is our problem? Our problem is that we want victory under an alien law system.

The Problem: Wanting Victory Under an Alien Law System

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 8. First Samuel 2:30 says, "Them that honour me will I honour, saith the Lord." The opposite is also true: those that dishonour God, God shall dishonour. "Them that honour me will I honour, saith the Lord."

Here is an illustration. Let us suppose I am driving down Whitehaven on my way home tonight, and a policeman pulls me over. "May I see your license, please?" He takes my license and says, "Mr. Weaver, did you realize you were going 55 in a 45 mile an hour zone?" "No, sir, I didn't realize that."

“In fact, my speedometer said I was doing 45.” “Well, Mr. Weaver, I’m going to have to give you a ticket.” “Well, sir, you should not give me a ticket, for I was not speeding.” “Well, now, Mr. Weaver, don’t argue with me. I’m just doing my job.” Everybody has heard that, haven’t they? What does that mean? Shut up, or I am going to arrest you if you go any further. So I simply shut up and take the ticket.

I get so aggravated, I drive off and say, "Huh, he thinks he's got me. I know a thing or two about the law." I go back to my home in Georgia, get my Georgia Code book out, and draft all these wonderful motions based on Georgia law: motion to quash, motion to dismiss. I cite Georgia law left and right. I come down here to my court date, walk into the courtroom, file these before the judge, and say, "Chew on these a while, buddy." The judge looks at these things and says, "Mr. Weaver, do you realize you're in South Carolina? Georgia law doesn't apply here?" You see, all of my arguments, no matter how good they are, if they're based upon Georgia law, Georgia, according to South Carolina, is an alien law system. South Carolina doesn't recognize Georgia law.

In 1 Samuel chapter 8, the key to understanding this passage is to see it as a transition from one law structure to another. In 1 Samuel, chapter eight, the people trade God for a man. They trade God's law for man's law, verse 5: "And they said unto him," that is, to Samuel, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways."

"Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." Verse 6: "But the thing displeased Samuel, and they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord sent unto Samuel, hearken unto the voice of the people, and all that they say unto thee. For they have not rejected thee," watch, "but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

"According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even in this day, wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore, hearken unto their voice, albeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

Watch this transition from one law system to another. Since they traded God for a man, God said, I'm going to let them have what they want. But you show them what kind of man they're going to have. There is one word to underline in your Bibles as you read through this: I will emphasize that word with my voice. Watch it.

Verse 10: "And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of king that shall reign over you. He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots to be his horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties, and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and his instruments of chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed of your vineyards and give to His officers and His servants. And He will take your men's servants and your maidservants and your goodliest young men and your asses and put them to His work. And He will take the tenth of it, your sheep, and you shall be His servants."

Why? Because when they rejected God and traded God for a man, they rejected God's law and took man's law. Here are the four consequences for rejecting God and His law. You tell me if these are not apparent in our country.

The very first result of rejecting God and His law, according to 1 Samuel chapter 8, is totalitarianism. What is the king going to do? He is going to take, take, take, take, take. And you cannot stop him.

The second thing is oppression. When you are taken, you are oppressed. The third thing is loss of liberty. When things are taken from you and you are oppressed, you lose your liberty. The fourth thing is increased cost of civil government.

Now, what has happened in 1 Samuel 8? Men have traded God and His law for a king, for a man and his law. Let me show you how bad it was for the children of Israel. It will be equally as bad for us. Look in verse 18: "And you shall cry out in that day, because of your

king which you shall have chosen you. And the Lord will not hear you in that day."

God said, You want a man instead of Me? You want man's law instead of My law? I'll give it to you, and you're going to get so sick of him and so sick of his law that you'll wish to God you never chose him.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 81:10-16 (KJV)

Christ is not going to honor a God-forsaking, Bible-denying people. If you and I want victory, it is going to have to be on God's terms, in obedience to His Word and in obedience to His law. You are not going to win anything by rebelling against God or by denying the validity of His law.

Conclusion: Obedience Brings Victory

You may say, "Brother Weaver, I've got this plan, I've got this plan." If it is not biblical, you might as well forget it. God is not going to honor an alien law system.

In Psalm 81, God says, "I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide and I'll fill it."

Isn't that a blessing? "I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land. Open thy mouth wide and I'll fill it." Verse 11 says, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would have none of me." They would not listen. They would not obey. "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels."

This is one of the saddest, and yet at the same time, one of the most profound verses in the Bible. God says, "Oh, that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways, I should soon have subdued their enemies and turned My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him, but their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them also with the finest of wheat, and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."

> Did you hear what God said? If His people had only obeyed Him, if they had hearkened to Him, and if they had walked in His ways, He would soon have subdued their enemies and turned His hand against their adversaries.

And their enemies, the haters of the Lord, should have submitted themselves to me. The only success we will have over our enemies is on God's terms, in obedience to His law. For when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would impress upon our souls that obedience brings blessing and victory, and disobedience brings curses and defeat. May we understand your law word. May we understand what thou dost demand of us, so that we can apply thy truth to our lives, obey thee, and bring honor to thy name. Deliver us from our enemies as we obey Thee. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Holy War/Just War

November 5, 2002

Holy War

Introduction: The Biblical Concept of Holy War

I want you to open your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Joshua, chapter 4, and hold that while I give you a little information before we get started. I have been dealing with the concept, or the biblical doctrine, of war, especially because in our day and time I think that is desperately needed. Tonight, however, I am going to go a little differently than I have been going. When I preach, I like everyone to turn with me in the Scripture so they can see that what I am saying is exactly what the Word of God says, and we are going to do a good bit of that tonight. But in order to cover a lot of ground, I am going to try to give you three messages in one. Therefore, I am going to quote a lot of Scripture instead of having you turn to it. Make sure you jot down the references, and then go back and double-check everything after I get through.

We are looking at Joshua, chapter 4, and beginning tonight with the concept of holy war. Look in verse 13. It is one simple verse, and

I will come back and explain it before I leave it: “About 40,000 prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto the battle to the plains of Jericho.” Each of us has heard of Islamic jihad, or holy war.

It is a term that Muslims employ as they fight against the great Satan, which they usually refer to as America in general and Christians in particular. In fact, Muslims refer to all Christians as the infidels. Their concept of holy war, while misapplied, is nonetheless a biblical concept. It is interesting that this concept is maintained by individuals who live in the Middle East, in the Bible lands. Yet that same term is strange to our ears, because we have never lived over there and certainly have never understood the concept.

When you talk about holy war, most Christians are absolutely aghast at the idea. How in the world can anything so deadly, so destructive, and so devastating be classified as holy? It is true that the term holy war does not occur in the Bible. Yet the principles of it appear over and over in the Word of God.

You remember last night I dealt with the subject, God is a warrior. And I pointed out the fact in Numbers chapter 21 and verse 14 that all of those wars that Israel fought in Canaan, in the conquest of Canaan, all of those wars were designated as the wars of the Lord.

Now would anyone be so bold as to say or even suggest that those wars that God ordained and those wars that God commanded were unholy wars? And when you come to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 34, you don't have to turn there, but may I remind you last night we looked at it and the Bible says that God brought Israel out of Egypt by means of war. Would you once again be so bold and so blasphemous as to say that the war that God conducted against Egypt was unholy? Well, of course not. It was a holy war that God conducted against Egypt. It was a holy war that God commanded the people to conduct as they conquered Canaan land. And if you'd turn very quickly in your Bibles to the book of Revelation chapter 19 and look at verse 11, certainly none would be so blasphemous as to say this would be an unholy war because the Bible says in Revelation chapter 19 and verse 11, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse."

So we're talking about Christ. "And he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." So when you take the idea that all war is unholy, then you have a real problem because here is a holy Savior conducting a holy war in righteousness. And thus, if you say all war is unholy, then you have to say that you have an unholy Savior who is fighting an unholy war. Obviously something is wrong with the concept when someone just simply pronounces that all war is wrong and all war is unholy. No, there is a concept of holy war taught in the Bible. Do you remember in Ephesians chapter 6, many of you can quote the passage beginning there with verse 10, where the Apostle Paul says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord," and he tells you to put on the whole armor of God, and we're to put on the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, and the helmet of salvation, and we're to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

He says, “that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” That passage presents a concept of holy war.

There is an objection: “But Pastor, don’t you understand? Ephesians 6, verses 10 through 17 speaks of a spiritual warfare.” I understand that. But may I remind you that if warfare is inherently evil and wrong in and of itself, it would be wrong to engage in it either spiritually or physically.

Warfare Is Not Inherently Evil

Let me give you an illustration. Is adultery wrong? Yes, it is. God says very plainly, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Physical adultery is wrong; it is wicked, sin, and rebellion against God. But what about the spiritual aspect of adultery? What did our Lord say in Matthew chapter 5? He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her in his heart hath committed adultery already.” In other words, since adultery is inherently evil, it is wrong to commit it either physically or spiritually. Now, if warfare were inherently evil, it would be wrong to engage in it either physically or spiritually.

Here is another objection. Someone says, “Brother Weaver, don’t you understand that in physical warfare, people get hurt, people get killed, and in spiritual warfare no one gets hurt?” I hope that is not your idea. Because if you do not engage in spiritual warfare, first of all, you get hurt. Secondly, it does not matter whether warfare is physical or spiritual. In all warfare, your mission, your goal, is to inflict damage upon the enemy. You want to destroy Satan. You want to destroy his work. You want to destroy his efforts. Certainly, someone gets hurt. It is impossible to have war without casualties, either physically or spiritually.

Let me emphasize one simple point before going any further: there is a concept of holy war. I want to bring this down to what I will call an irreducible minimum, in order that you might comprehend the fact that there is indeed a holy war. According to the Bible, does God demand the death penalty for murder? What is the answer? Yes.

The Death Penalty as a Foundation for Holy War

Let us look in our Bibles to Numbers, chapter 35, verse 31. The Word of God says: “Moreover, you shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death, but he shall be surely put to death.” God says that is it. There is no life sentence. There is no remuneration. There is no restitution. God says the murderer shall surely be put to death.

God says, “But if any man hate his neighbor, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally, that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities”—that is, a city of refuge—“then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.” Then God says, “Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.”

If a murderer escapes to a city of refuge, God says that you bring him out and give him to the avenger of blood, that the avenger of blood may kill him. “Thine eye shall not pity him.”

Everyone knows Romans chapter 13, especially verse 4. When the Bible is talking about the civil magistrate, God says, “He beareth not

the sword in vain." In other words, God has given the civil magistrate the authority and the power to execute the death penalty. Murder, then, deserves capital punishment.

Capital punishment is based upon the fact that man is made in the image of God. If I were to come over and murder Greg, it is not merely that I am snuffing out Greg's life, harming his family, and harming society. When I murder Greg, I am attacking the image of God in him. It is an assault upon God Himself. Therefore, God demands the death penalty. In Genesis 9:6, God said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

Does the Bible sanction the death penalty? The answer is yes. Is it holy and right to put a murderer to death? The answer is yes. If I murdered Greg, you were all witnesses against me, the jury found me guilty, and I was sentenced to be electrocuted in the electric chair, no one would have a problem with that. You shouldn't have a problem with that, because that is God's answer. That's what God demands.

Suppose there were four other men in the room with me when we attacked Greg, and all five of us participated in his murder. Should all five men get the death penalty? Of course. Suppose there were twenty men in the room who attacked Greg, and all twenty helped kill him. Should all twenty men get the death penalty? Of course.

Once the principle of justice is admitted by enforcing the death penalty upon the murderer or the murderers, it makes no difference whether the murderer was one or many. By extension, the same principle applies to an army or even a nation. It doesn't matter if it's one, one hundred, five thousand, or fifty thousand. The principle is exactly the same. This is exactly the principle that God used in waging holy war.

Genesis 15 shows this principle. God is telling Abraham that his seed is going into a strange land for four hundred years, and he tells him why. Here is the biblical reason why Israel went down into Egypt to begin with: "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years. And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge." God will take care of

Egypt. "And afterwards they shall come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."

Now what did God do? God sent Israel into Egypt for 400 years. Why? Because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. Here was a wicked people, a wicked nation, who were shaking their fist in the face of God and rebelling and sinning against Him. At the end of 400 years, God brought Israel out of Egypt. He put a sword in their hand. And what did He say? “Kill every one of them. Destroy them all.” Was that a holy war? Yes, it was. It was a war against a nation of sinners, adulterers, murderers, and wicked, ungodly people.

It was the same principle that God used when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, when He destroyed all the nations of Canaan, and when He destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It is the same principle that our Lord will use when He comes back, as Revelation 19, verse 11 tells us, when He will in righteousness make war against all His enemies and destroy every one of them. Once you understand the principle of justice—that it is right to execute those who are wicked and wrong and violate the law of God—the same thing applies to nations as well.

Warfare as Divine and Covenantal Activity

May I remind you that warfare in the Bible is considered as divine activity? God was Israel’s sovereign Lord. Not only was warfare a divine activity, but there was also a covenantal aspect to warfare. God has promised Israel that if she will obey Him, God will bless them in numerous ways. One of those ways is militarily speaking. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Leviticus, chapter 26. I will show you this in two passages very quickly. Here is the covenantal aspect. Watch Leviticus 26, beginning with verse 2. God says, “You shall keep My sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary. I am the Lord.”

God says that if Israel walks in His statutes, keeps His commandments, and does them, He will give rain in due season; the land and trees will yield their increase. Their threshing will reach unto the vintage, and the vintage unto the sowing time. They will eat their bread to the full and dwell safely in the land. God says, "And I

will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall a sword go through your land." If they obey Him, He will protect them from war and invaders.

He continues, "And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword." If Israel obeys God, it will prosper militarily. It will have safety in the land, and when attacked, five will chase a hundred and a hundred will chase ten thousand. They will not have to worry.

But these are the curses if they do not obey: "If you will not hearken unto me, and will not obey all these commandments, and if you shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that you will not do all my commandments, but that you break my covenant." God then tells them what He will do. "And if you walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, according to your sins."

He says, "I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, and your highways shall be desolate. And you will not be reformed by these things, but will walk contrary to Me. Then I will also walk contrary to you, and will punish you seven times for your sins." He will bring a sword upon them and avenge the quarrel of His covenant. When they are gathered within their cities, He will send pestilence among them, and they will be delivered into the hand of the enemy. If they disobey, God will bring the enemy to their gates; the enemy will destroy and captivate them.

In Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 1, God said, “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth.” Then verse 2 says, “And these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.”

Let me explain that word overtake. God says, “If you obey me, these blessings will overtake you.” Picture this in your mind: You are obeying God, bringing your life into conformity to the Word of God, and honoring Him in every area that you can. Here you are, running down the highway as fast as you can, trying to outrun the blessings of God. You know what God says? “My blessings will run you down and overtake you and fall all over you. And you can’t stop it. They’ll catch up with you. You can’t outrun the blessings of God.”

Some of those blessings are given in verse 3: “Blessed shalt thou be in the city. Blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body.” Verse 6 says, “Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in. Blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.” Verse 7 says, “The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face. They shall come out against thee one way and flee before thee seven ways.” If you obey God, part of the blessings is military superiority and military victory.

Now consider verse 15: “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee.” Here you are doing your own thing, refusing to listen to God and to bring your life into conformity to His Word. You want nothing to do with God, and you are running down the highway as fast and as furiously as you can, trying to outrun the curse of God. God says, “My curses will run you down and knock you down and fall all over you, and you can’t stop them.” What are the curses?

These were just the opposite of the blessings. He said in verse 16, “Cursed shalt thou be in the city, cursed shalt thou be in the field, cursed shalt be thy basket and thy store,” and in verse 25: “The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies. Thou shalt go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them, and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.” In verse 29: “And thou shalt grope at noonday as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways, and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.”

God said, “If you disobey me, I’ll bring my curse upon you.” Understand that the curse is for failing to obey the Word of God. This is divine warfare.

The Meaning of 'Before the Lord' in Joshua 4:13

In Joshua, chapter 4, beginning with verse 13, the Bible says, “About 40,000 prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto battle to the plains of Jericho.” I want to take a moment and explain this verse. The word “prepared” is important, and it will be addressed later.

The phrase “before the Lord” also requires attention. The Hebrew word is panim. It does not mean simply in the face of, or in the presence of, but it actually means as unto. So here were 40,000 men who passed over into the battle as unto the Lord. They were not merely in His presence.

They were certainly in His presence, because God is omnipresent. He is everywhere, once in the totality of His being. Certainly, they were in His presence that way. But they passed over as unto the Lord. That is, they passed over religiously, worshipfully, and as honoring unto the Lord.

God sent King Saul to war against the Amalekites and told him to kill every one of them. But Saul spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the oxen and the best of the sheep, while all the refuse he utterly destroyed. Samuel, a man of God, came to Saul, and Saul, the hypocrite, said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I performed all of the commandments of God."

Samuel said, "Saul, if you've obeyed God, what meaneth the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep in mine ears? If you'd obeyed God, everything would be dead." Saul answered, "The people spared these that we might offer them as a sacrifice to God." Samuel said, "Hath the Lord as great delight in sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken is better than the fat of rams." Then little Samuel the prophet said, "Bring Agag hither unto me." First Samuel 15:32 says, "Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately."

Can you see Agag kind of prissy and dancing around? He came delicately and said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." Nothing was going to happen to him. Samuel said, "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Samuel, the prophet, took a sword and hewed Agag in pieces.

What does the Bible say? The same phrase appears in Joshua 4 and verse 13: He hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. That little phrase, "before the Lord," does not mean simply in the presence of God. Surely he did it in God's presence, because God is omnipresent. Literally, it means that he hewed Agag in pieces as unto the Lord in Gilgal. In other words, Samuel did to Agag exactly what God wanted done to Agag. He did it in obedience to God, worshipfully, reverently, and religiously, because that was what God had commanded.

When these 40,000 men passed over in battle before the Lord, they passed over as unto the Lord. They were honoring Him and worshiping Him.

Everyone knows what Elijah did to the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. In 1 Kings 18, the Bible says, “And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.”

“And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, The Lord, he is God, the Lord, he is God. And Elijah said to them, Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape. And they took them, and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slew them there.” What did Elijah do to those prophets of Baal? He killed them as unto the Lord. He did to those prophets exactly what God would have done to them.

War is not inherently evil in and of itself. There are evil wars, but that does not negate the fact that there are holy wars, especially when those wars are there to eradicate evil and wickedness.

It is our responsibility to make sure what a holy war is before we ever engage in it. In ancient Israel, all life was religious and covenantally related unto God. Warfare was no different. There were definite regulations concerning warfare in the Word of God. War was an aspect of worship and had to be conducted by the rules laid out in the Word of God. We should not think that strange, for everything in Israel of old was related to God.

What does the Bible say in 1 Corinthians 10:31? “Whether therefore you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the honor and glory of God.” What does he say in Colossians 3:23? “And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord your God.” So we are to have every aspect and every area of our lives brought into conformity to the Word of God as well. Every area, every activity, and every sphere are to be regulated by the Word of God.

Now, in Joshua 4:13, here is another word that I did not deal with earlier, but that I want to deal with now. The Bible says, “About 40,000 prepared for war passed over as unto the Lord unto battle to the plains of Jericho.” Now look at the little word “prepared.” Some of you may want to do a little research when you get home, get a Strong’s Concordance, and look up this word.

The Word 'Prepared' Means Sanctified

You are going to find that this word occurs numerous times at the command of God. For instance, you may just jot the Scriptures down. In Jeremiah 6:4, God said, “Prepare ye war against her.” So God gave the command: “Prepare ye war against her.” In Jeremiah 22:7, God said, “And I will prepare destroyers against thee, everyone with his weapons. And they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.” Again, listen to what God said: “And I will prepare destroyers against thee.”

When you get to Jeremiah 51:27–28, God said, “Set you up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among nations, prepare the nations against her.” In Joel 3:19, the Bible says, “Proclaim ye this

among the Gentiles, prepare war. Wake up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw nigh. Let them come up."

Now, there is an interesting thing about this little word, "prepare." The Bible says that about 40,000 prepared passed over before the Lord. Let me tell you what the Hebrew word "prepare" is. It is the word qadash, and it literally means to be or to make as clean, either ceremonially or morally. It means to be consecrated, to be dedicated, to be hallowed, to be holy, or to be sanctified. Now, here is the interesting thing.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Genesis, chapter 2 and verse 3. Here is a verse that probably all of us know: "And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his works which God created and made." Isn't that interesting? God blessed the seventh day and qadash, prepared it. The word "prepared" in all of these Scriptures that I just quoted, even when God said, "Prepare war against her," literally is "sanctify war against her," or "consecrate war against her."

The same exact Hebrew word is used in Exodus 29:43. When God is talking about the tabernacle, He said, "And there will I meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified, or prepared, by my glory." In Isaiah 13:1–5, especially verse 3, God is talking about the soldiers, and He said, "I have prepared my sanctified ones."

The Cause Must Be Holy

War is holy because it is something that is used as sanctified in the Bible. It is something that has been consecrated. These 40,000 men were sanctified and consecrated to the war, and they went over as unto the Lord. That is, they were doing what they were doing for His honor and His glory.

Now, let us talk about what is absolutely necessary to have what you and I would call a holy war. I am going to give you at least four things, and I believe that these are what, once again, I would call an irreducible minimum. There may be others that could be added, but you must have a minimum of four things to have what you and I would call a holy war.

The first one is this: the cause must be holy. The cause for one fighting is actually his reasons for fighting, his motivation for fighting, his goal for fighting, and his aim in fighting. It is that which motivates him; it is that which moves him along.

Four Prerequisites for a Holy War

Now, one is not to fight without a cause. Neither is one to fight for a wicked cause. Do you realize there are so many wars that happen and take place just because one government or one nation wants the resources, the money, or the land of another government or another nation? Let me tell you something, folks. When God says, "Thou shalt not steal," that applies to governments as well as individuals. When you have a wicked cause, the war is wrong and wicked in and of itself.

David says in Psalm 109, "Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise. For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me. They have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred and fought against me." Watch: "Without a cause." It is wrong to fight without a cause, and it is wrong to fight in a wicked cause. The wicked fight without a cause. That is exactly what David is saying. So you and I must have a righteous cause if we are going to fight.

You will remember 1 Samuel 17, where Goliath comes out and challenges the armies of Jehovah. Little David goes there with bread sent by his father, and his brother begins to look at him and says, "What in the world did you come out here for? Who did you leave those few sheep with? I know the naughtiness of your heart. You just came out here to see the battle. That's the only reason you came."

About that time, David hears Goliath come out and defy Israel. David looks at his brother and says, "Is there not a cause?" David says, "Look, I'll fight Goliath. Don't worry about it. I'm not afraid of him." All the mighty men of battle were afraid of him, but David said, "I'll fight him because there is a cause. There is a reason to fight."

King Saul said, "Well, how in the world can you fight? I mean, you're just a lad, and this man has been a warrior from his youth.

You're just a boy." David said, "Let me tell you something. There came a bear against my sheep. And I caught him, not killed him. There came a lion against my sheep, and I caught him, not killed him. And this uncircumcised Philistine will be just like one of them. There's a cause."

In 1 Samuel 17:36, David said, "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing, seeing, that he has defied the armies of the living God." Here was one man challenging the Lord of Hosts and the Lord of Hosts' armies. In verse 45, when the battle took place, David said to the Philistine, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield. But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, that is, the Lord of the armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

What was Goliath doing? He was not simply defying Israel; in so doing, he was defying the God of Israel. God was being dishonored and mocked, His people disgraced, and His armies dismayed. David asked, "Is there not a cause?" The cause certainly was a righteous cause, because God's honor and God's glory were at stake. There is a holy cause in defending the honor of God. There is also a holy cause in defending oneself.

A holy cause may involve defending one's family, one's property, and one's nation. When you talk about a holy cause, understand that it is our responsibility, before we ever fight, to determine whether or not the cause is holy. I tell people, I'm ready to defend my country in a heartbeat. I'm not afraid to fight. I'm willing to fight. I'll defend my country, but if you think I'm going to go over and defend someone's oil wells, you're mistaken. Let the rich man hire his own mercenaries to defend his oil wells. Don't use my sons or my daughters under the pretext of defending the country and supporting someone's oil wells. There is a cause that has to be holy. It is holy to defend our families.

Consider Nehemiah 4:11. Here were some men planning a surprise attack against Israel: “And our adversary said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.” So they were planning a surprise attack. Then he said, “And it came to pass that when the Jews who dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all

places which ye shall return unto us, they will be upon you." In other words, here were some people trying to discourage Nehemiah. He continues in verse 13: "Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places I even set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears and their bows."

"And I looked and rose up and said unto the nobles and to the rulers of the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and terrible and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." What is Nehemiah saying? He is saying it is a holy cause to defend your life. It is a holy cause to defend your family. It is a holy cause to defend your property. It is a holy cause to defend your nation. You fight for them, he said.

That certainly is indeed biblical. That certainly is right. In 2 Samuel 10:6-10, the children of Ammon, that is, the Ammonites, are fighting against David's men. They have also hired Syrians to fight against David and his men. Joab realizes that he is surrounded. He has men in front of him, and he has men behind him.

And so he divides his army: "You go over there and fight them while we fight them. And if yours are too great for you, we'll come help you. And if ours are too great, then you come help us." But this is what he said in verse 12: "Be of good courage and let us play the men for our people and for the cities of our God and the Lord do that which seemeth him good." What is he saying? "Let's fight for our people. Let's fight for our cities."

It is certainly not my intent to list all of the holy causes. Circumstances could arise that I know absolutely nothing about. But if you are going to say that something is a holy war, the very first requirement is that the cause must be holy. Therefore, it is your responsibility to make sure that the cause is indeed holy. It is not your responsibility to fight for anything unbiblical, ungodly, and unchristian. It is also your responsibility not to get suckered and hoodwinked into fighting for that which is not right. You must examine the cause according to the Word of God. For a war to be holy, first of all, there must be a holy cause. Secondly, the army must be holy.

Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 23 and verse 9. "When the host goeth forth against thine enemies"—the host, that is, the army—"when the host of the army goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing." It is not enough that the cause be holy; the people of the cause must be holy as well. Therefore, God said, "Keep thee from every wicked thing." The word "wicked" is the word ra, which means bad, evil, wicked, or wrong.

This term is used throughout the Bible. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, God talks about idolatry. In verse 5 He says, "Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman which have committed that wicked thing into thy gates. Even that man or that woman shalt thou stone them with stones till they die." Notice that wicked thing. The Bible says that the army is to keep itself from every wicked thing. In 2 Kings chapter 17 and verse 11: "And there they burned incense in all the high places, as did the heathen, whom the Lord carried away before them and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger."

The word “thing” is the Hebrew word dabar, which literally means a word, a matter, a thing, or a cause. God is pleased to use holy vessels. He says that not only must the cause be holy, but the army must be holy as well. In Joshua 3:5: “Sanctify yourselves, for to morrow the Lord will do wonders for you.” Sanctify yourselves; prepare yourselves; consecrate yourselves. Thus, 40,000 prepared, or sanctified, men went unto the battle as unto the Lord.

Now, let me give you an illustration that you certainly can understand. When God brought the children of Israel to Jericho, what did God tell them in chapter 6? God said, “You don't touch anything in this city. This whole city and all the inhabitants except Rahab and her family, all of it is cursed. It's to be burned with fire.” So when you get to Joshua chapter 7, here's a man by the name of Achan.

What does he do? He steals a goodly Babylonian garment, a wedge of silver, and some gold, and hides them under his tent. Shortly after the fall of Jericho, the men come to Joshua and say, “Look, the next town up the road is Ai. It's a little town. Don't make all the people work. I mean, come on. It's just a little town. Just send a few thousand up there and we'll take care of it.” Nobody asked the

Lord, nobody prayed, and nobody sought the Lord, so Joshua said, “Go, head on out.”

Well, you know what happened. When they got out there, the men of Ai came against them and chased them, and thirty-six Israelites were killed. When they came back, Joshua fell on his face and said, “Lord God, what in the world is wrong when Israel turns their back against our enemies? What's going on?” And what did God say? God said, “Get up. Get up off your face.”

“There’s sin in the camp.” Then He said, “Neither will I be with you anymore until you deal with this accursed thing.” That was when Achan was found out. Achan made his confession, and they found the silver, the gold, and the Babylonian garment. Everything that Achan had—his wife, his children, and his animals—was stoned to death and then burned with fire. You say, “Man, killing Achan and his family just because he stole?” Oh no, it was not just because he stole. He not only dishonored and disobeyed God, but he was also responsible for the death of thirty-six Israelites. And God said, “Neither will I be with you anymore.” Not only must the cause be holy; the army must be holy.

King Amaziah, the king of Judah, went to war and hired some Israelites to fight with him—mercenaries from the northern kingdom. Remember, Judah was the southern kingdom, and Israel was the northern kingdom. The northern kingdom apostatized well before the southern kingdom did.

In 2 Chronicles 25, beginning with verse 5, we read: “Moreover, Amaziah gathered Judah together and made them captains over thousands and captains over a hundred, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and he numbered them from 20 years old and above, just like we saw last night, and found them 300,000 choice men able to go forth to war that could handle spear and shield. He hired also 100,000 mighty men of valor out of Israel for 100 talents of silver.” Thus he had obtained 100,000 men from the northern kingdom.

“But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee, for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong

for the battle. God shall make thee fall before the enemy, for God hath power to help and to cast down." Amaziah, naturally a politician, asked, "But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" The man of God answered, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

What did God tell Amaziah? "Don't let those Israelites go with you. I'm against them. They're unholy. They're unsanctified. They've apostatized. And if you let them fight with you, you just make yourself strong and fight on. You won't, because I'm going to give you to the enemy. You'll be defeated. But you send them back home." Amaziah did exactly that. God was telling us that the army must be holy. It is not only the cause that must be holy; the army must be holy as well.

Not only must the cause be holy and the army be holy, but the camp must be holy. Deuteronomy 23: "When the host of the army goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing."

Now, verse 10: "If there be among you any man that is not clean, by reason of uncleanness, that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp. But it shall be when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself with water. And when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again. Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, where thou shalt go forth abroad. And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon, and it shall be when thou wilt ease thyself abroad. Thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back again, and cover that which cometh from thee. For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of the camp to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee. Therefore shalt thy camp be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."

Not only must the cause be holy and the army be holy; the camp must be holy as well. If a person had become unclean through a nightly occurrence or accident, he was to go out of the camp and remain there until evening. After cleansing himself, he could return. Moreover, the latrine was to be outside the camp. God said, "You've got a paddle, you've got a shovel. If you're going to ease yourself, you

go outside of the camp, you dig a hole, and you turn again, and you cover it again."

Maybe this is where we get that old saying—maybe this is the source of it—that cleanliness is next to godliness. I don't know. But these requirements were not simply for sanitary reasons. Certainly the latrine should be outside the camp for health and sanitary reasons, but that is not the reason God gave. Look at verse 14. Here is why God says you cleanse yourself and have your latrine outside the camp: "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp to deliver thee and to give up thine enemies before thee, therefore shall thy camp be holy." Why? Because God is walking in it: "That he shall see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."

Jehovah Himself walks in the midst of the camp. These requirements were to be followed out of consideration and reverence to God, and out of obedience to God. A lack of obedience and respect for God would cause Him to turn away and not deliver their enemies unto them.

God is not saying that what comes from us is wicked and vile in itself. He is saying there is a reason and a principle here: God is infinitely holy, and there can be nothing unclean in His presence. If it offends a sovereign, holy God to have even some minute uncleanness in man—something over which man has no control, including the fact that God created us so that we must go to the bathroom—and if such a lack of consideration and reverence would offend God, causing Him to turn away from the camp, how much more would our unclean thoughts, impure motives, and ungodly actions offend a sovereign, holy God? God is saying, if you want My blessing, if you want a holy war, the cause must be holy, and the army must be holy.

You cannot take an unholy army and accomplish a holy purpose. Moreover, your camp must be holy. Fourthly, the leader must be holy. You can study the Bible all you want, and you will never find in the Bible that a war was run by a cabinet, a committee, or a Pentagon official. The wars were run by prophets, by Moses-like men who stood for what was right and were holy in and of themselves by the grace of God.

Look in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 17. Here is a war with the Amalekites, beginning with verse 8: "Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses said unto him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses and Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Watch carefully, and it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed. And when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed."

The rod of God was in his hand, which spoke of authority—God's authority. Verse 12 says, "But Moses' hands were heavy, and they took a stone and put it under him. And he sat there on, and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side."

"And his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." What was Moses doing? He was saying, "Here's the authority of God. Here's the rod of God." He held it up, and as long as he held it up, the people were victorious.

There are multitudes of passages, but this one will be sufficient. The author of Hebrews says, "And what shall I more say? For the time would fail to tell me of Gideon, of Barak, and of Jephthah, of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of the lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword out of weakness, were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Notice whom he is listing: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel. These are not Pentagon officials. These are godly men. Some hardly had any military experience at all, but God used them. Each of us must determine whether or not a war is holy, and we determine that based upon the Word of God.

Just War: Defensive and Offensive

Certainly there is indeed a just war. But please understand that a just war is not simply a defensive war. Many times you can have a defensive war and the defensive war be unholy and unjust.

Do you remember in Judges chapter 20? Here were the children of Benjamin, who were protecting the Sodomites and defending their city against the children of Israel, who were sent there by God to destroy them. The Benjamites had a defensive war, but it was certainly an unrighteous and unjust war. It is unjust to protect those who are wicked, wrong, and vile. The children of Israel had a just war, although they were the aggressors in that particular war.

When you get to Jeremiah chapter 27, Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, was going to fight against Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. You may say, "His war had to be a just war because he was defending his kingdom." But God had already sent him word through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Fight not against the king of Babylon. You submit to him."

"I've given this land into his hand." And God said, "If you submit to him, you're going to live. If you fight him, you're going to die." Jehoiakim was fighting a defensive war, but his war was unjust because God had specifically directed him not to fight against the king of Babylon.

In Genesis 34, there is another war. Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was raped by Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the country where they lived. The prince and his father came and said, "I love Dinah and I want to marry her." Her brothers replied, "We've got this religious principle, and we cannot give our daughter to someone who is uncircumcised. If you want to have our daughter, or have deals with us financially and every other way, then all the men of the city must be circumcised." Hamor and his father went back and said, "If we'll circumcise ourselves, all their cattle will be ours, their women will be ours; we'll have everything."

All the men circumcised themselves, and on the third day, when there was a sword, they could hardly move. Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, killed every man in the city.

Was that a just war? The answer is no. Dinah was raped; therefore, the rapist should have died. Why should the entire city die for someone else's sin? Just because you might be defending something, or think you have a holy cause, does not necessarily mean that you have a holy cause. A defensive war can be unjust if it oversteps the bounds of morality, justice, and righteousness, as in Genesis 34. It can be wrong when defending wickedness, immorality, and injustice, as with the Benjamites. It can also be wrong when it is contrary to the clear will and Word of God, as when Jehoiakim fought against the king of Babylon.

An offensive war is not always wrong. God commenced offensive wars against the tribes and nations in Canaan; He was the One who directed them, over and over. David pointed out that the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. God has the sovereign right to dispossess anyone whom He chooses.

Have you ever considered the first war in the Bible, the first time war is mentioned? You will find it in Genesis 14. Kings were fighting against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot was taken captive. When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been taken captive, he armed 318 trained men whom he had in his own house, went after them, defeated and destroyed them, and rescued Lot.

What did Abraham have to do with Sodom and Gomorrah? Nothing. What did he have to do with the other kings? Nothing. Nothing was stolen from Abraham, yet he went and rescued Lot. He had a family member there. Although Abraham was not defending himself or his own property, in one sense he was defending his family because Lot was his nephew. Abraham had not been involved in that war whatsoever, but Abraham got involved.

God sent Melchizedek to bless Abraham and honored exactly what he did. Abraham's action was basically an offensive move: he was rescuing his family.

Consider the story of 1776—Jonas Clark, Lexington Green, and the shot heard around the world. Jonas Clark is one of my favorite pastors. It has been said of him, in a direct quote, "He knew his Knox," referring to John Knox, a trumpeter of Scotland, who taught

that only a defensive war is a just war. Therefore, these Christian men, members of Jonas Clark's church, stood on the church-house green and took the first volley of the English fire. Seven were killed on the spot. As the story goes, Jonas Clark and the others then had a right to defend themselves because they were the first to be attacked.

Some defensive wars are wrong, and some offensive wars are right. But there are other principles in the Bible. "Thou shalt not kill" has the positive meaning, "Thou shalt preserve life." I have a duty and an obligation to preserve my life. If Ron is trying to kill me, I must kill him before he kills me, if that is necessary to preserve my life. Self-defense is obligatory according to the Word of God.

Moreover, according to Deuteronomy 22, it is right to protect the lives of others. If I have to kill someone to protect the lives of others, it is right, biblical, and holy. Therefore, the claim that a defensive war is the only right war is not necessarily true. You may justly take the life of another if that person is trying to take your life. You do not have to be killed, or allow someone else to be killed, before destroying the one who is trying to kill. When it comes to a holy war or a just war, it is our responsibility to search the Word of God and make sure that we are fighting for the right reasons.

Conclusion: Our Responsibility to Evaluate War

Let me ask you a simple question: Of all the wars that our country has been in, why were we really in them? What was really going on? Isn't it amazing what comes out and is brought to light many times forty and fifty years after the fact? Like President Roosevelt knew the Japanese were going to bomb Pearl Harbor before they ever did. That's a fact. It's a fact that the Vietnam War and the Korean War, some of them, were never even officially declared wars. They were police actions. The war in Afghanistan—just stop and think. What is it really all about?

We have to determine for ourselves. It is our responsibility unto God to make sure that, if we're engaged in a war, it is a holy war and a just war. If it is not holy and not just, it is nothing but legalized murder. It's that simple. God said the cause must be holy, the army must be holy, the camp must be holy, and the leader must be holy.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would help us, bless us, and speak to our hearts. Teach us Thy Word. Teach us Thy truth. May Thy will be done. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen and Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Faith & Gratefulness

March 21, 2004

Faith and Gratefulness

Introduction: The Sin of Ingratitude

“And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? They are not found that return to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.”

I suppose that one of the most heinous sins of Christians is the sin of ingratitude. Ingratitude and unthankfulness are usually a mark of

the unconverted and the ungodly. In Luke 6:35, the Lord tells us that our Heavenly Father is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Notice how unthankful and evil are connected. In 2 Timothy 3:2, the Word of God tells us that men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, proud, boasters, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Once again, unthankfulness or ingratitude is connected with the ungodly.

Such attitudes should not be in the Christian. But the truth is, we are still in the flesh and, consequently, occasionally we do have those attitudes. Thankfully, it should not be a permanent attitude. Have you ever stopped to think about your own personal life and how you have helped people in the past? You and I are oftentimes personally incensed at those whom we help when they turn out to be ungrateful and unthankful. I might add, rightly so, because one should at least have the courtesy and the character to acknowledge the blessings and help.

If that is true with each of us, how much more is it true with our Heavenly Father? We may only help someone occasionally, but our Heavenly Father helps us constantly, incessantly, and faithfully. Failure to realize this truth leads to an attitude of ingratitude. Why is it that, by and large, we are so unthankful to our Heavenly Father?

Or why do we not praise Him more than we do? Why do we not cheerfully acknowledge all of His blessings? I believe the text today gives us the answer to those questions. Our Lord was traveling between Samaria and Galilee, and He encountered ten lepers. Verse 12 tells us, “And there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off.” As He sees these ten lepers, each unites his voice with the others, beseeching the Lord to have mercy upon them. I want you to note how the Bible tells us that one of them was a Samaritan.

The Commonality of Sin and Suffering

There is one truth here that you and I need to emphasize at the very beginning: the commonality of sin. Here were men who were Israelites, and here was a man who was a Samaritan, who usually would not ever have anything to do with each other. Yet here they were, sharing a commonality in their sin and in their suffering. I will explain why I am saying sin a little later.

Look in your Bibles, and hold Luke 17, but look to John chapter 4. You remember how our Lord went there to the woman at the well. Beginning with verse 4, the Bible says: “He must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well.” It was about the sixth hour. “Then cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat. Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?” Watch: “For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.” You remember the Samaritans, according to 2 Kings 17, were half-breeds. They had intermingled with the heathen, and many of the Judeans, those people of the tribe of Judah, would walk all the way around Samaria just to keep from going through there. So despised were the Samaritans.

In Luke chapter 17, some Israelites and a Samaritan are bound together. Usually, when men will not have anything to do with each other, they will come together in sin or in suffering.

Remember the story in Luke chapter 23, verse 12. Pilate and Herod were enemies, but Pilate sent Christ to Herod. Herod had longed to see Christ for a long time, and that day Herod and Pilate were made friends, for before they were in enmity with each other. Here were men who would come together in sin and wickedness, and to hate and betray Christ, when before they would not have anything to do with each other.

The same thing was true with the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Herodians. They despised each other, but they surely got together to betray Christ and tempt Christ. Sin and suffering many times will indeed bring men together.

Why am I talking about sin when the Bible talks about leprosy? Leprosy in the Bible is a type of sin and a type of judgment. Usually speaking, all through the Bible leprosy was a special judgment of God against an individual who had sinned against Him. In Deuteronomy 28:27, one of the curses God places upon the disobedient is that He will smite them with a scab wherewith they

cannot be healed. One of the curses is leprosy. Man cannot heal leprosy. God says, You disobey me; I will curse you. I will smite you with a scab that cannot be healed. In Numbers chapter 12, verse 10, when Miriam treated Moses with contempt, God smote her with leprosy instantly. Moses besought the Lord that He would heal her. God said if she had spit in her father's face.

“Must she not bear her reproach and put her out of the camp? Let her bear her reproach overnight. I'll heal her tomorrow. I'm not going to heal her today.” So God smote her with leprosy. In 2 Samuel 3:29, David cursed Joab's house with leprosy. In 2 Kings 5:21, Gehazi was smitten with Naaman's leprosy after he lied to Naaman and took a bribe. Elisha said, “The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee.” Then, in 2 Kings 15:5, King Uzziah went into the temple to offer incense when he was not permitted to do so. When Azariah the priest and the other priests confronted him, he said, “Well, look here, I'm the king.” But as he lifted his hand, God smote him with leprosy. Leprosy, then, is a type of sin and judgment in the Bible.

When we think of leprosy, we normally think of men who are smitten with this dreaded disease. But leprosy in the Bible could also be found not only in men, but in clothes and in houses as well. There are certain laws in the Bible that regulate not only lepers, but also the healing and the cleansing of lepers.

The Bible says in Luke 17:12, “And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off.” They were in His path, in the road as He went into the village. Why were they simply on the road or in the path? Because lepers were not permitted to be in the village. In fact, they were not really permitted to have contact with anyone. Leviticus 13:46 says, “And all the days wherein the plague shall be in him, he shall be defiled. He is unclean.” It also says, “He shall dwell alone, without the camp shall his habitation be.” God said the leper could not be around other people.

Numbers 5:2-3 likewise commands, “Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead, both male and female, shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them, that

they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell." God says the leper is to be put out of the camp.

According to the Bible, lepers had to keep a proper distance from anyone who was healthy. Leviticus 13:45 says, "And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean." Anytime he saw anyone, he had to warn them that he was unclean, contagious, and a leper. That is why they stood afar off and lifted up their voice to our Lord.

Although they could not have contact with someone who was healthy, that certainly did not stop the lepers from interacting with each other and doing that which was beneficial for a leprous group. In fact, read 2 Kings 7 about the four lepers at the gate of Samaria. Those four lepers, looking out for themselves, brought the good news back to Samaria that the enemy had disappeared, and thus they saved the entire city. They were not able to go into the city; they were at the gates outside the walls, but they at least came back.

Luke 17 tells us that Jesus, as He was traveling in the way, saw these lepers. They turned aside and, undoubtedly, warned Him as they were required to do. Then they cried out for help, keeping their distance from the Lord. I hope you see a spiritual truth here. Our Lord is walking down the path. The lepers see Him. They know who He is, but they cannot approach Him.

The Cry of the Lepers

You know what the Bible says in Isaiah 59: "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." Why is it that man by nature cannot come close to the Lord? Because of his sin, because of the judgment and curse of God upon him. It is our sin that has separated us from God.

The Urgency of Their Cry

First, note their cry. In verse 13, they stood afar off, lifted up their voices, and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us."

Their cry was urgent. How do we know? The Bible says they lifted up their voices; evidently they were very loud, and usually when one becomes loud, one becomes urgent. Moreover, leprosy was incurable except by divine intervention, which made their cry even more urgent. They understood its importance: if Christ did not help them, they would not be helped.

Their cry was probably like that of blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10. When he was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he cried, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me." Those around him told him to hold his peace—to be quiet. Yet the more they urged him to be quiet, the louder he cried, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me." Why? Because he knew that if Christ did not help him, he would never be helped.

It was the same cry Peter made. When he saw our Lord walking on the water, he said, "Lord, if that's you walking on the water, bid me come unto you." Our Lord answered that it was He and told Peter to get out of the boat and walk to Him. Peter walked on the water until he took his eyes off Christ. Seeing the waves and boisterous wind, he began to sink. Do you remember Peter's lengthy prayer? Two words: "Help, Lord."

Was that an urgent cry? Yes, because the man realized that if Christ did not help him, he was a goner. The same was true of these lepers. They realized that if Christ did not help them, it was all over. Their cry was also unanimous: all ten raised their voices together, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us."

Those who expect help from Jesus Christ must recognize Him as Master. If you want Him to be your Savior, He must also be your Lord. The word Lord means boss, owner, master, and sovereign.

They did not necessarily ask to be cured of their leprosy. Isn't that interesting? What they asked for was mercy. Do you realize that it is sufficient to throw yourselves upon the compassion of Jesus Christ? It is sufficient to throw yourselves upon His mercy. Jesus Christ will always do for us that which is for our good and for His glory. They had heard of Jesus Christ; they knew of His fame. They were encouraged to make application to Him and say, "Just have mercy upon us."

Here is their cry. Note, secondly, their cure in verse 14: “And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.”

The Cure: Obedience and Faith Tested

Amazingly enough, Christ simply told these ten lepers to go show themselves to the priest. He did not do here as He did in Matthew 8:1–2. There, a leper came to Christ, knelt, and said, “If thou wilt, thou can make me clean.” Christ simply said, “I will,” reached out, touched him, and cleansed him.

Here our Lord did not reach out and touch them, nor did He bid them come near. He simply said, “Go show yourselves unto the priest.” Jesus Christ is not limited to a certain means or method. Because He heals someone one way in Matthew 8 does not mean He must use the same method in Luke 17. Here, in Luke 17, the divine power of Christ was displayed in His word.

Here also is positive proof of the high estimation which God holds for the obedience of faith. Our Lord simply said to these ten lepers, “Go show thyself to the priest.” They turned, obeyed His word, and went to the priest. They did not ask for proof, a sign, or a miracle. They simply obeyed the command of Christ.

Why did Christ send them to the priest? Look back in your Bible to Leviticus chapter 14. The priest, of course, could not cure anyone from leprosy. The only thing he could do was inspect and judge the leper. If he was clean, they could pronounce him clean; if he was not clean, they would pronounce him unclean. Leviticus 14:2 says, “This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest.” The passage then gives the whole ritual the priest was to perform for his cleansing. It was the priest who pronounced the man clean. Here was a ritual that was used, but the priest certainly did not heal and could not heal leprosy.

Interestingly enough, when Christ said, “Go show thyself unto the priest,” He did not tell them positively that they would be healed. He did not tell them what would happen to them. They simply obeyed. What was He doing? He was testing their faith, and rightly it should be tested.

Do you remember Naaman the Syrian, when he came to Elisha the prophet? Elisha sent Gehazi out and told him to say to Naaman, "Wash seven times in the Jordan River, and he'll be clean." Naaman turned and went away in a rage. He said, "I thought at least the man would come out and strike me with his hand and call upon his God." He was angry and was running back to Syria as fast as he could, when one of his men said, "If the prophet had bid you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?"

"Of course."

"How much more simple it is just to go duck yourself seven times in the Jordan River and be clean." When he went and did so, he came up clean. Here was a test of faith. Those who expect Christ's favor must submit to His method and His way. You and I cannot dictate to Christ whom to heal, where to heal, when to heal, or how to heal.

That is solely and totally up to Him. Someone asked me in time past, "Do you believe in divine healing?" My answer is yes: all healing is divine. God may use means and methods, or God may not use means or methods, but all healing is divine, because if God does not heal you, you are not healed, period.

He simply told them to go show themselves to the priest. Why? At this point, the ceremonial law was still in effect, and Christ was going to honor that which God had given in the Old Testament. Moreover, the priest who inspected these lepers would know of the perfection of the cure by the Son of God. He would know that these men were cured by Christ Himself.

The Bible says, "As they went, they were cleansed." Undoubtedly, they were going to do exactly as Leviticus chapter 14 says.

Learn this simple truth: You and I may expect mercy from God in the path of obedience and duty. When we obey Christ and do what He requires us to do, He will do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. But do not expect Christ to do for you that which you cannot do for yourself if you are unwilling to obey Him and submit to Him. That is why they cried, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us."

The Cordial: One Returns to Give Thanks

You have seen the cry and the cure. Look thirdly at the cordial in verses 15 and 16: “And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks, and he was a Samaritan.” I use the word cordial in the same sense that the old Puritans used it. Cordial means that which is refreshing, sweet, delightful. How refreshing, sweet, and delightful it is to find a humble, thankful, grateful person.

One of the lepers, and only one, when he discovered he was cleansed, returned to give thanks. When he saw that he was healed, instead of continuing to go to the priest to be declared clean and end his confinement, instead of rushing to receive a certificate of cleanliness, he returned to the author of his cure, whom he wished to have the glory for that cure. Even before he received the benefits of that cure, he wanted to honor the one who gave it to him. The Bible tells us he returned and with a loud voice glorified God.

He had lifted up his voice loudly in prayer for help; now he lifted up his voice loudly in praise, recognizing that he had received help. He was determined to give praise and thanks to the one who gave him help.

Notice what else he did. The Bible says in verse 16 that he not only turned back when he saw that he was healed and used a loud voice to glorify God, but he fell down on his face at his feet, giving Him thanks. He put himself in the most humble, reverent posture known to man. He simply fell down on his face and lay in the dust before giving Christ honor and glory. We ought to give thanks for the face of favors Christ bestows upon us, particularly when He gives us recoveries from sickness and diseases, and we ought to return His thanks as speedily and as heartily as we cried for His help in prayer.

Many times, when Christ gives us mercies and we delay giving Him thanks, we tend to forget those mercies. Everyone in this room has been sick at one time or another, and everyone in this room has been healed. Everyone has been without, and everyone has been supplied graciously by Christ. Yet we tend to forget the blessings God has so graciously bestowed upon us.

This one man was sensible not only to the power of God, but grateful for the mercies of God, and he returned immediately to give glory to God. He did not obey the letter of Christ's command instantly, but he certainly obeyed its spirit. Instead of going directly to the priest, he turned back to give glory to God. His attitude was, "I can get to the priest later. I know that I'm healed. Christ may not be here when I get to the priest; therefore, I'll give Him the praise, honor, and glory right now."

Do you realize that the first duty of sinners after they have been forgiven and after God has given them eternal life is to prostrate themselves at the feet of the great benefactor and consecrate themselves to his service? The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:18 that Christ hath once suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us back to God. Why did Christ suffer the just for the unjust? To save us. That would be a great answer if you understood what saving us meant. In saving us, He brings us back to the Father, in submission to the Father, His Word, His truth, and His law. Christ does not save us so that we can live any way we please. He saves us that we might be obedient.

After we give Him the honor, praise, and glory, then we may go and be a witness to others. Do you remember the maniac of Gadara? When our Lord healed him in Luke chapter 8, he immediately besought Christ that he might be with Him. Our Lord said, "You go and return to your own house and show how great mercy Christ has done unto you." Notice what he did first: he first besought Christ and what Christ wanted. Then he was a witness. Whatever God does for us, we must first learn to give Him the honor and glory, and then give a witness to others. First, praise and worship.

The Culmination: Christ's Response

Now look at the culmination, verses 17–19. After this one had fallen on his face with a loud voice, giving thanks unto God and worshiping Christ, Jesus answered, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? They are not found that return to give glory to God, save this stranger." Our Lord has been worshiped by this Samaritan, whom He calls a stranger, and He asks a simple question: "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" I want you to learn

this: Jesus Christ takes notice of those who are thankful and grateful to Him, and those who are not thankful and grateful to Him. Is that interesting? Do you not do the same?

Every day I took it, never acknowledged that it came from you, never thanked you, and never expressed my gratitude in any way. I simply took it. Would you not soon tire of my taking you for granted and taking advantage of you? Pretty soon you would say, "I know what I'll do. I'll stop giving him that hundred-dollar bill. All of a sudden he'll realize where his money has been coming from."

If you take notice of those who are grateful and those who are ungrateful, do you not think Christ would do the same? The Lord publicly noted the indifference and ingratitude of the nine, and He publicly noted the thanksgiving of the one. We look around and see all the blessings God has constantly and continually given us, yet how little we have really been grateful and thankful for all that He has done.

Observe, first of all, how rich Christ is in doing good. He asks, "Where are the nine? Were there not ten cleansed?" Can you imagine our Lord doing a wholesale cure at one time? He cleansed ten men instantly—a whole hospital full of lepers, so to speak. He cured them all. There is enough cleansing virtue in the blood of Jesus Christ, sufficient for all of His patients. Just because God has mercy on this one man or these ten men does not mean that His grace and mercy will run out.

He has plenty to go around. Our Lord richly, graciously, and mercifully cleansed ten at one time. Notice how rich He is in doing good. Secondly, notice how poor we are in our returns, because He asks, "Where are the nine?" This teaches us that ingratitude is a very common sin. Of the many who receive mercies from God, very few return to give God thanks in the proper manner due His holy and blessed name.

Think of the dangerous sicknesses from which people have been cured, and how few really publicly praise and thank God. Think of ships that have wrecked and airplanes that have crashed; here and there, one or two survive miraculously. What burns me up is when they are interviewed on television and say, "Man, I was lucky." Luck

my foot! If God had not sovereignly protected them, they too would have been dead. Yet they are embarrassed to say, “Thank God He spared me.” It is amazing how few people feel their obligation to give honor and glory to God for all He has done for them.

Our Lord asked, “Where are the nine?” Thirdly, we should understand how sometimes those proved most grateful from whom it was least expected. Who was it that returned and gave our Lord thanks? A Samaritan—a stranger. The others were Israelites. They had the covenant, the blessing, and knowledge of God. Is it not an absolute shame that many times those who profess no religion or a wrong religion do what is right more than those who profess the true religion?

Morality will not save you; I understand that. But I have seen unsaved men and women who were more moral and upright than some professing Christians. That is a shame. Many times you might even find them more grateful and thankful, and more readily willing to acknowledge God. I have seen Christians refuse to bow their heads and thank God for food in a public restaurant. Why?

Our Lord teaches us a valuable lesson: He justly resents the ingratitude of mankind, for whom He has done so much and from whom He has received so little. “Where are the nine?” The fourth thing is the great encouragement Christ gave this Samaritan: “Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.”

The Scripture does not tell us what happened to the other nine. I have often wondered whether their leprosy returned. It would have been just had it done so, but probably not. They were probably cured, even though they were ungrateful and unthankful.

Notice, however, that this Samaritan, this stranger, is set apart from the nine Israelites. Christ told him, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” The rest were made whole by Christ’s power, in compassion for their distress and in answer to their prayer. But this Samaritan was made whole by faith, which Christ saw as distinguishing him from the rest. The Bible is teaching us that he received not only a physical blessing, but a spiritual one as well. He was saved. The other nine may have received a physical blessing, but that blessing

did not benefit them spiritually. They received no spiritual teaching or truth because of it.

Our Lord re-emphasized this in Matthew 21:32: “For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not. But the publicans and the harlots believed him, and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards that ye might believe.” We are responsible not only to learn from the blessings of God in our own lives, but also to learn from His blessings in the lives of others. The Pharisees saw the publicans and harlots believe; they saw how those people were changed. But did it have any effect upon them? No. They repented not that they might believe.

Whatever God does for us, we are responsible to benefit from it spiritually. Therefore our Lord told the Samaritan, “Go thy way. Thy faith hath saved thee.” He received not merely physical cleansing, but spiritual cleansing as well.

Now let us make some applications. First, Luke 17:13 says that the ten bitter lepers “lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” They lifted up their voices. Do you realize how earnestly men cry for help when they sense and discover their need? Men do not normally cry for help when they do not realize they are in trouble.

Applications: Recognizing Need and Giving Praise

Let me illustrate it. Suppose I told you that in this tube of Chapstick I have the only known cure for cancer in the entire world. You say, “Really?” I say, “Sure. I’ll sell it to you for $100,000.” You look at me and say, “Well, I guess you would. But I don’t have $100,000 right now, and I don’t have cancer, and I don’t need it.” But suppose you did have cancer and just did not know it. The next week you go to the doctor for a checkup, and he tells you that you have cancer and that unless you get a cure, you will be dead in three weeks. All of a sudden, guess what? You want this more than anything in the world. You are willing not only to pay me $100,000, but $500,000. You get the point?

Here is what our Lord said in Matthew chapter 9: “And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and

sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." What did He say? "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Our Lord is saying that you will never call upon Him until you realize your need.

Let me tell you something, folks. If we do not realize our need and learn to cry to Christ, He may give us something to cry to Him about. He may give us something that will make us cry.

Secondly, if only one-tenth are grateful and thankful for the mercies and blessings of God, that means ninety percent ignore Him. They presume upon His grace and blessings and take them for granted. So here is my question: Which percentile are you in? Or perhaps we could say that we give Him the glory in our lives only ten percent of the time, and the other ninety percent of the time we take Him for granted. Once again, which percentile are you in? Let me show you.

Psalm 107 is a wonderful Psalm. You should read all of it, but I am only going to read several verses. Look at verse 1: "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever." Now watch: "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord." Why? "For he is good, for his mercy endureth forever."

Now skip down to verse 8: "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Skip down to verse 15: "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men." Now verse 21: "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men." Now verse 31: "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

In each one of those sections, He gives us many things that we should be praising Him about. We ought to praise Him that we were just able to wake up this morning. We ought to praise Him that He gave us rest. We ought to praise Him for help, for finances, for

friends, and for family. Any goodness that God gives us, we ought to give Him the honor and the glory.

Our Lord asks, “Where are the nine?” Which percentile are you in? Do you give Him the honor and the glory for all that He does in your life?

Since we are in Psalms, let us turn to Psalm 50, because I want to make another application. Here is the third application: Temporal mercies are doubled and sweetened to us when they are fetched by the prayer of faith and returned by the praises of faith.

What are you talking about? Look at Psalm 50, verse 23. God says, “Whosoever offereth praise glorify me.” You want to glorify God? One of the ways is by offering Him praise. So that means this: when I pray and seek a blessing from God, and God gives me the answer to my prayer, that is one blessing. But when I turn around and give God the praise for that answered prayer, that is another blessing. What a blessing it is to understand and know that I received a blessing through prayer, but now I may bless my heavenly Father through praise. Our temporal mercies, then, are sweetened and doubled when we give God the praise for what He has done. Here is the fourth application.

Applications: Why We Are Ungrateful and Muted in Praise

In Luke chapter 17, our Lord said this, verse 18: “They are not found that return to give glory to God, save this stranger.” I hinted at this earlier, but oftentimes God receives more praise and affectionate obedience from those who lived a long time without His knowledge and fear than from those who were bred up and raised among His people.

You say, What are you talking about? This occurs not only in Isaiah 65, but the Apostle quotes the same thing in Romans chapter 10. Since we are in the New Testament, look in Romans chapter 10 at what he says, beginning there with verses 20 and 21. In fact, let us read verse 19: “But I say, did not Israel know?”

But Moses said, “I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation will I anger you.” But Isaiah is

very bold and said, “I was found of them that sought me not. I was made manifest of them that asked not for me.” But to Israel he said, “All day long I’ve stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.”

Who ought to be giving God the most honor and glory? Those who had his truth belongs. Those who know him belongs. But all the time it is not like that. Sometimes someone comes in who has never ever been taught and raised up in the Christian faith. Then, when he is converted, he learns to praise God more than we who have been raised in a Christian home and in a Christian school.

Now let me ask and answer two more questions in my applications. Why are we so unmerciful, unthankful, and ungrateful? Here is the answer: because we have never learned to appreciate God’s mercies. Let me show you. Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 18. I want to take the time to read these last two passages because they are vitally important. Let us begin reading with verse 23. Look what our Lord says. I am showing you why we are so unmerciful, why we are so ungrateful, and why we are so unthankful. The answer is, we have just never learned to appreciate the greatness of God’s mercies. Here it is, Matthew 18, verse 23: “Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened to a certain king who would take account of his servants.”

When he began to reckon, one was brought unto him who owed him ten thousand talents, a humongous amount of money. Since he had nothing with which to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children, and all that he had, in payment to be made; they were thrown into slavery. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, “Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred pence, a pitiful, small amount. He laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, “Pay me that thou owest.” His fellow servant fell down at his feet and besought him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” He would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay all the debt.

When his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry and came and told their lord all that was done. After he had called him, his lord said unto him, “O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

God had forgiven this man an enormous debt, yet someone owed him very little. He put his hands around the man’s throat: “Pay me or else.” The man had no method of payment. He begged for the same mercy this man had begged for, but he would not be merciful; he cast him into prison.

Why did he do that? Because he had no appreciation, thankfulness, or gratefulness for the enormous debt from which his lord had forgiven him. If you and I do not learn to appreciate what our Heavenly Father does for us, we cannot be merciful to other people. We cannot be forgiving to others until we realize what God has forgiven us from.

Here is my sixth application. Why are our mouths so muted when it comes to praising our Heavenly Father? Why are we so insensitive to His praise? It is because we have not realized the greatness of our sin, nor the greatness of His forgiveness. That one leper, that Samaritan, knew that if Christ did not have mercy upon him, there was no help for him. He knew that leprosy was incurable by man and that he would never be cleansed if Christ did not cleanse him. Consequently, he felt very deeply the enormity of the grace and mercy extended to him.

In Luke 7:36, one of the Pharisees desired Jesus to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee’s house and sat down to meat. “And behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him, weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment.”

When the Pharisee who had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touched him, for she is a sinner.” Jesus, answering, said unto him, “Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.” He said, “Say on, master.” There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. The one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. They had nothing to pay, and he frankly forgave them both. “Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?” Simon answered, “I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.” And he said, “Thou hast rightly judged.”

He turned to the woman and said unto Simon, “Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, but thou gavest me no water for my feet. But she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss, but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head thou didst not anoint with oil, but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” And he said unto her, “Thy sins are forgiven.”

If you do not recognize and realize the greatness and enormity of your sins, the depravity and wickedness of your own life, you will never recognize the greatness of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness. Why did that one turn back? He knew the depth of his condition and the greatness of the mercy of Christ.

Our Lord teaches that a genuine child of God should be humble, thankful, and grateful for everything He has done for us. As we never tire of receiving God’s blessings, so we should never tire of giving Him praise for those blessings. If we are men and women of faith, the Bible teaches that we will be grateful and thankful; faith and gratefulness go together. Father, we thank You in the name of Jesus Christ for all that You have done. Lord, we acknowledge and confess our unthankfulness, ingratitude, and lack of praise and worship. You have been so good, gracious, loving, and kind.

We have been so impatient, unthankful, and ungrateful; we ask forgiveness. Open our eyes, Father, that we may see the depth of our sin, the greatness of Thy mercy, our unworthiness of the least of Thy blessings, and the greatness and innumerability of Thy blessings to

us. Truthfully, if You never blessed us again in our entire lives, we could honestly say we have already received more blessings than we have ever deserved. The only reason we are blessed is the person and work of Jesus Christ, for whom we are thankful and grateful. We fall at His feet today, acknowledging Him as Lord and Master, as well as Savior. Receive our thanksgiving and praises. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

When God Gives Up His People

December 26, 2004

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 81:1-16 (KJV)

Introduction: The Phrase 'God Gave Them Up'

The message is entitled, "When God Gives Up His People."

"Sing aloud unto God our strength, make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a psalm and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt, where I heard a language that I understood not. I removed his shoulder from the burden, and his hands were delivered from the pots. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder, and I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall no strange god be in thee, neither shalt thou

> worship any strange god. I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels. Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him, but their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."
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> Every Christian is aware of the phrase, "and God gave them up." When we hear that phrase, we immediately think of the Sodomites that are mentioned in Romans chapter 1. I want you to turn there, hold Psalm 81, but look in Romans chapter 1, and let's begin reading there with verse 22, just so that you can see how this phrase is used in Scripture. Notice Romans chapter 1 and verse 22.

The Bible says, concerning this group of individuals, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Verse 24 continues: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." Then, "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lusts one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

Twice, in verses 24 and 26, the Bible says, "God gave them up." In verse 28 it says, "God gave them over." Scripture specifically and emphatically states that God gave them up.

There is no way to deny this simple truth. Every Christian understands this principle when it is applied to the wicked and ungodly. But does God ever give up His own people? Consider 1 John 5:16: "There is a sin unto death." There is a difference between a professing people and a possessing people. Many profess, but do not actually possess the truth and the life of God. Paul says it like this in Romans chapter 9.

"They are not all Israel who are of Israel." What does he mean? There was an outward professing people who were in covenant, that is, an outward covenant with God, but they were not really chosen, they were not really regenerated, and they were not really converted. So you could be in the outward number and be covenantally connected, but not really be a child of God.

Now, when I ask this question, "Does God ever give up His people?" the question, while it is a valid one, is also a very distressing one. I mean, we know that we have eternal life, we know that we love the Lord, and we know that He loves us. Yet at the same time, think about this: as a nation and as a people that profess to be a Christian people, we know also that we turned our backs upon Him, trampled His law under our feet, and despised His Son. Now my question is, is it possible that we could be given up because of our sin and rebellion to His Word? Or I could ask, is it possible that we have already been given up because of our sin and rebellion?

God Gives Up Individuals, Families, Churches, and Nations

Now, before I go further, I want you to understand that I believe Scripture teaches us that it is possible to be given up individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. You say, how can you say that? Well, because of what Scripture teaches. We know that it is possible for individuals to be given up because we read that in Romans chapter 1. There was a group of individuals, and verse 24 says, "and God gave them up." Verse 26 says, "and God gave them

up." And verse 28 says, "and God gave them over." So it is very possible for individuals to be given up by God.

It is also possible for entire families to be given up by God. You say, what are you talking about? Look what God says about Coniah and his family in Jeremiah chapter 22, verses 28 through 30:

"Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? Wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord."

“Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.” God said, “I’m writing off the entire family. I’m writing off the entire lineage.” So it is possible for God not only to give up individuals, but also families.

Thirdly, it is also possible for God to give up churches. In the book of Revelation, chapter 2 and verse 5, we read the writings to the seven churches, those letters that were written. Here He is writing to the church of Ephesus: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Now God is writing to the church, and He says, “You better remember from whence you are fallen and you better repent, or else I will remove thy candlestick out of his place.” So God can give up an individual. God can give up a family. God can give up a church. God may also give up a nation.

And there should be absolutely no argument over this. Look in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 4 and verse 21. Everyone is aware of this story. When the ark of God was captured by the Philistines, remember Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, who were wicked and ungodly? When Phinehas’ wife found out that her father-in-law was dead and that her husband and brother-in-law had been captured, notice what happens. The Bible says, “And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is

departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."

God literally gave up His people to the Philistines there, and the glory was gone. God gives up individuals, families, churches, and nations. Therefore, it should not surprise us that it can be very easily done: He can give up a professing people who really do not possess any godly characteristics, or professing people who are full of sin and rebellion.

Historical Examples of God Giving Up His People

Go back in your Bible to Psalm 81, a psalm we are going to examine in detail, and look at verse 8. I want to show you what I mean when God gives up His people. God says, "Hear, O my people." He is not talking to the heathen; He is talking to His people: "Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me." Thus, "my people" and "Israel" are synonymous. Does God ever give up His people? I have shown you where He gives up individuals, families, churches, and nations.

Look in your Bibles at 2 Chronicles chapter 30, beginning with verse 1. A very interesting statement is made as it details how Hezekiah pleads with Israel to return unto the one true and living God. "And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel."

"For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together at Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according

to the commandment of the king, saying, ‘Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see.’”

What does King Hezekiah say that God did to all those people who profess to be His people? He gave them up—gave them up to desolation and destruction.

SCRIPTURE READING - Acts 7:39-43 (KJV)

> "To whom our fathers would not obey," that is, they would not obey Moses nor God, "whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."
>
> "And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon."
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> When God gave them up, it was not just over the golden calf in the wilderness, but for forty years as they traveled in the wilderness. Although they outwardly worshipped God, inwardly they were carrying the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of their god Remphan. Because of their continued idolatry, God gave up the southern kingdom and sent them to Babylon. The northern kingdom went to Assyria, but the southern kingdom went into Babylon.

Therefore, it should not be surprising to you, as you turn back to Psalm 81, to realize that God not only can, but often does, give up a rebellious and disobedient people. Look in verse 12: “So I gave them

up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels." God does give up a rebellious and disobedient people.

However, before He does so, there is always testimony given against them. There are always witnesses sent to call them to repentance. There are always offers of reconciliation; and when they will not hearken and hear, God gives them up.

The Rescue and Restoration of Israel (Psalm 81:1-7)

Look at Psalm 81. First, see the rescue and restoration of Israel. Remember that Abraham and his seed went down into Egypt for 400 years—actually, 430 years. Verse 1 says: "Sing aloud unto God our strength, make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a psalm and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day."

This psalm aptly begins with an admonition to sing aloud and make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. There was very good reason why they should sing with instruments and make a joyful song on these solemn feast days. Moreover, the Bible tells us that God had appointed a law and a statute for them to commemorate the Lord's mercy and deliverance. Verse 4 says: "For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob."

It was His right to be honored and glorified. It was His right to be praised over and over. Scripture tells us to give unto the Lord glory, and to give unto the Lord the glory that is due unto His name.

Now notice verses 4 and 5: "For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt, where I heard a language that I understood not." What did God do? God sovereignly, graciously, and mercifully rescued Israel from Egypt, and He restored them.

God says, "I want you to sing a joyful song to me. I want you to praise and be thankful for this deliverance." He makes it a law and statute that they praise Him, remember Him, and remember this gracious, sovereign deliverance from Egypt.

It is important to note that our customs and traditions in worship are to be rooted in divine authority. If there is no divine authority for a religious custom or tradition, it is not binding, nor can it be binding upon anyone. Why did Israel have solemn feast days? Why were they called to praise the Lord and worship? Because it was a law and a statute. God had divine authority, and He issued that law and statute. Without divine authority, nothing can bind anyone's conscience.

I have been in many churches over the last forty years, and inevitably someone says, "But Brother Weaver, we don't do things like that here." Well, why do you not do them? Or why do you do what you do? Where is your divine authority for doing it, or for not doing what you are not doing? A custom or tradition is worthless unless there is divine authority behind it.

Israel had been in Egypt 430 years, and God graciously rescued and restored them, for which He should be constantly and continually praised. He rescued them from slavery, servitude, constant drudgery, and bondage, bringing them into the glorious liberty and freedom of His grace and mercy.

Look in verses 6 and 7. Here is what God says: "I did for you. I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah." When they called, He answered. When they were in trouble, He delivered. You know why? Deuteronomy 7 tells us He is the faithful God. And God certainly is faithful. God graciously, sovereignly delivered them.

Now, a problem arose. However, the problem was not with God. The problem was not with God's deliverance, because His work is perfect. The problem was with the people. They did not want to give up their false gods, their strange gods, their foreign gods. They worshipped and served a god or gods of their own making instead of the one true and living God.

Look in verses 8 and 9. "Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;" God said, if you will just listen to me, I will tell you what the problem is. "There shall no

strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god." God says you are not to have any idols, and you are not to be worshiping any strange god, any foreign god. What is the first commandment? "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the second is, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." God said, I want to testify against you. I gave you my law. I gave you my statute. I delivered you. I told you not to do this, and yet you did.

God's Gracious Offer and Israel's Refusal (Psalm 81:8-11)

Now, look in verse 10. This is such a wonderful verse. God says, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." God said, Do you think that I brought you out of the land of Egypt just to drop you? No, I did not bring you out to drop you. I brought you out to bring you into the promised land. I am the God who can supply all of your needs, and all you have to do is just open your mouth wide; I will fill it. You worship me, you obey me, and I will supply every need that you could possibly ever think of having.

Alice and I enjoy watching the little wrens because we have some antiques hanging outside, including a little antique water pump. Every year, one of them puts her nest in that little water pot. This past year, she also built a nest in the back of my Bobcat, the little tractor. I could have used it, but I would not until those little birds hatched. There were three of them in the nest, and you could stand there, and those little birds would open their mouths so wide, waiting for you, thinking, I suppose, that you were the mother, to poke something down. We have all seen mother birds, and father birds as well, take worms and fill those little beaks full.

That is what God says: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." If you need something, God says, I am willing to give it to you. There was also a Persian custom that, when the king delighted in you, he would call you into his presence and tell you to open your mouth wide. Then he would personally fill it, either with sweetmeat or with gold coins. Whatever you could carry in your mouth was yours.

But here is the picture: God said, “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” I am willing, ready, and able to give you everything imaginable if you will simply obey my voice. Here is a perfect illustration of the heart of God. God’s great promise was that He Himself would be their all-sufficiency. He was nigh unto them in anything and everything that they called upon Him for.

If they would only adhere to Him, He would be their powerful protector and ruler, and He would always be their bountiful benefactor. There is certainly enough in God to fill all our treasures and replenish every hungry soul, to supply all our wants and desires, and to make us completely happy. God said, “I am the one who delivers you. I am willing to give you everything.”

And yet they would not hearken. They would not hear. Now look in verse 11, and you will see the reason for His giving them up: “But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.”

Now, let me tell you something. When you think of Old Testament Israel, don't just stop and think, well, God really showed them, didn't He? Hold Psalm 81 and turn in your Bibles to Romans 15 and then to 1 Corinthians 10. Okay? Romans 15. Look in Romans chapter 15 and verse 4. Romans 15 verse 4. Look what the Bible says. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime," that is in the Old Testament, "were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Huh? What did he say? Everything that was written in the Old Testament was written, what? For our learning.

In other words, there's an application to us. Look in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 11. 1 Corinthians 10, verse 11. He's talking about Israel. In fact, if I were to read the first 10 verses, he talks about how Moses led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea and all of this. He talks about the wilderness wanderings. But look in verse 11. He says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." So the Apostle Paul is taking everything that happened to old Israel and applies it to the new Israel. And says, You better listen and learn. So when the psalmist then says in verse

11, "But my people would not hearken to my voice," he's not just simply talking about old Israel, here he's also talking to us upon whom the ends of the world would come.

Now, the word "gave" in verse 12, "So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust," the word "gave" is the Hebrew word shalach. It occurs 847 times in our Bibles. And it is variously translated as send off, send away or out, to send forth, to dismiss, to give over, to cast out, to give up, to put away, to be divorced. He said, I divorced him. I put him away. I gave him up. I sent him away.

His testimony against Israel: In this testimony, he charges them with a high contempt of his authority as their lawgiver and contempt of his grace and favor as their benefactor. He says, "My people would not hearken to my voice." That is, they turned a deaf ear unto him.

God complains in verse 11 of two things specifically. First, He complains of their disobedience to His commands. They did not hear His voice, though no people had heard it as they did, but they would not hearken to it. They heard it from Mount Sinai. They said, “Don’t let God speak to us lest we die.” They heard the voice of God as no other people ever heard. But although they heard it audibly, they did not hear it internally because they never would obey.

They refused to abide by His law. They refused to honor His word.

Secondly, He not only complains that they would not hear; He also complains of their dislike for their covenant relationship to Him. He says, “But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.” They would not have God. They did not want Him. God was willing to be to them a God, but they were not willing to be to Him a people. They did not like God, and they did not like His terms.

Surely this must make us think of the words of our Lord in Matthew 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” You would not.

They would have none of Him. It is not that they might not have Him, because they had been invited to Him. It was not that they could not have Him, because He had entered into a covenant with

them and had given them His terms. So it was not that they might not or could not; it was that they would not. They literally hated and despised God. They refused to hearken to Him, and they would have none of Him.

The Results of Being Given Up (Psalm 81:12)

You cannot despise the words of God without despising God Himself. God and His word are basically one. Let me show you. Everyone knows the story of David and Bathsheba. When God sends Nathan to David, and David confesses his guilt, look at what is said in 2 Samuel 12, beginning at verse 9.

"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight?" What is the commandment of the Lord? "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife. Thou shalt not kill." He says, "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me." How did David despise God? By despising His commandment, by despising His Word.

Look in your Bibles to Numbers, chapter 15, beginning with verse 29: "Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord." Note the words, "the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people." Why? Because he had despised the Word of the Lord and broken His commandment. You cannot reproach God without despising His Word, and you cannot despise His Word without reproaching and despising God. Thus God complains in Psalm 81, "My people would not hearken unto Me, and they would have none of Me."

They did not want to be associated with Him; they did not like His terms. So God said, "I gave them up."

Thirdly, look at the results of having been given up by God. In Psalm 81:12, God said, "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels." Scripture tells us there is a twofold evidence of a people who have been given up by God: first, they fulfill their own hearts' lust; secondly, they walk in their own counsels.

The Hebrew word for "lust" is sheriruth. It literally means twisted or firm. Here is someone twisted, firm in his own imagination, his own lust, his own stubbornness, and his own hardness. The word "counsel" means their own plan or their own device.

What did God say? "So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust." Earlier, He gave them over to worship the host of heaven—to worship the sun, the moon, the stars, or anything they wanted to worship. Being given up to your own hearts' lusts is more dangerous than being given over to your enemies. It is true that God oftentimes gave Israel over to their enemies, but that was temporary. When God gives someone up to his own lust, He literally takes the bridle of restrained grace from him and allows him to do as he pleases.

Hosea 4:17 says, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." God said, "I'm not going to mess with him anymore. Just let him alone. He wants idols? Let him have them." Our Lord said of the Pharisees, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Let them alone. It is a righteous thing for God to give up individuals to their own hearts' lust, that they may indulge them. When they will not be led by God, they will be led by their own lust. His grace is His own.

He is debtor to no man. He has never given His grace to anyone who deserved it, and He has never taken it from anyone who did not forfeit it. God can do as He pleases.

What happens when God gives individuals or a people up to their own hearts' lust? The next automatic result is that they walk in their own counsels. They follow their own imagination, their own thoughts, and their own thinking. They do what they want to do.

I went back and checked three of the old commentators on verse 12. I want you to listen to what John Gill, Matthew Poole, and John Trapp said. John Gill wrote, "So I gave them up unto their own

hearts' lust." Sometimes God gave them up, when they sinned, into the hands of the Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, or other neighboring nations for their chastisement. But to be delivered up unto their own hearts' lust is worse than that—nay, even than being delivered unto Satan.

Salvation may be the consequence of that, but damnation of this. And yet it is a righteous judgment, for as men like not to retain God in their knowledge, it is but just with them to give them up to vile affections, to a reprobate mind, to do things not convenient. There is nothing men are more desirous of than to have their hearts' lust, and there is no greater judgment that can befall them than to be left in the power of them, which must unavoidably issue in their ruin here and hereafter. “And they walked in their own counsels,” which were bad, after the imagination of their own evil hearts, and not after the counsels and directions of God in his word and of his servants.

Matthew Poole said, “Upon their obstinate and oft-repeated rebellions and rejections of my grace and mercy offered them, I withdrew all the restraints of my providence, and my Holy Spirit, and my grace from them, and wholly left them to follow their own vain and foolish imaginations and wicked lusts. They walked in their own counsels; they practiced those things, both in common conversation and in religious worship, which were most agreeable, not to my commands or counsels, but to their own fancies and inclinations, as appeared in the golden calf and many others.” John Trapp was more succinct: “So I gave them up.”

“I lent them as a ship without a rudder, a horse without reins, to go whither they would and do what they would. This is a fearful judgment.” The greatest judgment that God can cast upon any people is to let them alone: let them have their own way, their own counsel, and do their own thing. That is what God said: “So I gave them up.” They wanted idolatry? I will let them have it.

Now, I want you to see with me forthly today the ramifications of having been given up, or the ramifications of disobedience. What do most Christians pray for? I mean real, genuine Christians. We pray for the lost. We pray for God's enemies to be overthrown. Do we not? We pray for God's blessing upon ourselves.

The Ramifications of Disobedience: Lost Blessings (Psalm 81:13-16)

People scream and cry and beg for these things. They hold missions conferences and do all these things. Yet, in our rush to have our own way, fulfill our own desires, and follow our own counsels, we never stop to think exactly what we are missing by disobeying God and His Word. Since I teach a lot on Southern history, one of the most frequently asked questions is, "What if the South had won the war?" An equally imposing question is this: "What if Israel had obeyed God?"

Or let us make it more practical: What if we, as a people, obeyed God? As I studied this passage, I thought of another sermon title: "Reminiscence of What Might Have Been."

Look in your Bible, since you are there at Psalm 81. I want to show you exactly what we lose by disobeying God. Scripture tells us that we lose about four wonderful blessings, and these are usually blessings for which we pray daily. The wonder of Psalm 81 is this: God, our Heavenly Father, is ready and willing and able to give us these blessings. We do not have to beg, plead, cry, and implore for them. All we need to do is obey.

Look at verse 13. God says, "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" That verse reveals the heart cry of God. Verse 13 is in the optative mood, which simply means a desire contrary to the fact. God is saying, "It was my desire. It was my wish. It was my greatest desire for them to obey me."

It is like when we do something foolish and stupid, and the first thing we say is, "I wish I hadn't done that." That is a wish or desire contrary to the fact; we have already done it. God said, "Oh, that my people had hearkened to me. I wish they had listened. I wish they had walked in my ways." Verse 13 immediately reminds me of Lamentations 3:33: "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." It is not a picture of God sitting in heaven with a big old switch, waiting for us to mess up so He can chastise us. God is saying, "My desire is that you obey me, so I do not have to chastise you."

I'd rather have your obedience. I'd rather have your submission. Verses 14 through 16 tell us of the great mercy that God had in store for Israel had they obeyed. The same mercy is for us if we obey.

First, verse 14: "I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries." God said, if they had just listened to me, I would have given them victory over their enemies and would soon have completed their reduction. It is only God, by the way, who can really and genuinely subdue our enemies.

There need not be a tedious, exhaustive, and expensive war. God said, if you would obey me, I would have done it. I would have turned my hand against the adversary, and they would not have been able to stand. How easily God could have done it. The Bible says in Isaiah 11, "Nay, with the breath of his mouth he destroys the wicked." God need not even lift his hand; just breathe upon them, and they will be destroyed.

We've got grievous as well as great adversaries in this country. It does matter whether or not you obey God. If we want God to smite his enemies and our enemies, that is a blessing that comes through obedience.

Look secondly, verse 15: "The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever." God said if my people had listened to me and obeyed me, the haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves to him. Some undoubtedly would have submitted to him in grace and mercy. Others may not have been brought to love him, yet they would have been made to fear him; they would have had to confess that he was too hard and too great for them, and that it was useless to fight against him.

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." If the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord and he can turn it wherever he wants, I can assure you the rest of the people are in his hands, and he can turn their hearts wherever he wishes as well.

God said if you had obeyed, I would have subdued your enemies, and the haters of the Lord would have submitted themselves. You don't have evangelism.

Thirdly, in verse 15 he said, “But their time should have endured for ever.” That is, he would have confirmed and perpetuated their prosperity and established it upon a sure and lasting foundation. In spite of all their enemies and all attempts against them, their time would have endured forever. In other words, no one would have disturbed you or your possession. We want our possession, our country, and safety. What does God say?

Safety is of the Lord. What is it? He said it like this: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." God said this will be ours. Fourthly, in verse 16, He said, "He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." He said, I would have given him plenty of great and good things—the best of grain and the best of honey, honey out of the rock, besides all the precious fruits of the soil. God said, I would have made everything prosper. I would have fed him and given him everything had he obeyed me.

Applications: The Need for Repentance

Think of everything that we have lost in this country because we have turned our backs upon the one true and living God, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and His Word. There are businesses—not that I agree with everything in Saturnalia, and I certainly do not agree with the Roman Catholic Church—that will not even allow their employees to say "Merry Christmas." They say "Happy Holidays" or "blessed winter days" or some stupid thing like that. You cannot have a nativity scene, but you can have a Santa Claus and a snowman and anything that is Islamic or foreign. Kwanzaa. Isn't that amazing?

Have we been given up to our own hearts' lusts and our own counsels? The first application is this: God's curses are upon disobedience, and His blessings are upon obedience. Psalm 81 is Deuteronomy 28 applied. Where God speaks of all those curses, the application is Psalm 81. Instead of reaping God's blessings, a disobedient people reap only God's curses. The duty God required from Israel as the condition of receiving all these blessings was obedience. The duty God requires of us in receiving all these blessings has not changed. It is obedience.

God said, all I have ever asked is that you hearken to Me as a scholar listens to his teacher or professor, that you obey Me as a servant obeys his master. You receive My commands and walk in them. It is just that simple. You do what I tell you to do because the ways of the Lord are right, pleasant, holy, and godly. Everything that God does, He does for your benefit. It is to help and not to hurt. All God requires is obedience.

Thirdly, observe that the reason for withholding mercy is laid to their neglect of duty. God said, if they had hearkened unto me—that is, if they had listened to me—I should have soon subdued their enemies. National sin or national disobedience is the great and only thing that retards and obstructs national deliverance. You cannot have a national deliverance until you have a national repentance. God said, "When I would have healed Israel," Hosea 7:1, "When I would have healed Israel"—that is, when I had set everything right among them—"then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered." God said, I was about to restore them, and then the idolatry of Ephraim came up, and that put a stop to it. What is it that puts a stop to God restoring our country? Our sin, our rebellion, our wickedness. The question is not, "Can God give up America?" The question is, "Will He give us up?" Or has He already given us up?

National repentance must begin with individual repentance, because a nation is made up of individuals. When individuals repent, that can lead to familial, or family, repentance. When families get right, that can lead to ecclesiastical, or church-wide, repentance. And when churches get right, that can lead to national repentance. It has to begin somewhere, and each of us should say, "Lord, let it begin in me. And Lord, make me just as obedient and as holy and as godly as I can be by your infinite grace and mercy."

Horrible words: when God says, "So I gave them up," and when our Lord says, "Let them alone." If we want an awakening, we must seek to be awakened ourselves. If we want a national repentance, we must be willing to repent ourselves. If we do not repent, God will give us up. No, that does not mean that real, genuine Christians are going to be lost. But it does mean our country is going to be lost. It does mean that we are going to be persecuted and have problems like we have never even dreamed about. God always has the elect;

God always has a remnant. But that elect and that remnant many times suffer when God gives up a nation, when God gives up a people.

By God's grace, let us repent, be obedient, holy, and godly. Let us pray. Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would help us. What an awesome thought when You give up a people, when You say, “Let them alone.” The greatest curse is to be left to our own lusts, sins, wicked thoughts, and imaginations. Father, we beg Thee for mercy. We ask Thee for repentance, faith, and obedience. May we not sin against Thee, grieve Thee, quench Thee, or vex Thee. Lord, we pray for each of these blessings that You have mentioned to us. Yet we realize they are ours only through obedience. May we hearken to Thy Word, and may we have all that we can get of Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask it. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

God's Answer to America's Problems

May 14, 2006

God's Answers to America's Problems

Introduction: The Failure of Man's Answers

There is a correlation between the previous messages and today's message. I took the last two messages and made them part one and part two. Although this is not part three, you will see how they go together. First, we considered America's curse and saw that the curse was false and foolish preachers who were not preaching or teaching the Word of God. Then, from the same passage in Jeremiah, we considered America's hope: the preaching of the gospel. Today I bring a message entitled God's Answers to America's Problems.

Look in Isaiah 55, verses 8 and 9: “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.”

Problems abound on every hand. It does not matter whether we are talking about economic problems, governmental problems, immigration problems, marital problems, discipline problems, or educational problems. These are only some of the problems that we face regularly. In reality, there are many more problems in our land—pressing problems, desperate problems, problems that need an answer in order to alleviate the circumstances under which we live. And when you think of all those problems, that is not even considering the corruption, fraud, crime, and rebellion in this country. There is enough to really lay us low.

The truth is, we have failed. Endeavoring to work out our problems politically, governmentally, economically, and in various other areas, we have failed. We still have the problems. That is why we find ourselves in the mess we are in today. It is time to face a simple fact: Political parties will not save us. Government will not save us. Furthermore, we cannot extricate ourselves from this mess. We cannot pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, so to speak. None of that works.

God's Ways vs. Man's Ways (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Do you realize that a problem is not a problem if you know the answer? The only time you have a problem is when you do not know the answer. I read the text today to show you that God's answers to our problems are different from man's answers. Look back, if you would, in Isaiah 55:8–9: “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 higher than your thoughts.”

We have found that God's answers are entirely different from man's answers. The age-old contest between theonomy—that is, God's law—and autonomy—that is, self-law or man's law—ought to be brought into clear light. Man has gotten himself into all of these problems because we have followed our way rather than God's way. We're like Adam. Adam did not want to obey God; he wanted to rebel. Modern man does not want to obey God; he wants to rebel as well. As the Word of God says, every one of us has turned after the imagination of his own heart. Or, as Isaiah said, each of us has

turned to our own way. The book of Judges says it a little differently, but its theme is found in Judges 17:6: “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Instead of listening to God, we have simply done that which was right in our own eyes. Please understand something. I mentioned in the last two messages sanctions. There are positive sanctions and negative sanctions. We have found, or at least should have discovered, that man's answers and man's ways really do not work, and that they are basically under the negative sanctions of God. That is, they are under the curse of God.

The Principle of Blessings and Curses (Deuteronomy 11, 28)

Deuteronomy 11 gives us this truth very succinctly. God gives a multitude of passages that teach it, but notice verses 27 and 28. In verse 26, God says, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.” Then He says a blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and a curse if you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day to go after other gods which you have not known. So God says, “Look, I’ve set before you a blessing and a curse.”

Blessings follow obedience and curses follow disobedience. Over and over in the Bible, God enunciates this simple principle. This principle, first and foremost, is national in scope. It is also applicable to individuals, to families, to churches, and to communities, but it is also national in scope.

Deuteronomy 28 is one of the sections where God lists the blessings and the curses. There are certain blessings that will follow obedience and certain curses that will follow disobedience. This is one of my favorite passages, and this is one of my favorite words. Notice, if you would please, the Bible says in verse one, “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God to observe and to do all his commandments, which I command thee this day, the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all”

Verse 2 says, “And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God.” Verse 15 says, “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments and the statutes which I command thee this day, then all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee.” The word overtake occurs then in verse 2 and in verse 15. It occurs in relationship to the blessings as well as in relationship to the curses. The Hebrew word is nasag, which literally means to overtake, to catch hold upon, to catch up with, or to take hold on. Here is the picture that God is saying: you are running down the road as fast and as furiously as you can in your obedience, trying to outrun His blessings. God says His blessings will overtake you. They will catch up with you. They will knock you down. They will jump on you and fall all over you. You cannot stop them as long as you obey Him.

But the opposite is also true. If you disobey God, here you are running from Him as fast and as furiously as you may run. But His curses will catch up with you. They will jump on you, knock you down, and fall all over you. You cannot stop them. Isn’t that plain? Isn’t that simple?

The truth of the matter is this: there is no way that you as an individual, family, church, or nation can escape either the positive or the negative sanctions of God. We just cannot outrun God. Period.

The Puritans used to have an adage that they were fond of saying: “We have great news for sinners. If we can only find some.”

Finding sinners is not difficult; they are on every hand. But finding sinners who are ready to repent and willing to listen to the Word of God is a whole horse of a different color. The great news is not just for sinners, but for sinners who are ready, willing, and desirous of repentance.

Likewise, finding answers is not difficult. There is an answer to every problem: the immigration problem that we are having in this country, the economic problem, and governmental problems. The problem is not that there are no answers; the problem is that we cannot find anyone who wants to hear what God has to say.

Everybody wants to follow what man says. Most of us are simply not willing or ready to hear what God demands.

In the more than forty years that I have been preaching, I have witnessed the demise of many marriages, the loss of families, the loss of material possessions, and even the loss of lives, simply because some would not listen to the Word of God and would not apply the truth.

You may have God's answer, or you may have man's answer. What did God say? God said, “I set before you the way of life and the way of death. I set before you a blessing and a cursing.” That is simple: you cannot have both. You may decide to take man's answer, but man's answer not only compounds but exacerbates the problem, and ultimately it will simply bring you to ruin.

Consider an illustration. Younger people will not remember this, but those who are middle-aged and older may remember that there was a generation who listened to Dr. Spock. Dr. Spock owned children. They refused to discipline their children based upon the teaching of the Word of God; they did not want to listen to the Word of God. They listened to Dr. Spock instead. Consequently, we sired a whole generation of rebellious, undisciplined children. Before he died, Dr. Spock confessed and acknowledged that he was wrong. But it was too late. A whole generation had, basically, been ruined.

The Conditioned Reliance on Man's Counsel

One of our problems is that we have been conditioned to listen to man rather than seek God's answer first. We are geared simply to listen to men and always look to them for answers. When we get sick, the first thing we do is call the doctor. When we have economic problems, we call the banker. When we dislike things in our city or county, we call our councilman. When things go wrong in our lives, we call our psychologist, analyst, or psychiatrist. We normally expect the advice of men to work out our problems. We very seldom check with the Lord first and ask, What does the Bible really say about this? What is God's answer to this problem?

Consider 1 Corinthians 11:30, a verse I have quoted frequently during the series on the Lord's Supper. God makes a statement

concerning many of those Corinthians in the church: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Now what is God saying? He is saying that if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged of God.

These people were committing sins. They were eating and drinking at the Lord's table unworthily—that is, in an unworthy manner. Some of them were sick, and some of them were dead. You can go to every doctor in the world, but if the source of your problem is spiritual and not physical, no physical doctor will be able to help you. Their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual problems had a spiritual root, not a physical one.

There are many people today under the care of analysts, psychologists, and psychiatrists, taking Prozac and all these other drugs, who, if they would simply repent of their sins and obey God, would probably get over many of their problems. But we are geared to listening to men and asking what man has to say. God says man's thoughts are not His thoughts, and man's ways are not His ways.

Five Biblical Problems and God's Single Answer: A Preacher

Let me give you a couple of illustrations today. I want to show you some problems and help us determine whether God's answer corresponds to man's answer.

Our first problem is Israel in Egypt—enslaved, overworked, mistreated, hated, and despised. If you look in Exodus 2, beginning at verse 23, the Bible says, “And it came to pass in the process of time that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of their bondage, and God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” The children of Israel were now in grave bondage. They were sighing, groaning, and moaning. This was a grave problem, and it required an answer from God.

Israel was under tremendous burdens and pressure. They cried to God, and God heard them. What did God do? Did He send an angelic

host to destroy all the Egyptians? No. Did He send supernatural earthquakes to rend their country to pieces? No.

In Exodus 3, Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and led the flock to the back side of the desert, coming to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush,” and the bush burned with fire but was not consumed. Moses said, “I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.”

Then the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters. For I know their sorrows, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land into a good land, and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey, unto the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”

“Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me. And I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppressed them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” What did God do? He sent him a preacher. He did not send a militia or an angelic host. He sent them a preacher.

Moses was called a prophet. He was a preacher of righteousness. In Deuteronomy 18, Moses told the people, “And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.” God was saying through Moses, “I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto me.” Jesus Christ, the true prophet, is typified by Moses.

"I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command them." Isn't that amazing? God says, Moses, I'm going to raise up a prophet, the true ultimate prophet like unto you. I'm going to put my words in his mouth. He'll speak my words like you speak my words.

Deuteronomy 34:10 says, "And there was not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Moses is

called a prophet, a preacher. Hosea 12:13 says, "And by a prophet, that is by a preacher, the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet, he was preserved." These passages identify Moses as a prophet, that is, a preacher through whom the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and preserved them. Now, here's the problem.

God's people are in slavery and bondage. They are oppressed, and a tyrant reigns over them. What does God do? He does not use a vast military organization, a bureaucracy, a committee, or an organization. He sends a preacher. I saw a sign that paraphrased John 3:16, and I liked it. It said, "For God so loved the world so much that he did not send a committee." What did God do? God sent a preacher. Why did God send the preacher?

The answer will come later, but you probably already know it. Now consider problem two. The children of Israel are already in the promised land. Instead of obeying God, they have disobeyed Him. Judges 6:1 introduces this situation: they have been extremely disobedient, and God has delivered them into the hands of their enemies.

Their oppression was now very severe. Look at Judges 6, verse 1: “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. And because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made them the dens, which are in the mountains, and caves and strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them. And they had camped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou comest to Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude. For both they and their camels were without number, and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.”

You are talking about a problem. That is almost like America today, where our sustenance is eaten up and taken from us. About 60 percent of the average man's income goes for taxes of some kind. Seventy, you say? It is a lot.

This was a horrible time for the Israelites. They were fearful for their lives, digging holes and hiding in caves and mountains. They were leaving their cities because they did not want to be easy targets. So they cried to the Lord. What did God do? Look in verse 7: “And it came to pass when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel.” Stop there. What did God do? God sent them a preacher.

You say, What good is a preacher? How can a preacher deliver the people? Surely the Lord needed to send a militia, or at least somebody with military training to lead them in a revolution. No, He just sent a preacher. Why did God send a preacher? You probably already know the answer, but I am going to tell you later.

Now let us go to problem three: corruption in the ministry. The Word of God is indeed applicable today. In 1 Samuel chapter 2, you have dishonest, corrupt, immoral, and wicked preachers abounding everywhere, just as you do today. Look at 1 Samuel 2, beginning in verse 12.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25 (KJV)

> Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial. They knew not the Lord. Look how wicked they were. The priest's custom with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came while the flesh was in seething and with a flesh hook of three teeth in his hand, and he struck it into the pan, or the kettle, or cauldron, or pot, and all that the flesh hook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh, and all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burned the fat, the priest's servants came and said to the man that sacrificed, Now look, give flesh to roast for the priest, for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth, then he would answer him, Nay, but thou shalt give it me now, or else I will take it by force.
>
> Wherefore, the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.
>
> Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel, and how they lay with the women that assembled at the

> door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do you such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear you make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him. But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him, notwithstanding they hearken not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them.

There came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt, in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel, to be my priest, and to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice, and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation, and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people. Wherefore, the Lord God of Israel said, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me forever. But now the Lord saith, Be it far from me, for of them that honor me will I honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

As you examine the sins of Hophni and Phinehas and all those associated with them, you will find a striking parallel with the sins of preachers in America. Preachers in this country are falling like flies to immorality, fraud, corruption, and compromise. Why are they falling like that? Because they have denigrated, despised, denounced, and denied the law of God. God's law is His standard. If God's law is not your standard, you must make or manufacture your own standard. By nature, how many men will make a standard displeasing to their flesh and lust? None. They will make a standard they like, one that lets them do whatever they want and get by with it.

What did God do in this situation? God sent him a prophet. God sent him a preacher. God destroyed Hophni and Phinehas later on, but He still sent a prophet. In 1 Samuel 3:1 we read, "And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the

Lord was precious in those days. There was no open vision." Then verse 20 says, "And all Israel, from Dan, even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." God sent a preacher.

The problems we are talking about prevail in our country today. In problem number four, the highest governmental leader has sinned. He is not only guilty of treason; he is also guilty of adultery and murder. The interesting thing is that this civil ruler had tried to hide his sin and rebellion. His commander-in-chief knew about it, and the king was in danger of being blackmailed.

Look in 2 Samuel chapter 11, beginning with verse 1: “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.” It came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house. From the roof he saw a woman washing herself. The woman was very beautiful to look upon. David sent and inquired after the woman. “And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

Surely, such a wicked, sinful man should be dethroned, kicked out of office, and put to death. The truth is, that is what would normally have happened. However, God did an unusual thing. Look at 2 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 1: “And the Lord sent Nathan unto David.” What? God sent a preacher. The highest civil leader in the land commits treason, murder, and adultery, and what does God do? God sends a preacher. Why did God send the preacher? You probably already know the answer, but I will give it to you later.

Wicked, vile persons have taken control of the government. They are oppressing the people, killing and stealing, and ruling tyrannically. God's preachers are being killed, imprisoned, and destroyed. False preachers are being elevated and feeding at the governmental trough. The problem is that this was not just in Israel; it prevailed throughout the entire region.

You can read about this in 1 Kings chapter 19, beginning with verse one: "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and

withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah saying, so let the gods do so to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." Elijah had killed all four hundred prophets of Baal. Jezebel, as wicked and vile as she could be, said, "By this time tomorrow, you'll be like them. I'll have you killed as well." The prophets of God who were not killed were hidden in a cave, being fed with bread and water, while the prophets of Baal were feeding sumptuously at the king's table.

What does God do in the midst of such problems and tyranny? Look at 1 Kings chapter 19, beginning with verse 11. Elijah goes before the Lord, and God says, "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord and behold, the Lord passed by in a great and strong wind, rent the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a still small voice." When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entering of the cave. And behold, there came a voice unto him and said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Elijah said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with a sword. And I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." The Lord answered, "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus. Now look, and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room."

What did God do? He told Elijah that if his time was about over, he should anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to take his place. Why did God do this? God was sending a preacher. What good is a preacher? The answer will come a little later, but you probably already know it.

In each instance, and in each problem, God sent a preacher. No matter how grave or difficult the problem was, God sent a preacher.

Isaiah 55:8 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." God sends a preacher because God's answers are not the same as man's answers. He sends His preacher to declare His Word and His answer to the problems.

Why God Sends Preachers: To Declare His Answer

Consider the first problem: the children of Israel were in Egypt, enslaved by Pharaoh. What did God do? God sent Moses, and Moses said, "Thus saith the Lord, let my people go." Pharaoh refused: "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." The Egyptians refused to hear and heed the Word of God. What did God do? He destroyed Pharaoh, the firstborn, Egypt, and the gods of Egypt. God did not need an army or a militia. He only sent a preacher. Why?

The Preacher Declares God's Answer

God is quite capable of cleaning people's plow by Himself. He does not really need any help. The truth is that God does use us occasionally, and we are grateful that we can be used by Him. But God does not need us. God can act alone. When you read the Bible, it is God who moved through Egypt and destroyed the firstborn. Why, then, did God send the preacher? God sent the preacher to declare His will and His word. When the people refused, God judged them and destroyed them.

Israel was in the land, but disobedient, and under severe oppression. Everything they had was being stolen and taken from them. So they cried to the Lord. Judges 6:7 says, "And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, who said unto them, This is why God sent a preacher, so he could declare God's answer to the problem. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up out of Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land. And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God, fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell, but you have not obeyed my voice."

What did the preacher do? He said, "The problem is with you. You are sinful, wicked, and rebelling. You are not obeying God." There is God's answer and there is man's answer. Which one are you taking? Do you want to know why you are cursed, why your enemies are on top, why you have economic problems, or why your land is invaded? You disobeyed God. That is why He sent a preacher: He wanted you to hear His answer to your problem.

God's true preacher, little Samuel, was raised up to confront Hophni and Phinehas and the other false priests. First Samuel 3:11 says, "And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel at which both the ears of everyone that hear it shall tingle."

“And that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. When I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. And therefore, I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering forever."

What is God doing? God is telling His preacher what to tell Eli and the others. It is a message of death and destruction. The result was that God killed them, but before He did, He sent a preacher to declare His Word. The message did not produce repentance, but that does not mean it failed. Go back in your Bibles to Isaiah 55. Look at verse 11: “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. It shall prosper in the thing whereunto I send it.”

God’s Word will always prosper in that which He sends it. It will always accomplish His mission. You must understand that God does not always send His Word for reconciliation. Sometimes He sends it for condemnation. Did God’s Word work? Yes. They were condemned, and they were destroyed. Samuel proclaimed the Word of the Lord; it happened to be a word of condemnation, and it did work, for God destroyed them.

Problem number four: The highest civil ruler in the land had committed treason, adultery, and murder. Look back in your Bibles at 2 Samuel chapter 12. David should have been put to death. He was

guilty of treason, adultery, and murder, all of which merit the death penalty in the Bible. Why was he not put to death? In verse 13 we read: “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord hath also put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.” It took a special pardon from God to keep David from being executed. But that does not mean David escaped his sins. He did not; he certainly reaped the consequences of them.

He suffered immeasurably in his family. But what did God do? God corrected the problem in the highest civil leader in the land by sending him a preacher. God gave that civil ruler repentance and faith. Isn't that interesting? God does not have to kill all the civil rulers. He can convert them. He can save them. He sent a preacher in problem number five.

Elijah said, “I'm the only one left.” “Oh, no,” says God, “you're not the only one. But I tell you what, Elijah: you go and anoint Hazael, you go and anoint Jehu, and you go and anoint Elisha.” Why did God tell Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria and Jehu king over Israel, and Elisha as prophet in his stead? By the way, God is sovereign over other nations. He is sovereign over every nation, and He puts kings and rulers over heathen nations just as He does over the so-called professing Christian nations.

He did so in order to sanction the destruction of His enemies. In 2 Kings 10:32–33 we read: “In those days, the Lord began to cut Israel short and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel, from Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites, the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan.” He sent Hazael to take care of rebellious northern Israel.

Elisha, by the way, did not use the sword, but he oversaw the use of the sword. Jehu was used to destroy the house of Ahab. Jehu was anointed over Israel and destroyed Ahab and his family. Hazael was anointed over Syria and took care of northern rebellious Israel. In 2 Kings 6 and 2 Kings 13, Elisha takes care of armies.

In 2 Kings 6, verse 14 records, “Therefore sent he thither horses and chariots and a great host, and they came by night and encompassed the city about.” The young man of Elisha said to

Elisha, “We're surrounded by our enemies.” Elisha said, “I pray thee, Lord, open the young man's eyes.” What did he see? He saw chariots of fire in the mountains. He said they'd be far more for us than those who are against us. Elisha prayed and asked God to smite those Syrians with blindness, and God did so. Then Elisha led them to the king of Israel. The king of Israel said, “Shall I smite them, my Lord? Shall I smite them?” Elisha said, “No, you would not smite those that you took in battle, would you?” No, feed them and let them go. The Bible said from that time forth, those came not back into the land of Israel.

In 2 Kings chapter 13, Elisha is dying. “Now Elisha was fallen sick of the sickness wherewith he died, and Joash the king of Israel came down unto him and wept over his face and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. And Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon the bow. And Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands, and he said, open the window eastward, and he opened it. Then Elisha said, shoot, and he shot.”

“The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance, the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians at Aphek, till thou have consumed them.” And he said, “Take the arrows.” And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, “Smite upon the ground.” And he smote thrice, three times, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it. Now whereas thou shalt only smite Syria but thrice.”

So Elisha did not necessarily wield the sword, but he oversaw the use of it. Why did God send the preacher? In problem number five, to sanction the destruction of His enemies and to say, “Thus saith the Lord. Here is what God will do.”

The Real Problem: Refusing to Hear God

Now, the problems we face in America are not our main problem. The problems we see in America are merely the symptoms. Unhappily, most people would rather deal with the symptom than the root of the problem. Every problem has a solution. Our real

problem is that we do not hear what God has to say. We do not want to hear His answer or His solution to the problem. What we want is man's answers, and all man's answers do is get us deeper and deeper in trouble. In five instances, God never changed; He just sent a preacher.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 36 and look at verses 14 through 17. "Moreover, the chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord, which he had hallowed in Jerusalem." What are the people doing? Sinning, rebelling, being wicked, ungodly.

Verse 15: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending." Why was God sending these preachers? Because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But what did the people do? "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

Therefore, He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with a sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age. He gave them all into his hand. Let me tell you something, folks: there comes a time when we continue to refuse to hear God's words; then God's mercy comes to an end, and He sends forth His judgment.

I have wonderful news for Americans who are willing and ready to repent and obey God—if I could just find some. God has the answer. God has the solution. I have wonderful news for individuals, for families, for churches, and for nations that will hear and heed the Word of God.

Based upon Second Chronicles 36, we discover a very important truth: when God has compassion upon a people, what does He do? He sends them preachers. The opposite is also true. When God is going to judge a people, what does He do? Number one, He can remove His preacher from the land, like He did Elijah. Or, number two, He can do as He did in the time of Jeremiah: He kept Jeremiah

in the land; He just shut his mouth. When God had compassion upon a people, He always sent them preachers. When God judged a people, He always took their preachers out of the land or shut their mouths.

Conclusion: God's Mercy in Sending Preachers

Jeremiah 3, beginning in verse 14, says: “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you, and I will take you one of a city and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” Now, look at God’s promise. If they will repent, if they will turn, if they will listen, God says, “and I will give you pastors according to my heart who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

One of the greatest mercies that we could possibly have, and one of the greatest demonstrations that God has not entirely passed us by in this country, is the fact that we still have a few men who are preaching faithfully the Word of God. “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, who shall feed you with wisdom and knowledge and understanding.” God’s Word will do one of two things. It will either convert or condemn. It’s just that simple. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.

When the Word of God goes forth, it does not return void. It will accomplish that which God purposes for it, whether it is reconciliation or condemnation—individually, familially, ecclesiastically, nationally, governmentally, ever how you want to say it. Our problem, our real problem, is that we’re not listening to God.

He said, “For my ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts. For as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” When God wants us to know His will, His way, and His word, He will send us a preacher.

Do you remember our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration? Peter did not know what to say. He said, “Lord, it’s good for us to be here. Let’s build three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” About that time, a cloud covered them, and a voice came from that cloud and said, “This is my beloved son. Hear ye

him.” We need to hear the Word and the answers from God, because those are the true, only, and genuine answers.

I have wonderful news for people, if I can just find some who will listen. Let us pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You to help us. Thank You for Your Word. Thank You for not passing us by. Thank You for the true preachers in this country who are faithfully proclaiming Your Word. Father, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ that thou wouldst indeed honor those men and honor that word that's being preached that's true and accurate. Grant us repentance and faith, and call us back to Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen and amen.

CHAPTER 6

The Testimony of the LORD

January 14, 2007

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 81:8-16 (KJV)

Introduction: The Principle of Obedience and Blessing

The message is entitled “The Testimony of the LORD,” or, if you prefer the longer title, “The Testimony of the LORD and the Correlation Between Obedience and Blessings.” You will find out why I chose that title and the correlation between obedience and blessing. God says, “Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee”—hence the testimony of the LORD—“Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.

“Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and

> Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.
>
> "The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."
>
> I hope you remember that I have repeatedly taught you over the years a simple principle in the Word of God. That principle is this: blessings follow obedience, and curses follow disobedience. Psalm 81, verses 8 through 16, illustrates this principle very clearly.
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> When you look at the mess that we are in in this country, we have to confess and acknowledge that we are in the mess that we are in because of our own disobedience and our own failure. The fault is not with God. The fault is with us, and we are going to see that very clearly out of Psalm 81. It is we who have sinned and rebelled and done wickedly against God.

It is amazing, as you read this passage, because you will discover that the desire of our Heavenly Father is that He might bless us, hear us, and give us victory. He would do so as long as we are obedient unto Him. It does not matter whether you are considering Deuteronomy 28 or Leviticus 26, two tremendous passages on the connection between obedience and blessing, and curses and disobedience, or whether you are looking throughout Scripture. You will find that one principle repeated over and over.

In Deuteronomy 11, verses 27 and 28, this truth is so clearly specified in the passage that I do not see how anyone could misunderstand or fail to comprehend it. Notice Deuteronomy 11 and verse 27. In fact, let us read verse 26. God says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse." You have a choice of one or the other: "a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known." God says, "I'm setting before you this day a

blessing and a curse"—a blessing if you obey and a curse if you disobey.

Inevitably, someone will usually object, "But Brother Weaver, that verse and those promises were given to Old Testament Israel." Let me remind you of two passages in the New Testament. The first is Romans chapter 15 and verse 4. There the Apostle Paul said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime"—that is, the Old Testament—"were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Notice what he said: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." Everything that happened in the Old Testament is for our learning and admonition. The second passage is found in 1 Corinthians 10.

Paul gives the story of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. In 1 Corinthians 10:1 he says, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea." He is speaking about Israel's deliverance out of Egypt and then about their wandering in the wilderness.

In verse 6 he says, "Now these things"—that is, everything that happened to Israel—"were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted." Then, when you skip down to verse 11, he says, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." What is he saying? He is saying that everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament is for our admonition and our learning.

The Apostle Paul takes what happened to Old Testament Israel and applies it to the Corinthian church in the New Testament. Therefore, there are very obviously applications that can be made today. These applications do not apply only to Israel in the Old Testament or to the Corinthian church in the New Testament; they apply to all of God's people in all ages.

If you carefully examine Psalm 81:8–16 and comprehend its impact, you will discover the reason for individual, family, ecclesiastical, and national judgments. You will find out why God

judges and why God curses. May I remind you that God has not changed and does not change because God is immutable. The very things He judged four thousand years ago He still judges today. In Psalm 81:8, note the sovereign's testimony: "Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me."

The Sovereign's Testimony

It is not unusual for a ruler to testify against his subjects, especially when that ruler is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. God says, "Listen to me, and I'm going to testify." The Hebrew word for testify is `ud`. In our Bibles it is translated testify, protest, witness, record, and charge. It therefore carries the force of bearing witness, enjoining, giving a warning, or testifying against someone, as in a criminal or civil case.

Let me give you several examples of how this word is used, and you will see the impact of God's testimony. In Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 19, God says, "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."

What did God just say? He is warning them: if they disobey Him and go after other gods, He testifies against them that they shall surely perish. This is God's testimony against them.

In Deuteronomy 30, verse 19, God says, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." He says, "I call heaven and earth to witness," or to testify, or to record against you this day. God has set before them the way of life and death. He is presenting a choice, while also recording His testimony against them.

In Deuteronomy 31, verse 28, He says, "Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them." In other words, God is saying, "I am testifying against you."

Then, in Deuteronomy 32:1, He says, "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth." What is He

doing? He is giving a witness again. He is testifying. He is recording: "This is what I have said, and this is what I am going to do."

One last passage before we go further is Psalm 50:7. Notice how closely it resembles Psalm 81:8: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God." All through Scripture, you can see how God testifies. He records, He bears a record, and He speaks against. Now go back to Psalm 81 and look at verse 8.

This is absolutely amazing. He says in verse 8, "Hear, O my people, and I will testify." Then he says, "O Israel, if thou wilt hearken." Is it not amazing that God has to look at His own people and say, "Listen up, hear Me. Give Me your ear, hearken unto Me"? Israel was so insensitive to God that she would not listen. Therefore, God had to speak to them and get their attention to make them listen. Is it not amazing today that most professing Christians could care less about what God says? Therefore, God has to slap us up against the head to get our attention.

You have heard that old story about the proverbial mule. A man bought the mule and said, "I thought you told me this mule would obey." The former owner came and said, "Let me show you." He picked up the two-by-four and hit him upside the head. "Now he'll obey. You've just got to get his attention first." That is the way it is with us. Now, let me show you what the Lord testifies against His people. There are five things.

The Exclusiveness of the Covenant

Look at verses 8 and 9 together. First of all, He testifies to the exclusiveness of His covenant: "Hear, O my people, I will testify to thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall be no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god." Verse 9 delineates the core issue of God's testimony against His people. Do you remember when God gave the law in two passages?

You have it in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5. In Exodus chapter 20, verses 2 and 3, He said, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me." In

Deuteronomy chapter 5, He says it again: “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me.”

In verses 8 and 9, God reminds Israel that they should be contented with Him alone. They were to be exclusively His people; there was to be no strange god found in them. This is the core issue of the covenant. God said, “I will be your God and you shall be My people.” In other words, there is an exclusiveness: I am your God, and you are My people.

No man—and no woman—wants to enter into a marriage covenant with a woman and then find out she’s sleeping with all the other men in town. What does the marriage covenant mean? It means that the woman is to belong to the man exclusively and the man is to belong to the woman exclusively. That’s what covenants are all about. That’s what God’s covenant was: I am your God. You are my people.

God is said to be a jealous God. In fact, Jealous is one of God’s biblical names. In Exodus 34:14, God says, “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” In Deuteronomy 4:24, he says, “For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.” I would be jealous over my wife. I would hope she would be jealous over me. God is jealous over his people.

We are to be His. Do you remember what God said in Isaiah 42, verse 8? Now listen to this: God says, “I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” God does not want His people living for, praising, or even recognizing false gods. You just stop and think about that.

When we talk about our good fortune, Fortunatus was a Greek goddess or Roman goddess. It is not good fortune; it is the providence of God. It is not good luck; it is the providence of God. It is something that God has done. When we talk about our good luck or our good fortune, we are giving praise to a false god. Instead of thanking the one true and living God for it, we give praise to a false god. What God is saying is, “Look, I require you to be exclusively mine.”

The same exact thing is said in the New Testament. I want to show you this because I want to make it exceedingly plain. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, we read, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” Why? Here are the questions: “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” The answer is none. “What communion hath light with darkness?” The answer is none. “What concord hath Christ with Belial?” Or what agreement hath Christ with the devil or with a false god? None. “Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” None. “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” None. “For ye are the temple of the living God.”

“As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

The same exact thing that He said of Israel in the Old Testament, He says of the church and His people in the New Testament. I am simply pointing out that God wants us to be totally separate from false gods and to be totally and completely His. As my wife is to be exclusively my property, and if I am to be exclusively her property, so we, the people of God, are to be exclusively His.

He testifies to the exclusivity of the covenant: “I am your God and you are to be my people.”

The Extensiveness of the Covenant

Now look at Psalm 81, verse 10. He testifies not only to the exclusiveness, but also to the extensiveness of His covenant: “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” God's redemption does not simply relate to that which is past, but to that which is present and future as well.

In verse 10, He gives three arguments as to why His people are bound to Him. First, He says, “I am the LORD thy God.” In other words, consider His name, His character, and His position. “I am

Yahweh. I am Jehovah. I am the one true and the living God. I am the being of beings in whom all live and move and have their being. I am the covenant God." Since He is the one true and living God, that is reason enough why we should love Him, serve Him, worship Him, and be bound to Him. Beside Him there is none other.

Listen to Isaiah 43:11: "I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour." Isaiah 44:6 says, "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." Then Isaiah 45, verses 5 and 6, says, "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me." God alone is God, that we may know Him from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun. There is no God but God. That is reason enough to serve and worship Him.

When you understand that He is the one true and living God, He is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Preserver, the Lord, the Saviour, the Provider—He is everything.

First of all, you know who I am. I have revealed myself to you. That is reason enough to serve me. But second, look what he says in verse 10: "I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." His claim of delivering his people from Egypt was a claim of his people's allegiance. God usually pleads this. What he is saying is, "You are morally bound to worship me and to be mine because I am the one who delivered you."

Now, you say, "Brother Weaver, I was never delivered out of Egypt. Ha!" That happened thousands of years ago. Oh? The truth of the matter is this: You may not have been delivered from physical Egypt, but you certainly were delivered from spiritual Egypt if you are a child of God. And, by the way, your deliverance from spiritual Egypt is far greater than the deliverance from physical Egypt.

You remember what happened in the Exodus? What did they have to kill? A lamb. And they put the blood over the doorposts. In 1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19, he says: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

In the Old Testament, they used the blood of the Lamb. In the New Testament, it was the blood of the Lamb of God. If physically delivering Israel out of Egypt morally bound them to serve God, how much more does spiritually delivering us through His only begotten Son morally bind us to worship and serve Him? Our redemption through Christ is far greater than the redemption that was through the blood of the physical Lamb. Paul's argument for our serving God is based upon this.

All of us can quote Romans 12:1–2, where Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Go back to verse 1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." What mercies is he talking about? All those mercies displayed through the previous eleven chapters. In Romans 3 through 8, he discusses our justification. In chapters 9 and 10, he discusses our election, predestination, calling, and regeneration; chapter 11 deals with that as well. Then, in chapter 12, he says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." Based upon those mercies, he says, "You present your bodies a living sacrifice."

It is God's mercy that He has redeemed, saved, called, and chosen us. Therefore, we have an obligation to God to present our bodies as living sacrifices. We are, in a greater sense of the word, morally bound to God. He is not merely our Creator; He is our Redeemer, our Savior, our Lord, and our Provider.

Thirdly, in Psalm 81:10, there is a third claim: "I'm the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." God's redemption is not confined to the past; it includes the present and the future. God controls all providence. There is nothing that happens by chance in a world ruled by God. When He says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I'll fill it," He is saying that He can supply our every need, give us more and abundantly over what we need or could possibly want. He is the all-sufficient God.

He will be nigh to us as long as we are nigh to Him. As long as we obey Him, He will be our kind and gracious benefactor. Remember

Moses' argument in Deuteronomy 4:7: "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" God does more than deliver us spiritually. He does not merely save us and drop us.

What He is saying is, "I'm willing to bless you. I want to bless you. Open your mouth wide and I'll fill it." Our insufficiency and lack are not any trouble on God's part. He is able. The trouble is on our part: we are disobedient. God says, "I want to give you the fulfillment of my covenant blessings. Open your mouth wide. I'll stuff it full."

There was an old Persian custom that, when the king was pleased with one of his servants or ambassadors, he would call him into his presence and tell him to open his mouth. He would then stuff his mouth full of either sweet meats or sometimes jewels, as much as he could hold. That is what God is saying: "Open your mouth wide. I'll give you not just a stomach full, but more than you can chew on." He is willing.

So He testifies to the extensiveness of His covenant. It goes far beyond spiritual salvation. It includes that, but includes so much more as well. Notice, thirdly, in Psalm 81, that He testifies to their enmity toward His covenant. Enmity is a strong word for hatred. In verse 11, He testifies against His people: "But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me."

The Enmity to His Covenant

That is an astounding situation: a people who owed so much to God and yet thought so little of Him. They thought so little of Him that they did not even want to hear Him. They wanted nothing to do with Him. Some parents get a little smattering of this. We raise our children, bless them, and give them things, and then they turn and rebel against us; they will not listen to us, hate us, and despise us. That is only a tiny smattering of what it must be like to grieve the heart of God when we, His people, refuse to listen to Him. Over and over in the Bible, God says, "Hear my words. Hear, O my people." When the prophets preached, they usually began, "Hear ye the word of the LORD." Look in your Bibles, hold Psalm 81, and turn to Jeremiah chapter 11 and verse 10.

Jeremiah 11:10 shows how God testified against His people in one instance: “They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers.”

I find this interesting. He says they are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, “which refused to hear my words,” and then, “they went after other gods to serve them.” Do you realize that when you refuse to hear the Word of God, you always go into idolatry? Always! Let me make it plainer. When you refuse to hear God, you not only go into idolatry; that is idolatry. You have already set yourself up above God and determined that you are God and do not need to hear Him. So anytime you refuse to hear God, it is not that you are just going into idolatry—it is idolatry. And God says.

My people who should have loved me hated me. You talk about ungratefulness, unthankfulness, and insensitivity. They would not even listen to Him. So God testifies to their enmity to His covenant. Then, fourthly, in verse 12, He testifies to their exclusion from His covenant: “So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.”

The Exclusion from His Covenant

You may not recognize this instantaneously, but this is an awful and horrendous judgment: “So I gave them up to their own heart’s lust, and they walked after their own counsel.” Have you ever noticed, especially as you read through the Book of Judges, that many times when Israel sinned, He gave them into the hands of the Amorites, the Philistines, the Hittites, or some other nation?

That was bad, but it was not as bad as this. Not even being delivered over to Satan is as bad as this. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, when Paul was addressing discipline in the New Testament church, he told that church to deliver such a one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Then he added that the spirit might be saved. When God delivers you over to chastisement, even to nations, or when God delivers you over to Satan, there is, in one sense of the word, hope, because there may be salvation in that. But when God

delivers you over to your own heart's lust to walk in your own counsel, that is damnation.

There is no deliverance from that. There is no salvation from that. It is the righteous judgment of God to deliver people over to their own heart's lust who do not want to hear God. Romans chapter 1, verse 21, says: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." What did they do? They did not want to listen to God. They refused God, turned from Him, and turned into gross idolatry.

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

Three times God gave them up. Why? They did not like to retain God in their knowledge. They wanted their lusts.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, beginning in verse 10, we see the same truth: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." They would not receive God's truth. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

They did not want to hear God or do what was right; they wanted their lusts. God says, "Have at it. I'll let you have them."

The Hebrew word for gave back in Psalm 81 is shalach, variously translated as to send away, send out, put away, cast away, let loose, or divorce. Notice what the Bible said: "So he gave them up." What did He do? He divorced them: "I don't want you. You can go." When God gives up a people, He withdraws His restraining grace from them.

He takes the bridle off them and allows them to do as they will. But we must remember something: when God allows people to do as they will, that does not negate the fact that God can still do as He wills. Therefore, in Hosea 4:17, He says, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” He does not want Me to interfere in his life. Do not worry, says God. I will not interfere.

He can follow all his counsels and all his heart’s lust, according to his heart’s desire. But the end is damnation, not salvation. God said that His people would not listen to Him; they would have none of Him. All they wanted was their sins and rebellions, so He gave them up. He let them have what they wanted.

Listen carefully. God’s grace is His own; He is debtor to no man. God never gave His grace to any who deserved it, and He never took it from anyone except those who forfeited it. So He says, You do not want it? Fine. Do what you will. No greater judgment can fall upon man than to be left alone by God. “Let them alone.”

Our Lord said in Matthew, “The blind lead the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall in the ditch. Let them alone.” When God lets somebody alone, it is merely damnation. No greater judgment.

The Enjoyments of His Covenant

Now look at Psalm 81:13–16. God says, “Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.”

In verses 13 through 16, God testifies to the enjoyments of His covenant. He shows Israel what might have been. If they had obeyed Him, they would have enjoyed the fruits of His covenant. It is astonishing that God begins verse 13 with the conditional particle, "O": "O that my people had hearkened unto me."

The Hebrew word is the word `lu`, which means, "Are you listening?" "Would God," or "O that it might be," or "if haply," or "peradventure." Here is what God is saying: "O I would to God that my people had listened to me." That is what He is saying. The mood in the Hebrew is the optative mood. It may not mean anything to you, but when you see something in the optative mood, it means this: it is a wish contrary to reality, or a wish contrary to fact. The fact is that they would not listen to God. They would not have anything to do with God.

They wanted no part of Him. And now He says, "Oh, I wish that my people had hearkened unto me and Israel had walked in my way." There is no easy way to say this, but God's people sometimes are dumber than rocks. They are dumber than animals. You may ask, how can you say that? Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

I got news for you. I call my cows, and they come. They see that golf cart and come running. Let General Farr see that big white bucket, and I guarantee he will come on the run. He knows where he is fed. But God said, "My people do not know. They don't consider." We do not even consider what might have been. To me, when you get to verse 13, it is an amazing fact of God's condescending love. Then He expresses great pain at His people's disobedience: "Oh, I would to God that my people had hearkened to me and Israel had walked in my ways." Basically, that is what He is saying.

Now hold Psalm 81 and turn to Matthew 23. You will find the Lord Jesus Christ using exactly the same expression. Look at Matthew 23, beginning in verse 37, as our Lord laments over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee." What is He saying? You will not hear the word of the Lord. You will not listen.

"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" They would not listen to Him; they would have none of Him. Therefore, in verse 38, He says, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." When God gave Jerusalem over, what happened in 70 A.D.? Millions were killed.

Can you not hear the condescension and the love of God in this verse when He says, "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me and Israel had walked in my ways"? God is saying, "I'd much rather they had enjoyed the fruits of my covenant. I'd much rather they had been obedient." But now they are judged.

Consider what Israel missed, and at the same time consider what we are missing by our disobedience. In verse 14, God said, "I should soon have subdued their enemies and turned my hand against their adversaries." All the enemies of His people, He said, He would have subdued. He would have turned His hand against their adversary. They would not have had to lift a sword, pull back an arrow, or shoot an AK-47. He would have subdued their enemies and given them victory. Our greatest defense is obedience to God.

He goes further in verse 15. If Israel had obeyed, He says, "the haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever." If they had listened and obeyed, He would have subdued their enemies and turned His hand against their adversaries, to the extent that the haters of the Lord would have submitted themselves.

Their submission may not have been real and genuine. On the other hand, it may have been so real and genuine that the enemies of the Lord could never have lifted a hand against Israel. That is what He is saying in the latter part of verse 15: "but their time"—that is, Israel's time—"should have endured for ever." Everyone would have sought to make peace with them because of the blessings of the Lord upon them. His blessings would have been so thorough that there would have been no rebellion in the land.

Do you remember the passage in the book of Joshua? The book of Genesis? When Jacob went out and when Joshua went out and the power of God was upon them, the fear of the LORD fell upon the

people of the lands. They feared Israel, they feared the people of God; they were not about to touch them. Their time should have endured forever; that is, they would have been firmly established, and their prosperity would not have ceased.

Nothing confirms a church or a state as much as obedience to God and holy walking before the Lord. Proverbs 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Then look at verse 16. We are talking about missed enjoyments. He said, "He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." Under the emblems of the finest wheat and the purest honey, he is saying that you would have had more than spiritual blessings.

You would have had physical, financial—any kind of blessing that you could imagine. It would be yours, to the extent that you would say, "It's enough. Don't give me any more. I can't handle any more of it." Let me give you a quote by Spurgeon. Commenting on verse 16, he says, "Luxuries as well as necessities would be forthcoming."

"The very rocks of the land would yield abundant and sweet supplies. The bees would store the clefts of the rocks with luscious honey, and so turn the most sterile part of the land to good account." If the most sterile part of the land is abundant and thriving, what must be the fertile part of the land? The bees would store the clefts of the rock with luscious honey, and so turn the most sterile part of the land to good account.

The Lord can do great things for an obedient people. When His people walk in the light of His countenance and maintain unsullied holiness, the joy and consolation He yields them are beyond conception. To them, the joys of heaven have begun upon earth. They can sing in the ways of the Lord; the spring of eternal summer has commenced within them. They are already blessed and look for brighter things.

By contrast, how sad for a child of God to sell himself into captivity and sin, bringing his soul into famine by following another God. O Lord, forever bind us to thyself alone and keep us faithful unto the end. What did God say? If you had obeyed me, I would have given you the finest of wheat and the purest of the honey.

Applications for Today

Consider this passage under three points: what we had, what we lost, and what we might have had. Think of America and what we had in the beginning of this country: generally speaking, a believing people who worshiped the one true and living God. Think of what we lost in the last 150 years and what we could have had today had our forefathers continued in obedience. We are in such desperate straits because many people do not know what we had, what we lost, how to recover it, what might have been, or what we could have by the grace of God.

The second application is this: true religion, by which I mean true Christianity, begins, continues, and ends with obedience. It is impossible to belong to the Lord and be continually disobedient. I did not say you would never be disobedient; all of us are sinners. But if you have constant and continual disobedience in your life, something is wrong with you. What did our Lord say in Luke 6:46? “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” Lord means boss, owner, master, sovereign. Jesus Christ is saying, if I am really your boss, you will obey me; if I am not your boss, you will not obey me. Disobedience demonstrates that we are not His, while obedience demonstrates that we are genuinely His.

The third application is this: if we want victory over our enemies—and I want to see old Babylon fall, I want to see her go down—it must be on God's terms. God's terms are repentance and obedience. The use of arms will be useless without repentance and obedience. True victory will come no other way. God said, "If my people had just listened to me, if they had just obeyed me, I should soon have subdued their enemies and turned my hand against their adversaries. And the haters of the LORD would have submitted themselves. And we would have had peace and victory and prosperity, the finest wheat of the purest honey."

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ for your grace and mercy to us. Lord, teach us the correlation between obedience and blessing. If we want greater blessings, we must have greater obedience. If we want greater blessings, we must hear thy word and bring our lives into conformity unto it. Give us grace, Lord, to serve

thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear, and give us obedience. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

God's Answer to America's Problems

March 16, 2007

Introduction: The Nature of Problems

Open your Bibles tonight, if you would please, to Isaiah 55. The message tonight, I hope, will tie together everything that I have tried to teach you this week. I usually dread the last night, only because there is so much I want to teach and share, and I am down to just one final message. Sometimes that is exceedingly difficult, in the sense that there is just so much left to teach. The message is entitled, "God's Answer to America's Problems." Look at Isaiah 55, beginning with verse 8.

God says, "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 bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, 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 whereunto I send it."

You and I could literally sit here tonight and discuss problem after problem. Problems abound on every hand. I do not care if we talk about economic problems, governmental problems, immigration problems, marital problems, discipline problems, or educational problems. Those are just a few. There are problems in every area of life.

In reality, in our land today, there are so many problems—pressing problems—that must be dealt with, and answers must be given to those problems in order to alleviate them. The interesting thing is this: if one does not even consider the fraud, the corruption, the crime, and rebellion in this country, we still have enough problems simply to lay us low. When you look at the problems that we face as a whole, as a country, you have to admit that, as a whole, we have failed. We have failed as men trying to work out our problems politically, governmentally, economically, and in every other area as well.

We have those problems, and we're in a mess, and we don't know which way to turn. So it's time to face one simple fact: political parties are not going to save us. I certainly believe, like Brother Ted said, that we ought always to stand, promote good men, stand with them and behind them, support them, help them, and fulfill our responsibility. But no one party is going to save us. We also have to admit that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot pull ourselves up by the bootstraps. No, we have our problems.

But have you ever stopped to think about this? A problem is not a problem if you know what to do. The only time you have problems is when you don't know what to do. I'm not a mechanic, nor am I mechanically inclined at all. Something could go wrong with my automobile, and I might drift over beside the road. All I know to do is raise my hood, see if there are any loose wires, and jiggle here and jiggle there. I might be sitting beside the road for four or five hours waiting for someone to come help me. When a mechanic is driving my car, the same thing could happen. He could open the hood, adjust whatever needs to be adjusted, get back in, and drive off. It

was not a problem for him. Why? Simply because he knew exactly what to do.

The Contest Between Theonomy and Autonomy

You see, God's answers to our sins, dilemmas, and problems are far different from man's answers. We have in this sermon tonight an age-old contest between theonomy and autonomy. By theonomy, I mean God's law, the totality of God's Word. When you talk about autonomy, you're talking about man's law, man's will, and man's way. Like Adam, our problem is that we have desired our will, our way, and our word above God's. We're like Isaiah, when Isaiah declared that all of us have turned, every one of us, after the imagination of his own wicked heart. We've turned, every one of us, to his own way. You remember the theme of the book of Judges. You'll find it in Judges 17, verse 6, and also in Judges 25, where there was no king in Israel in those days, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

There is something that we need to understand, and that is simply this: man's way does not work, will not work, and cannot work because man's disobedience is always under the negative sanctions of God. Deuteronomy 11:26-28 says: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. Now look, a blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day and a curse if you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day to go after other gods which you have not known."

So God says, "I've just set before you a blessing and a curse." It is really very simple, says God. If you obey me, then you're going to have blessings. If you disobey me, then you're going to have curses. Over and over in the Bible, I don't care which book you turn to or which testament you're in, you're going to find this principle: God's blessings always follow obedience, and God's curses always follow disobedience.

The fact is, that is true not only individually, but familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. It is true in our families, in our churches, and in our nation.

Deuteronomy 28 deals with the blessings and the curses. I find it interesting that the first 13 verses basically deal with obedience, and then the rest of the entire chapter deals with disobedience. God promises his blessings if we obey and his curses if we disobey. There is an interesting word in Deuteronomy 28:2: "And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God." Note the word "overtake." God says, if you diligently obey my voice, as verse 1 says, "if thou shalt diligently hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations."

So he is talking about a national blessing here: “And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God.” He then lists a number of those blessings through verses 13 and 14. The Hebrew word for “overtake” is nassag, and it literally means to overtake—to take hold upon, to catch up with.

Here you are, or here is your family, this church, or even this nation. You are obeying God and bringing your life into conformity with His Word, while running down the road trying to outrun the blessings of God. God said that His blessings will outrun you, overtake you, knock you down, fall all over you, and there is not one thing you can do about it.

But verse 15 contains an interesting word: “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and what? Overtake thee.” It is the same Hebrew word. Here you are as an individual, as a family, or as a church.

Here we are as a nation, disobeying God left-handed and right-handed and running down the road as fast as we can, trying to escape the curses of God. God says, “My curses will overtake you, run you down, and fall all over you.” There is not one thing you can do about it. It really does not matter whether you obey or disobey, in one sense of the word, because you cannot escape the sanctions of God. You cannot outrun the positive sanctions, nor can you outrun

the negative sanctions. Everyone is under the sanctions of God, either positively or negatively.

The Puritans used to have an old saying: "I have wonderful news for sinners if I can only find one." You may say, "Wait a minute, Brother Weaver. All you have to do is look around, get on the street, or go to any city. You will find sinners everywhere."

It is easy to find sinners in one sense of the word, but it is not easy to find a sinner who is willing and ready to acknowledge that he is a sinner, that he is in rebellion against God, and that he is ready to listen to the gospel and repent of his sins. That is what they were talking about. Likewise, finding answers to problems is not difficult.

Do you realize there is an answer to every problem? I usually say, "I do not have problems with problems. I can work out any problem. I have problems with people"—getting people to do what is necessary to work the problem out. I have had husbands and wives come to me and say, "Pastor, we are having marital problems. Can you help us?" My answer is, "That depends. Do both of you want to do what is right? If both of you want to do what is right, I can help you. But if one of you wants to do what is right and the other wants to do what is wrong, there is no way in the world I can help both of you. I can only help the one who wants to do what is right."

The problem is really not the problem. Every problem has an answer and a solution. The difficulty is this: Are we going to choose God's answer and God's solution, or are we going to choose man's answer and man's solution? Man's answer will only make the problem more complex and compounded. Only God's answers will resolve the problem.

I have been preaching for forty-two years, and in that time I have witnessed the demise of many marriages, the loss of families, the loss of material possessions, and even the loss of lives simply because some would not listen and would not apply the Word of God. It does you no good to know the Word of God if you are not going to apply it. It does you no good to hear the Word of God unless you are going to obey it.

Man's answer is not the answer. You may have God's answer or man's answer, but the truth is that man's answer is not really an

answer. We had a whole generation that listened to Dr. Spock instead of the Word of God. Before Dr. Spock died, he admitted that he was wrong. But it was too late. We raised a whole generation of undisciplined and disobedient people who are now mature and grown, and they are still like that.

Unhappily, one of our problems is that we always want to listen to men first. Now, let me explain what I mean by that. When most of us get into financial problems, what do we do? We call our banker. When we start having physical problems, we call our doctor. When things go wrong in the city or in the county, we call our councilman. When things go wrong in our lives, we call a psychiatrist or psychologist.

The point I'm trying to make is this: When things go wrong, most people automatically think of man and man's answers. They never think of God and God's answers. Carnal answers will never resolve spiritual problems. I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Let me ask you. Suppose you are a member of this church, or of your church, and you notice that not everybody in your church is staying sick. They are not only staying sick; some are actually dying, and they are dying at a very rapid rate. You say, "We had better call the CDC and get them in here to find out what is wrong," or, "We had better get a doctor in here. We had better get the health department here."

Folks are getting sick and falling out, and folks are dying everywhere. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of God." Why were there so many in that church who were weak and sickly, and why were some dead?

It was not because they lacked a CDC, a center for disease control. It was not because they lacked doctors or a health department. It was because they had spiritual problems. They were partaking of the Lord's Supper wrongly. They had divisions, misuse of gifts, and all kinds of other problems, and it ended up with many of them sick and dying. You could have had forty doctors in the Corinthian church, and none could have saved these people. Why? Because the problem was not physical. The problem was spiritual. Their personal,

physical, and church problems were spiritually related, and until that relationship was rectified and remedied, no amount of medical attention would have worked.

Now I want to show you five problems in the Bible—five problems that are very prevalent in our land today—and show you God's answer to those problems. It is going to surprise you, I am sure. Look in your Bibles, if you would, for the first problem in the book of Exodus, chapter 2.

Five Biblical Problems and God's Answer

Problem One: Israel Enslaved in Egypt

Here is the first problem. Problem number one: Israel is in Egypt, enslaved, overworked, misused, hated, despised, and persecuted. Beginning with verse 23: "And it came to pass in the process of time that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect upon them."

When Pharaoh died, a new Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph, and he enslaved all these people. Now they are grinding and groaning because of their bondage and oppression, and God hears their cry. God says, "I'm going to do something about that." What do you suppose God is going to do? Is God going to send an angelic host, smite all of Egypt, and destroy them?

Could God have sent a massive earthquake and literally rent that land in two? Yes, but He did not. Could God have sent a foreign army to annihilate every Egyptian? Yes, but that is not what He did.

Remember, the people were groaning and crying. Let us find out what God did. In Exodus 3:1, we read, "Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the backside of the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."

Then, in verse 7, “And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them out of the land of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land into a good land and a large, into a land flowing with milk and honey, unto the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”

“Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me. And I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Do you know what God just did? God sent them a preacher. He did. Moses was a prophet. In Deuteronomy 18:17, Moses says, “And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee.” That would be a prophet like Moses was a prophet.

"And will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." God said, "I'm going to raise up a prophet like Moses." Deuteronomy 34:10 says, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Hosea 12:13 says, "By a prophet the Lord God brought Israel out of Egypt." Moses is called a prophet, or a preacher of righteousness.

God did not use the military, a vast bureaucracy, or a committee. Had He done so, they would still have been trying to figure out the best route to take. God did not send supernatural powers instantaneously—earthquakes and so forth. What did God do? God sent a preacher.

Why did God send the preacher? The answer will be given a little later, though you probably already know it.

Now consider problem number two. Israel is in the Promised Land, but instead of obeying God and His law, they have become extremely disobedient. They have turned from God and worshiped Baal. God has delivered them into the hands of their enemies, and

they are greatly oppressed. Judges 6:1 says, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. And because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made them dens, which are in the mountains and caves and strongholds."

Problem Two: Midianite Oppression

It is pretty bad when you must flee from your home and farm and hide in a mountain cave or dig a hole somewhere to keep the Midianites from killing you, raping your family, and taking everything you have. Verse 3 says, "And so it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them, and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou comest to Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither for sheep, ox, nor ass." Nothing was left when they got through.

“For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came up as grasshoppers for multitude. For both they and their camels came without number, and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites and the children of Israel cried to the Lord.”

You talk about a similar situation in our land today. All of our substance is eaten up; it is taken from us. You end up working six to seven months out of the year just to pay taxes. You look at the people who are afraid to stay in their own homes, and at the people who have to do everything imaginable just to protect themselves from our own government.

This oppression was so horrible and awful that verse 6 says Israel was greatly impoverished. Verse 7 says, “When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.” They were ready for help and deliverance. Note what God did. After they cried to the Lord, the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, who said unto them:

“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt and brought you forth out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, out of the hand of all that

oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land. And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God. Fear not the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell, but you have not obeyed my voice."

Isn't that amazing? God didn't send the militia, the military, or another foreign army. He did not raise someone up to lead a revolution. No, what did He do? He sent a preacher.

Why did God send the preacher? You probably know the answer, but I'm going to answer it a little bit later. Here's the third problem: the corruption of the ministry. Look in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 2. This is very appropriate today when we talk about the corruption of the ministry. We see how applicable the Word of God is to our modern-day problems.

Problem Three: Corruption of the Ministry

Dishonest, immoral, corrupt, and wicked ministers abound today, exactly as they did in Old Testament and New Testament times. Now look in 1 Samuel chapter 2, and let's begin reading there with verse 12.

The sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas—were sons of Belial: "They knew not the Lord." They were priests, but they were not even converted. You mean, Brother Weaver, there are a lot of preachers in this country who are not saved? Oh, yes. I can assure you.

"And the priest's custom was with the people that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came while the flesh was in seething with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand, and he struck it into the pan or the kettle or the cauldron or pot, and all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself." That was the custom. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites that came thither. And before they burned the fat, the priest's servant came.

It was a little different then: "And the priest's servant came and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest. He'll not have it sodden of thee, but raw." In other words, he did not want boiled meat; he wanted something to put on the grill.

"And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, then take as much as thy soul desireth. Then he would

answer, Nay, but thou shalt give it me now. If not, I'll take it by force. Wherefore, the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

You know what I hear people say everywhere I go? "I just hate going to church. I just can't stomach what I've been hearing and all that's going on and all the corruption." You would be amazed at how many phone calls I get every week from people in every state saying, "Pastor, do you know any decent church in my area that will preach and teach the Word of God?"

Now, Eli was very old and heard all that his sons did in all Israel and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said to them, "Why did you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings with all these people. Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress."

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 2:25, 27-30 (KJV)

"If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him. But if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding, they hearkened not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." So here these priests then were not only thieves and then not only caused people to despise the ministry of God, here they are immoral, committing fornication, adultery, even at the very door of the tabernacle.

"There came a man of God unto Eli and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifices, and at mine offering, which I have commanded to my habitation, and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people. Wherefore, the Lord God of Israel said, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me forever. But now the Lord said, be it far from me for them that

> honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Now the sins of Hophni and Phinehas were great, and their corruption back then has a striking parallel to what is going on in our country today. Preachers are falling like flies. If they are not running off with some woman, they are running off with some man, or they are stealing. They are corrupt.

When you denounce, deny, and denigrate God's standard, when you will not listen to God's law or God's Word, it is only so that you might elevate your own standard. You are either going to follow God's law or your law; God's Word or your word. Here was a corruption of the ministry, and what did God do? God raised up another preacher.

He sent that little preacher. In 1 Samuel 3:1, we read, “And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the Word of the Lord was precious in those days. There was no open vision.” Verse 20 says, “And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord.”

Why, in the face of the corruption of the ministry, did God raise up and send another preacher? I will tell you the answer in just a minute, but you probably already know it.

Problem Four: The Highest Leader's Sin

Here is problem number four: The highest governmental leader has sinned. Not only has the highest governmental leader sinned, he is also guilty of treason, adultery, and murder. That is really applicable today, is it not? He has tried to hide his rebellion and his sin. But his top military commander knows all about it, and thus he is in danger of being blackmailed. You know the story.

In chapter 11, verse 1, we read: “And it came to pass after the year was expired at a time when kings go forth to battle that David sent Joab and his servants with him in all Israel, and they destroyed the children of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in the evening time that David arose

from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself, and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman, and said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers and took her." She came in unto him, and he lay with her, for she was purified from her uncleanness, and she returned to her own house. The woman conceived and told David, "I am with child."

You know the story. David sent for Uriah, her husband, and tried to pretend that he simply wanted to learn how the battle was going. He thought Uriah would go home, but Uriah slept at the doorstep of the king. When David questioned him about refusing to go home to his wife, Uriah said, "God forbid it." As long as the ark of his God, Joab, and Israel were in battle, he would not go home and enjoy himself while the ark of God was there. Uriah had more character than David at this point.

David tried to make him drunk, but even then Uriah would not go home. Finally, David sent a note to Joab: "Put Uriah in the foremost front of the battle and retire from him that he may be smitten." David had not only committed adultery and murder; he had also committed treason. What he did was treasonous not only toward God, but toward the nation and the people he was supposed to protect and lead.

What did God do? In chapter 12, verse 1, we read, "And the Lord sent Nathan unto David." When the highest civil ruler had committed treason, murder, and adultery, God sent a preacher. Why did He send the preacher? I will answer in a minute, but you probably already know the answer. Let us look at problem number five: wicked, vile persons have taken over the civil government.

Problem Five: Wicked Civil Government

That is applicable, isn't it? Here is the problem. Wicked, vile persons have taken over the civil government. They are oppressing the people, killing, stealing, and ruling tyrannically. God's preachers are being killed, imprisoned, and driven out of the country, while false prophets are being elevated and feeding at the governmental trough.

Moreover, neighboring kingdoms have followed suit, so much so that there is absolutely no peace in the region. You would think this was a great problem, requiring great concentration, deliberation, specific planning, and careful strategy. Let us look in 1 Kings 19. You already know who the two wicked people are who have taken over the government.

In verse 1, “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and with all how he had slain all the prophets with the sword,” that is, the prophets of Baal. “Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah saying, So let the gods do so to me and more also if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”

Notice that Elijah is the prophet. Elijah has killed the 450 prophets of Baal. When Ahab tells Jezebel what has happened—and you know who is running things when he goes home and tells Jezebel—she says, “The Lord do so to me tomorrow. If you're not like one of those prophets, Elijah, oh boy, I got news for you. By this time tomorrow, you're going to be dead.” She had killed many others.

Elijah believed her and took off. You know the story: God came to him as he rested under the juniper tree and said, “Elijah, what are you doing here?” Then God fed him, watered him, and sent him to the mountain.

At the mountain, Elijah tells God, when God asks what he is doing there, “I've been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars and slain thy prophets with the sword.”

Elijah said, “And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” God, I am the only one left. How many of us have ever thought that? We are the only ones standing for righteousness and truth. We are all by ourselves.

Let me tell you something that might encourage you. I travel all over this country, and I find people just like you everywhere who know the truth, believe the truth, and are standing for the truth. We think this is just our community, but I have news: it is not just us anymore. We have people who believe God's Word and are standing for truth all through this country. They may be in small numbers,

but they are everywhere. I meet them everywhere I go. Elijah said, “I’m the only one.”

Skip down to verse 11. God said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire a still small voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, went out, and stood in the entering into the cave. A voice came unto him and said, “What doest thou here, Elijah?”

Then he said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” The Lord said unto him, “Now look, go, return on the way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” Whoever escaped the sword of Hazael, Jehu would slay; whoever escaped the sword of Jehu, Elisha would slay.

What did God do when Elijah ran? Elijah said, “Lord, I’m the only one left.” God said, “Oh no, Elijah. I have seven thousand which have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Then He told Elijah to anoint two kings: Hazael king over Syria and Jehu king over Israel, and to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place.

Out of these five problems, note that in each instance God's answer was to send a preacher. Why? Do you remember our text, Isaiah 55:8–9? “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 higher than your thoughts.” God's answers are not necessarily man's answers. Therefore, God sends a preacher to declare His Word and give His answer to the problem. In doing so, the preacher demands repentance and obedience.

Why God Sends Preachers

Consider the first problem. Israel was down in Egypt, enslaved, and God demanded that Pharaoh allow them to go free. But the Egyptians and Pharaoh refused. Pharaoh said in chapter 5, verse 2, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." What did God do? He destroyed Pharaoh, destroyed the Egyptians, and delivered His people. God did not use an army; He only sent a preacher. God is quite capable of taking care of business by Himself. It is true that oftentimes in the Bible God uses means and uses us, but He does not have to use us. Someone says, "Well, God and one man is the majority." That is not true. God is a majority in and of Himself; He does not even need one man. Yet He sent the preacher, and God brought His people out of Egypt by a preacher.

Now consider problem number two. Israel was in the land, had forsaken God, and was serving Baal. God had delivered them into the hand of the Midianites. Judges chapter 6, verse 7, says, "And it came to pass when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, who said unto them, Now look what the prophet said. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up out of Egypt, and I brought you up out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out before you, and gave you their land."

"I am the Lord your God. Fear not the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell, but you have not obeyed my voice." It was not that they lacked the Word of God. They had it; they simply did not obey it. What good is it if you do not obey it? It does you no good at all. Do you realize that our rebellion and wickedness bring most of our problems upon us? I do not care whether it is an individual, family, church, or nation: we bring our problems upon ourselves because of disobedience.

There are some problems that God's people ought never to have. I ought never to have venereal disease, because I am going to obey God and be faithful to my wife and to Him. I ought never to have cirrhosis of the liver, because I do not plan to be a drunkard. I ought never to have many of the problems the world has, including the

fussing, fighting, and feuding in the home. Why? Because I am a Christian. We bring most of our problems upon ourselves—even our financial problems—because we refuse to be faithful in giving to the Lord, refuse to save, and refuse to follow biblical economics.

We refuse to stay out of debt, and it is our disobedience; it brings it—we bring it—upon ourselves. Why did God send the preacher? God sent the preacher to say, “Look, you have the Word. You just did not obey it.”

Now you are in it up to your eyeballs. You know what we want? Unhappily, we want to live disobedient lives, and when we start sleeping somehow, we want to look up and say, “God, You have got to deliver me. I am one of Yours.” It does not work like that. We may be one of His, but we still reap what we sow.

Here is problem number three: God’s preacher, God’s prophet, was raised up to confront a corrupt ministry. God raised up little Samuel. These boys were just as wicked and ungodly as they could be. You could say, “It did not do Samuel any good to confront them.” You know what God said to Samuel? God told Samuel, “Look, I am going to do something that will make the ears of everyone tingle. I am going to really do something. I am going to wipe out Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas.”

When Eli found out that God had spoken to Samuel, Eli said, “You tell me everything that God told you. Do not hold anything back.” Samuel did not hold anything back; he told him everything. When Samuel confronted Eli and those boys, it did not seem to do any good—but God killed those boys. Yes, He did. I want you to look in your Bibles, Isaiah 55; that is our text. Go back to Isaiah 55. Let me show you something. Before I close tonight, I am going to really emphasize this. Look in Isaiah 55 and notice, if you would please, verse 11. Isaiah 55, verse 11. Look what God says about His Word.

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing where I sent it." Underscore that, not just in your Bibles, but in your minds. God says, "My Word shall not return unto me void." God said it shall always accomplish that whereunto He pleases, and it will always prosper in the thing where

He sent it. Remember this: God does not always send His Word for reconciliation. Sometimes He sends that Word for condemnation. And it did work, because God killed those boys exactly the way Samuel said. Samuel preached, and God sent a preacher.

In problem four, the highest civil leader in the land had committed treason, adultery, and murder. David should have been executed for any or all of those crimes. Treason merits the death penalty. Adultery merits the death penalty. Murder merits the death penalty. Why didn't David die? Look in 2 Samuel chapter 12, verse 13: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." The only reason David did not die was that God gave him a special pardon.

Just because God pardoned him and did not execute him certainly did not mean that he got away scot-free. David had to reap what he sowed. He suffered immeasurably because of his sins. He lost that child. Absalom tried to run his own father off the throne; Amnon raped his own half-sister Tamar; and Absalom murdered Amnon. He reaped everything he sowed. David did not get off scot-free.

What did God do? God sent him a preacher to bring him to his knees in repentance before God. Problem five was when wicked people were in control of the government, namely Ahab and Jezebel. God told Elijah, "You go and anoint Jehu over Israel and Hazael over Syria and Elisha prophet in your room." Now, why did God tell him that?

In 2 Kings 10:32, we read, “In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short, and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel.” What was God doing? He was sending Hazael to judge Israel. If we look back at verse 31, it says, “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all of his heart, for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.” Yet God used Jehu to cut off the whole house of Ahab. So God says, “Look, you anoint two men to be king. Why?” Because they were going to execute some men and have God’s sanction upon them for the judgment that they brought. Hazael judged the northern kingdom, and Jehu judged the house of Ahab.

When you get to 2 Kings chapter 6, although Elisha never really used the sword in and of himself, he was the one who certainly oversaw it. The king of Syria sent the Delphin to capture Elisha, and Elisha asked God to smite them with blindness. Then he led them to Samaria, and the king of Samaria said, “Shall I smite them, my father, shall I smite them?” Elisha said, “No. Feed them and send them home.” Every aspect of life and death is covered by the Word of God.

We are talking about problems that we are facing in America. May I remind you that the problems that we are facing are not our main problem? You know what most of us do? We deal with symptoms. We do not deal with the problem. Here is someone who has an apple tree in the backyard, and they despise and hate apples. Every year they go out and snatch all those apples off that tree, and every time they snatch one off, they say, “I hate it, I hate it, I despise you,” and throw it down and stomp it into the ground. If you really hate and despise apples, the wise thing to do is cut the tree down. Kill the root, and then you are not going to have any apples. You see, we look around and see the economic problems, the governmental problems, the educational problems, the marital problems, and the discipline problems. Let me tell you, folks, those are not the problems.

Those are the symptoms. The problem is that we will not heed, hear, and obey the Word of God.

I had a dear lady in our church whose husband was very likeable, but he was a drunk. He did not stay drunk all the time, but about once a month he had to pitch him a good royal drunk. He was one of those fellows who worked and made good money. His wife was a member of our church, and his children came to church regularly. One day his wife came to me, very upset and weeping. She said, "Pastor, he's such a good man. If he would just stop his drinking."

I looked at her and said, "Sister, don't say that. It's not his drinking. The drinking is not the problem; the drinking is the symptom. His problem is that he has a wicked, rebellious heart. That's the problem. If he quit drinking and his heart were never regenerated, he'd start running around. He'd do something else."

The problem is, folks, that we want to deal with the symptoms instead of dealing with the problem, and the problem is that we simply will not hear God.

Let me ask you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 36. Let me show you. Begin reading at verse 14: "Moreover, all the chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen and polluted the house of the Lord, which he had hallowed in Jerusalem."

Now look what God did: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending. Why? Because he had compassion on his people, on his dwelling place. But they," that is, the people, "mocked the messengers of God." Note that, please. “Messengers” is plural, right? "But they mocked the messengers of God and despised His words." “His” is singular, so the words were God's words. Here is what the people were doing: "But they mocked the messengers of God and despised God's Word and misused His prophets. Why and how? Until the wrath of God arose against His people till there was no remedy."

Therefore, He—God—"brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with a sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion upon young men or maiden or old man or him that stooped for age. He gave them all into His hands."

The Bible says in verse 15, “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers.” You can tell when God has compassion upon a people, a church, a community, a state, or a nation because God will always send His preachers. Because He had compassion upon them, He sent these preachers. I have wonderful news for repentant, honest, obedient people: when God has compassion upon people, He sends them preachers.

Turn it around. How do you know when the curse of God is upon a people, a church, a family, a state, or a nation? God removes His preachers. Remember the passage in 1 Kings where God sent Elijah out of the land, and for three and a half years there was a drought. Elijah said, “As the Lord God liveth before whom I stand, there shall

not be rain or dew these years, but according to my word." God sent Elijah to a widow's house in Zarephath, in Sidon, outside of the land.

The lack of rain was a physical illustration of a spiritual reality. God's preacher was out, and there was no word from God for three and a half years. Sometimes God does not remove His preachers as He did Elijah. Sometimes He simply shuts their mouths, as in Jeremiah. Jeremiah was told three times, "Pray not for this people, for I will not hear thee," saith the Lord. Finally, Jeremiah wanted to pray so much that, in Jeremiah 14, God said, "All right, Jeremiah, I'm going to let you pray, but here's what you're going to pray. You're going to pray that I'm going to destroy them, for that's exactly what I'm going to do."

So when God curses a people, He removes His preachers or shuts their mouths. Jeremiah 3:14-15 says, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married to you, and I will take you one of a city and two of a family, and I'll bring you to Zion. And I will give you pastors, according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." How can we tell if we have the blessings of God? God will send men who feed us with knowledge and understanding. Why does God send His preachers?

I want to answer that. Why does God send His pastors? The answer is that the Word of God will either convert you or condemn you. The Word of God will either convert you or condemn you. I want you to underline one word there in your mind. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, the Apostle Paul writes, "Now thanks be unto God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ." Do we triumph only sometimes, occasionally? Oh no. We always triumph in Christ. Paul continues, "and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place." Then he says, "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish."

The Savor of Life and Death

"To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" Now let me explain to you what the Apostle Paul is saying. The Apostle Paul is using an Old Testament illustration of an offering going up before the Lord, with the sweet smell of that offering. In

verse 15 he says, “For we,” that is, we the preachers, “are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we're the savor of death and to the other we're the savor of life unto life.” So let me try to illustrate what he's saying.

Suppose that in this room are 150 unconverted people. I stand and preach Christ, repentance, and faith, and the power of God falls. Men are regenerated and converted by the grace of God. What does God do as I preach? He says, “That’s a sweet smell. My Son is preached.”

But now same 150 are in this room, and I preach Christ as hard as I can preach Him. I preach repentance and faith, and all 150 shake their fists in my face and say, “We’ll kill you if you don’t shut up!” God says, “My Son is preached, and I’m satisfied.” The savor of life unto life and the savor of death unto death.

Dear friend, it is important whether or not you obey the Word of God. Your response to God’s preaching tells us which camp you are in: those of life unto life or those of death unto death. As Scripture says in Luke 9:35, “This is my beloved Son. Hear ye him.”

Conclusion: Hear and Obey

God sent a preacher in every one of those situations that you might hear His Word and His answers. God does have the answer for your life, your family, your church, your state, and your nation. We need to learn to hear, heed, and obey.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, speak to our hearts. Teach us, Lord, the absolute necessity of hearing and obeying Your Word and bringing our lives into conformity to Jesus Christ. We are thankful that Your Word has the answer to every problem, and we give Thee the praise in Christ’s name. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Why God Allowed the Slaughter of the Priest

August 16, 2007

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 21:1-10 (KJV)

Introduction: The Slaughter at Nob

Then came David to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Where art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee, and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.

Now therefore what is under thine hand? Give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David and said, There is no common bread under my hand, but there is hallowed bread, if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest and said unto him, Of a truth, women have been kept

from us about these three days since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common.

Yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread, for there was no bread there but the showbread that was taken from before the Lord, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord, and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul. And David said unto Ahimelech, And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? For I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste. And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.

If thou wilt take that, take it, for there is no other save that here. And David said, There is none like that; give it me. And David arose and fled that day for fear of Saul and went to Achish, the king of Gath.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 22:6-18 (KJV)

When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me? And there is none that showeth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse. And there is none of you that is sorry for me or showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me to lie in wait, as at this day. Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub.

> And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine. Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, and the priests that were in Nob. And they came, all of them, to the king. And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here am I, my lord. And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread and a sword, and hast inquired of God for him, that he should rise up against me to lie in wait, as at this day? Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honorable in thine house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Be it far from me. Let not the king impute anything unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father, for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more. And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou and all thy father's house. And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn and slay the priests of the Lord, because their hand also was with David, and because they knew when he fled, and they did not show it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord. And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou and fall upon the priests.

Doeg the Edomite turned, fell upon the priests, and slew that day fourscore and five persons who did wear a linen ephod. Nob, the city of the priests, he smote with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, oxen, asses, and sheep. One of the sons of Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. Abiathar showed David that Saul had slain the Lord's priests. David said unto Abiathar, “I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house.” Then David said, “Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.”

This week God brought a message to my mind. I had been praying specifically about what to bring, then encountered material that upset and bothered me. I thought, “Lord, how in the world can I handle this?” This passage came to mind, refreshing this truth to me

as it had to my own mind: You can't outrun God. You'll understand what I mean.

Modern Parallel: Wickedness and Hypocrisy

Someone sent me a link entitled “Anthrax and Vested Interests.” I checked it and want to read a little from it. In big, bold letters it said, “100% chance of bio-attack in the United States,” says The Networks. The possibility of terrorists using anthrax as a biological weapon in the United States has not gone unnoticed by the talking heads of the network and cable news outlets. We have been told over and over that there is a 100% chance of such an attack. One hundred percent! Wow!

What do the teleprompter readers know that we don't know? Why do they fail to mention how terrorists came into possession of anthrax? Searching the internet for answers, I came across this quote from retired Air Force Major Glenn MacDonald: Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William J. Crowe Jr. was part of a crew that sold Saddam Hussein the deadly means to wage war with anthrax germs. That was when the United States wanted to butcher Baghdad to use anthrax on Iran. Thus, William J. Crowe Jr. said it was the United States that originally sold Saddam Hussein the anthrax. Admiral Crowe was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1985 until retiring from the Navy in 1989. This was the era when the United States government backed Saddam Hussein, just before President George Herbert Walker Bush waged war on Iraq because Hussein was no longer considered an asset to the United States.

It is disturbing that our own government provided such a means of mass destruction to Saddam Hussein—and who knows how many others. Equally disturbing is that Admiral Crowe is now positioned to reap profits from selling anthrax vaccine to the United States Department of Defense, or, one shudders to think, perhaps to prevent its manufacture. Crowe sits on the board of directors and owns a 13% share of Lansing, Michigan-based Bioport Corporation, the only company in the United States licensed to make anthrax vaccine. His share ensures a tidy profit from any government sale.

However, what disturbs me most is that Bioport has not produced a single drop of vaccine since purchasing Michigan Biological Products Institute from the state of Michigan in 1998. Meanwhile, the Department of Defense advanced Bioport $18 million in 1999 and $24 million in 2000. Contracted to supply the military with 14 million doses, Bioport delivered less than 4%, although the government agreed to raise the price from $3.50 to over $10 a dose. FDA inspections in 1999 and 2000 found contamination and suspicious changes to expiration dates; consequently, the agency barred the company from releasing any vaccine. MacDonald asks why the Pentagon fronted millions of taxpayers' dollars to this troubled manufacturer despite its continued failures.

Does that have something to do with who some of the owners and investors are? Admiral Crowe is also an advisor to Global Options, LLC, an international crisis management firm based in Washington, whose website contains the slogan, “The Corporate Equalizer.” Former CIA director R. James Woolsey, along with several others, is also on Global Options’ advisory board.

Here is the last quote: Under the disguise of invoking national emergency provisions, George W. Bush ordered National Guard sentries to guard the Bioport facility in Lansing, Michigan. Under the pretext of national security, Bush ordered that Bioport employees and officials be forbidden to discuss with reporters, commentators, and researchers the nature of Bioport Corporation’s ownership.

When you stop and think about such wickedness, double-dealing, and hypocrisy, you ask, “Lord, how in the world can people get away with what they get away with?” The point I want to make is simply this: They can’t. It sometimes appears in time and history that the wicked never get caught and never get punished, but that is not so. God always, always takes care of the wicked.

The Certainty of Divine Judgment

I don’t know what’s behind everything that’s going on, or who is behind it. But I do know this: They shall not escape. As Deuteronomy 32 says, their foot shall slide in due time.

In 1 Samuel chapter 19, David escapes from King Saul. The evil spirit from the Lord is upon Saul; the Spirit of the Lord has departed from Saul and gone to David, and Saul is seeking to kill David. David never sought to kill Saul. Jonathan, Saul's son, intervenes for David, reminding Saul how David jeopardized his own life to defeat Goliath of Gath in the Valley of Elah. Saul relents, acknowledges that David has done nothing wrong, and says he will let him live. But soon, while David is playing his harp before Saul, the evil spirit from the Lord comes upon Saul.

Background: David's Flight from Saul

The next thing you know, Saul throws a javelin at David, trying to smite him to the wall. On the one hand, he says David shall not die; on the other, he tries to kill him.

In chapter 19, David escapes and goes home. He tells his wife Michal, "If I do not get away, I will be a dead man by morning." Michal lets him down from the window, puts a bolster in the bed, and places goat's hair in it. King Saul sends soldiers to kill David. Michal tells them, "David is sick and cannot get out of bed; there is no way he can come to Saul."

When the soldiers return, Saul asks whether they killed David. They answer that he is sick in bed. Saul says, "You dummies, bring him to me that I may kill him." They return and find David gone, with the goat's hair and the bolster in the bed. Saul asks Michal, "Why have you done this to me?" She answers, "He threatened to kill me; I had to go along." He had not threatened her; she was covering for her husband, understandably.

In chapter 20, Saul still seeks to kill David. David and Jonathan, Saul's son, have entered into a covenant to the Lord. David tells Jonathan, "As I live, there is not but a step between me and death." Jonathan says, "Don't say that." David answers, "Your father is going to kill me." Jonathan insists his father will do nothing unless he tells him. David replies, "Jonathan, don't be naive. He will not tell you, lest you be grieved, but he intends to kill me." Jonathan says, "All right, I'll do whatever you want to do."

David said, “Here’s the plan. This is the new moon, and I must go and eat at Saul’s table. But I’m going to stay out three days. If Saul asks you where I am, tell him that I asked permission to go visit my family, because my family has a yearly sacrifice in Bethlehem, and that’s where I am.”

“If your father says, ‘That’s fine,’ I know I’m safe. But if your father becomes enraged, you know that he’s determined to kill me.” Jonathan agreed. David told him that when he found out, he would come to the stone Ezel, where David was hiding, take his bow, and shoot some arrows with a young boy. If he said to the boy, “The arrows are on this side,” Jonathan would know that everything was safe. But if he said, “The arrows are further, go on, go on further,” Jonathan would know that evil was determined and David could get away.

Sure enough, after about the second day, Saul looked at Jonathan and asked, “Where’s David? Why?” Jonathan said that David had asked permission to go to his family’s yearly sacrifice in Bethlehem, and that he had let him go. Saul became so enraged that he cursed his son: “Thou son of a rebellious, perverse woman, do I not know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion?” He picked up a javelin and tried to kill Jonathan. Jonathan escaped, knowing that his father intended to kill David.

Jonathan shot the arrows and told the boy, “They’re beyond you, they’re beyond you.” The boy found the arrows, took the arrows and the bow, and was sent back. Jonathan and David said their goodbyes. At this point, you pick it up in 1 Samuel chapter 21, where David escapes and comes to Nob, the city of the priests, to Ahimelech.

David's Lies to Ahimelech

Why did David go to Ahimelech? The Bible tells us that he and the young men with him ate the hallowed bread. This was the showbread, the bread set daily before the Lord, fresh. When David asked for it, the priest said, “If thou hast kept thyself at least from women.” David answered, “Of a truth, women have been kept from us about these three days.” So the priest let him eat the bread.

But notice what David begins doing. In verse one, Ahimelech is afraid when he sees David and asks, “Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?” David evidently approached him himself; the other young men hung back. David said unto Ahimelech the priest, “The king hath commanded me a business, and said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.”

David said that the reason he was alone was, first, that the king had told him to get about this particular business and not to tell anybody. He could not tell Ahimelech about his mission. That was his first lie to Ahimelech.

Notice the second lie, in verse 8: “And David said unto Ahimelech, And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king’s business required haste.” The king had sent him on a special mission, and he had not even had time to get his weapons; he had left so quickly. That was the second bald-faced lie David told the priest.

What happened as a result was that Doeg the Edomite killed eighty-five of the Lord’s priests. Look, if you would please, at chapter 22, beginning with verse 9. In fact, let us go back and read beginning with verse 6: “When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites!”

Doeg's Report and the Massacre

“Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?” Saul was saying, If David takes over and becomes king, do you think he will treat you any better than I am treating you? Saul was a Benjamite himself; David was not a Benjamite. Is he going to treat you any better? Look in verse 8: “That all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that showeth unto me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse.” And watch this: “There is

none of you that feel sorry for me, and that showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me to lie in wait, as at this day." Jonathan had not stirred up David to lie in wait for him.

Verse 9 says, "Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, and he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." I want you to know that Doeg now lied. It is true that the priest gave David the hallowed bread, and it is true that the priest gave him the sword of Goliath. But the priest did not inquire of the Lord for David. Doeg was adding this particular scenario to what actually happened.

Then, of course, the king sent for Ahimelech and all the priests. He accused them of conspiracy and treason. In verse 13 Saul said unto him, "Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me to lie in wait, as at this day?" Why was this called a conspiracy? The priest answered, "Look, David is your son-in-law. Everyone knows how faithful he is. Everyone knows how honorable he is in thine house." Then, in verse 15, he said, "Did I begin to inquire of God for him? God forbid! Far be it from me. Let not the king impute anything unto his servant, or to all of the house of my father. For thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more." Ahimelech was saying, I do not know what you are talking about.

It is true that David came to me. It is true that I gave him the sword and food. I did not inquire of the Lord for him. I mean, he is your son-in-law. What was I to do? What was I to think? Then Saul says in verse 16, "Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house." Saul orders his soldiers to kill the Lord's priests, but they refuse—and rightly so.

Then Saul looks to Doeg, an Edomite, not an Israelite, and says, "Fall thou upon the priests of the Lord." Doeg slew eighty-five of the priests of the Lord. Then he went to Nob, the city of the priests, and killed the women, the children, the oxen, the asses, the sheep, and everything that was there. He slaughtered them all.

God's Sovereignty in Detaining Doeg

Now consider 1 Samuel 21:7. David escapes to Ahimelech at Nob, and the first thing David does is lie to him. Why did he lie to Ahimelech? He thought he was saving him. He probably thought, “I do not want to get him involved. If he really does not know anything, nothing is going to happen.” But the text says that a certain man of Saul’s servants was there that day, detained before the Lord: “And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul.” Why did God detain Doeg and keep him there so that he could see and hear everything that happened? Is not God absolutely sovereign? The answer is yes. God could have removed Doeg before David ever arrived, or He could have shut his eyes and ears so that he would neither see nor hear anything David said.

But God did not do that. God detained Doeg so that Doeg could see what Ahimelech did for David and hear what Ahimelech and David said. It is almost as if God wanted those priests slain. Isn't that amazing? Could it possibly be that God wanted 85 of His own priests slain and their city destroyed? In order to answer those questions, we must determine who Ahimelech is.

In 1 Samuel 21:1, David comes to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: “Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest.” That is all he is called there, Ahimelech the priest. But in chapter 22, verse 9, Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, says, “I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob to Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub.” Now he is called the son of Ahitub. In verse 12, Saul says, “Hear now, thou son of Ahitub,” and Ahimelech answers, “Here I am, my lord.” So he is called the son of Ahitub.

Tracing Ahimelech's Lineage to Eli

Verse 20 says, “And one of the sons of Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David.” Once again, he is called the son of Ahitub. Out of all the priests who were slain, and out of all the women and children who were slain, only Abiathar escaped. So all the priests, all the women, and all the children were killed except Abiathar.

Now we must find out who Ahitub was. We know Ahimelech was the son of Ahitub, but who in the world was Ahitub? Why in the world would God want him killed? Look in 1 Samuel chapter 14, verse 3: “And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod’s brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD’s priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod.” Some of you will have marginal references. When you look there, you will find another name for Ahiah. What is it? Ahimelech. Ahiah and Ahimelech are one and the same person. Thus Ahimelech was the son of Ahitub, and Ahitub and Ichabod were brothers.

What does that mean? In 1 Samuel 4, the Philistines have invaded Israel and captured the Ark of the Covenant. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, are both killed in battle. The Bible says, “And his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child near to be delivered, and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law, that is, Eli, and her husband, Phinehas, were dead, she bowed herself in travail, for her pains came upon her.”

“About the time of her death, the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not, for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.” Ichabod was the last child born, the youngest son of Phinehas. If Ahimelech is the son of Ahitub, then Ahitub and Ichabod were brothers, and their father was Phinehas.

Why is this fact significant? In 1 Samuel 4:4, we read, “So the people sent to Shiloh that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.”

Now trace the line: Ahimelech the priest was the son of Ahitub; Ahitub was the brother of Ichabod; Phinehas was their father, and Phinehas was the son of Eli. Thus the line runs from Ahimelech to Ahitub, to Phinehas, to Eli. What is significant about that? In 1 Samuel 2, God pronounces doom, judgment, and death upon Eli and his descendants for their wickedness and rebellion against Him: “And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus

saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?"

God's Judgment on Eli's House

And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, and to offer upon my altar to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by the fire of the children of Israel?

God said, "Eli, I chose your fathers. Since you were in their loins, that means I chose you as well. I also gave you your offerings. I told you what belonged to the priest and what belonged to me." Then He says, "Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?"

God tells Eli what he is doing: "You are not taking what I have given you; you are taking what you want. You and your sons are stealing from me. You are guilty, Eli, not necessarily because you are doing the taking yourself, but because you are allowing your wicked, rebellious sons to steal from me." He continues, "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me forever."

But now the Lord saith, "Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." God gives Eli a principle: "If you honor me, I will honor you. If you despise me, I will despise you." He says, "Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house forever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from my altar,"

God declared to Eli: "shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do

according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed forever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

God told Eli that He would cut him off and cut off his family. Eli would no longer be His priest. Moreover, God would kill his children in the flower of their age. Any man who lived to be old in Eli's house would be a beggar—worthless, powerless, and useless.

Now notice how this was confirmed. Look in 1 Samuel 3, beginning in verse 11. God tells Samuel, who would take Eli's place: "And the Lord said unto Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house." Note the next words. These are fearful words: "And when I begin, I'll also make an end."

The Progressive Fulfillment of Judgment

God says, "Don't get Me started." But when He gets started, He finishes the job: "When I begin, I will also make an end." For He had told Eli that He would judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. They were committing fornication with women at the door of the tabernacle and stealing the sacrifices of God, and Eli did not stop them.

"Therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." Now I want you to see what God has done. God said, "Eli, I'm going to judge you and your house because you and your sons have made yourselves vile. You have honored yourselves before you honored Me." And God says, "When I begin, I will make an end."

The first installment of God's judgment came in 1 Samuel 4:11, when Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed the same day. The Bible says, "...and the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain." God had said this would be a

sign: both sons would be lost in one day. So Hophni and Phinehas died—the first installment of God's judgment.

The second installment came in Ahimelech's lifetime, in 1 Samuel 22, when eighty-five priests, all descendants of Eli, were killed. Notice this: God's paydays are not always on Friday. God slew Hophni and Phinehas relatively soon after telling Eli that they would die, but then the judgment passed from Phinehas to Ahitub to Ahimelech.

What was that—another fifty, eighty years? And God's judgment fell again. "Oh," you say, "Brother Weaver, you have told me that God said He was going to wipe out Eli's house, but I listened to you read this Scripture a while ago, and I know that Abiathar escaped. In fact, I can show you the verse." It is found in 1 Samuel 22:20: "And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David." God did not get them all? Abiathar escaped. It is true that Abiathar escaped temporarily. Abiathar was with David and was faithful while he was with him. But after David's death, he turned against Solomon because he was with Solomon's opponent for the throne.

In 1 Kings 2:26, Solomon said unto Abiathar the priest, "Get thee to Anathoth into thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death." He continued, "But I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted." So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord, "that he might fulfil the word of the Lord which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh." Did God get them all? He got them all. What did God say? "When I begin, I will also make an end."

Now I want to spend the rest of my time making applications. Remember this one truth: God's judgments are sure and certain. His paydays are not always on Friday. Just because God does not instantly and immediately slap a wicked person down does not mean that person has escaped. There are wicked people who have done great harm to the people of God, and yet they seemingly are still in power. Nothing appears to have happened to them yet. I want you to look in your Bibles.

Applications: God's Sure Judgments

Turn first to Deuteronomy 28, and hold Zechariah chapter 1; we will come back there. Zechariah is a minor prophet, right before the book of Malachi, next to the last book in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 28, you have the blessings and the curses. It is one of the most important passages in the Bible.

It may interest you to know that the presidents of the United States used to take their oath of office with their hand upon the open Bible to Deuteronomy 28, because they realized we are a covenanted nation. They realized that as long as we obey God, God would bless us. They also realized that when we disobey God, God would curse us.

Beginning with verse 1, let me show you something concerning the blessings: “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth.” If you obey Me, said God, I will set you on high. “And all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.” Then He gives you all these blessings.

Notice the word overtake. God says, “If you obey me all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you.” Here you are obeying God, bringing your life into conformity to His Word and honoring Him. God starts blessing you and blessing you and blessing you, and you say, “Look, I’ve got so many blessings, I don’t need any more.” Here you are running down the road as hard and as fast as you can, trying to outrun the blessings of God. God says, “I’ve got news for you. My blessings will run you down, chase you down, knock you down and fall all over you, and you can’t stop them.”

That sounds good to me. But unhappily, that is not the whole story. If you skip down to verse 15, God says: “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God”—that is, if you will not obey—“to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee.”

So here you are, disobeying God, living in rebellion, being wicked, doing your own thing, and running down the road as fast and as furiously as you can, trying to outrun and escape the judgment and the curse of God. God says, "I have news for you. You cannot run fast enough. My curses and my judgments will chase you down, run you down, knock you down, and fall all over you. You cannot stop them."

Zechariah 1 gives this testimony. The fathers had to come up with this true confession: "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." He then says, "Be not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Turn ye now from your evil ways and from your evil doings." But they did not hear or hearken unto the Lord. They did not hear nor hearken.

They were living their lives, doing their thing without regard to God and His law. Then God says, "Your fathers, where are they? Your prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold, or did they not overtake your fathers?" They returned and said, "Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us." What did they confess? God's Word is true. His curses overtook us. His judgments caught up with us. We could not escape.

It is no different today than it was in Zechariah's time or in Moses' time. The Word of God is absolutely, totally sure.

A lot of Christians are suffering now as well—yes, a lot of disobedient Christians. First Peter 4:17 says, "For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it first begin at us," what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

If, in the judgment of God, we His people are chastised, what in the world is going to happen to those who are not His people? God only chastises His own. He does not condemn and destroy them; He just whips them like we do a disobedient child. But God says, "Will you see what I do to the wicked?" If He will whip His own for their disobedience and rebellion, what in the world will He do with the

wicked? God's judgments are absolutely sure and absolutely certain. God will deal with the wicked.

It may not be today. It may be tomorrow. God may knock some down tomorrow, and it may be ten years later before He gets the rest of them. But God will get them. Rest in the Lord. Trust in the Lord. Make sure you understand that God will judge the wicked.

Applications: Human Plans and Responsibility

Here is the second application. Go back in your Bibles to First Samuel, chapter 21. David flees to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech says, “David, why are you alone? Why?” He said, “The king is commanding me a business. I had to leave quickly, and it is a secret mission. I am not supposed to tell anybody.” Then David said, “Is there a weapon here?” Ahimelech asked, “Where are yours?” David said, “I had to leave in such haste, I did not have time to get them.”

Here is the application: Things do not always turn out the way we want them to or the way we plan them. Probably, I have no doubt in my mind, David, being a man of virtue, did not want to involve Ahimelech in his problems. He probably thought he was saving Ahimelech's life and the lives of those with Ahimelech by being untruthful. But Ahimelech confessed and told the truth. He told Saul, “Your servant knew nothing less nor more. All I know is David came to me. I did not inquire of God for him. I did give him bread. I did give him the sword. But he is your son-in-law. Who is as faithful and as honorable as David?”

David evidently tried to protect Ahimelech and keep him out of it, but it just did not turn out that way. No matter how hard we try, we cannot even protect ourselves from evil and death, much less anyone else. We try to keep other people out of problems, and many times we cannot. We can plan, prepare, scheme, and do whatever we want to, but ultimately we must understand that God is sovereign. Things do not always turn out the way we want them to.

That is not only true concerning Christians; it is also true concerning the wicked. He shall fall in the pit which he has digged; it is going to return upon his own head. All the wicked plans and

schemes will ultimately come to nothing. There is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor understanding against the Lord.

We must learn to assume personal responsibility for our actions. Abiathar escaped, and the Bible says that he showed David that Saul had slain the Lord's priests. David said unto Abiathar, “I knew it. I knew it that day when Doeg the Edomite was there that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house.” David said, “I take full responsibility. I knew what was going to happen when I saw Doeg there. I knew he'd tell Saul.” But he said to Abiathar, “Fear not. He that seeketh thy life, seeketh my life. Be with me, and thou shalt be in safeguard.” David protected him, but he was assuming full responsibility for his actions.

There is one other thing we must learn: even when God uses the wicked as an instrument of His wrath, they have their certain and sure judgments as well. God detained Doeg. Doeg saw, heard, told Saul, and murdered the priests of the Lord and all those women and children. Psalm 52 is a psalm that David wrote against Doeg: “Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?” Doeg was the chiefest of the herdsmen of Saul. “Why boastest thou thyself in thy mischief, O mighty man? Lord, you've killed the Lord's priests, you've killed women and children. The goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischief like a sharp razor working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee forever. He shall take thee away and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living.”

The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him. Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. David says, But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. I will praise thee forever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.

What does God say about Doeg? God said, Lord, you will destroy him, you will pluck him out of his dwelling place, you will root him out of the land of the living. The Bible says in Psalm 37, the wicked

shall be destroyed, thine eyes shall see it when the Lord cuts the wicked off from the land of the living. You cannot outrun God, either in blessings or curses. That is true individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. That is why the Scripture says, blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. But the nations that forget God shall be turned into hell.

Father, we ask Thee today to help us, to teach us, to strengthen us, to build us up in the most holy faith, to make us totally dependent upon Thee, trusting in Thee, leaning upon Thee, understanding that we are responsible to obey, but Thou art the one that must work things out. We give Thee the praise and the honor and the glory in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

2 Sanctification & Sexual Purity

October 22, 2007

Review of Verse 1: The Exhortation

First Thessalonians chapter four. Now, for those of you who were not here last week, I will take a few moments and review, since I did not have a tape to copy to bring you. Roy faithfully gave me my tape to duplicate for you, and I have lost it. I can't find it anywhere. I'd normally blame it on Alice, but I'm the one that put it in the car. So I don't know where it is, but I got another copy today, which I gave to her. So I do not have a tape next week.

It will be her fault. OK, this week is my fault. All right. First Thessalonians chapter four, beginning with verse one. "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his

vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit." Now, last week I began a study on 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 1-8.

And I told you it's going to take several weeks to get through this passage, at least a couple of weeks to get to what I would call the main thrust of this passage, and I believe the main thrust is verses three and verse four, where he says, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour." So last week, by way of review, we looked only at verse one. We looked, first of all, at an exhortation. The Apostle Paul says, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more." Now, one of the very plain, evident statements in Scripture, it is the will of God that we be sexually pure. That is part and parcel of our sanctification. And in verse 1, Paul is giving his exhortation.

The exhortation that the Apostle Paul gives us is in or by the authority of Jesus Christ. He says, “we exhort you by the Lord Jesus.” That is, it is in His name and by His authority.

There are three things in this first verse. First, there is a practical necessity: “that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk.” The practical necessity is that we must be taught the Word of God. I went through the Bible and showed you clearly how He gave some pastor-teachers the gifts and ability to teach. Here is the very practical necessity: we must be taught the Word of God.

Secondly, there is the personal application: “that ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God.” It does no good to have someone teach you if you do not make a personal application, apply that truth to your life, and put it into practice.

Thirdly, there is a progressive reality: “so that ye would abound more and more.” Our life is not to be a life of neutrality or regression; it is to be a life of progression, where we are going from holiness to holiness, sanctification to sanctification, faith to faith, and glory to glory, as the Word of God says.

Introduction to Verse 2: The Explanation

The very first thing we have in verse 1 is an exhortation. Today I want to cover only verse 2, and that is an explanation. He says, “For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.” Note first the connection between verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 he says, “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us, how ye ought to walk and to please God.” How did they receive from the Apostle Paul and those with him how they ought to walk and to please God? Look in verse 2: “For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.” The way they taught them was based upon the commandments. It was based upon the Word of God.

So the connection is simply this: You cannot know how to walk and to please God unless you know His commandments, unless you are being taught. A life that is well pleasing to God is a life brought into conformity to His Word, which means very clearly that we must obey His commandments.

Note verse 2: "For ye know what commandments we gave you." Note the phrase "by the Lord Jesus." In other words, you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus, in the name of the Lord Jesus, or by the authority of the Lord Jesus. These commandments were honored and recognized by Christ, blessed by Christ. Therefore, they are to be received by us and applied to our daily lives.

The Meaning of 'Commandments' (Parangelia)

Before we get started, consider the word commandments. There are several Greek words in the Bible that refer to commandments. One of the first and primary words is entolē, and that is not the word used here. The word used here is parangelia. Parangelia is

sometimes translated in our Bibles as charge, command, or sometimes simply an announcement.

In Acts 16:24, referring to the prison guard, the jailer, the Bible says, "Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

What had happened? Paul and Silas had been arrested and brought to the jailer, and they said, "You keep these men fast." In those times, the jailer's life went for the prisoner's life. If the prisoner escaped, the jailer died. When he received the charge, "You put these men in prison to keep them safe," he thrust them into the inner prison. There were two walls, and he made their feet fast in the stocks, so he was not going to lose his life. He had a charge; he had a commandment.

In Acts 5:28, this same word, parangelia, is translated command, but this time it has a prohibition attached to it. The rulers said to the disciples, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?"—that is, in the name of Christ—"And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

They said, “We gave you a charge. We gave you a commandment.” It was negative; it was a prohibition: “We told you, Do not preach any more in this man’s name.” Here was the command received from superiors, but the disciples ignored it because it was a wrong and wicked command.

Now, 1 Timothy 1 shows how this word is used in a positive sense and reveals the broad spectrum of *parangelia*. In verse 3, Paul writes to Timothy: “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.”

Now watch verse 5: “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” Read 1 Timothy 1 very thoroughly and find the word *commandment* used any other time in this context when Paul gives it to Timothy. It is not there, and I will tell you why.

Look back to verse 3. Paul tells Timothy, “I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia,” so that Timothy might “charge some that they teach no other doctrine.” Paul is giving Timothy a direct command from an apostle, based upon apostolic authority: Timothy, charge others—that is, command them—to preach no other doctrine. We do not want heterodoxy; we want orthodoxy, the pure Word of God.

The word *charge* in verse 3 is *parangelia*, often translated “command.” In verse 5, “the end of the commandment” means the end of the commandment mentioned in verse 3, though there it is translated “charge.” The end of preaching nothing else but the Word of God is love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith.

What is he doing? He is using the word commandment here, the word parangelia, to cover the entirety of the Word of God. Let me tell you something that we fail to comprehend: all of God’s Word is law. Why? Because God is the sovereign King, and a king rules by his law. Paul uses this word in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 1 Timothy 1:5 to cover the entirety of the Word of God. He is telling us in 1 Timothy chapter 1 that the Word of God, when it is preached in its entirety, illuminated and applied by the Holy Spirit, and personally received, will produce right living, which will be love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and unpretended, or unhypocritical, faith.

Commandments in Harmony with God's Law

If you look back in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 2, when the Apostle Paul says, “For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus,” let me ask you a question. Do you think that the Apostle Paul and those who were preaching with him were doing nothing more than reciting the Ten Commandments? Well, of course not. What they were doing was making application out of those Ten Commandments, applying case laws, and showing how the Word of God applied in personal situations. They were not just simply going around quoting the Ten Commandments.

One truth is absolutely certain: the commandments they were giving in verse 2 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 were not contradictory

to the law of God. How do I know that? Because the charges, because the commandments they were giving in verse 2, were given in the name of the Lord Jesus. If the commandments in verse 2 were given in the name of the Lord Jesus—that is, by His authority and with His approval—do you think that anything they said would be contrary to the total law of God? The answer is no. Why? Because Christ came to fulfill the law. Isaiah 42:21.

It is very important that you understand this point. In Isaiah 42, verse 21, we are talking about the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. He says, “The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.” Where the first Adam violated the law, broke the law, and sinned against God, the second Adam obeyed the law, magnified the law, and made it honorable.

Look in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 5, verse 17. Here it is very plainly, straight from the lips of our Lord. Christ said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Christ did not come to abrogate the law, set it aside, or nullify it. He came to fulfill it, to put it into full force as continuous.

That is why the Bible says in Galatians, chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Jesus Christ was made under the law. He magnified and honored that law, offering unto God full, total obedience to the law of God. Yet many people try to evade, elude, and even abolish the law of God. And what they try to do is this.

They then make spirituality, sanctification, or holiness absolutely subjective. In other words, being spiritual or sanctified is dependent not upon the law of God, but upon how they feel, their whims, and their desires.

Let me give you an illustration. There has been a massive amount of advertising on Christian news and radio stations. I received a Christian magazine the other day and showed Alice two full pages

advertising jewelry and headbands with WWJD on them. Come on, tell me what that stands for: What Would Jesus Do?

I get so aggravated at that. Everybody sits around asking what Jesus would do in a situation. I do not have to guess what Jesus would do. I know what Jesus would do in every situation: He would obey the law of God. That is what He came to do.

A lot of people wear the jewelry and headbands; they have book satchels, sweatbands, and everything else with these initials on it. Let us imagine a group of modern-day Christians committed to this subjective spirituality, sitting around while thieves, robbers, and money changers are all around them in the church, asking, "What would Jesus do in this situation?"

I will tell you what He did. He made Himself a scourge of small cords, beat the devil out of him, and drove him out. Now, you show me a Christian willing to do that. Why did He do it? Scripture said, "Then they remembered it was written in the law of God, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but ye have made it a den of thieves." And He said, "The zeal of the Lord had eaten him up." What Jesus did, He did in obedience to the law of God.

That is why I think it is absolutely silly, in one sense, to sit around meditating on what Jesus would do. You do not have to meditate; just look in the Book. The Book will tell you what Christ would do, because Christ obeyed the law of God. In John 8:29, Jesus says, "And he that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone. For I do always those things that please him." What pleases God? Obedience.

The interesting thing is this: the word "please" is arestos in the Greek, and it literally means to be agreeable with. How did Jesus Christ please the Father? By agreeing with Him that His law was perfect and demanded a perfect obedience, and that He needed to do exactly what the Father had demanded He do.

With that in mind, look back in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 1: "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to..." What is that next word? "Please God." Remember that in John 8:29 the Greek word was arestos. It meant

to be agreeable to. When you come to 1 Thessalonians 4:1, the Greek word is areskō, which is the verb from which the noun comes in John 8:29. Literally, he says, “that ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to agree with God, or be agreeable to God, so ye would abound more and more.”

So how do you walk agreeably with God? How do you walk to please God? The answer is by obedience—by obedience to the law.

The Law and Justification

Let me emphasize this: the law was never given for our justification. There are many verses in the Bible that condemn the law as a means of justification. The law was never meant to save us.

Look first at Romans 3:20: “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” No one is going to be made acceptable to God in salvation by keeping the law. Why? Because the law demands a perfect obedience, a personal obedience, and a perpetual obedience. The only one who has ever given that to the law has been Jesus Christ. No man, therefore, can be justified by keeping the law.

In verse 28, Paul says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Look also at Romans 6:14: “For sin shall not have dominion over you,” why?

"For ye are not under the law." That is, you're not under it as a standard of justification, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Grace is our standard of justification, not the law.

Paul says it again, this time even more plainly. Galatians 2:16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

I am not talking about legalism. Most people don't even know what legalism is. When you mention keeping God's law, they say, "You're a legalist." No, do you know what legalism is? Legalism is trying to earn your salvation by the law. You're not a legalist if you obey God's law after you're converted, after you're saved by the grace of God. You're not obeying God's law in order to be saved. You're

obeying God's law because you have been saved. That's not legalism. Legalism is when you try to earn your salvation by your works.

Since you're in the book of Galatians, look in chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, and you'll see that's absolutely impossible: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of

God, it is evident: for, “The just shall live by faith.” There is no man that can be good enough to get into the sight and the presence of God by his own works. It is impossible to be justified by the law. So the law was never, ever given for our justification. Just because the law was not given for our justification, just because the law was not good for one thing, does not mean that it is not good for anything. What most people will do is say, “You can't be justified by the law,” and simply throw the law out. No. God does indeed give us in the Bible the proper uses of the law.

First Timothy chapter 1 in verse 8 says, “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.” So there is an unlawful use of the law, and there is a lawful use of the law. God's law must be used lawfully. How do you use God's law lawfully? You use the law of God lawfully by using it for that which God intended it to be used for.

Five Lawful Uses of the Law

In the rest of my time, I want to show you, very generally, five ways the law may be used lawfully. I believe these five ways are what I would call an irreducible minimum. There can be some overlapping in them. I am not saying this is an exhaustive listing of the lawful uses of God's law, but this is certainly a primary listing of the lawful uses of the law.

Why did God give us His law? If He never intended the law to be our standard of justification, why did He give us the law? First of all, the law is used to educate. I could preach all day right there, but I am going to show you just two areas. There are two specific areas in which the law educates us. The very first way the law educates us is to the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.” That is an improper and unlawful use of the law, to try to use the law as justification. But here is a lawful use of it: “for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

You and I cannot know what sin is apart from God's law. How do we know that it is wrong to steal? God says, “Thou shalt not steal.” How do we know that it is wrong to commit adultery? God says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” First John 3:4 says, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” What is sin? It is transgressing God's law. Whoever commits sin breaks God's law.

You cannot sin without violating God's law. Chester can put up a sign saying, “Do not walk on the grass.” I can walk on that grass, but just because I have walked on his grass does not make me a sinner. He might get angry with me, but I am not a sinner; I have not violated God's law. I may have violated man's law, but I have not violated God's law.

You could come to my house, and I could say, “No salt is to be used in this house.” You might say, “Well, Brother Weaver, I've got to have salt on my food,” and begin salting it with salt you brought yourself. I might get angry and say, “Well, take that old salty food and eat it outside.” But you have not sinned against God. My wife knows better than that, because I would ask you for some of your salt.

You cannot sin by breaking men's laws; you sin by breaking God's laws. You cannot know what sin is without God's law. God's law is a means to educate us. Galatians 3:24 says, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. What does the schoolmaster do? He teaches; he educates. How does the law work as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ?

It shows us, first, that we are sinners; second, that we cannot save ourselves; third, that there is a great chasm between an unholy sinner and a holy God; and fourth, that if we ever get to that holy God, we must get to Him through the merits of someone else and not our own. That someone else is Jesus Christ.

The law, then, is a lawful means of education. God gave us the law to educate us: first, to teach us the knowledge of sin, and second, the perfection and satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

The second lawful use of the law is restraint. Let me show you a passage that occurs over and over in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 13:5, God speaks about a false prophet: "And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee."

Whenever God uses capital punishment, He always includes this phrase: "so shalt thou put the evil away from among you." Deuteronomy 17:6-7 says, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you."

Verse 12 says, "And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel." Concerning a false witness, Deuteronomy 19:19 says, "Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you." Deuteronomy 21:21 says, "And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

The law, then, has a restraining influence. First Timothy 1:9-10 says, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound

doctrine." What does he mean when he says, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man"?

The law does not have to restrain someone who is doing right. It only has to restrain someone who is doing wrong. You can argue about it all you want, but it is really simple. The death penalty restrains sin, evil, and wickedness. You say, "I do not think so." Well, the one on whom it is executed will never commit any more wickedness. If you know that, for doing something, you are going to receive the death penalty, I guarantee you will think twice before doing it. The law, then, is given as a restraint. That is a lawful use of the law.

Thirdly, the law is used to convict. Romans chapter 7, beginning with verse 7:

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful."

What am I talking about when I say the law is used to convict? Paul says, "For without the law sin was dead." Then he says, "For I was alive without the law once." But when the commandment came, "sin revived, and I died." What is he talking about?

If you were to go to Philippians chapter 3, you would read all the pedigree of Paul. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and then he makes this statement: "as touching the law, blameless." Was the Apostle Paul perfect before he was converted? No. "As touching the law, blameless"—what was he talking about? He was a Pharisee. As

touching the Pharisaical interpretation of the law, he thought he was blameless. Thus, when he says he was alive without the law, he means without the true understanding of the law and without the true intent of the law.

But when the commandment came—when he saw the law in its true light, reaching inwardly as well as externally—he says, "sin revived, and I died." What happened? The law of God convicted him.

One reason there are not the multitude of conversions today as there used to be is that the law of God is not preached. One of the lawful uses of the law is to convict men of their sin. James says, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." He says again, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." How are you convicted? Because God's law says, "Do not do this."

When our Lord witnessed in the New Testament, He always used the law of God. Whether we are talking about the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10 or the woman at the well in John chapter 8, He always used the law of God. The law of God, then, is given to convict. Fourthly, the law of God is given to condemn. Deuteronomy 27 shows us this truth. The Levites pronounced the curses of the law, and the people answered, "Amen."

"And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice, Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And

all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen."

Then he goes right on down and says in verse 26: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say..." Now wait a minute. Look at verse 26 again: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." And all the people shall say what?

Hold Deuteronomy 27 and look in your Bibles to Galatians 3:10. Let us see whether there is a similarity between Deuteronomy 27:26 and Galatians 3:10: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Did we just read that? Yes, back in Deuteronomy 27. What is he doing? He is confirming the law and saying that one of the lawful uses of the law is that it condemns. That is why, back in Romans 7:13, the Apostle Paul said that by the law sin might become exceeding sinful.

So far, I have given you four uses of the law. The law is used to educate, to restrain, to convict, and to condemn. Here is the fifth one, and the one I want to develop for a little while: the law is to be used to sanctify. Or let me say it another way: the law is the means of sanctification.

The law was not given for our justification, but it was given for our sanctification. I could have used another word, and there would have been no theological eyebrows raised by anyone who ever heard this tape. I could have said the law is given for our direction, and it is. But it is more than our direction. It is for our sanctification. God's law directs us, but it is also the means of sanctification.

The Law as the Means of Sanctification

I am not discounting the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent in sanctification. He is the one who must make the law of God effectual in our lives, enlighten our minds, illuminate our understanding, and lead, guide, and direct us. He is the agent. But I am not talking about the agent in sanctification; I am talking about the means. The agent will always lead, guide, and

direct us in accordance with the means. And the means is the law of God.

In regeneration, the law of God is written on our hearts. If I only had one point to prove this, I think this would be sufficient. Look first at Jeremiah 31. I want to show you this in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. Beginning with verse 31, God says, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant." What does the word Testament mean? It means covenant. So we are talking about the New Covenant, or the New Testament. He continues: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD."

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." Now that is the new covenant. It is not going to be written in stone; it is going to be written in our hearts.

Now look at Ezekiel 36, beginning with verse 26: "A new heart also 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 an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." What is this new covenant going to do? Verse 27 says, "And I will put my spirit within you," and cause you to walk in his statutes, keep his judgments, and do them. The new covenant is going to write the law in our hearts. We are going to have the agent of sanctification living within us, and he is going to cause us to walk in his statutes and keep his commandments. Now look in your Bible at Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:16 records the author's affirmation of the same covenant promise declared by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, concerning the placing of God's law within His people: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."

So what does God do in the New Testament? He writes his law.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul contrasts the old covenant with the new covenant: "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?"

He says to these Christians, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." Right out of Ezekiel. Right out of Jeremiah. "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

"But if the ministration of death," that is, the old covenant, "written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?"

When Moses received the law written in stone, his face shone so greatly that the children of Israel could not look on it. Paul said that was glorious, but it was to be done away with and replaced with something more glorious. "How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth." The ministration of Christ in the New Testament is so glorious that the glory of the Old Testament looks like nothing compared to Christ.

What is the difference? The Old Testament is written in stone, and the New Testament is written in our hearts. This is the distinction between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, we have the law written in our hearts and the Holy Spirit living within us to lead us, guide us, and direct us. By the way, if you were to read Romans 8:11, 16; Galatians chapter 5, verses 16 through

26, it talks about the leading of the Holy Spirit. So many people try to say, “The Holy Spirit led me to do this. The Holy Spirit led me to do that.”

Let me tell you something. The only thing the Holy Spirit will lead you to do is to obey the Word of God. If whatever anybody does is contrary to the Word of God, and they say the Holy Spirit led them, they are a liar. A spirit may have led them, but it was not the Holy Spirit, because He only leads, guides, and directs us in conformity to the Word of God.

Second Corinthians 7:1 is one of the clearest definitions of sanctification in the Bible. I want you to see it. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Now, here is my question. You say, “Brother Weaver, I want to be holy. How am I to be holy?”

The answer is very simple: cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. You say, “Well, how do I know what is filthiness of the flesh, and how do I know what is filthiness of the spirit?” Let us go back to 1 John 3:4: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” Filthiness of the flesh is anything contrary to the law of God. Filthiness of the spirit is anything contrary to the law of God.

When we get quote-unquote bad attitudes, it is not that we merely had a bad day. It is sin if our attitude is contrary to the law of God. Now, let me show you something. Look in your Bibles to the book of Leviticus, chapter 20. We will start with verse 7. Look what God commands.

"Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God." How can I sanctify myself? It is God who must sanctify me. Yet He says, "Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy." How do you sanctify yourself? Look at verse 8: "And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you."

How do you sanctify yourself? By keeping God's statutes and doing them. Then He says, "I am the LORD which sanctify you." Are you sanctifying yourself, or is God sanctifying you? Both. Your responsibility is to obey God, and God enables you to obey Him.

When you bring your life into conformity to the Word of God, it is only through and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

No one wants to obey God apart from the Holy Spirit. Everybody wants to do his own thing. If you want to obey God and bring your life into conformity to His Word, someone greater than you is working in your life. By nature, man wants to be unholy, rebellious, and wicked and to do his own thing. It is only the supernatural work of God that makes us want to do what is right. Thus, when God commands, "You keep My statutes, you keep My judgments, you do them," it is our responsibility to obey Him. But when we obey Him, He is the One sanctifying us and empowering us to obey Him.

Application: Holiness and Obedience

Deuteronomy 6:24 says, "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always." Why does God give us His commandments? Is He mad at us or mean to us? Why does He say, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"? Does He simply not want us to have fun? Why does He say, "Thou shalt not kill"? Does He merely want us to live among our enemies? No. Whatever God commands is for our good always, "that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day," and for His glory.

Verse 25 says, "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us." We are not earning righteousness; it is God who makes us righteous. But how do we know that we are righteous? Because we are obeying God's law.

Deuteronomy 4:1-9 says: “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.” Hey, paste, obey God. “Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even

as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them."

"For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." What is God saying? God says it is His law that is our wisdom, His law that is our understanding, His law that is our righteousness, and His law that is to be communicated to our children and our children's children.

Has God changed? No. Malachi 3:6 says, "I am the LORD, I change not." Has God's law changed? No. Psalm 119:89 says, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." Has God's way of sanctification changed? No.

First Peter 1:13 says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

"As obedient children." What are we to obey? God's law, which is the totality of His Word: "as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." How can I be holy as God is holy? The answer is by obeying His law. Why? Because the law is an expression of His will. It is an expression of His holiness. It is an expression of His righteousness. The only way I can be holy as He is holy is by obeying the totality of His Word.

Romans 7, verse 12, says, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." So how can I be holy as God is holy? It is by obeying His commandments.

Look back in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. I want you to watch carefully because this is very vital and important. He says in verse 1, “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God.” How ought you to walk and please God? “For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.” You know how to walk and please God based upon His commandments, based upon His Word.

The law is the means of our sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the agent. This is difficult for me to say, but I have had preachers take me to task over what I just preached. They said the law has been done away with. Well, you don't need sanctification. You don't need the law for sanctification. Oh, well, just let me ask you a question or two.

I want you to think this thing through. Here is a Christian who says he is sanctified. Is it possible to be holy and sanctified and, at the same time, be an idolater? No, it is an impossibility. Is it possible to be holy and sanctified while profaning the name of God? No. Is it possible to be holy and sanctified while in rebellion against God and your parents? No, it is impossible. Is it possible to be sanctified and holy while actually being a murderer? No. Is it possible to be holy and sanctified while being an adulterer and a fornicator? No. Is it possible to be holy and sanctified while being a thief? No. Is it possible to be holy and sanctified while being a covetous, wicked, desirous individual and bearing false witness against your neighbor? No, that is an impossibility.

So that must mean this: sanctification by the law. It is impossible to be sanctified and holy without the law of God. I want you to remember this, folks: sanctification does not consist in keeping the rules of man. It consists in keeping the law of God. You know what we have done in our churches? We have set aside the law of God, and we have made up our own little standards.

If you’re here Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, come to visitation, tithe, and do these things, you can do them in the average Baptist church, and they do not care whether you are a fornicator, thief, liar, or whatever. You are in good standing because we have substituted man’s rules for God’s rules. We ought to

be faithful and tithe, but we do not do those things in order to be holy, in one sense of the word. We do them because we are holy; they are expressions of our holiness.

But we must bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God. No one will benefit from the teaching and preaching of the Word of God unless they personally apply it. He said in verse 1, “as how ye ought to walk and to please God.” It is your responsibility to walk and to please God.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ for your grace and mercy. Teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. May we bring our lives into conformity to the totality of your Word. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

The Lord as Defender

February 3, 2008

Introduction and Review of Psalm 18:1-28

In Psalm 18, beginning with verse 29, David said, “For by thee I have run through a troop, and by my God have I leaped over a wall. As for God, his way is perfect. The word of the Lord is tried. He is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God, save the Lord, or who is a rock, save our God? It is God that girdeth me with strength and maketh my way perfect.” He maketh my feet like hinds' feet and setteth me upon my high places.

We began this psalm with verse one, where David expressed his determination: “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.” Biblical love has three parts, an irreducible minimum: attitude, affection, and action. If you have a biblical attitude, you will have a biblical affection; and if you have a biblical affection, it will always demonstrate itself in a biblical action. David was responding to God's love, because no one can love God first.

We also considered why David said, “I will love the Lord.” The Lord was his strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, God, trust, buckler,

horn of salvation, and high tower. Each of those names showed from Scripture what was involved in his love for God.

Then, in verses 3 through 6, we looked at David's distress. He was in deep trouble, and oftentimes God will back us up against the wall and put us in distress so that we may learn to call upon Him, cry unto Him, and trust in Him. In verses 7 through 19, we looked at David's deliverer. He described God's mighty attributes, grace, power, and strength, and how God simply delivered him.

Last week, in verses 20 through 28, we saw David's deportment. David was acting biblically and scripturally. If you want to be delivered, you have to act right—biblically, basically speaking. David kept his heart, and David kept his life.

He did not take vengeance into his own hand. He had a perfect opportunity on several occasions to kill his personal enemy Saul, and yet he would not. Although Saul was looking for him, David's life was not in imminent danger at those particular times. And although he was encouraged to take Saul's life, he refused. On the other hand, Abishai said, "Let me smite him to the ground even this once." In other words, David, if you let me kill him, I will do it clean the first time. He will never know what hit him.

No, David said, "Don't do that. His time will come. Or he'll die in battle, or God will take care of him. He's not going to die at my hand." God had already promised David the kingdom. But David was saying, "I'm not going to have the kingdom at the expense of violence at my own hand, especially me taking it." He was patiently waiting upon the Lord to give him the kingdom. David demonstrated that he was a person who could be trusted with authority and power. He was not going to abuse the situation even when God delivered Saul into his hand. David was willing to wait upon God either to take Saul's life or to give him the kingdom on God's terms.

The Connection Between Patience, Obedience, and Victory

And certainly that's what happened. Does God reward trust and faithfulness? The answer is yes. Is there a connection between patience, obedience, and victory? Again, the answer is a resounding

yes. We must understand that, in reality, as David confessed, the battle belongs to the Lord. Victory is not determined by who has the most soldiers, weapons, or the best strategy. Victory depends upon the grace, mercy, and power of God. We must maintain a biblical attitude if we desire God to give us victory over our enemies. While it is an undeniable fact that we have enemies, they should not be enemies of our own making.

Our enemies should be our enemies simply because they are enemies to God, His law, His righteousness, and His people. They ought not to be our enemies because of our own personal misconduct, hatefulness, and ungodliness. So when you and I conform our attitude and our actions to the Word of God, mark it down, we will have enemies. However, at the same time, they are going to be the enemies of God, the enemies of righteousness, and the enemies of truth. We are not denying the fact that we are going to have enemies, but they should not be enemies based upon our own misconduct.

Biblical Basis for Righteous Persecution

Turn in your Bibles, if you would, holding Psalm 18, of course, but turn first of all to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 11. This is one of those verses in the Sermon on the Mount. Notice what our Lord says: "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." Now, wait a minute. Somebody has some enemies because they are reviling, persecuting, talking evil, and saying things falsely against him. Why? Our Lord said, "for my sake."

In other words, you are living a righteous, godly, holy life. You would think that if you live that way, who in the world is going to be your enemy? The truth is, an enemy of God is going to be your enemy, and an enemy of righteousness is going to be your enemy. Look, if you would please, in John 15 and verse 20. It is interesting how the Scripture teaches that we are going to have enemies if we live righteously. In John 15 and verse 20, our Lord said it like this: "Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

Now, Jesus Christ was the sinless Son of God. He was the most perfect and the most holy man who ever lived. And look at all the enemies He had. Look at the ones who tried to murder Him constantly. By the way, they were the religious leaders of the day. They were the ones who put forth themselves as the great ones. But our Lord said, "Look, if they persecuted me, they are going to persecute you."

The servant is not greater than his master. If they receive my words, they will receive yours; if they did not receive mine, do not think they are going to receive yours. Paul sums up this broad, general truth in 2 Timothy 3:12: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” So, if you live godly in Christ Jesus, mark it down: you are going to have enemies.

When I speak about maintaining a biblical attitude, here is what I mean. When we have enemies of our own making, and we are lied about, persecuted, and slandered, we understand that although we have enemies, and they are God's enemies as well, we do not become bitter, hateful, and vindictive. We do not deny the fact that we have enemies, nor do we try to whitewash the facts. We do indeed have enemies, and we do not deny that something must be done on certain occasions. Still, we learn to think biblically and act biblically, maintaining that biblical attitude and biblical action.

God's Vengeance and Our Attitude

Even though we have enemies, that does not mean they are all trying to kill us, or that they are all trying to kill us at one time. Think of slander and rumors. I have been talked about, and you have been talked about. My standard answer when someone asks, “Did you hear what so-and-so said about you?” or “Do you know what is being said about you?” is this: “If they really knew me the way God knows me, they would probably say worse things than that about me.” That does not hurt. We used to say as children, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Well, it does hurt some, but it is not life-threatening.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:19, “For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.” In other words, Peter is saying, we would rather suffer than sin. I would

rather suffer wrongfully than suffer rightfully; I would rather suffer wrongfully because I have done what is right and holy than suffer rightly because I violated the law of God and brought reproach upon His name.

God will indeed exact His vengeance upon our enemies; there are no two ways about that. But even when He does, we must maintain a biblical attitude. Turn to Proverbs 24, beginning with verse 17. This is not only a very important passage; it is one that we really need to learn if we want our Lord truly to take care of our enemies. Proverbs 24:17 says, "Rejoice not when thy enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth."

Now, wait a minute. Why does God say this? Why does He say, "Rejoice not when thy enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth"? Why can we not jump up and down and say, "Thank God, you finally nailed him, Lord. Praise the Lord"? Why did He say not to do that? Look in verse 18: "Lest the Lord see it and it displeased him and he turned away his wrath from him." In other words, God says, "If you really want me to clean his plow, you do not start rejoicing too soon. You just wait and say, 'Lord, you take care of him.' When I have really got him taken care of, then you can say, 'Thank you, Lord.'" Do not jump up and down simply because the Lord is destroying your enemies. Do not rejoice too soon. That is exactly what He is telling us.

The Worth of Acting Biblically: Old Testament Promises

Let me ask you a question in light of Psalm 18:20–28, where we looked at David's deportment. David was being persecuted by Saul. I gave you illustration after illustration of that last week. Since Saul persecuted David, and David controlled himself and acted biblically and rightly in his attitude and actions toward Saul, refusing to render vengeance for vengeance or hatred for hatred, was it worth it? Although Saul was doing wrong, David did what was right. Was it worth it for David to act biblically toward his enemy? I could ask this question another way: How much is it worth to have the blessings and the power of God upon us as we fight against our enemies?

Stop and think about this. What Saul was doing to David was, in reality, only a minute portion of David's life. It was a short time. It may have seemed long while he was being persecuted by Saul, but it was short. David reigned on the throne for forty years. Was it worth it? Let me show you what I mean when I ask that question.

David had exercised patience and control and acted rightly toward his enemy in order to have the blessing and power of God upon himself. This is why we must maintain a biblical attitude and biblical actions at all times. God says in Exodus 23:22, "But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak, that I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries."

The angel of the Lord, who is Christ, speaks here. If you obey Him and do all that God speaks, then God will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. I do not know about you, but I believe I would rather have God on my side than all the armies in the world. God says that if you want Him to be on your side, you must obey Him. If you do, He will be an enemy to your enemy and an adversary to your adversaries. This is the power and blessing that come when we act rightly, maintain biblical attitudes, and obey the Lord rather than taking matters into our own hands.

Leviticus 26 is another one of those places where God gives the blessings and the curses concerning His law. God says that one of His blessings for obedience is this: "And you shall chase your enemies and they shall fall before you by the sword, and five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight, and your enemy shall fall before you by the sword." Five of you will be able to chase a hundred, a hundred of you will be able to put ten thousand to flight, and your enemy shall fall before you. I do not know about you, but to me it seems worth it to act biblically and to act scripturally for five to chase a hundred. I am showing you what it was worth for David to exercise patience and control toward Saul.

A hundred to put ten thousand in flight? There are plenty of other verses, but in Joshua 21:44 we read, "And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that He sware unto their fathers." "And there stood not a man of all their enemies before them. The Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand." How many were able to

stand? Not one. And what did the Lord do? The Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand.

Joshua 23:10 says, “One man of you shall chase a thousand. For the Lord your God, He is he that fighteth for you, as He has promised.” One man of you shall chase a thousand. This even gets better. Is it worth it to conduct yourself biblically, to have a right attitude and right action, in order to have the blessing and the power of God upon you, where one man shall chase a thousand? Why? Because God is fighting for us.

Deuteronomy 20:1 says, "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them." Why? "For the Lord thy God is with thee, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." When Israel came near to battle, the priest was to speak to the people: "Hear, O Israel, you approach this day unto the battle against your enemies. Let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them. For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you to fight for you against your enemies, and to save you."

Is it worth it to have victory in every area? Of course it is. Deuteronomy 28:7 says, "The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face. They shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways." Whenever they run at you in one concerted effort, God says that when it is over, they will be running seven different ways, just trying to get away from you.

Deuteronomy 33:29 gives another passage we should remember: "Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, who is the sword of thy excellency, and thine enemy shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places." God is here referred to as our shield and our sword. It is God that enables us to tread upon our high places, or their high places. We take them from them and make them ours.

Psalm 127, verse 1, says, “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” In other words, what he is saying is

that if God does not protect us, if God does not fight for us, no amount of watchmen will do us any good. Proverbs 21 and verse 31 says, “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord.” I love this verse: “Safety is of the Lord.”

David's Defense: God as the Source of Victory (Psalm 18:29-31)

We must go back to Psalm 18 and examine this portion in light of all these verses—in light of God’s gracious provisions and blessing upon David, and in relation to the deliverance God gave him from his enemies. When we talk about David, we immediately think of this great warrior. Truly, he was indeed a great warrior. But we must remember that David was not initially a warrior. Initially, he was a shepherd, a musician, and a poet.

When he met Goliath in 1 Samuel chapter 17, he had no armament. He had no shield. He had no spear. He had no sword. The only thing he had was a sling. It was God who taught David to fight, and it was God who gave David his victories. Now, with that in mind, consider David’s defense, beginning with verse 29. David said in Psalm 18 and verse 29, “For by thee I have run through a troop, and by my God have I leaped over a wall.” Notice how David emphasizes this one central and important fact: “for by thee I have.” David carefully and accurately ascribes all glory to God.

He arrogates nothing to himself. The phrase “run through a troop” has been variously interpreted. Some understand it to mean that he met a troop with courage and skill. Others interpret it, “I have run after a troop,” as David pursued the troop of the Amalekites who burned Ziklag in 1 Samuel 30 and verse 8. Still others take it as it stands: “I have run through,” or “broken through a troop,” signifying that he broke it into pieces. It is a word fitly used for destroying and cutting an enemy into pieces.

In one sense, it does not matter whether we say, “I met a troop,” “I ran after a troop,” or “I cut through a troop.” Each speaks of the fact that God gave David the victory. David fought without fear, pursued without failure, and destroyed without flinching. He was fighting God’s battles in God’s way: “By thee, I’ve run through a troop. I’ve cut them in pieces. If they ran away, I pursued them. I overtook

them. When they came at me, I met them courageously and skillfully."

In verse 29 he says again, "By thee I have run through a troop, and by my God I have leaped over a wall." This refers to scaling walls and taking fortified places. It was by God that David scaled the walls and took fortified places, which was literally true of him in many instances. It could possibly refer to David's taking the fortress of Zion, Jerusalem, from the Jebusites and making it his own.

Charles H. Spurgeon said, "Whether we meet the foe in the open field, or leap upon them while they lurk behind the battlements of a city, we shall by God's grace defeat them in either case. If they hem us in with living legions, or environ us with stone walls, we shall with equal certainty obtain our liberty. Such feats we have already performed, hewing our way in a run through host of difficulties, and scaling impossibilities at a leap. God's warriors may expect to have a taste of every form of fighting, and must by the power of faith determine to quit themselves like men."

"But it behooves them to be careful to lay all their laurels at Jehovah's feet, each one of them saying, 'By my God, have I wrought this valiant deed!' Our spolia optima, the trophies of our conflicts, we hereby dedicate to the God of battles and ascribe to him all glory and strength."

Spurgeon said, "God's warriors must expect to have a taste of every form of fighting." That is true not only physically, but spiritually as well. Our spiritual fighting is really and truly more important than our physical fighting, and God does indeed give us a taste of all of it.

Spurgeon also said, "our spolia optima." What is he talking about? The trophies of our conflicts. In 1 Chronicles 26:27 we read, "Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord." When we give God our spolia optima, that is, all the spoils that you and I win, we give God credit for them because it is by His grace and by His mercy.

David says, "For by thee I have run through a troop, and by my God I have leaped over a wall." David is giving God all the praise and all the glory. Then he says, "As for God, His way is perfect. The word

of the Lord is tried, he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God, save the Lord, or who is a rock, save our God."

God's way is perfect in every aspect because He is perfect. He deals with us in a perfect way. That perfect way may be incomprehensible to us, and at times it may be indiscernible, yet it is still perfect. His Word has been tried. Throughout history and throughout the saints' lives, it has been demonstrated over and over that He is faithful. His Word is faithful, true, accurate, and infallible.

David, again, in verse 30, refers to God as a buckler. I don't know if you remember, but I explained this when I preached on verse 2 of Psalm 18. A buckler is something much larger than a shield. A shield, of course, was used offensively and defensively, but it differs from a buckler in this respect: a shield usually defends or covers primarily a small portion of the body, while a buckler is large and enables one to shield his entire body.

In Psalm 35, David prays, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me. Fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear and stop the way against them that persecute me. Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." He asks God to take hold of shield and buckler and to stand up for his help.

A buckler was large enough that a man could hide his entire body. Thus, in Psalm 91, the Scripture says concerning God, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, and Him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings thou shalt trust." These are wonderful verses, presenting God as the One who covers and protects His people.

"His truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler." In Psalm 140:7, David puts the icing on the cake: "O God, the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." What did God do? God placed that buckler over David. His head and his body were under it, and David was thus protected.

So David gives us a very pictorial illustration of how God defends him and how God is indeed his defense. Then, in verse 31, he says, "For who is God save the Lord? Or who is a rock save our God?" David gives us another picture of God as the Rock, and of David trusting in God for his defense and preservation. It is God who receives all the honor and glory. Now look at verse 32, because I want to spend the rest of my time on verses 32 and 33.

In verse 32 he says that “it is God that girdeth me with strength and maketh my way perfect.” It is God that girdeth me with strength.

God Girds with Strength and Makes the Way Perfect (Psalm 18:32)

The girding with strength is a metaphor taken from the belt or girdle of a warrior, or sometimes from the reins, which Scripture sometimes places a man’s vigor and strength in. When David says that God has girded him with strength, he is saying that God has put the warrior’s belt around him. Without this divine girding, he would have been weak, effeminate, and anemic. In other words, he has been made strong, powerful, and courageous by the hand of God. It is God who upheld him; it is God who sustained him.

Soldiers always girded themselves for battle. They did not go into battle without putting on their battle harness or battle girdle. In 1 Kings chapter 20, there were two ungodly men, Ben-Hadad and Ahab. Ben-Hadad was the king of Syria, and he was picking a fight with Ahab, the king of Israel. Everyone knew that Ahab was a wicked, ungodly king, yet he gave a pretty good answer to Ben-Hadad. Ben-Hadad said, “And Ben-Hadad sent unto him and said, ‘The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.’”

In other words, he was saying, “You do not have enough to stand against me. I am going to whack you out; I am going to take you and pull you apart.” Ahab answered in verse 11, “Tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself, as he that putteth it off.” In other words, “We have not fought yet, Ben-Hadad.” You are counting your chickens before they hatch. Do not boast while you are putting on your battle girdle, because you have not taken it off yet.

David said, “It is God who has girded me with strength.” It was God who placed the battle harness upon David. If God places a battle harness upon you, the outcome is assured. The victory is absolutely yours. David said further, “It is God who’s made my way perfect.”

Notice Psalm 18:32: “It is God that girded me with strength,” and “maketh my way perfect.” The word “way” must be understood as the course of actions and language, whatever David undertook. God was leading, guiding, and directing David so that the outcome of his efforts would be extremely successful. They had to be successful because everything was ordered by God.

In 2 Samuel 5, David had already defeated the Philistines once. Verse 18 says, “The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of the Lord, saying, ‘Shall I go up to the Philistines?’” He continued, “Wilt thou deliver them into mine hand?” And the Lord said unto David, “Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.” David came to Baal-perazim, smote them there, and said, “The Lord hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me as the breach of waters.” Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim.

God had delivered David. Verse 21 says, “And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them with fire.” David defeated them so badly that those who remained immediately left their gods, and David burned them. It was a momentous victory. Yet a temporary victory may not necessarily be a full victory. The Philistines could have had something planned or been trying to lure him into a trap.

They came up yet again and spread themselves in the Valley of Rephaim, just as they had the first time. When David inquired of the Lord, He said, “Thou shalt not go up.” They had something planned for him. God said, “Thou shalt not go up, but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself, for then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.” David did as the Lord had commanded and smote the Philistines from Geba until he came to Gezer. This is what David meant when he said, “Thou makest my way perfect.”

This is exactly what he meant. David was going to go out and fight them the second time exactly the way he fought them the first time. He had gotten a victory that way before, but God said, "Don't do that. You fetch a compass behind them, and you don't attack until you hear going in the mulberry trees." They had evidently planned something, and David was unaware of it, but God said, "We'll thwart their plans. You come on behind them this time. Don't fight the way you fought the first time." So David said, "It's God who girded me with strength. It's God who ties on my battle harness. And it's God who makes my way perfect."

Feet Like Hinds' Feet: Swiftness and Sure-footedness (Psalm 18:33)

Spurgeon was very perceptive. He said, "Gird about the loins with power from heaven. The warrior was filled with vigor far above all created might, and whereas, without this wondrous belt, he would have been feeble and effeminate, with relaxed energies and scattered forces, he felt himself embraced with the girdle of truth, to be compact in purpose, courageous and daring, and concentrated in power, so that his course was a complete success; so undisturbed by thoughts of disastrous defeat, as to be called perfect. Have we been made more than conquerors over sin? And has our life hitherto been such as becometh the gospel? Let us ascribe all the glory to Him who gird us with His own inexhaustible strength, that we may be unconquered in battle and unwearied in pilgrimage."

Whatever God did for David physically, He can do for us spiritually. God not only undergirds us; He equips us. He enables us through His strength to do that which otherwise would be impossible to accomplish.

In Psalm 18:32, David said, "It is God that girdeth me with strength." It is God who puts on my battle harness and makes my way perfect. In other words, God led him and directed him. Then he said, "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet and setteth me upon my high places."

The illustration should be exceedingly clear. Deer are known for their swiftness, agility, balance, grace, and sure-footedness. David is saying that God has made his feet like hinds' feet. It is God who not

only enables David to swiftly overtake his enemies, but also enables and empowers him to do so in the most dangerous situations. David literally says, "He maketh" or "matcheth my feet like hinds' feet."

If you notice mountain goats and mountain sheep, usually wherever their front hooves go, that is where their back hooves go. If they safely stand where their front hooves are, they will certainly safely stand where their hind hooves are. David says, “You’ve made my feet like hinds’ feet.” He is speaking of feet that can safely and surely follow wherever the front feet have gone.

In 2 Samuel 2:18, Zeruiah had three sons. Zeruiah was a woman, not a man. Her three sons were Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Asahel “was as light of foot as a wild roe or a wild deer.” When you hear that, you ought to know that Asahel could really run. He was swift. He was fast. This helps us understand what David means when he says, “He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet.” He is talking about swiftness and speed.

In 1 Chronicles 12:8, we read of the Gadites who separated themselves unto David into the hold in the wilderness. They were “men of might and men of war, fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions and were swift as the roes upon the mountains.” These were battle-hardened men, men whose faces were like the faces of lions; that is, they were fearsome men. Yet they were swift as the roes upon the mountains. They had strength for battle and speed for movement.

This is the blessing of God. Isaiah 40:30-31 says, “Even the youths shall faint and be weary. And the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” Human strength in and of itself is worthless. The strongest young men may faint, become weary, and utterly fall. But those who wait upon the Lord receive renewed strength. God gives what human strength cannot supply.

“They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.” You are talking about swiftness, speed, and perseverance. The Lord gives His people strength to run without weariness and to walk without fainting.

When David said, “He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet,” he was not only talking about swiftness and speed. In 1 Chronicles 12 and verse 8, we read, “And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were swift as the roes upon the mountains.” Did you notice that last phrase? They were swift as the roes upon the mountains.

We are not just talking about swiftness and speed. We are talking about agility and perseverance. Let me ask you: Have you ever hunted in the mountains or done any mountain climbing? I know Joe probably has, and I know Dean and Trip have. There is a vast difference between hunting and walking on the mountains and walking on this flat land in South Georgia, I can assure you.

You are going up, up, up, up, using leg muscles that you hardly ever use if you are a flatlander. The air is thinner, the rocks are sharper, the banks are steeper, and it is far more dangerous. What does the Bible say? These men were like young roes upon the mountains. Have you ever watched mountain goats and mountain sheep? They go places that look impossible.

Some years ago, Tripp, Lacey, Alice, and I were at Yellowstone National Park, at a place called Artist’s Point. It was absolutely gorgeous. There was a huge waterfall, and I do not know how many thousands of feet the water was falling. The sides of the mountain were different colors of rock. We were looking at the beauty, which is why it is called Artist’s Point. Everybody was taking pictures and snapping; some folks stood there and painted.

I took pictures, too, because I looked to my right and saw a mountain wall straight up. There were animal trails not only going straight up, but going at an angle, every which way. What could be walking in places like that? I knew the answer, but I asked the ranger who was standing nearby, “What animal made those trails over there?” Deer—mule deer, and probably some blacktails that they had there—were walking straight up. David said, “You’ve made my feet like hinds’ feet.” What does that mean? I am not only swift; I not only have speed; I am sure-footed, even in the most dangerous places.

Spurgeon wrote: “The conqueror's feet had been shod by a divine hand. And the next note must thereof refer to them: ‘He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places.’ Pursuing his foes, the warrior had been swift afoot as a young roe. But instead of taking pleasure in the legs of man, he ascribes the boon of swiftness to the Lord alone.”

"When our thoughts are nimble and our spirits rapid, like the chariots of Amminadib, let us not forget that our best beloved hands have given us the choice favor. Climbing into impregnable fortresses, David had been preserved from slipping and made to stand where scarce the wild goat could find a footing, herein whilst preserving mercy manifested." We too have had our high places of honor, service, temptation, and danger, but hitherto we have been kept from falling.

"Bring hither the harp and let us emulate the psalmist's joyful thanksgiving. Had we fallen, our wailings must have been terrible. Since we have stood, let our gratitude be fervent." David was able to stand where scarce a wild goat could stand, and we too have had places of honor, service, temptation, and danger. If we had fallen, there would have been great wailing. But God preserved us; therefore, let there be great gratitude and praise.

We must always remember to give God the honor and glory and ascribe all our victories to Him. How easy it would have been for David to say, "Did you see what I just did? Ah, do you know what I accomplished? Look at me." No. David said, "It is God who giveth me strength. It is God who preserves me."

Psalm 147 gives us the truth. Verse 10 says, "He delighteth not in the strength of the horse. He taketh not pleasure in the legs of man." David could not say, "Lord, I've run. My legs are strong. I can climb. My legs are strong. Lord, look what I did." It is not what we do; it is what God enables us to do. It is His strength and His power, and we do it through Him. That is why the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." It is His strength. It is His honor.

Too often we look back on the Old Testament with a wish: “Oh boy. I wish I could have been there. I wish I could have helped. I

wish I could have experienced that. I wish I could have seen that. I wish I could have been a part of that power and excitement."

Spiritual Application: The Armor of God

It is absolutely amazing that we are more concerned with the physical than the spiritual. We want physical victories more than we want spiritual victories. Or sometimes we want physical victories and do not even want spiritual victories. Interestingly enough, the truth is that if we are unwilling and unable to conquer spiritually, we will certainly be unable to conquer physically.

Scripture teaches that first and foremost our battles are spiritual battles. The physical manifestation of our enemies is merely a representation of the fact that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and darkness of this world against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Look at Ephesians 6, beginning there in verse 10. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication of the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Ephesians 6:10-18 gives us all of the spiritual equipment that we need to face our enemies. David was first of all a man after God's own heart, and secondly, a man of war. We want the physical victory without the spiritual victory, when in reality, the spiritual has to come first. Our hearts must first be given to the Lord; if they are not, our bodies will be weak and useless.

Paul says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." This is where we are and what we need. If we are strong in Him, we may not only face our enemies, but all enemies. If we are not strong in Him, we will not be able to face any enemy. David said, "It's the Lord who defends me. It's the Lord who girds me to battle. It's the Lord who gives me strength and gives me every ability that I need."

By God's grace and in God's providence, the next message will deal with verse 34: "It is God who teacheth my hands to fight." If you want to understand where we are and how we must be taught of God, make sure you hear the message.

Father, we're so thankful today for Jesus Christ. And we're thankful, dear Lord, that we know that you are our God. And if we're obedient to thee and honor thee, you will be an enemy to our enemies and an adversary to our adversaries. If we want you on our side, Lord, we must be on Thy side. Make us obedient. Make us holy and godly. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 11

When Prayer Is Useless

July 12, 2009

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 1:35-46 (KJV)

The title of this message is “When Prayer Is Useless.”

“Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land which I sware to give unto your fathers, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord. Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. Moreover, your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

“But as for you, turn you and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.” And then he answered and said unto me, “We have sinned against the Lord. We will go up and fight according to all that the Lord our God commanded

> us." And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill. And the Lord said unto me, "Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you, lest ye be smitten before your enemies." So I spake unto you, and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and went presumptuously up into the hill.
>
> And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah. And ye returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you. So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days that ye abode there.
>
> This title may be disturbing to some people, so I want to clarify a few things.

Introduction: Clarifying the Title

First of all, this is not an atheistic sermon. I am not denying the existence of God, nor the power of God. I did not say that God did not exist, nor did I say that God does not answer prayer. I simply said there are times when prayer is useless, when it does no good to pray.

Secondly, this is not an agnostic sermon. I am not saying that God cannot be known or that His will cannot be known. I am not indicating in any way that God is unknowable. I certainly believe in God the Father. He has revealed Himself in His Son and also in His Word very clearly. So this is not an atheistic sermon. It is not an agnostic sermon.

Thirdly, it is not a deistic sermon. Deism teaches that God created the world, wound it up like a big clock, and now simply sits back and watches it run down. There is no divine intervention. There is no providence. There is no nothing. God is simply sitting back, watching everything run down. That concept is totally and completely unbiblical. I did not say that God would not answer prayer because He wound up the world like a big clock and does not intervene. I simply said there is a time when prayer is useless.

Fourthly, this sermon is not a rationalistic or humanistic sermon—one that places emphasis upon man, his works, thoughts, and desires. I am not saying that man must work everything out according to his abilities. All I said was that there is a time when prayer is useless. Fifthly, by way of introduction, before I finish I hope you will see that this statement is indeed biblical: at times it is useless to pray.

Biblical Commands to Pray

One cannot deny the plain fact that there are ample commands, exhortations, and admonitions in the Bible by which you and I are exhorted and even commanded to pray. Let me give you just a few of them. In Mark 14:38, our Lord said, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” First Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” That is a plain command—pray without ceasing. In 1 Timothy 2:8, the Apostle Paul said, “I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and without doubting.” James 5:16 says, “Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." In Romans 12:12, he says, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." In Ephesians 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." In Philippians 4:6, he says, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." In Colossians 4:2 he says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."

We have been commanded to pray. We've been commanded to pray without ceasing, to continue instant in prayer, and to make everything known unto God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Since all of these are plain, obvious commands, how can I say that there is a time when prayer is useless? Let me state this same truth another way: There are times when it does no good to pray. There are times when prayer will not work at all, and it is useless to pray.

How can I make such a statement since it is very obvious in the Bible that God has ordained prayer? Is it possible to use a lawful truth in an unlawful way? If you take that which is lawful and right, pervert it and corrupt it, and use it in a way in which it was not intended to be used, should it surprise you that it is useless and will not work?

Lawful Truth Used Unlawfully

Let me show you what I am talking about. Hold Deuteronomy 1; we are coming right back there. But look in your Bibles to the book of James, chapter 4, beginning with verse 1. Listen to what James writes: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

Now look at verse 2: "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not." Isn't that amazing? He says you need to pray. You need to ask. But look at verse 3: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." In other words, here are people who are praying, but they are praying wrongfully and for the wrong reason, for the wrong motivation, and God says, "You're not getting it."

God does not answer a prayer that is contrary to His law. Think about that for a moment. Suppose I said, “I’m tired of my wife. Forty-seven years is long enough. I’m going to start praying for a younger woman.” God help me, I don’t want a younger woman, I can assure you, especially today’s younger women. But would I be praying correctly if I asked God to give me another wife, another woman? Why would God hear that, when He said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife”?

If you do not believe what I am saying, go back to Deuteronomy chapter one. Let the Word of God settle this, because there is a time when it is useless to pray. Deuteronomy 1:45 states it very plainly. Moses tells the people, “And ye returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you.”

If God would not hear them or listen to them, did it do them any good to pray? Did their prayer work? No. God did not listen to them.

Did these people pray? Yes. They not only prayed; they prayed with great emotion and feeling. They wept before the Lord. Did it do any good? No. Did it accomplish anything? No. Their cries, their weeping, and their praying were in vain because God would not hear them. It was useless for them to pray, because God was not going to hearken or listen. Therefore, there is a time when it is useless to pray: when God will not hearken and will not listen.

In Deuteronomy 28, the passage concerning blessings and cursings, God promised blessings if His people obeyed His law and curses if they disobeyed His law. In verse 23, He described part of the curse upon those who disobeyed: “And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thy feet shall be iron.”

When God said that the heaven would be like brass, He was not referring to its clearness, brightness, and splendor, spread out like a molten looking glass in the Old Testament, which was usually made of brass. No, when God gave this as an illustration of a curse, saying, “Your heaven is going to be brass,” He was talking about its dryness and hardness: no moisture could pass through it, no showers or rain would fall, and no dew from heaven would come upon their crops. Consequently, no prayer could penetrate it. When God said, “Thy heaven shall be brass,” it was a statement of God's judgment.

What makes heaven brass for us? What makes it useless to pray? Isaiah 59 gives a very general statement. Here is what makes heaven brass for us; here is when it is useless to pray. The Bible says: “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”

It is sins, so to speak, that turn God's face away from us, so that He will not hear.

Those of us, like myself, who have hearing problems can really identify with this. You talk to me face to face, and I can hear you. But you turn around and walk off and say something; I can hear sound, but I cannot hear what you are saying. This is what God is saying:

"I'll turn My head." You may be making sound, says God, but I am not listening. I am not hearing.

What is it that makes it useless to pray? What is it that makes our heaven brass? In Deuteronomy chapter 1, verse 27, there is first the sin of unbelief: "And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the Lord hated us, He hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us."

The Sin of Unbelief

"Whither shall we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there. Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The Lord your God which goeth before you, He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes; and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went until ye came to this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God."

Unbelief makes prayer useless. Without faith it is impossible to please Him: "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Does it do any good to pray without faith? The answer is no. Even our Lord, in Mark 11, verse 24, said, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe."

"That ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Now, here's my question. How in the world can one believe when he's filled with unbelief? It is important to note that unbelief is not concerned with anything, nor does it concentrate upon anything, but its own unbelief. It feeds upon itself. God told Israel in verse 32: "Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God." Facts, reality, evidence, grace, and mercy mean nothing to unbelief. Unbelief is ready to take the word of men, but it is not ready to take the Word of God. Unbelief will believe man, but refuses to believe God.

These Israelites were willing to believe the ten wicked spies who brought up an evil report upon the land. They refused to listen to

Joshua and Caleb and to the Lord, but they were ready to believe wicked, fallen men. Unbelief will always believe wicked men ahead of and before the Word of God. Unbelief is willing to deny and disbelieve the Word of God so that it may believe in unbelief. That is what unbelief believes in—unbelief. It does not even consider facts and reality.

God said, “And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went until ye came to this place.” These people understood God’s providence. God sustained, nourished, and took care of them. He carried them in the wilderness as a man carries his own son. He tenderly treated and provided for them. They saw His provision and protection and experienced all of this firsthand. God went before them “to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.” It was a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. God led them every step of the way. God provided for them, protected them, and nourished them. Did they believe facts? No. Did they believe reality? No. Did they believe truth? No.

Unbelief is only concerned with itself. How does unbelief manifest itself? How can you tell whether you are falling into unbelief? Look at verse 27. Here is a characteristic of unbelief: “And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the Lord hated us, He hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.”

“Whither shall we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.” Notice that they murmured and complained. Here is discontent.

Here is criticism, not only of Moses and Aaron, but now criticism of God Himself. Their murmuring and complaining was not private; it was public. Unbelief always expresses itself in doubt, in ingratitude or ungratefulness, and in a misuse and misunderstanding of God's providence. How do these people interpret God's love, providence, protection, and provision?

Look at verse 27: “Because the Lord hated us, He hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.” Their miraculous, marvelous, wonderful deliverance from slavery and the bondage of Egypt had now become, to them, not an act of love but an act of hate. It was only because God hated them that He brought them out of that wonderful vacation spot called Egypt. It was because the Lord hated them that He provided for and protected them. God's exceeding great love was now measured in terms of hatred. They were so dissatisfied with God, His providence, His protection, and His deliverance that they said, “Make us a captain, and let us return to Egypt.” They would go back into slavery and bondage.

I want to show you what unbelief says. Unbelief says this: God doesn't know what's best for me. My unbelief knows what's best for me. I'll never trust in God. I will trust in unbelief. Based upon verses 27 and 28, unbelief turns everything upside down and inside out. We should hate unbelief. We should flee from unbelief. We should understand that it is wicked, vile, and malicious.

Prayer is useless when one is full of unbelief. Unbelief dishonors God. It disbelieves God and discredits God's truth. You may pray and go through a form and a ritual when you are full of unbelief, but your prayer is useless and worthless because God will not hear you.

The Sin of Disobedience

Secondly, in Deuteronomy chapter 1, beginning with verse 34, there was not only the sin of unbelief; there was the sin of disobedience: "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land which I sware to give unto your fathers. Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord. Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. Moreover, your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil,

they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea."

Unbelief always leads to disobedience. The reason we disobey is because we do not believe. If we believe, we would not disobey. When God commanded the Israelites to enter the Promised Land, they refused. They said, "Man, we're not going to fight those giants. We're not going in that land." Instead of believing God, they chose to believe the men who brought up the false report, and consequently they disobeyed God. God commanded them to fight, to go into the land, and to possess it. They refused. They disobeyed. They refused to enter in by faith and to trust the Lord to give them victory. So what does God do? In His righteous judgment and holy anger, God pronounces judgment upon them: "Because of your disbelief, because of your disobedience, you're not going into this land. You're going to die in this wilderness."

Look in verse 40. He says, “But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.” They were at Kadesh-barnea, ready to enter into the promised land. Sin and disobedience might allow you to see it, but it will certainly keep you out of it. So God says, “You turn and go to the wilderness.”

God had told them to go in, but they said, “No, we’re not going to do it.” Then God said, “All right, you’re right, you’re not. You turn to go to the wilderness.” They answered, “No, no, no. We’re not going to do that. Now we’re going to gird on our weapons and go fight.” God said, “No, don’t do it.” They replied, “Yes, we are.”

What is disobedience? It is sin. Hold Deuteronomy 1, but turn first to Jeremiah chapter 3. Let me show you how sin is defined. Jeremiah 3:25 says, “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.” Notice that they sinned against the Lord by not obeying His voice. Now look in Jeremiah 9:13: “And the Lord saith, Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, neither walked therein.” Sin is called a forsaking of the law.

Look also at Jeremiah 44:23: “Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in His law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you, as at this day.” Thus, in Jeremiah 3:25, sin is not obeying the voice of the Lord; in Jeremiah 9:13, it is not obeying His voice and violating His law; and in Jeremiah 44:23, it is refusing to walk in God’s law, statutes, and testimonies. Disobedience is a refusal not only to hear, but also to obey God’s Word.

It is useless to pray when you are full of unbelief. God will not hear you. It is also useless to pray when you are disobedient. David said in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Iniquity is sin, a violation of the law of God.

First John 3:4 says, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” If I harbor in my heart that which is contrary to God and His law, and if I do that which is contrary to God and His law, is God going to hear me? No. David said He is not going to listen.

Proverbs 28:9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” The word abomination literally means a stench in God's nostrils. God says that if you turn your ear away from hearing His law, even your prayer is a stench in His nostrils.

God says, “I'm not going to put up with it. I'm not going to have it. I'm not going to listen to it.” In Jeremiah 44:4, speaking of sin, He says, “Howbeit I sent unto you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.” God calls sin that abominable thing which He hates. Sin is disobedience to God, a violation of God's Word and God's law.

The people in Deuteronomy chapter 1 were full of unbelief and were disobedient. God plainly commanded them to do something, and they refused; in fact, they did just the opposite. What good does it do to pray when you are full of unbelief and disobedient? It does not do any good. It is useless, because God will not hear it. Your prayer is an abomination to God, a stench in His nostrils. When is it

useless to pray? Not only because of unbelief and not only because of disobedience, but go back to Deuteronomy 1.

The Sin of Rebellion

Consider the sin of rebellion. God says, “Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God.” Later, Israel answered, “We have sinned against the Lord, we will go up and fight, according to all that the Lord our God commanded us.”

“And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill. And the Lord said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies.” Then Moses says, “So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and went presumptuously up into the hill.”

We have talked about the sin of unbelief and the sin of disobedience. Now we are talking about the sin of rebellion. It is possible to be disobedient without being rebellious. Just because you are disobedient in some things does not necessarily mean that you are rebellious. For instance, how many of you prayed yesterday the way that you should have and the way God has commanded you?

You probably prayed some, but you did not spend any great deal of time in prayer. Who is going to say, “I prayed every day the way God has commanded me to pray”? You have sinned. How many of you studied yesterday the way God has commanded you? You did not. That means you were disobedient, but it does not necessarily mean that you were rebellious.

Usually, sin or disobedience and rebellion go hand in hand, and disobedience often leads to the sin of rebellion. Rebellion is usually associated with deliberate, premeditated disobedience. Rebellion is sin, but not all sin is rebellion. Job 34:37 says, “For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.” He has already sinned, but now he is adding rebellion to his sin. All rebellion is sin, but not necessarily all sin is rebellion. You can sin and not be rebellious, although usually your sin leads to rebellion.

Rebellion is usually associated with being stiff-necked, hard-headed, stubborn, and hard-hearted. In Deuteronomy 31:27, God says to Israel through Moses, “For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death?” He knew their rebellion and their stiff neck; they were hard-headed and would not listen.

Nehemiah 9:17 says, “And they refused to obey, neither were mindful of Thy wonders that Thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage.” In their rebellion, they hardened their necks and said, “Let us make us a captain, and let us return to Egypt.” Here was a stiff-necked, hard-headed, rebellious people appointing a captain to return to Egypt.

Unbelief is sin and it is bad. Disobedience is sin, and it is bad. Usually unbelief and disobedience lead to rebellion, and rebellion is far more grievous to the Lord than what we would call unbelief and disobedience, although they are all sin. Samuel told Saul in 1 Samuel 15:23, “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” The penalty for witchcraft was death, and the penalty for idolatry was death.

“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” So rebellion merits the death penalty as well. Rebellion is not just one sin or one act of disobedience. It is the attitude of someone so hard-headed, so stiff-necked, and so stubborn that he refuses to listen. They will not listen.

Deuteronomy 1:43 describes these people exactly: “So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord.” Then comes the next word: “And went presumptuously up into the hill.” To demonstrate the perverseness and malignancy of rebellion, consider what happened. God commanded these people to enter the promised land, and they refused. Next, He commanded them to turn and go into the wilderness, and they refused. Next, they determined they were going to go up as God initially commanded them, and then God commanded them not to go up.

Deuteronomy 1:44 says, “And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah.” The Bible says they disobeyed and went presumptuously up the hill. The Hebrew word translated “presumptuously” means to boil, to boil up, to seethe, to act proudly, presumptuously, and rebelliously, to be arrogant, to act insolently, and to be rebelliously proud.

It is very difficult for me to put up with an insolent, rebellious, arrogant teenager. You have no doubt seen that little sticker that says, “Teenagers: Act now. Run away from home while you know everything and can do everything.” If you cannot tolerate an arrogant, stubborn, hard-headed, insolent child, think of what it must be like toward God when we have a rebellious attitude. What is a rebellious attitude? Here is a rebellious attitude.

"I'll do whatever I please. Nobody's going to tell me what to do. I am in charge of my life. I don't care what God says or what the Bible says. My life is my own. I live it the way I please." You've never heard those statements before, I'm sure. But that is an attitude of rebellion.

Rebellion is not simply one act, one sin, or one disobedience. Rebellion is a hard-headed, stiff-necked, stubborn determination that you are not going to listen or learn, and that you are going to do whatever you want to do. It does not matter what God says or what anyone else says. You will do what you are going to do.

That's what these people believed: "Nobody's going to tell us what to do. Not Moses. Not God. We're going to go up." God said, "Don't go up. I'm not among you. It's useless to fight against your enemies without God. Go not up."

Now watch the result of their rebellious attitude and action. First, they were chased and destroyed by their enemies. God said, "They're going to chase you like bees." Rebecca can tell you about being chased by bees. She bumped a hive one time with a lawnmower, and they were after her.

Allison gave Alice a butterfly box, which we have on the porch. Someone called me on the cell phone, and I walked over to see whether there were any butterflies. There were no butterflies, but there were red wasps. I dropped my cell phone and ran like a scalded

dog to get away from them. Two or three got me, but I know what it is like to be chased by hornets and bees. That's what God said: They are going to be all over you before you know it. They are going to chase you and destroy you.

You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 29:1? "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Who has a hardened or stiff neck? Who is stubborn? Those who are rebellious. God said they shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Secondly, these people failed to conquer, and they were condemned by God. Here is the overall picture: They were full of unbelief, murmuring, complaining, bellyaching, and criticism of Moses and God. They misinterpreted God's love and thought evilly of God. Consequently, they disobeyed. Their sin of unbelief and disobedience led to pure rebellion. When they found out they were not going into the Promised Land and attempted to do so in their own strength,

They were chased like bees by their enemies and destroyed. Look what happens in verse 45: “And ye returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you.” What did their weeping and crying avail? Nothing. Why? God refused to hear them. God would not hearken to them. God would not listen to them. Proverbs 28:9 said, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” Remember, David said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Were these people harboring iniquity? Were they turning their ear away from hearing the law of God? You better believe it. Their prayer was useless.

Examples of Useless Prayer

In Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 16, we find another instance. Everyone knows the story of old Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. The Bible says, “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” How much

crying and praying did Esau's avail him? None. Could Isaac change the blessing that he had given Jacob? No. Had Jacob already received the blessing? Yes. Esau could cry and weep and pray all he liked. It was to absolutely no avail.

There is a time when prayer is useless. Now, consider Proverbs chapter 1 in light of a common statement that you hear from preachers. I have heard it all my life, and I want to ask you if it is correct based upon the Word of God. The statement is this: "Well, I know that God doesn't hear the prayer of unsaved people because they're sinful, disobedient, and rebellious. But now there's one prayer that God will always hear from an unsaved person, and that's the prayer of salvation."

Let us see. Proverbs chapter 1, beginning with verse 20: "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets." Verse 21 says, "She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"

"Turn you at My reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you." This is the pleading: "Turn at My reproof. Listen to Me. Now is the time. Listen right now. Repent right now. Come right now. Turn you at My reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you."

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of My counsel: they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Does that sound like God is going to hear the prayer of an unsaved man anytime the unsaved man prays? No. I want you to understand something: salvation is of the Lord. That is what Jonah 2:9 says. That is what Galatians 1 says. That is what all the Bible says. Since salvation is of the Lord, it is not in man's hand, nor is it in man's time. It is in God's hand and in God's time. If a man is not saved by God in God's time and by God's hand, he will not be saved now.

Isaiah 55:6-7 says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found." The implication is that there are times when He cannot be found. "Call ye upon Him while He is near." The implication is that there are times when He is not near. When God cannot be found and when God is not near, it is useless to pray, because God is not going to hear you because of your rebellion, wickedness, and sin.

The first application is this: We need to learn to pray when God will hear us. If we do not hear Him, He will not hear us; we must hear His Word. There is a time when prayer is useless. If you do not believe that, look in Revelation chapter 6. Let me read this passage, and then you tell me whether this prayer avails anything. Revelation chapter 6, verse 15. Look carefully, and tell me whether this prayer is useless or not.

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Do you think their prayer was answered? Do you think the mountains are going to fall on these wicked men and hide them from God’s judgment? It is useless to pray when God is not near and when God will not hear. We can see that in relationship to the unsaved.

Applications for Believers

Now let me put it in relationship to we who are saved. I hear this verse quoted constantly: 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

I want you to note carefully that it is not just prayer, nor just seeking God’s face. There are plenty of Christians who pray and seek God’s face. But God says, “If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face”—and turn from their wicked ways—“then will I hear from heaven.” Is God going to hear our prayers while we are still in sin, disobedience, and rebellion against Him? No. Is He going to forgive our sin and heal our land while we still refuse to turn from our sin? No.

There are so many people who pray hypocritically, yet pray regularly and faithfully. They ask God to bless us, to bless this land, and to heal our land. But God is not going to heal our land or forgive us until we turn from our sins. Period. It is useless to pray, even as a Christian, while we are harboring sin, iniquity, disobedience, and rebellion in our lives. For “if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Here is the second application: Pomp, ceremonies, and rituals mean nothing to God.

They have no effect upon Him whatsoever. If I had time, I could take you through Isaiah and Amos and show you where God says, literally, “I hate, I despise your feast days. I will not have them. I won't listen to you. Take away from Me the noise of thy songs.” Did God appoint those feast days and that music? Yes, He did. Did He appoint the burnt offerings and sacrifices? Yes, He did.

But the people had turned them into mere ritual and ceremony—pomp and circumstance. What have we done in our modern-day churches? They are either pomp and circumstance, so high and pompous that the average man would not go to them, cold and dead as a mausoleum; or most folks have turned the average church into a circus, nothing but entertainment and recreation. God could care less for pomp and circumstance, ritual and ceremony,

entertainment, and recreation. I will show you what God is interested in.

David had sinned. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed Uriah, her husband, with the sword of the children of Ammon. In Psalm 51:16, David said, “For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

You can go through all your rituals, ceremonies, good deeds, and humanistic, rationalistic performances, and it just nauseates God. But you come to God with a broken heart that’s genuinely sorrowful for their sin and repentant over those sins, and that’s God’s delight. That’s what God wants. We are not dealing with some God of our imagination, but with a sovereign, holy, majestic, just, and righteous Judge of heaven and earth.

If we want His blessings and help, we must not only pray and seek His face; we must turn from our wicked ways. Anything and everything in our life contrary to God’s Word needs to be changed. You cannot change everything overnight, but you can start with the most obvious sin in your life.

I tell people I've done far more repenting after I was saved than I did when I got saved. I repented of sin in general when God saved me, and of one or two sins specifically that I was convicted of. I didn't know I was so wicked till I started reading the Bible. Of course, Alice tried to tell me, but I wouldn't listen to her. The more you study the Bible, the more you find things wrong in your life, and you need to change your attitudes, your actions, and your conduct—to bring them into greater conformity to the Word of God. I can't control you, and I can't control the wicked. There's only one person by God's grace that I have control over, and that's me.

If I don't start with myself, I can't expect anyone else to start with themselves. When is it useless to pray? When we're full of disbelief, disobedience, and rebellion, God will not hear our prayers. We may pray, we may weep, and we may show great emotion, but that's worthless in the material. God says, "I will not hear. I won't answer it." There are times when prayer is useless.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We ask You to help us. Lord, change us. Enable us, Lord, to have Thy grace and Thy gift of repentance in our lives. May we bring our lives into greater conformity to Your Word. May we not only pray and seek Your face, but turn from our wicked ways. Until we do, Lord, I pray that You will convict us even more so. Make it harder for us until we realize we cannot go on in our sin, our iniquity, and our rebellion. We pray for grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 12

The Price of True Deliverance

May 27, 2012

Introduction: The Cost of Freedom

I certainly never planned this message in light of Memorial Day. When I was preparing it, it never entered my mind that tomorrow is Memorial Day. But in light of that, here is the price of true deliverance.

"They feared the Lord and served their own gods after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners. They fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel, with whom the Lord had made a covenant and charged them, saying, 'You shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourself to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them. But the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, Him shall you fear, and Him shall you worship, and to Him shall you do sacrifice. And the statutes and

the ordinances and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do forevermore, and you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I made with you, you shall not forget, neither shall you fear other gods. But the Lord your God you shall fear, and He shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.'"

"Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord, and served their own graven images, both their children and their children's children, as did their fathers. So do they unto this day."

Have you ever considered the cost of freedom? What would true liberty and true freedom be worth to you? There are many people alive today in America who vainly think that in America we have true liberty and true freedom.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe that they are free." William Blum, an investigative journalist in Washington, D.C., has written a book, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*. He writes:

"Overtly and covertly, legally and illegally, the military-industrial complex in the United States has joined forces with the prison-industrial complex, linked further to the omnipresent national security police complex, all clasping their hands tightly with the war on drugs in a declaration of war on the American people and the Bill of Rights. This authoritarian juggernaut, enamored with its own perpetuation, glorification, and enrichment, has convinced the American public that without its stormtroopers, all hell would break loose and the safety and security of the citizenry would be on a life support machine.

"In this undertaking, it has had the indispensable assistance of intimidated legislatures, an iconoclastic judiciary, compliant media, and a president who, in the words of civil liberties columnist Nat Hentoff, in this century has afflicted the most harm on our constitutional rights and liberties."

The military-industrial complex particularly needs fear and war in order to keep its appropriations at the utmost amount. It also needs them to keep the people under control.

So just how much do you think it should cost to protect, defend, and deliver us into what you and I would understand as true liberty and true freedom? James Madison, called the father of the Constitutional Convention because he was secretary of the Constitutional Convention, said, “If tyranny and oppression ever come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy.” It will be in the guise—that is, a disguise—of fighting a foreign enemy. The American people would be absolutely petrified to discover that most of our foreign enemies are really not enemies at all. They are simply the pawns of an elite group who use them to further their power and control over the American people.

We are in far more danger from the Congress of the United States than from the people of Afghanistan. We are in far more danger from our corrupt politicians, immoral bureaucrats, and socialistic and communistic executives than from the people of Iran and Iraq. Neither of those countries has attacked us. Neither has assailed our liberties and freedoms. But our Congress has. Our judicial system has. The executive department has.

They are now demanding that we give up more and more liberty and freedom in order to be secure. The truth is, we are neither secure nor free. I had known this before, but it came out in print this week. The Mujahideen were the database of the Al-Qaeda assets. If you go to the Drudge Report, you will see where Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledges that Al-Qaeda is a CIA operation. Here is what it says: "Al-Qaeda are a controlled opposition force of the Central Intelligence Agency to promote their Middle East destabilization process, to give the empirical United States military-industrial complex a reason to invade whenever they want to." In fact, the word Al-Qaeda simply means "database." That is all it means. It was basically made up by the CIA to destabilize the Middle East.

You say, "Well, what about all these people attacking us?" Let me ask you a question: If we had foreigners invading our country, would you fight back? Of course you would. We have not only lost our

liberty and freedom; we have been robbed, pillaged, and taxed to the point of desperation.

In 1996, Senate Bill 1635 established a United States policy for a national missile defense system, and the budget for that alone was $60 billion Federal Reserve notes. There has recently been a fight over a $57 billion increase in Defense Department spending. They are having a row over $57 billion when the 2012 budget was $676 billion. What is a paltry $57 billion when you are talking about $676 billion? They were saying that by 2015 the budget would be $2.8 trillion just for defense.

Consider this: With the millions, billions, and trillions spent and being spent to provide liberty and freedom for America, is it not interesting that in 2012 we had less freedom and liberty than our founding fathers, who did not even have a standing army, navy, or Department of Defense? Stop and think about that.

The Real Problem Is Spiritual, Not Political

We have not been delivered from anything by the excesses of our government. If you want to put a different spin on the word "delivered," in one sense we have been delivered: into greater bondage, slavery, and servitude. It simply appears that things are getting worse and worse.

We have political problems in America, but our real problem is not political. We have economic problems, but our real problem is not economic. We have racial problems, but our real problem is not one of race. We have defensive problems, but our real problem is not one of defense. Our problem is spiritual. We have sinned against, forsaken, and apostatized from the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Consequently, all these other problems have enveloped us. We will always have problems when we are disobedient to the Word of God.

All our problems stem from this one foundational and elementary problem: we have forsaken God. On the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., are inscribed these words from Thomas Jefferson: "God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm

basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift from God, that they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and that His justice cannot sleep forever."

We sin like the other nations, and we will be judged exactly like the other nations. Jefferson also said, "The issue today is the same that it's been throughout all history: whether man shall be allowed to govern himself or be ruled by a small elite."

Robert Winthrop, a former Speaker of the House, stated it more fully: "Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by power within them or by power without them, either by the Word of God or the strong arm of man, either by the Bible or the bayonet." When we refuse to be responsible and govern ourselves, inevitably someone will do it with a strong arm or a bayonet. It is like your child: as long as your child is obedient, wonderful; but if he will not govern himself and do right, there comes the rod.

The same principle is true even when we are adults. Jedediah Morse, who was also a patriot and is known as the father of American geography, said: "To the kindly influence of Christianity, we owe that degree of civil freedom and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoys. Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government and all blessings which flow from them must fall with them." Whenever Christianity is overthrown, all of our civil liberties and the principles of a republican form of government will fall with it. We have true liberty and true freedom through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But first and foremost, we must remember that true liberty and true freedom are freedom from sin, wickedness, and rebellion.

Spiritual Freedom Leads to Civil Freedom

The Bible says in Galatians 5:1, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Our Lord said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." It is impossible to be free apart from Jesus Christ and His Word. In Romans 6, sin is personified as a lord or king. Sin has dominion over unconverted

men; sin reigns unto death, the Scripture says. Those of us who have been converted by the grace of God are under the lordship and kingship of Jesus Christ, while those who are unconverted remain under the kingship and dominion of sin.

Understand this simple principle: spiritual freedom will lead to civil freedom. In 2 Corinthians 3:17, the Bible says, "Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. The opposite is also true: where the Spirit of the Lord is not, there is slavery.

Have you noticed that most people concerned about liberty and freedom in this country, and speaking out about them, are Christians? Why are Christians more concerned about liberty and freedom than are the unsaved? The answer is that the unsaved are already slaves—slaves of their sins, their lusts, and their desires.

A slave is interested in making his slavery more enjoyable, endurable, and comfortable. He is not necessarily interested in freedom for himself, nor in freedom for anyone else. He is a slave and cannot understand why everybody else cannot be content to be slaves as well. As long as you have your six-pack, your color TV, and your boat, you want to be happy. That is the mentality.

The principle should be obvious: where there is no true Christianity, where there is no truth that is the Word of God—biblical truth—there is always tyranny and totalitarianism. Think about all the countries around the world that are tyrannical, totalitarian, and despotic. Whether you are talking about South America, Mexico, China, Russia, or North Korea, in all those countries where there is totalitarianism, you do not have Christianity, or Christianity is so minute that the few Christians there are persecuted and prosecuted.

Any time there is a denial of Jesus Christ and a denial of the Word of God, inevitably there will be tyranny and totalitarianism. In some countries people say, “But we do as we please.” Doing as you please is not freedom. It may be lawless, licentious, or immoral. The false idea of freedom is that freedom, in its essence, is merely the ability to do whatever you please. I might think I have liberty to go up and punch Robert in the nose. I feel like doing it.

And I punch him in the nose, but he might feel like shooting me for punching him in the nose. Is that liberty? No, it is not liberty. Liberty and freedom are not doing what you think you would like to do. True liberty and true freedom are doing what you should do and what you ought to do based upon the Word of God.

I did not read all of 2 Kings 17. It is a long chapter. But I want to show you the price of true deliverance from 2 Kings chapter 17. Everyone knows that Israel had been in a covenantal relationship with God, and their covenant was very simple. God gave them His law and said, "Now your part is to obey Me and worship Me."

"Do not fear other gods. You only fear Me." Israel accepted the terms of the covenant: "Whatever the Lord has said that we will do." They agreed to that, as you can read for yourself in the book of Exodus. But you must understand that God's covenant had both good and bad, or positive and negative, sanctions. The good, positive sanction was this: if you obey, God says, "I'll bless you." The bad, or negative, sanction was this: if you disobey, "I will curse you and will judge you."

Now, 2 Kings chapter 17 gives us a very full and impressive vindication of the divine procedure in punishing a very highly privileged, but rebellious and apostate, people. In Leviticus 26, here is the covenant in detail. Notice what God says: "You shall make you no idols nor graven image. Neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall you set up any image of stone in the land to bow down unto it, for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary, I am the Lord."

SCRIPTURE READING - Leviticus 26:3-18 (KJV)

> If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach into the vintage, and the vintage shall reach into the sowing time, and you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will rid evil beasts out of your land, neither shall the sword go through your land.

> And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight, and your enemy shall fall before you by the sword. For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful and multiply you and establish my covenant with you. And you shall eat old store and bring forth the old because of the new. And I will set my tabernacle among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their bondmen, but I've broken the bands of your yoke and made you to go upright.
>
> But if you will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments, and if you despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that you will not do all my commandments, that you break my covenant, I also will do this to you. I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart, and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies. They that hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. And if you will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass, and your strength shall be spent in vain, and your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if you walk contrary to me and will not hearken to me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.

God says, "I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you and your children and destroy your cattle and make you few in number, and your highways shall be desolate. And if you will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary to me, then will I also walk contrary to you and punish you seven times for your sin. And I will bring a sword upon you that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant. And when you are gathered together within your

cities, I will send the pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

"And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied." You can keep reading all the curses. I am not going to go to Deuteronomy 28, but if you read there, you will find exactly the same thing.

So God has given this covenant, and there are both positive and negative sanctions, or good and bad sanctions. God says, "If you obey me, I'll bless you. If you disobey me, I'm going to curse you."

Treason Against God and Conspiracy Against Man (2 Kings 17:1-6)

Now, when you get to 2 Kings 17, Israel and Judah have found themselves in a very difficult situation. Begin by looking at the first six verses. First of all, there was treason against God and conspiracy against man. Look in 2 Kings 17, verse 1: "And in the twelfth year of Ahaz, the king of Judah, began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years." Notice what the Bible says about Hoshea: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him."

Now, he was wicked, but not quite as wicked as some of them. “Against him came up Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and Hoshea became his servant and gave him presents. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no presents to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore, the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years.”

So, there was treason against God and conspiracy against man. The treason against God was revealed in the fact that the king was evil in the sight of God. He did not honor God, obey God, or seek to please God. He may not have been as bad as the former kings, yet he was a wicked king.

You have to remember that the Ten Commandments give us our duty toward God and our duty toward man. Hoshea broke all of the

commandments. He not only dishonored God, but also dishonored himself and his word. He had been defeated by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, and agreed to be his servant. After a while, he grew tired of serving the king of Assyria, so he went to So, king of Egypt, and entered into a covenant with him to try to throw off the yoke of the king of Assyria. His subterfuge and conspiracy against Shalmaneser were thus made manifest because he was a traitor to God.

Now you are going to ask me, “Well, wait a minute, Brother Weaver. Would you try to get out of slavery and servitude like that?” There was a problem. It was not merely slavery and servitude. If you will hold 2 Kings chapter 17, look in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 10. God had sovereignly sent the Assyrians against Israel to punish and chastise them for their sins. It was not simply that Shalmaneser came; God had sent him. Isaiah 10:5 says, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against the hypocritical nation and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil and to take the prey and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.” God said, “I sent him,” for one particular reason: to punish, chastise, and judge His sinful, wicked, disobedient people. And notice what is happening now. Hoshea says, “I don't like that chastisement. I don't like that

Punishment, so I'm going to do whatever I can to get out of it. When we are justly, rightly, and righteously being punished for our sins, the Word of God says it is right that a man should bear the punishment for his sins, and certainly that is true. But Hoshea did not like that, and so he cried to So, king of Egypt, “Come up and deliver me.” Hoshea did not want God, nor did he want His curse or His judgment. Thus, he sought to revolt against God and man.

Here is a biblical principle: whenever there is treason against God, there will always be conspiracy against man. Look at the Bilderbergers, the Illuminati, and the desire for one-world government. They are traitors against God and His law, and look at the varying conspiracies they have against countries to control them.

Whenever there is treason against God, there is always conspiracy against man. Consider how America, the United States government, violated not only its covenant with God but also conspired against

the Indian nations. I understand certain principles, and I have a number of books on the Indians and the treaties our government made. But do you realize our government broke every treaty it ever made with the Indians—every single one of them?

When you read of the shenanigans our government used to steal their land, you find that they would take one Indian, make him drunk, proclaim him a chief, and get him to sign over the land while he was drunk. Then they would claim that this was a legitimate title to the Indians' land, although none of the Indians had chosen him to be chief and he had no standing at all. You read some of these things and think, "Lord, have mercy." No wonder they hated the white man. I realize they were heathen, but just because somebody is a heathen does not mean that you do them wrong.

The same is also apparent in how the United States government violated the Constitution, invaded the South, and denied self-government to five million Southern people. Think of Ruby Ridge, where Randy Weaver's wife was killed with a baby in her arms and his son was shot in the back by federal officers. Think of the Branch Davidians and how those children, along with adults, were burned to death by the United States government. We gasp when we think of that, but it was nothing compared to the thousands whom the federal government raped, robbed, pillaged, burned out, and murdered under William Tecumseh Sherman, Sheridan, and Grant, with the blessings of Abraham Lincoln.

Whenever there is treason against God, there is conspiracy against man. Why? The Bible teaches us very clearly in Romans chapter 3 that all these sins are simply because there is no fear of God before their eyes. If you are not afraid to sin against Almighty God, you are certainly not going to be afraid to sin against man. If you are not afraid to rebel against God, you are not going to be afraid to conspire against man.

God had given Israel her liberty. He brought them out of the land of Egypt, made them walk upright, broke their chains, and delivered them from bondage. In 2 Kings chapter 17, verse 7: "For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of the Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods." It

was God who gave them their liberty, their law—read Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5—and their land.

He enabled them to conquer Canaan. In fact, they had to confess, "We got not the land by our sword and by our arm, but we got it by the blessing and the grace of God" (Psalm 44). Whenever there's treason against God, there will always be conspiracy against man. Because whenever there's treason against God, nothing else matters but sin and self.

Rejection of God's Law for Man's Law (2 Kings 17:7-8)

Secondly, note in verses 7 and 8 of 2 Kings 17 that there was also a rejection of the law of God and a replacement of God's law with man's law. Look in verses 7 and 8: "For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods," watch, "and walked in the statutes," that's laws, "and walked in the statutes of the heathen whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel which they had made." Wow!

Hold 2 Kings 17, but go back to Deuteronomy chapter 6. I want to show you why God gave the law to Israel and explain exactly what they have just done. Look at Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 1 through 3. Then we're going to skip down. Deuteronomy 6, verse 1:

“Now, these are the commandments, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that you might do them in the land whither you go to possess it, that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou and thy son and thy son's son, all the days of thy life.” He'll watch, “that thy days may be prolonged.” Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it, that it may be well with thee, that you may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

God said, “I've given you my law, and I want you to obey it, that you may have a long life, and that you may prosper.”

"And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes to fear the Lord, our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord, our God, as he has commanded us." They understood that the law of God was for their good. It was for their righteousness.

But what has happened now? They have traded God's law for man's law. In 2 Kings 17:8, the Bible says, "And they walked in the statutes of the heathen whom the Lord cast out before them." The Hittites, Jebusites, Hivites, and all these wicked, perverted people had their laws, and Israel was now obeying them. The verse adds, "and of the kings of Israel which they had made." You remember that the kings of Israel were apostate kings.

They had ceased obeying God and His law and substituted man and man's law. We confess and acknowledge the righteousness, perfection, and holiness of God's law; however, as a people, we have done exactly what Israel did. We have swapped and traded God's law for man's law. We have rejected God for man. We refuse to bow to God's law, yet bow to man's law.

In verse 7, God charges Israel with fearing other gods. What gods? The civil-government gods of the heathen and of Israel. We have forgotten that government can be an idol just as much as anything else. Israel's idolatry was evidenced by walking in the statutes of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel, and in the statutes of the kings of Israel whom they had made. Simply stated, they forsook God's law in order that they might obey man's law.

We've done the same thing in America. We've traded God's law, the Ten Commandments, for the laws of man. Do you realize, unhappily, the United States government today does not recognize God or His law? Neither do most Americans. And what we've done, we've traded God's Ten Commandments and we live in total ignorance of God's law, but we are inundated with a voluminous amount of man's law. Do you realize, and I have a large print Bible, not the largest, but I've got a large print Bible, but as large as this Bible is, I can carry God's law in my hand. How many of you would like to carry the Federal Register around in your hand? How many

would you like just carry the IRS code around in your hand? You could not.

It would be absolutely impossible. Now, I want you to know something. God's law does not change. But man's law is changing continually and constantly. Moreover, man's law is always incomplete and incoherent. Man's law contradicts all the time. God's law does not. I want you to listen to what James Madison said concerning law. Remember, he was the father of the Constitution, Secretary of the Constitutional Convention. He said this: "It will be of little avail to the people that the laws are made by men of their own choice if the laws are so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they could not be understood, if they be repealed or revised before they are promulgated, or undergo such incessant changes that no man who knows what the law is today can guess what it will be tomorrow. Law is defined as a rule of action, but how can that be a rule which is little known and less fixed?" What would James Madison say today if he had a look at the Federal Register?

Secret and Open Idolatry (2 Kings 17:9-12)

God's law traded for man's law equals tyranny, despotism, and totalitarianism. There was a secret and then open rejection of God as demonstrated by blatant idolatry: "And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God. And they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchman to the fenced city. And they set them up images and groves in every high hill and under every green tree. And there they burn incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them, and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger. For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said of them, 'You shall not do these things.'"

Those whose hearts are set on rebellion and refuse to repent or even listen to the Word of God will always demonstrate their rebellion. The sins that began secretly are now openly committed. Scripture teaches us, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Here is a simple and yet evident reason why we should never harbor unbiblical thoughts, ideas, or imaginations in our hearts. Our Lord said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth

from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies." Out of the heart. So we should never keep unbiblical, ungodly thoughts in our hearts.

There was a secret rejection of God, followed by open rejection demonstrated through blatant idolatry. The principle that is true when applied to individuals personally is equally true when applied nationally. When our country first began, there was an open confession and acknowledgment of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

Numerous state charters and constitutions said pointedly that no man could serve as an officer, senator, or representative who did not acknowledge Jesus Christ and confess that the Bible was the inspired Word of God. The Founding Fathers demanded Christian rulers. Yet our country began with an open confession of Christ, proceeded to a secret denial, and now has nothing but open, blatant blasphemy through the denial of every principle of Christianity.

Prayer was removed from the schools. Bibles were removed from the schools. Bible clubs were denied the ability to meet even after school hours. Consequently, we are producing a whole nation of illiterate and immoral boys and girls who have no perception of right and wrong because they are taught that there are no absolutes. The amazing thing is that one cannot even carry a Bible in many schools today, or even in our courtrooms. But it is acceptable to have a Bible in prison.

That is like shutting the gate after the horse is out. Why not give them the Bible first to keep them out of prison? Secret sins will always blossom openly after a while. Secret idolatries will always become open, brazen, and public. They had sinned secretly, but then they began to do everything openly.

Rejection of Prophetic Warnings (2 Kings 17:13-17)

Fourthly, in verses 13 through 17, there was an open rejection of the demand for repentance and obedience. “Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah by all the prophets, by all the seers, saying, ‘Turn you from your evil ways and keep my commandments

and my statutes according to all the law that I commanded your fathers, which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.' Notwithstanding, they would not hear, but hardened their necks like the neck of their fathers that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and his testimonies which he testified against them.

"And they followed vanity," that is, idolatry, "and became vain and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove and worshipped all the host of heaven and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire and used divination and enchantments and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger."

Once you have set your course on idolatry and refuse to listen to someone warning, rebuking, or reproving you—telling you that you are on the wrong road—when you refuse to hear the word of repentance and restoration, you will always go further and deeper into rebellion and wickedness.

Now watch this progression. God sent the preachers, but verse 14 says, "Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks like the neck of their fathers that did not believe in the Lord their God." They got a stiff, hardened neck. What happened? Verse 15 says, "And they rejected his statutes and his covenants that he made." They became so stiff-necked and hardened that they wanted nothing to do with the covenant of God or the Word of God.

They totally refused all His testimonies. When you refuse to listen to the Word of God, you are in dire straits. Verse 15 continues: "they followed vanity and became vain and went after the heathen that round about them." Their hardened neck caused them to refuse utterly and totally the Word of God. Their refusal to hear the Word of God drove them farther into idolatry and wickedness. Now skip down to verse 16.

Here is the full and final effect of it: "And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten

images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal, and caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire." That is, they either dedicated them to false gods, or burned them alive in honor of those false gods. When men refuse to hear the Word of God, there is only one direction for them to travel: straight into the judgment of Almighty God.

Judgment and Loss of Everything (2 Kings 17:18-23)

The Bible says in Proverbs 29:1, "He that being often reproved and hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." That is what is happening to these people. Fifthly, they faced the curse and judgment of God because of their stubbornness and their sins. That is verses 18 through 23: "Therefore, the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight."

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 17:18-23 (KJV)

> There was none left but the tribe of Judah only. And Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel, which they had made. And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel and afflicted them and delivered them into the hand of the spoilers until he had cast them out of his sight. For he rent Israel from the house of David. And they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat sin, and Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did, and they departed not from them until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all of his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land unto Assyria unto this day.

The Devastation of Sin and the Corruption of Worship

God had given Israel their liberty. He delivered them, gave them His law, and gave them their land. Everything Israel had, God gave them. Yet because of their stubbornness, sin, and rebellion, they lost their liberty. Those who were not killed were carried as slaves into Assyria. They lost the law in the sense that they could no longer offer sacrifices or do anything else, because the temple was destroyed.

They lost their land because it was occupied and controlled by heathen. They even lost their nation and national unity because they were dispersed everywhere. In other words, they lost everything. Sin devastates and destroys.

Sin will not only destroy you personally; it will destroy you familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. Sin is no respecter of nations. Sin and justice will destroy America as they did Israel. It does not matter to sin. Israel and Judah lost everything because of their sin, and so will America, because God is immutable and unchangeable. What angered Him in 2 Kings 17 angers Him today. What He did in 2 Kings 17, He can do equally well today.

Adopting a Mongrel Religion (2 Kings 17:24-41)

Sixthly, after judgment, instead of seeking pure religion, they adopted a synergistic or mongrel religion. Verses 24 through 33 explain this. The king of Assyria moved a lot of heathen into Samaria; he took many Samaritans and moved them into Syria and other places. God sent lions among them, and the lions killed the people because of their sin and rebellion. The people said to the king of Assyria, “We’re being hurt and we’re being killed because we know not the manner of the gods of the land.” They were not only polytheistic; they had no earthly idea of the omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence of the one true and living God. Therefore, the king of Assyria sent an apostate priest back to teach them the way of the God of the land.

Remember, that was why God sent them into captivity to begin with: they were worshiping the golden calves. So what did the people do? The Bible says they made their own gods and worshiped the Lord God. He was merely an added deity beside their gods. He was not the true, supreme, sovereign God. They professed that they worshiped the one true and living God, but they did not. In fact, that is exactly what God says.

They did not hearken, but followed their former manner: they feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children and their children's children, as did their fathers. So do they unto this day. They did after the former manners; they feared not the Lord, neither did they follow the statutes, ordinances, law, and

commandment which the Lord God commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel.

They said they followed the Lord, but they did not. Our churches are full of people who say they worship Jesus Christ, but they do not. You can worship Christ only according to how He is laid out in the Word of God. You cannot worship Him any old way you please. That is what these people were trying to do: "Well, we'll do it this way." No. Our Lord told the woman of Samaria, "The time is coming when you shall neither in this mountain nor Jerusalem worship the Father. For all that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." If you are not worshiping God in spirit and in truth, you are not worshiping God.

It is amazing how even most professing Christians will not listen to the Word of God. What the average Christian wants is a mongrel religion, with everything blended together so he can partake of many different things. I have heard people say, "It doesn't matter which religion you are, just so that you're sincere." You can eat arsenic or strychnine sincerely, thinking it is an aspirin, but you are going to be sincerely dead. Some say, "There's a lot of good in all religions."

Yes, but rat poison is ninety-nine percent cornmeal. Cornmeal is good food; it is that one percent of arsenic that kills you. The only true religion is biblical Christianity. All else are false. You cannot worship God any way you please. That is what these people tried to do.

Now, here are the reasons the Israelites suffered and were deprived of their lives, liberty, law, and land: first, because of their idolatries; second, because of their rejection of God's law; third, because they replaced God's law with man's law; fourth, because they disregarded the warnings of God's prophets; and fifth, because they accepted a mongrel or synergistic religion.

The Price of True Deliverance: Repentance and Obedience

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 17, beginning with verse 35: "With whom the Lord had made a covenant and charged them, saying, 'You shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourself to them, nor

serve them, nor sacrifice to them. But the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, Him shall you fear, and Him shall you worship, and to Him shall you do sacrifice. And the statutes and ordinances and the law and the commandment which He wrote you, you shall observe to do forevermore, and you shall not fear other gods.'"

Watch: "'And the covenant that I made with you shall you not forget? Neither shall you fear other gods.'" Why? "'But the Lord, your God, you shall fear.'" Here it is: "'And he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.'" Are you listening? Freedom and liberty do have a price. Being delivered from enemies, both foreign and domestic, does have a price. However, the price is not the millions and billions and trillions that are being spent by the Defense Department on the defense of America. The price of true deliverance is repentance and obedience to the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. "And he shall deliver you from all your enemies." There is no deliverance except by God's deliverance.

Turn to one last passage, Psalm 81. As you turn there, consider Psalm 127, verse 1: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." If God does not protect us, we are not protected. If God does not deliver us, we are not delivered. The price of true deliverance is repentance and obedience.

In Psalm 81, beginning with verse 10, God said to His people: "I am the Lord, thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." Lord, have mercy, what a promise: "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." I cannot help but think of little baby birds. You have seen them when mama comes with that nice juicy worm. What do they do? They open those little beaks wide, and they are just crying. They want—"Open your mouth wide," said God, "and I will fill it."

"But my people would not hearken to my voice and Israel would have none of me." They would not listen or obey. What was the result? "So I gave them up into their own hearts' lusts, and they walked after their own counsels." And here is what God said: "Oh, that my people had hearken unto me and Israel had walked in my ways!"

“I should soon have subdued their enemies and turn my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him, but their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them also with the finest of wheat and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied them.” God said that if they had listened and obeyed, He would have soon subdued their enemies and turned His hand against their adversaries. Even their adversaries would have submitted to Him.

If we want deliverance individually, familially, ecclesiastically, or nationally, it must start with repentance toward God, faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience to His Word. Only He can deliver us from our enemies, both foreign and domestic. The price of true deliverance is repentance and obedience.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask, Father, that You would be pleased to work in our hearts, grant us real, genuine repentance, and grant us, Heavenly Father, real, genuine obedience, that our lives might be brought into greater conformity to Your Word and that You would be honored and glorified in our lives. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 13

A Needful and Necessary Prayer

August 18, 2013

Introduction: The Problem of Selfish Prayer

"And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise" (1 Chronicles 16:35).

I believe it is absolutely true that every child of God prays to his heavenly Father. Most of the time, however, we probably do not pray aright, but at least we do pray. Many times we pray selfishly. We pray for our own lusts and desires. Such prayers are usually unanswered, and moreover, they are condemned in Scripture.

James 4:1 says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not." Then verses 2–3 continue: "Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

God tells us, first of all, that most of the time our prayers are unanswered because we really fail to pray. Secondly, when we do pray, we fail to pray aright. There are many ways in which we fail to pray aright. We fail oftentimes to pray in faith. We fail to pray according to the will of God or according to the word of God. We fail to pray with forgiveness in our hearts, and we fail to pray unceasingly. There are probably a multitude of areas in which we fail in our prayer life.

But I must confess that probably one of the greatest areas in which we fail, David hits the nail on the head for us in 1 Chronicles 16:35. Most of us, when we pray, pray for ourselves, our family, and our friends.

There is nothing wrong with praying for yourself, your family, and your friends, except that most of the time we suffer from what is known as tunnel vision; that is, we simply do not see the larger picture. I always try to explain it like this: There is my ministry, our ministry, and the ministry. My ministry is just a small part of our ministry, and our ministry is still just a small part of the ministry. So many times we are consumed with my ministry or our ministry and totally fail to see the broader picture of the entire ministry. It is true that our Heavenly Father is concerned with us, since we are part and parcel of the ministry. He is certainly concerned with our needs and desires.

He is not going to forget our work of faith and labor of love. The Bible says in Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 10, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” God is not going to forget the little part of my ministry and our ministry.

But the point is quite simple: most of the time, we are not concerned with the greater part or with the whole. We are concerned with the little, tiny parts. When you pray, are your prayers broad enough to include the Christians in this state, God’s people in this country, and God’s people in the world? Are they broad enough to consider other ministries and not just our own? In other words, can you see the forest and not just one or two trees?

In 1 Chronicles 16, David gives us a wonderful example of what I call an enlarged prayer. He is not just praying for himself or his household, but for the people of God. We need to learn to pray for all of God's people wherever they are located.

The Context of 1 Chronicles 16: Rejoicing at the Ark's Return

The context before verse 35 is important. The context of 1 Chronicles chapter 16 is a context of rejoicing because the ark of the Lord has been brought into the tabernacle that David has set up for it at Jerusalem. In 1 Chronicles 16:1-3, the Bible says, "So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God. And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord."

"And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine." Can you imagine the king giving everyone a loaf of bread, a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine? It certainly was indeed a time of rejoicing. You have to remember what made this occasion special. It was the very first time David attempted to bring the ark into Jerusalem.

It was a dismal failure, because they failed to seek the Lord after the proper manner. What they tried to do was use the way of the Philistines. Turn back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 6. You will see what a dismal failure it was in attempting to bring the ark to Jerusalem the first time. Notice 2 Samuel chapter 6, verse 1: "Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart."

Remember, the Philistines had sent it back like this: “And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him into the city of David.”

“But David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.” The Philistines had sent the ark back on a cart, and David and the people of Israel attempted to bring it back on a cart as well. That was not the God-ordained way of carrying the ark.

David gets it right the second time. In 1 Chronicles 15:12-13, he says, “And said unto them, Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.”

The priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. David said, “God smote us because we did it not right the first time.” Since the ark was now coming into the tabernacle, or tent, that David had pitched, there was great rejoicing.

In 1 Chronicles 16:4, David appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to record, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel: “Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jeiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obed-edom: and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals; Benaiah also and

Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God. Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren."

David not only appointed the musicians; on the day the ark returned, he handed a copy of this psalm to Asaph and the singers that they might sing. The central truths of this psalm, expressed in 1 Chronicles 16, can also be found in Psalm 96, Psalm 105, and Psalm 106. It was written particularly as a time of rejoicing when the ark was being brought correctly into the city of Jerusalem.

Verse 35 is the verse I want to expound: "And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise." In verse 34, David commands the giving of thanks to God: "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." After telling us to give thanks to the LORD, he not only gives us certain concepts; he gives us the petitions and the words we are to use to express those petitions in prayer.

Praying for the Salvation of God's People

There is nothing better than quoting Scripture in prayer. One way we know that we are praying biblically and scripturally is when we quote Scripture and use the words of God Himself. David wrote this psalm under the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit: "And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise." Let me break these petitions down and show you why this is a needful and necessary prayer. First, verse 35 tells us to pray for the salvation of God's people.

First Petition: 'Save Us, O God of Our Salvation'

When we think of salvation, we immediately think of what is termed eternal salvation—salvation from punishment and wrath. Certainly, that is an aspect of salvation, and an extremely important one. We indeed need to learn to pray for the salvation of God's elect, whoever they are and wherever they may be. In 2 Timothy 2:10, the Apostle Paul said, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with

eternal glory." Paul endured all things for the elect's sakes. When you read of all the things Paul suffered—a night and a day in the deep, being stoned and beaten, and facing enemies day and night—he said, "I endure for the elect's sakes that they might be saved."

We know that God has an elect because His Word declares that concept very clearly. Whenever and wherever I preach, I rely upon this truth. I know that not everybody is going to be saved, and I know that many people will be upset by my preaching. The Southern Poverty Law Center does not like my preaching, and I am sure the ACLU does not like it either. Many people do not like my preaching; some will get mad and upset. But I also know that some will be glad and rejoice. God is going to save His elect, whoever they may be.

The doctrine of election is a motivation to evangelism. In Acts 13:48, Paul had been preaching to the Jews, and they rebelled because they did not like what he said. Therefore, he turned to the Gentiles. The Word of God says, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord.”

“And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” How many believed? As many as were ordained to eternal life believed. In this passage, some got mad and some got glad. Some rebelled against the truth and some obeyed the truth. What is it that will keep someone preaching and teaching? It is the very fact that I know God has a people somewhere, and when the time comes, God will use His Word and speak to their hearts.

God has not only ordained the end; He has also ordained the means to the end as well. It is true that God has an elect, but God has also ordained the means of reaching those elect. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14, Paul wrote to these Thessalonian Christians: “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So did God ordain them? Yes. Did God choose them to salvation? Yes. Did God appoint the means of reaching them? Yes. Through

sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, Paul said, “He called you by our gospel.” Therefore, we have to pray for the salvation of God’s people.

However, what I want to emphasize is this: the word salvation is used in a variety of different ways in the Bible. Whenever you see the word salvation in the Bible, it is not always talking about eternal salvation. For instance, it can include physical deliverance. It can include being delivered from our enemies, as 1 Samuel 14 will show.

You remember that Jonathan and his armourbearer had wrought a great victory. Saul had cursed anyone who tasted any food until he had gotten his way upon his enemies. Jonathan wasn't around and didn't hear that. He dipped the tip of his staff into a honeycomb, put some honey in his mouth, and ate it, and his eyes were enlightened. When someone said, "You shouldn't have done that; your father placed a curse on anyone who ate," he said, "My father has done foolishly. Think what would have happened to all the enemies now if we had been able to eat and have our strength." But look what happened: Saul says he's going to kill Jonathan because of this.

In 1 Samuel 14:45, the Bible says: "And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not." But note: "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?" What salvation is he talking about? Defeating the Philistines.

Look in your Bibles at Psalm 140:7. David says, "O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." Now, what is David talking about when he calls God the strength of his salvation? God's protecting hand upon him as he fought the enemy. It has nothing to do with eternal salvation, but it does have to do with a physical deliverance.

Psalm 144:10 says, "It is he that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword." Very plainly, the salvation David is talking about here is being delivered in battle. God has spared him; God has saved him. Turn to Jeremiah, chapter 8, verses 19 and 20, and see how the word saved is used here.

The truth of the matter is that in this passage Judah, or the people of God, has been surrounded by her enemies. Jeremiah 8:19 says, “Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? is not her king in her?” They have been attacked by their enemies. “Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities?” Then notice what the people say: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” What do they mean by “we are not saved”? There has been no deliverance from the oppressing army. They are going to perish and starve to death. The harvest is over; they could not get out and gather it. It has ended, and they are not saved. Salvation here has to do with physical deliverance.

In Philippians 1:19, the Apostle Paul says, “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Was Paul not already saved? Did God not save him when He called him to be an apostle? Of course He did. But Paul is in prison, and when he says, “For I know this will turn to my salvation through your prayer,” he is saying, “I know that I will be released from prison through your prayer.” So it is called a salvation.

Salvation, then, can refer not only to eternal salvation, but also to salvation from our enemies, salvation in battle, and salvation from prison. It can also include salvation from what we would call physical ills and sickness. In Philippians 2:25, Paul writes concerning Epaphroditus: “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.” Epaphroditus longed after them and was full of heaviness because they had heard that he had been sick. Indeed, he was sick nigh unto death.

In other words, he nearly died. But God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

Paul said, "God had mercy upon Epaphroditus, and God also had mercy upon me." How did God have mercy upon Paul? By sparing Epaphroditus, so Epaphroditus could help working with the Apostle Paul. When God healed Epaphroditus, He not only saved Epaphroditus' life, but He saved the Apostle Paul a great deal of agony as well.

If I'm facing any surgery or any difficulty like that, I certainly want to ask the Lord to deliver me, help me, and save me. I want to ask the Lord to give the doctors wisdom and discernment. God's people do need to be saved. We need to be saved from ourselves. The worst thing that God could ever do to us is just leave us to ourselves. The enemy would not have to really destroy us if we were just left to ourselves, because we destroy ourselves.

We need to be delivered from ourselves, from our sins, from the servants of Satan, and from our pride; from our lethargy and our apathy, and from our cold, hard, unforgiving hearts.

There are saints in prison for the faith's sake and for righteousness' sake. They need to be delivered. There have been a multitude that have been unlawfully, unbiblically, and unconstitutionally imprisoned. I know some now who are in prison that have no more reason to be in prison than you or I need to be in prison. They've done nothing wrong, but yet they're there because of the faith's sake.

So many people tend to think that if someone is in prison, they must undoubtedly deserve to be there. But the apostles were imprisoned. Even our Lord was imprisoned. A multitude of saints have been imprisoned. In fact, in Revelation 2 and verse 10, here's what our Lord said. Listen carefully.

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Satan shall also cast some of you into prison. If you have the mentality that if someone is in prison, in all probability he deserves to be there, you've got another thing coming. Many are there who have done wicked things, but many are there who have done absolutely nothing wrong.

Hebrews 11 says, "Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment." Verse 38 says, "Of whom the world was not worthy." Here is a multitude that had been imprisoned wrongly and wickedly. Obviously, our Lord did not deserve to be in prison. The apostles did not deserve to be imprisoned, and the saints did not deserve to be in prison, and yet they were in prison.

Hebrews 13:3 commands, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them. And them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." What does God tell us? If you know a Christian, a saint of God, who is in prison, you had better remember him as being bound with him. If he is suffering adversity, you had better suffer with him, being yourselves also in the same body.

In other words, what one goes through, we should understand, and we should empathize and sympathize with. I have no sympathy for someone suffering for his sins and getting what you and I would call the just desserts. But I do have a great deal of sympathy for individuals who have been in prison unlawfully, unbiblically, and unconstitutionally. How in the world can you and I fulfill Hebrews 13:3 if we do not pray for those saints who are in prison?

I read this morning, though I did not have time to read the whole thing. I only caught the headlines: a judge's clerk told a prisoner how to file a motion and obtain a DNA test. The man had been sentenced to seventy years for a rape he did not commit. He filed, obtained the test, and it proved him innocent. The judge who sentenced him became angry with the clerk and fired him.

Now, if I'm thrown into prison, I want somebody praying for me. And if you ever find that I'm in prison, it will not be for violating God's law, but for obeying God and doing what is right and holy. Simply put, if we're going to remember those in bonds, we must learn to pray. What must we learn to pray? We must learn to pray what David commanded us in 1 Chronicles 16:35.

"Save thy people, O Lord." Do you realize God's people need to be saved soteriologically, that is, with real, general, eternal salvation?

We need to be saved physically, economically, materially, mentally, and emotionally. There are multitudes of ways that we need to be saved. So it doesn't matter where you are, or where anyone else is, in the Christian life; it is still legitimate, as the Apostle Paul and King David say, to pray, "Save thy people, O Lord." We all need to be saved in one way or the other.

Second Petition: 'Gather Us Together'

In 1 Chronicles 16:35, we find a second petition: "And say ye"—this is what you are supposed to say when you pray—"Save us, O God of our salvation." Here is the second petition: "and gather us together." We are not only to pray that God's people will be saved, since salvation belongs to God and He is the one who must save us; we are also commanded to pray, "gather us together."

While that may not be a physical possibility at this moment, it may be in the future. Certainly, we will be gathered together at His coming. The Bible tells us He will gather the wheat into His garner in Luke 3:17. In Mark 13:27, it says He shall send His angels and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Certainly, in the future there will be a time when we are gathered together. I believe David means that we should pray, "Save thy people, O God, and gather thy people together," or "gather us together." We may be miles apart physically, but we may be gathered together spiritually, culturally, and intellectually.

We must learn to think alike, act alike, and be alike. I don't care if you live in California, Idaho, Missouri, Georgia, or Florida—if you are God's people, we need to learn to think alike, act alike, and be alike. How do we accomplish such a feat? Wherever we are located, we must be constantly, consistently, and continually bringing our lives into conformity to the Word of God. We cannot act alike unless we believe alike. We cannot have the same Christian culture unless we believe alike. And we cannot believe alike unless each one of us submits his mind to the Word of God.

Concerning my travels, this is the question: “What are other Christians like in the other states?” You think of funny California

and socialistic Washington, but the Christians in those states believe, think, and act just like we do. God has an elect everywhere.

I never will forget when I first started preaching nearly fifty years ago. The first time I went up north and preached, I came back, and one man in our church—the first question he asked me—was this: "How'd them Yankees treat you?" He asked it just like that. I said, "Well, since they were Christians, they treated me the way I should be treated." And it is true.

If you are in the North, South, East, or West, it does not matter. If you submit your mind to the Word of God, we are going to end up thinking alike. Can you imagine the impact that Christians would have upon our culture, our government, economics, Hollywood, and a host of other subjects if each one, regardless of location, simply acted upon biblical truth and biblical principles? Can you imagine Christians rising up and acting biblically and scripturally all over this country? What an impact! We would change our culture back into a biblical and godly culture. We do not have to be in one wad to accomplish these things.

People say, "If we could just get everybody together," but that will be impossible until Christ comes. You do not have to have everyone in one wad, a big glob. All you would have to do is learn to think alike and act alike. Consider how we are exhorted to be gathered together in our minds. Romans 12:16 says, "Be of the same mind one toward another." Romans 15:5 says, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." How can you speak the same thing? You have to have the same mind.

You have to have the same judgment and believe the same things. In Philippians 2:2, the Apostle Paul said, "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." In Philippians 3:16, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." And 1 Peter 4:1 says, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us

in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Can you imagine what it would be like if every Christian submitted his mind to the word of God and had the mind of Christ? We would think alike and act alike.

Third Petition: 'Deliver Us from the Heathen'

David says, "Here's what you should pray and say in your prayers: Save us, O God of our salvation." That's the first petition. The second is, "and gather us together." Looking back to verse 35, there is a third petition: "and deliver us from the heathen." Certainly, David's kingdom was under attack from the Philistines and countless other enemies. Israel in the Old Testament was continually under attack by surrounding kingdoms.

But may I point out that the kingdom of God is equally under attack today? Look at the attack from Islam, from our own government, and from the atheists. Look at the attacks from Christians who are just shooting and fighting with each other. There are attacks on every hand. Enemies abound, unceasingly endeavoring to eradicate anything and everything that is biblical and Christian. The Bible teaches very clearly that when the wicked reign, there is only trouble, turmoil, and confusion. All you have to do is look at the present administration and understand that statement. Authority and power in the hands of the wicked only encourage them in their efforts to establish their agenda, their goal, and their kingdom, while seeking to destroy all that oppose them.

Do you realize the enemies in control in this country are not stupid? They may be rebellious, but they understand that if they succeed, they have to destroy Christianity, our culture, and the Constitution. That's exactly what they've been doing. Turn to Proverbs chapter 28, and look at verse 12. We'll look at several passages here.

The Bible says, “When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.” Why is the man hidden? He is trying to stay out of the way because there is trouble, turmoil, and confusion. Proverbs 28:28 says, “When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.” You want the righteous to increase? Let the wicked perish. Proverbs

29:2 says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”

Deuteronomy 28 shows that the reason the heathen are ruling and reigning over us today is because of our own sin and our own rebellion. Pay special attention to the following curses for disobedience to God and His law. It is not disobedience on the part of the wicked that is condemning us. It is disobedience on the part of the righteous.

“The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.”

God said, you can either serve me in thankfulness and joy and gladness of heart and obedience, or you can serve your enemies. God’s people are going to serve one or the other. We will either serve God or we will serve our enemies. It is just that simple.

Luke chapter 1 shows us what Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, said. Remember Deuteronomy 28 and David's prayer: “Save thy people, O Lord, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen.” Zacharias prophesied:

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all

that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."

Someone may say, "But Brother Weaver, that is going to happen when our Lord comes back." I understand that. But Zacharias is not talking about the return of the Lord. He is talking about the first coming of the Lord, His birth. Why did He come? To deliver us out of the hand of the enemy and to give us an obedient heart—that we might be delivered out of the hand of our enemies, that we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives.

The prayer of Zacharias is essentially the same prayer as that of David. David's prayer is more abbreviated, yet the essence is the same: "Save thy people, O Lord, gather us together and deliver us from the heathen." I do not know about you, but I pray daily—in fact, many times a day—that God would deliver us from our enemies and from the hand of the heathen. It is a needed and necessary prayer. "And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen." Why?

The Purpose: God's Glory and Praise

"That we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise." There is a purpose for this prayer: that we may give thanks to God's holy name and glory in His praise.

Applications: Praying for Deliverance and Righteousness

These three requests flow together toward one end: the glory of God. We are to pray, "Save us, O God of our salvation. Gather us together. Deliver us from the heathen." Why? So that we may give God honor and glory. Is that not a prayer worth repeating? Is it not worth beseeching our Heavenly Father to save His people in every way possible, gather us together in one mind, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may praise Him? Yes.

Christians who are in captivity to sin, Satan, and self are just as bound as those Israelites carried captive into Assyria and those Judahites carried captive into Babylon. Romans 6:16 says, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are.

If you are serving your lust, you are a slave to your lust. If you are serving your pride, you are a slave to your pride. If you are serving your laziness and apathy, you are a servant, a slave, to your laziness and apathy. In 2 Peter 2:19, the Word of God says, "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."

If Robert can jump up, whip me, throw me down, and put his knee on my chest or throat, I am willing at that point to do whatever he says to get him off me. If he overcomes me, I am in bondage to him at that particular point. The same thing is true with our sins. We do need to be delivered from sin, self, and Satan.

Not only that, we also need to be delivered from every system contrary to God and His orderly way. God's people need to be delivered from tyranny, despotism, and totalitarianism. We need to be free to serve, honor, and worship our Lord as He has ordained. The command of God to the pharaohs of this world is the same as it was to the pharaoh of Egypt: "Let my people go, that they may serve me."

Thirdly, if we place these three requests together—"Save us. Gather us. Deliver us"—it should be easy to see that they speak of the downfall of the wicked and the establishment of the righteous. When you pray, "Save thy people, O Lord, and gather us together and deliver us from the heathen," you are in essence saying, as our Lord taught us, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

There's a song that R.L. Peacock sings regularly. I enjoy the song. I enjoy hearing him sing it. I don't know all of it, but one of the stanzas goes like this, or the chorus: “I want to see Israel marching. I want to hear that trumpet call. I want to climb up Zion's mountain. I want to see Babylon fall.” And I do want it to fall. And how in the

world are we going to get it to fall unless we pray, “Deliver us from the heathen. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth”? What we're saying is, “Lord, we want Thee to reign supremely and sovereignly. Let all the world know that Thou art God alone.” And He is. Jesus Christ is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and God of Gods.

Father, we pray today in the name of Jesus Christ that You would indeed help us to pray. Help us to pray aright. And Lord, here is a very special prayer that we've been commanded to pray: “Save thy people, O Lord God of hosts. Gather us together and deliver us from the heathen, that we may glory in thy holy name and worship and praise thee.” Father, we do ask for deliverance from the enemy. Thou didst say, “O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just.” And Father, we ask that that would indeed be done by your grace and by your mercy and through the repentance and obedience and faith of thy people. Make us holy, make us godly, make us obedient. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

This program was produced by Dominion Ministry. For more information about Pastor Weaver's sermons, you may contact Dominion Ministry by mail at 7400 Abercorn Street, Suite 705, PMB 175, Savannah, Georgia, 31406, or call 912-925-0990. You can also visit www.dominionministry.com.

Gather us together and deliver us from the heathen, that we may glory in thy holy name and worship and praise thee. Father, we do ask for deliverance from the enemy. Thou didst say, “O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish thou the just.” And Father, we ask that that would indeed be done by your grace and by your mercy and through the repentance and obedience and faith of thy people. Make us holy, make us godly, make us obedient. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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CHAPTER 14

How to Know the Hand of God is Against a Nation

January 19, 2014

How to Know When the Hand of God Is Against a Nation

Introduction: The Hand of God Against Judah

We will read Lamentations, chapter one, beginning with verse one and continuing through verse seven. I am going to be quoting a lot of Scripture today because I will be pressed for time. I will ask you to turn to some passages, but I want you to listen as I quote them, because they are related to the truths that I will be expounding.

"How doth a city sit solitary that was full of people? How has she become as a widow, she that was great among the nations and princess among the provinces? How has she become tributary? She weepeth sore in the night and her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her. All of her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They are become her enemies. Judah is

going into captivity because of affliction and because of great servitude. She dwelleth among the heathen, and findeth no rest.

All her persecutors overtook her between the straits. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feast. All her gates are desolate, her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief. Her enemies prosper, for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. Her children are going into captivity before the enemy, and from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed.

Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer. Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all of her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her. The adversary saw her and did mock at her sabbaths."

There is absolutely no dispute that the hand of God was against Judah and Jerusalem. In fact, the entire book of Lamentations is written concerning the downfall and the destruction of the nation. Moreover, there are specific passages that state undeniably that God was moving to destroy that nation.

Isaiah 5:25 says, "Therefore, as the anger of the Lord kindled against His people, He had stretched forth His hand against them and had smitten them. And the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." Obviously, God's hand is stretched out in anger. Isaiah 9:21 says, "Manasseh, Ephraim, and Ephraim, and Manasseh, and they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." In Jeremiah 15:6, God says, "They have forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward. Therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee and destroy thee. I am weary with repenting." In each of these passages, the Bible refers to God's hand being stretched out against them.

Defining the Hand of the Lord

It is important that we understand our terms. When we speak of the hand of the Lord, what exactly are we discussing? The phrase “the hand of the Lord” is usually presented to discuss the power of God. The hand is the instrument of power, work, and blessing.

Stephen Charnock, in The Attributes of God, says concerning God's power: “The power of God is that ability and strength whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve. As holiness is the beauty of all of God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfection of the divine nature. How vain would be His eternal counsels if power did not step in to execute them. Without power, His mercy would be feeble pity. His promise is an empty sound. His threatening is a mere scarecrow. God's power is like Himself, infinite, eternal, incomprehensible. It can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature.”

He also writes: “Power is also used as a name of God. The Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, Mark 14:62, that is at the right hand of God. God and power are so inseparable that they are reciprocated. As His essence is immense, not to be confined to place, as it is eternal, not to be measured in time, so it is almighty not to be limited in regard to action.” Thus, when we speak of the hand of God, we are referring to the power of God. As we study Scripture, we find that God's hand may be upon us either in blessing or in anger.

It is the hand of the Lord that guarantees His promises as well as His threatenings. In Numbers 11:23, the Bible says, “And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? And shalt thou see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not?” Obviously, God’s hand is not waxed short, and it is quite capable of bringing to pass whatever God has decreed.

In 2 Kings 3:15, regarding Elisha, we read about the hand of the Lord being upon him. In this instance, it was the hand of blessing. Elisha said, “But now bring me a minstrel.” And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. This was a hand of blessing, salvation, and deliverance, for Elisha

was telling the kings before him how God would deliver them and their armies and give their enemies into their hands. Nevertheless, when we speak of the hand of the Lord, we normally refer to the anger of God, His righteous judgment.

As you study the Bible, you will find that the hand of the Lord can be against individuals, families, cities, and nations. Naomi and her husband went into a foreign land with their two sons. Her husband died, and the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died also. I think her husband's name was Elimelech. All she had left were her two daughters-in-law. When Naomi heard that there was food back in Israel, she decided to leave Moab and return.

In Ruth 1:13, speaking of her inability to have more sons, she said, "Would you tarry for them till they were grown? Would you stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters, it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." In the loss of her husband and her two sons, she said that the hand of the Lord had gone out against her. Thus, it is not only against individuals; it is also against certain families. Eli's family was to be destroyed because the hand of the Lord was against them on account of their sins and rebellion.

Scope of God's Hand: Individuals, Families, Cities, Nations

In 1 Samuel 3:11–14, the Lord said unto Samuel, "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house. And when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever."

Here God, in His righteous anger and indignation, is not simply destroying an individual, but an entire house, an entire family. God's hand can be directed against individuals and families. It can also be directed against entire cities. You remember when the Philistines had captured the Ark, defeated Israel, and taken the Ark into the

house of Dagon, their god. Dagon fell over before the Ark, and finally broke in two.

The Bible says in 1 Samuel 5:6, “But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods even from Ashdod unto the coast thereof.” The hand of the Lord was heavy against them. It did not matter where the Ark went in Philistia among the Philistines; all their cities were afflicted by the hand of God being against them.

God's hand was certainly against the men that came from Egypt—the Israelite men who refused to obey God. God destroyed them, and they never had the opportunity to enter into Canaan. In Deuteronomy 2:15, the Bible says, “For indeed, the hand of the Lord was against them to destroy them from among the host, and they were consumed.” Here is the hand of the Lord against individuals, against families, against cities, and against people. I do not have to quote any Scriptures to show that the hand of the Lord was against all those nations whom the Israelites defeated and conquered in Canaan land.

Obviously, the hand of the Lord was against them, for they were defeated and conquered. But God gave a warning to Israel. In 1 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 15, God says this: “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you as it was against your fathers.”

So God gave them a warning. God says, look, if you refuse to obey me, if you rebel against me, my hand will be stretched out against you exactly the way you were stretched out against your fathers.

So here is my question, and this was a thought that came to my mind as I read through Lamentations chapter 1. We know that God’s hand was stretched out against the nation of Judah, the entire southern kingdom. We know that it was stretched out against their capital, Jerusalem. What are the evidences? What are the manifestations that God’s righteous anger is being exhibited when His hand is stretched out against a nation?

Let me cut it down to the very bare minimum. How can we tell whether or not God’s hand is stretched out against America? How

can we tell whether or not God's hand is stretched out against England or Canada? The reason I quoted so many Scriptures is that I have eight things I want to show you this morning: eight truths, eight manifestations. I will have to be very quick on each one because of time. But I want you to begin looking at verse 1. How do we know that God's hand is stretched out against a nation or against the people? How do we know whether or not God's hand is stretched out against America? Verse 1: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people?"

A Nation of Serfs and Slaves

Evidence 1: A Nation of Serfs and Slaves

"How has she become as a widow? She that was great among the nations and princess among the provinces. How has she become tributary?"

Number one: We know that God's hand is against us when we become a nation of serfs and slaves. Note how Jerusalem now sits solitary. It has been depopulated. She has become a widow, so to speak. She was once great among the nations, but now she has become a tributary. In the context, Judah and Jerusalem had become tributary to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. They were his servants, his slaves, and his serfs.

He killed most of the people. Less than 5,000 he took into captivity in Babylon. The remaining poor he left in the land to work the land for him, for himself. They were his servants and his slaves. So here, Judah and Jerusalem had been conquered by a foreign power.

I can hear you with an objection: We have not been conquered by a foreign power, and therefore we are not serfs or slaves. Let me ask you a direct question. Does it really matter whether or not we are serfs or slaves to a foreign power or to a domestic power? Does it really matter whether you have been conquered by an enemy from without or an enemy from within?

A serf is a serf, and a slave is a slave. Does it really matter whether or not we have been conquered by a foreign power? The truth is, we

are a conquered people. Let me try to enlarge upon this just momentarily. You may ask, How can you say we are a conquered people? Have you ever considered, and I realize the money issue, that I am not getting into that right now, how much money America as a nation owes China? What about our foreign debt? Do you realize that the Chinese could actually devastate us economically by refusing to buy any more of our debt or hold any more of it? The Bible says, "the borrower is servant to the lender." Even if you do not want to consider China and Japan, Japan holds 1.8 trillion dollars, so-called, of our debt. China has more than that. If you do not want to consider that, consider the fact that the Federal Reserve is neither Federal nor Reserve, yet it controls our so-called money supply, and they are international bankers.

Their goal is not to help and strengthen America. Their goal is to destroy and bankrupt us. You say, "But I'm still not a serf. I'm still not a slave. I'm nobody's servant." If you believe that you are not a serf, and that you do not hold your property at the discretion of your liege lord, try not paying your property taxes. Or try to sell your property, your crops, your produce, or your land without his permission. All of a sudden, you are going to discover who is really in control.

The problem is this: We are living in a day when the servant has become the master and the master has become the servant. It was Solomon, the wise man, who said this in Ecclesiastes 10:7: "I have seen servants upon horses and princes walking as servants upon the earth." Everything has turned upside down. Servants were riding horses and princes were walking.

It is the same thing today. Our servant, the servant of the states, the federal government, has become our master. The masters—the states and the individuals—have now become the servants, the serfs, and the slaves of the federal government. When an individual is a tributary, when he owes, when he has to pay, when he is forced to pay, when he cannot do anything but pay, he is a serf. He is a slave. He is a servant.

How do we know when God's hand is stretched out against America? When we become a nation of serfs and slaves, just like Judah and just like Jerusalem. Verse two says, "She weepeth sore in

the night and her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers, she hath none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her and they have become her enemies." We know that the hand of God is against us as a nation when we become isolated, unwelcome, and disrespected.

Evidence 2: Isolation and Disrespect

Where are the nations and countries that are really, truly, and genuinely our friends? Where is the respect that America had one hundred years ago? What nation or country actually respects our government, our policies, and our leaders? The truth is, our president, his cabinet, and our political leaders are irresponsible buffoons and lack the common sense and courtesy of the average country boy. Most Americans do not even respect the politicians. You remember the poll where the question was asked, Who do you think more of, a toenail fungus or Congress? The toenail fungus won. Another asked, Who do you think more of, hemorrhoids or Congress? The hemorrhoids won. Obviously, something is wrong.

There was a time when America's foreign policy was to walk softly and carry a big stick. Now our foreign policy is to walk softly, bow to foreigners, apologize for our ways, and give in, give up, and surrender. Is it any wonder that our so-called friends deal treacherously with us, and we deal treacherously with them?

There is no character. Like Israel of old, we no longer possess or exercise that which originally set us apart from other nations. What was it that set us apart? Hold Lamentations 1 and go to Deuteronomy, chapter 4, beginning with verse 5. This set Israel apart.

If I had time today, I could go over our founding documents and the original charters and constitutions of the states and prove this to you. But watch in Deuteronomy, chapter 4, beginning with verse 5. God says to Israel, "Behold, I've taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me that you should do so in the land, whither you go to possess it." Now look what he says about these statutes and judgments: "Keep therefore and do them for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes and say surely this great nation is

a wise and understanding people for what nation is there so great who have God so nigh to them, as the Lord our God is in all the things that we call upon Him for. And what nation is there so great that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?"

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life, but teach them thy sons and thy sons' sons." Note what God said: It is His law that sets us apart. It is His law that makes us unique. It is His law that makes us special. We know the hand of the Lord was against Judah and Jerusalem because they forsook His law and His statutes. We also know that God's hand is against America because we have forsaken His law and His statutes.

Evidence 3: Dwelling Among the Heathen

Thirdly, we know the hand of the Lord is against us as a nation when we dwell among the heathen. What did He say? "She dwelleth among the heathen." Lamentations 1:3 says, "Judah is going into captivity because of affliction and because of great servitude. She dwelleth among the heathen and findeth no rest. All her persecutors overtook her between the straits."

The complaint is also the truth of what happened. Psalm 44 says, "Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat and hast scattered us among the heathen." The hand of God in judgment scattered them among the heathen. "Thou makest us a reproach" is stated in verse 13; then verse 14 says, "Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people." In other words, God put them there. God made them a reproach, and God scattered them. They were not merely living among the heathen by accident or by ordinary circumstance; the scattering was the hand of God in judgment.

We know exactly what God did to Judah and Jerusalem. He slew many of them, sent the rest into captivity into Babylon among the heathen, and left the poor in the land. So here is the question we have to ask: Do we dwell among the heathen? The answer is yes. Unhappily, we do not need to be transported to a foreign nation to

dwell among the heathen. It appears that they are being transported here. And I am not simply talking about, or referring to, the multitude of illegal aliens that have invaded and continue to invade our land. The issue is that we dwell among the heathen, just as Judah dwelt among the heathen, and the question concerns the condition of the nation before God.

What about the multitudes of foreigners, and especially Muslims, that have been brought into our country by our own government? These very same Muslims are now demanding that we adopt Islam and submit ourselves to Sharia law. Do you realize there are certain sections in this country that have been literally taken over by foreigners? When I say that, I was trying to think of the group of people who were from—not Vietnam, Laos, I believe—that settled in the northern part.

There is a whole congregation of them. I use the word congregation not as a church, because they are heathen. One of these men, known for his violence, went deer hunting, saw a man in a stand that he wanted to hunt deer from, and shot and killed the man so he could use the stand.

I am simply pointing out that in certain sections of our country, these places are controlled by foreigners. Look at what has happened in England, Canada, and France. If you have seen the pictures, look at what is happening in New York City when streets are blocked by Muslims for afternoon prayers. Do you realize a Muslim does not need to pray in the streets? They have mosques. They have other buildings.

Why would they do that? Because it is a sign of dominion and control when they can successfully stop traffic and stop anyone else from doing what they are doing, in order to prove that they are in control and their demands must be met. I just read that every tenth child now born in England is a Muslim. The most prominent name in England today in 2014 is Mohammed.

Multiculturalism, diversity, and multi-religions are not signs of success, advancement, and prominence. They are signs that the hand of the Lord is against us, because Judah and Jerusalem dwelt

among the heathen. Yes, multiculturalism, diversity, and multi-religions are signs that the hand of the Lord is against us.

If you look back in Lamentations chapter 1, verse 4, here is the fourth truth: “The ways of Zion do mourn because none come to the solemn feast. All her gates are desolate. Her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.”

Evidence 4: A Nation of Hypocrites and Apostates

Now listen carefully. We know the hand of the Lord is against us when we become a nation of hypocrites and apostates. Go back to verse 4: The ways of Zion do mourn because none come to the solemn feasts. All our gates are desolate, our priests are sighing, our virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

If you and I totally disregard the heathen being imported into this country legally and illegally, we must consider the fact that, as a whole, most professing Christians and most professing Christian churches have apostatized and, for all practical purposes, have become heathenistic and pagan in faith and practice. The truth is, folks, we dwell among the heathen because the hand of the Lord is against us, and our churches today are filled with hypocrites and apostates. I could go off over Scripture after Scripture.

Do you remember that passage in 1 John 2, verses 3 and 4? In 1 John 2 he says, “Hereby, we do know that we know him, when we keep his commandments.” But when you get to verse 4, the Bible says, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” What? If you were to take God’s Word and measure most preachers and most professing Christians by it, they are not anywhere near what God demands.

How many in America really and truly honor the ways of Zion? I am not talking about earthly Zion; I am talking about heavenly Zion. There is a difference between earthly Zion and heavenly Zion. In Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 22, God says, “But you are coming to Mount Zion, and into the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels, to the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn which are written

in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the Spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

What does the Bible say? There is a heavenly Zion. We live in a time when God's house is neglected, His word is rejected, His ordinances are despised, His worship is perverted, His preachers are mocked, His people are ridiculed and persecuted, and His name is blasphemed and profaned. Very few today are willing to identify themselves with Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13, beginning with verse 12, says, "Wherefore Jesus, also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." That is, without the gates of Jerusalem, the fleshly or earthly Jerusalem. Verse 13 says, "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp bearing his reproach." The Bible is teaching that Jesus Christ and true Christianity are without the camp. If we stay true to Christ, inevitably and invariably, we will suffer reproach with Christ.

You go to the average church today, and there's not enough gospel preached to convert a gnat. Professing Christians are absolutely and totally ignorant of the Word of God. We know that the hand of the Lord is against us when we live in a land of hypocrites and apostates, and when the sovereign God of heaven and earth is rejected and despised. None come to the solemn feast. Nobody wants the truth—well, hardly anyone wants the truth.

Evidence 5: Enemies in Power

Fifthly, we know that the hand of the Lord is against us when we are overpowered and controlled by our enemies: "Her adversaries are the chief. Her enemies prosper. For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. Her children are going into captivity before the enemy." What does God say? Her adversaries are the chief; her enemies prosper.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (KJV)

It is one thing to be surrounded by your enemies, and something quite different to have your enemies in positions of

power and control, ruling as chief among us. Hold Lamentations chapter one, but turn back to Deuteronomy 17, because I want you to see that God demands Christian rulers.

Concerning the king or the civil ruler, not only does God demand that each one be a Christian, but He demands that each one have his own personal copy of the Word, or the law of God, and read it daily.

"When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me. Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose, one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

"But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.

"And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom."

The Word of God demands a Christian ruler, one who reads and studies the law of God daily. On October 12, 1816, John Jay, who was also the first Supreme Court Justice, said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers." That was 1816. The Supreme Court

Justice said this is a Christian nation, and it is in our interest that we select and prefer Christians for rulers.

Someone is going to object: "Oh, but Brother Weaver, somewhere in the United States Constitution, it says that there is to be no religious test to hold office." You will find that in Article six of the Constitution: "The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all the executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this Constitution, but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification of any public trust or office under the United States."

You have to remember that the Constitution was written in 1787. The phrase "no religious test," in the parlance of that day, would mean no denominational test. In other words, in 2014, you did not have to be a Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Anglican. It was not excluding Christian beliefs. The original state constitutions required you to be a Christian to be a ruler. Thus, when the Constitution says there is to be no religious test, it meant no denominational test: you did not have to belong to a certain denomination to be a ruler.

Since God demands Christian rulers, the original state constitutions demanded Christian rulers, and even the first Supreme Court Justice said it is our interest to select Christian rulers, why do we not have Christian rulers? Look in Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 43. God says, "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high. And thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee. Thou shalt not lend to him." This is the curse of God.

“He shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail. Moreover, all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee. And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever, because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things. Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he

shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee." The hand of God is against us.

It is evident when we know and see that our enemies are in power, are chief, and have control. Psalm 106:41 says, "And he gave them into the hand of the heathen: and they that hated them ruled over them." How do we know the hand of God is against America? Because our enemies, who hate Christ and hate Christianity, rule over us.

Evidence 6: Widespread Distress and Discouragement

Lamentations 1:6 says, "And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer." We know the hand of the Lord is against us when the people as a whole are distressed, discouraged, and depressed.

How can an individual function when he is discouraged, depressed, and distressed? It is impossible. Everyone in this room has been discouraged at one time or another. You have been depressed at one time. You sit around with your hands folded, twirling your thoughts. You do not want to do anything; you cannot function. If that is true of an individual, how can such an attitude and disposition affect an entire nation? According to verse six, it is not merely a few individuals who are given to distress, discouragement, and depression. No, it is practically the entire population. Jeremiah intimates by these words that none would dare to contend with their enemies or stand up against them.

They were so discouraged and so depressed. Instead of fighting, they fled and proved that they were wholly heartless and lifeless. Think how discouraging it must have been for these Judahites to realize that their kingdom was removed. The priesthood had ceased; their temple, their beautiful house, was burned to the ground; the palaces of the kings and the nobles were demolished; and everything in church and state which they considered glorious was now gone. Everything had changed, nothing was the same, and everything that they had loved and appreciated had disappeared. May I remind you,

those of you who are my age and older, that everything is changed? Everything that we once held sacred and dear is gone.

"And he said, 'Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.'" Even the rulers were worthless. They were without courage; they were fearful and timorous. That describes our politicians: no character and cowards to the hilt. The hand of God was against them.

We know that the hand of God was against King Saul as well, because God had already said He was going to destroy his kingdom. One of the manifestations of this is found in 1 Samuel 22: "David therefore departed thence and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him." Then verse two says, "And everyone that was in distress and everyone that was in debt and everyone that was discontented or discouraged gathered themselves unto him and he became a captain over them. And there were with him about 400 men." In other words, there was a revolution. Everyone who was in debt, everyone who was distressed, and everyone who was discontent came to David.

The same scenario is prevalent in America today. Do you realize that now in America there are over 92 million Americans who are out of work? There are over 100 million who are on welfare. There are over 300 million who are in debt up to their eyeballs. Practically the entire nation is distrustful of our political leaders of every stripe. The truth of the matter is, the hand of God—the hand of God—is against us.

Evidence 7: Mocking of Faith

"Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and her miseries, all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old when her people fell into the hand of the enemy and none did help her. The adversary saw her and did mock her sabbaths." Number seven, we know the hand of God is against us when our faith is mocked and ridiculed. The Sabbaths pictured and symbolized their deliverance and redemption. They had been defeated and enslaved, so how could they speak of deliverance and redemption?

In Deuteronomy 5:15, God said, "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm. Therefore the Lord commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day." He commanded them to keep the Hebrew Sabbath because it symbolized their deliverance and redemption from Egypt.

What happened when they were captured and enslaved by Nebuchadnezzar? Psalm 137:1-4 says, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hang our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For they that carried us away captive required of us a song, and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" They were mocking them: "Sing us one of those songs of Zion. Come on, make mirth, be happy."

They were saying, "Don't you remember? You are the special people. You were delivered. You were redeemed." How could they sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Christians are mocked and ridiculed because the enemy believes we have been captured and defeated. Therefore, they believe they are free to gloat and rejoice. Such gloating and rejoicing is temporary.

But the truth is, they are doing it. In Ezekiel 22, verses 1 through 5, the Lord shows where His hand is against us: He gives us over to reproach among our enemies. “Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Now thou, son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? Yea, thou shalt show her all her abominations. Then say thou, Thus saith the Lord God, The city sheddeth blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and maketh idols against herself to defile herself. Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed, and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made, and thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come even unto thy years. Listen, therefore have I made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all the countries, those that be near, and those that be far from thee, shall mock thee, which art infamous and much vexed.”

What did God do to Judah and Jerusalem? He delivered them over to mocking. The hand of the Lord is against us when everything holy, righteous, and biblical is mocked and ridiculed.

In verses 10 and 11, notice: “The adversary has spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things. For she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation.” All her people sigh, and they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul. “See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile.”

The hand of the Lord is against us when we are destroyed by inflation and worthless money. What did Judah have to do? She had to barter and trade her precious things just for bread to eat. Bread was no longer plentiful, nor was it inexpensive. It took everything they had just to stay alive.

Evidence 8: Inflation and Worthless Money

Do you realize that is a prevalent complaint today? In 1970, one parent was able to work and provide everything the household needed and still save 11 percent of his earnings. Today it takes both parents working, and they still cannot make it. They have absolutely no savings. In Nehemiah, chapter 5, the same thing occurred when the people had to sell themselves into slavery just to have something to eat.

Because either there was no real money or their money was worthless, we know that the hand of God is against us when we have a fraudulent, dishonest, and unbiblical monetary system. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:11, "A just weight and balance are the Lord's: all the weights of the bag are his work."

One last passage: look in Leviticus chapter 19, beginning with verse 35. "You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight or in measure. Just balances, just weights. And a just ephah and a just hin shall you have. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore, shall you observe all my statutes and all my judgments and do them. I am the Lord."

God demands honest money. We know the hand of the Lord is against us. How do we have an honest monetary system?

Applications: God's Immutability and Call to Repentance

Now, let me make a couple of quick applications. First, God is not changed. God is immutable. The sins that he judged in Israel and in Judah are the same sins that he judges today. His hand is still stretched out in judgment against all those who violate his law. Read the book of Jeremiah and notice the question that God often asks, especially in Jeremiah chapter 5.

I think he asked it three times there: “Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord, and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” God has not changed.

The second application is this: We need to examine our circumstances, our situation, and our environment in light of Scripture. When we do, we cannot help but see an amazing parallel between what happened in Judah and Jerusalem and what is happening right today before our eyes. God is a God of judgment.

The third application is this: If you really understand what I have preached today, we must repent. We must cry to Him for grace, mercy, and help. We must determine that we are going to be biblical, holy, and godly, to the extent of our ability and the grace He gives us.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth, for teaching us, helping us, opening our eyes, awakening us, and turning us, O God. We shall be turned, and we will give Thee the praise and glory, in Christ’s holy and blessed name. Amen. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Are You Horrified Yet?

January 4, 2015

Introduction: The Meaning of Horror

Psalm 119, verse 53, says, “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.”

We use the expression “I was horrified” so frequently that it can mean anything from being embarrassed, humiliated, scared, or upset. Usually, when someone says, “I was horrified,” it does not mean that the individual is genuinely and completely horrified. In fact, we use it so much that the phrase can refer to almost any strong reaction. Most of the old horror movies we saw as children were intended simply to scare or terrorize people. I remember going as a boy to see Dracula and laughing. It really was not scary at all. It scared my sister, but it did not scare me. I was not merely trying to be macho. Compare the horror movies today with what we saw as children, and they are not really horror movies. They are outright blood and guts and gore, absolutely worthless.

The truth is that when we use the phrase “I was horrified,” if we are genuinely horrified, we are usually horrified at a symptom and not at the cause.

When David said in verse 53, “Horror hath taken hold upon me,” the word “horror” literally means a rage, a violent or burning heat. It means absolutely to be horrified. Albert Barnes, in his commentary, discusses the word and says, “Horror hath taken hold upon me.” In other words, it has seized me, overpowered me, and overwhelmed me. “I shudder, I tremble, I’m afraid, I’m filled with distress.” Then Barnes gives Luther’s rendering: “I am burnt up.” The Hebrew word comes from a verb meaning to be hot or to glow. The idea is violent heat, a glow or burning, as of a wind—the simoom of the desert.

Barnes points to Psalm 11:6, where the word is translated “a horrible tempest,” with “burning” in the margin. The word also occurs in the passage before us and in Lamentations 5:10, where it is rendered “terrible famine,” or, in the margin, “terrors” or “storms.” The state described is that of one who sees a storm, a burning wind and sand approaching, expects every moment to be overcome and buried, and whose soul trembles with consternation. You would have to be in the desert to understand this word and its implications.

Thomas Manton, the old Puritan, goes a little bit further and describes the word like this. He says the word for horror signifies also a tempest or storm. Translations vary. Some read, as Junius, “a storm overtaking one”; Ainsworth, “a burning horror has seized me,” and expounded, “a storm of terror and dismay.” The Septuagint reads, “faintness and dejection of mind possess me.” Our own translation is, “I’m horribly afraid.” All translations, as well as the original word, imply a great trouble of mind and a vehement commotion like a storm.

It was a matter of disquiet and trembling to David. So when David says, “Horror has taken hold upon me,” or, “Horror has seized me,” he is expressing a real, genuine state of horror.

We Are Usually Horrified at Symptoms, Not the Cause

Now, let me return to a statement that I made originally: very seldom, when we are genuinely horrified, are we horrified at the root

cause; usually, we are horrified more at a symptom. Allow me to explain. Each of us has heard recently of the young woman in Mississippi who was literally burned alive. Individuals not only doused her with gasoline and lighter fluid, they even squirted it up her nose and down her throat, set her on fire, and let her burn alive. When we hear of such an incident, we shudder and are horrified, asking, “How can anyone do that to another individual?” Well, look at our own CIA in the torture report.

Look at what men and women do to each other all over this country and in the entire world. We sit there with our minds boggling and say, “How in the world can such things take place?” The United Kingdom Independent reported this story recently. In North Korea, some North Korean soldiers guarding prisoners took a prison woman’s child, killed it, cooked it, and fed it to their dogs. A UN report on human rights abuses in North Korea suggested that prison officials in the state cooked a female prisoner’s baby and fed it to their dogs. These alleged unspeakable atrocities were published for the first time in February, when a 372-page report by an independent UN panel of inquiry into the North Korean regime was released. How could anyone be so cold, callous, and calculating as to murder a baby, then cook it and feed it to the dogs?

Some will say, "What do you expect from North Korea?" The same article went on to say that these North Korean soldiers were free to have sex with the female prisoners at their leisure, just so the female prisoners did not become pregnant. Those female prisoners who did become pregnant somehow disappeared. They were murdered and buried somewhere.

Does all of this horrify you? Hold on tight, because this happened this past week. Here is the headline: "Baby Betsy starved to death while parents ate at Golden Corral." Roy Allen Stevens, forty-eight, and his wife, Ruby Angelita Stevens, twenty-three, were arrested and later charged with murder after their baby, Betsy Key Stevens, starved to death while they ate at the Golden Corral. Baby Betsy was only twenty-two days old at the time of her death. Betsy was born December the 1st in Indiana.

She weighed six pounds, one ounce at birth. According to the Orlando Sentinel, Betsy's parents left her buckled in a car seat in the

parking lot while they went inside a lakeside Florida Golden Corral restaurant and ate dinner on December the 23rd. When they returned to the car, the mother noticed that Betsy's foot was cold, so she covered her with a blanket. Sometime later, when she checked on the baby again, her feet were unusually cold and the baby was unresponsive, so she decided to call 911 for assistance. When emergency medical personnel from Polk County Fire Rescue and the Lakeland Fire Department arrived, Betsy was examined and rushed to Lakeland Regional Medical Center, where she was pronounced dead. An autopsy revealed that Betsy had been dead for at least three-and-a-half hours before the 911 call. She had lost ten-two pounds over the course of her short twenty-two-day life and weighed only four pounds and one ounce when she died. Dr. Vera Volnick, the associate medical examiner, said Baby Betsy died as a result of malnutrition because she had been starved to death.

Are you horrified yet? If not, hold on for one more newsflash. A man in Oldsmar, Florida, was arrested for murder after deputies said he decapitated his mother at the family home on New Year's Eve, all because of a chore he did not want to complete. The County Sheriff's Office charged twenty-three-year-old Christian Jose Gomez of 1924 Sheffield Court in Oldsmar with first-degree murder. Investigators responded to the home at 7:24 p.m., where they found the decapitated body of the victim, whom deputies identified as Gomez's forty-eight-year-old mother. According to the Pinellas County Sheriff, Gomez hit his mother over the head with an axe, cut off her head in the garage, and dragged the body to the garbage outside the home. The sheriff said Gomez had been planning his mother's murder for two days and was angry over her nagging him to put boxes away in the attic.

I hope by now you are at least a little horrified. Let me tell you why I read each of these incidents. Do you realize that each incident is a symptom? It is not the cause or the problem. David placed his finger on the source of the real problem when he said in Psalm 119:53, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." The root problem in each of these incidents is that these individuals forsook the law of God.

The Root Problem: Forsaking God's Law

If you would stop and think, it does not matter which incident we are discussing. If the individuals involved had obeyed and followed God's law, none of those things would have happened. We usually become horrified at the symptoms, not at the real problem.

Years ago, I remember one dear lady, a friend of ours, whose husband was basically a drunkard. He was a decent man and did not stay drunk all the time; once or twice a month, he would get thoroughly drunk. But he supported his family. His wife told me one day, "He's such a good man if you would just stop drinking." I looked at her and said, "Drinking is not his problem. That's a symptom. The problem is his wicked heart. The problem is that he violates God's law." All the time, we get horrified at the symptoms and never at the problem. Do you understand that one of the designs of God's law is to restrain? How does God's law restrain?

It restrains by pronouncing negative sanctions, or curses or judgments, upon individuals who violate that law. A sanction can be either positive or negative. You can have a positive sanction for obeying God's law, and you can have a negative sanction for disobeying God's law. The sanction depends upon the crime or the crimes committed.

I never will forget. Years ago, I was preaching in the state of Iowa. The pastor asked me to go with him to visit a man who had gone through a very bitter divorce and invite the man to come to the meeting. The pastor warned me, "All he's going to talk about is a divorce because he's very bitter, he's very upset." Sure enough, that's basically how it turned out. I was trying to invite him to the meeting, letting him know that there was hope in the Lord and hope in His Word. All of a sudden, the man looked at me and said this. I've never forgotten his exact words. Here's what he said: "I should have killed her. I should have killed her. I should have killed her. I should have done it like I started to do. Had I killed her, I'd have been in prison and out in seven years."

Why did he even entertain the thought of murdering his wife? Because he knew that a sanction would not be levied against him that was commensurate with murder. The Bible says in the book of

Ecclesiastes chapter 8 and verse 11, listen carefully, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men in them is fully set to do evil."

If you took murderers and executed them, it would restrain a lot of others from committing murder. Someone may argue, "Well, one thing for sure, it might not have any restraining influence upon anybody else." It may not, but it surely would restrain the one that you executed. He would never kill anybody else. Do you understand that most murders, a lot of them, are repeat offenders? And God just laid it down: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men in them is fully set to do evil."

Galatians 3:10 says, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse of the law, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continues not in the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” So those who violate God's law, those who transgress God's law, and those who leave God's law are under God's curse. All you have to do is read Deuteronomy 28 and 29, and you'll find both positive and negative sanctions there.

Our Lord sums this up very beautifully for us. In Proverbs 8, verses 35 and 36, he said, “For whoso findeth me, findeth life and shall obtain favor of the Lord.” Whoever finds Christ finds life and obtains favor of the Lord. But then he goes on to verse 36 and says, “But he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death.”

David Was Horrified at the Wickedness of the Sinner

Now, David said it like this: “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.” Horror had taken hold upon him—a strong burning tempest, he said, that had taken hold upon him because the wicked forsake God's law. Only have two thoughts today, and I want you to see these. First of all, David was horrified at the wickedness of the sinner. “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.” I want you to understand that every sin is a transgression of God's law. And the absolute truth is that no one can sin without violating God's law.

Let me say this another way: if it is not a violation of God's law, it is not a sin. You might not like it, but it is not a sin. Our Lord said in 1 John 3:4, "Whoso committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is a transgression of the law." You cannot sin without transgressing God's law.

Now, you have to understand that sin is a common occurrence. No one is perfect; everyone sins. David, a man after God's own heart, sinned and transgressed. There are numerous words in Scripture for sin: sin, iniquity, transgression, and a falling short. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Everyone sins. Sinning against God's law is bad. It is not good; it is bad. It should grieve us, upset us, and horrify us that we do sin and fall short there.

But sinning against God's law is not the same as forsaking God's law, although when we do sin, we forsake it in some degree. David is not talking about just an occasional sin here. David is talking about a turning away from God's law, in fact. The Hebrew word for "forsake" literally means to desert, to leave, to abandon, to apostatize, to depart from, and to leave behind. Thus, when David said, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law," he meant that they totally and absolutely left God's law behind. Yes, they are transgressing it; yes, they are committing iniquity; yes, they are sinning; yes, they are falling short. But the law of God means nothing to them.

There is no restraint upon them. They have no fear of God's punishment or of God's judgment upon them. They have literally forsaken that law. They are lawless individuals. The New Testament term is anomos or anomia: someone without law, or someone who is lawless.

Now look at 1 Timothy 1:8-10. The apostle says, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." The apostle Paul tells us there is a right use of God's law and a wrong use of God's law. God's law was never meant to justify us; it was never meant to save us. When people try to be saved and go to heaven by their good deeds and their good works, they are using God's law wrongfully. They will never go to heaven by their good deeds or their good works.

Paul says, “We know that the law is good if a man uses it lawfully.” Knowing this, the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.

Each one of these things is a violation of the Ten Commandments. But what does Paul mean when he says that the law is not made for a righteous man? Is the law not the rule of life for the righteous man? Certainly it is. Does not a righteous man obey the law? Certainly he does. But the law is not restraining someone who wants to obey. A righteous man is going to do that which is right.

It is like when I went to the university. They had a bunch of rules, but I never bothered reading most of them. My attitude was, “I’m going to do what’s right.” I never had any trouble. The law is made for the ungodly in the sense that God intends for it to restrain them. A righteous man is always going to obey the law, but the wicked are not; therefore, they have to be restrained.

When one casts off, throws off, and abandons God’s restraints, he has committed himself not only to a horrific life, but also to a way of death.

David said, “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.” Are you horrified yet? We may be righteously horrified that our society and nation have cast off, thrown away, and discarded the law of God. If you think that we have treacherous and traitorous civil rulers who readily and willingly violate their oath of office and sell their souls to the highest bidder, hold on to your hands, because things are going to get worse. If you think we are on the verge of rioting, pillaging, plunder, arson, rape, and murder, buckle up your seatbelts. It is going to get worse. If you think that tyranny, martial law, and living in a police state are bad now, hold on tight. When a nation forsakes and abandons God’s law, all hell is going to break loose. That is why David said, “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.”

The Consequences of a Nation Forsaking God's Law

Does not this make absolute common sense? If the wicked do not fear God and His punishments, do you think they are going to fear man and his punishments? If the wicked will not obey God and His law, what makes you think they are going to obey man's laws? If men are unafraid to openly confess that they are a law unto themselves, what effect would any legislation have upon their lives? What does it matter what laws are passed as long as people are going to ignore them and live the way they choose? There is no restraining influence.

If you are not horrified yet, get ready, because here is a report from the Examiner. The radical black racist and former national chairman of the New Black Panther Party, and current co-founder and national president of Black Lawyers for Justice, Malik Shabazz, reached out to the racist New Black Panthers to begin building an army in 2015 and to start going to gun ranges, Britt Burke reported. Pam Key found Shabazz's statements on the New Black Panthers Party Black Power Radio, where Shabazz promoted a race war in 2015, saying it was time to build an army and telling the Black Panthers to begin going to the gun range. In his broadcast, Shabazz said, "Mr. Malcolm X, he consistently teaches us self-defense. The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad continually teaches us self-defense. The Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey teaches us self-defense. And we know our leader and our teacher, the Honorable Khalid Abdul-Muhammad, teaches us self-defense."

"Right now, it's time to build up that army. Right now, it's time for us to build up those troops," says Shabazz. "It's time to get strong. It's time for lifting weights and working out and going to gun range and all of that." What can man's law do to restrain such rhetoric and unbiblical actions? If these people have cast away the law of God, what makes you think they are going to listen to the law of man? There are already multitudes of laws on the books that are totally ignored, not only by these same people, but by the legislators who passed them. I personally have been attacked by the Southern Poverty Law Center for teaching self-defense and teaching what the Bible says about self-defense. Where is the Southern Poverty Law Center now in attacking this group and expounding and explaining their racist and wicked agenda?

All I'm trying to say is this: David was absolutely horrified at what he saw when the wicked were forsaking God's law. He saw the end, the consequences, and the result. David understood that when men, as a society and as a nation, forsake God's law, the only possible outcome can be anarchy, chaos, and confusion. Ultimately, the only law that would reign would be the law of the jungle, because that is what would replace God's law: you just do what you have to do to survive. I hope you're beginning to get a little horrified.

David Was Horrified at the Wrath of the Sovereign

Not at the symptoms, but at the problem. The problem is that we have forsaken God's law, and we should be horrified at what is happening in the lives of individuals, in our churches, in our state, in our nation, and in our society. David said, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." David was horrified at the wickedness of the sinner.

Here's the second thing: David was horrified at the wrath of the sovereign. He said, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." David knew the wicked, and he also knew the Lord. He knew the results and consequences of forsaking God and His law. He understood the righteous anger and wrath of God. He understood that God will not allow His honor, His Word, and His law to be despised without showing forth a righteous vengeance.

Look at Psalm 119, beginning with verse 118. Look what David says about those who forsake God's law: "Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked from the earth like dross. Therefore, I love thy testimonies. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, for I am afraid of thy judgments."

A righteous man is going to be afraid of the judgments of God. Notice what David said concerning the wicked: "Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes, for their deceit is falsehood." Then he says, "Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross." God treads down the wicked and puts them away like garbage, or like dross— that which is useless and worthless. God

treads them down and puts them away. I want to read you just two statements.

John Calvin says, “God overthrows all the despisers of His law and casts them down from that loftiness which they assume to themselves. The phrase is directed against the foolish or rather frantic confidence with which the wicked are inflated. Would they recklessly deride the judgments of God? And what is more, scruple not to magnify themselves against him as if they were not subject to his power.”

Those individuals who magnify themselves against God, who do not think that they are subject to the power and justice of God, will understand when God tramples them down and casts them out.

John Gill said it like this: “That wander away from the Lord's commandments, that deviate from his precepts, go astray constantly and willfully, of people that are in their hearts and with all their hearts. These the Lord treads down as mire in the streets, as grapes in a winepress, which shows the abhorrence of them, His indignation at them, and how easily they are subdued under Him.”

David said in Psalm 119:126, “It is time for thee, Lord, to work. For they have made void thy law.” They have done their thing, and now, Lord, You do Your thing. It is time for You to work. God's work is going to be treading down and casting out the wicked.

Biblical Examples of Divine Judgment on the Lawless

Isaiah 63:1 says, “Who is this that cometh from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength, I that speak in righteousness mighty to save.” So we are talking about our Lord. “Wherefore, art thou red in thine apparel and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me. For I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeeming is come.”

He says, “And I will tread down the people in mine anger and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to

the earth." What is God going to do to those who forsake His law? He is going to tread them down. He is going to cast them out. You have to remember that God is immutable; He does not change. Has God punished such wickedness in times past?

The answer is yes. He is going to punish such wickedness in the present and in the future. If you want a little example, a testimony, notice Amos 2:9. God said this concerning the Amorite: "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath." God says, Do you want to know what I can do? Look at the Amorites. They were strong as the oaks, but God destroyed their fruit from above and their roots from beneath. He brought down their strength to the earth.

God gave us examples, and that is exactly what has happened. When God sent the Assyrians against Israel because Israel forsook the law of God, He said in Isaiah 10:5–6, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation." God said, "It is my anger, it is my staff." "I, that is God, I will send him against the hypocritical nation," which was Israel, "and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil and to take the prey and to tread them down like the mire of the streets."

Do you understand now why David was horrified—not only at the wickedness of the sinner, but at the wrath of the sovereign? He knew what was coming. Practically all of the prophets foresaw and foretold the same thing. In Jeremiah 2:12–13, these two truths are tied together: "Be astonished," or be horrified, "O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

You had better be horribly afraid. Why? You have forsaken God's law. You have forsaken the living water and hewed out a broken cistern that can hold no water. You are in for trouble, because you are going to perish.

Jeremiah 5:30–31 says, "A wonderful," that is, an awesome and horrible, "thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy

falsely, and the priests, they rule by their means; and my people love to have it so. And what will ye do in the end thereof?" The charade that has been going on will come to an end, and the hypocrites will perish.

As the Scripture says, the nations that forget God shall be turned into hell. David was horrified at the wrath of the sovereign. He knew that God would not long endure an insolent, wicked, God-hating, Christ-denying people. Hosea 6:10–11 likewise speaks of the horrible thing God had seen in Israel and the harvest appointed for Judah.

God had sent Israel into captivity into Assyria, and Judah was going to go into captivity into Babylon. In Hosea 6:10, He says, "I've seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel. There's whoredom of Ephraim. Israel is defiled." God will take care of that. Assyria. "Also, O Judah, He has set a harvest for thee when I return to captivity of my people." Judah, you think you're getting away? In 722 B.C., Israel went into captivity. In 586 B.C., God destroyed Judah and sent them into captivity. "I've set a harvest for thee." God sets a harvest for all those who forsake His law.

David said, "Horror hath taken hold upon me." Why? Because of the wickedness of the sinner and the wrath of the sovereign. He said, "I know how this is going to turn out."

Applications: Siding with David and the Lord

The first application is this: David did not say, "Horror has taken hold upon me because of the cruel designs of the wicked against me." It is true that no one is safe when the wicked forsake God's law. But David was not concerned with his safety. He was concerned about the contempt and insolence that the people harbored toward the one true and living God. David was more concerned for God's honor and glory than for his own safety. I'm sure that each one of us wants to be safe; I do. But are we more concerned for our safety than we are for the honor and glory of God?

The second application is this: a Christian does not need to watch television and horror movies to be horrified. He simply needs to observe our society and our nation as it destroys itself and sinks into oblivion because we have forsaken the law of God. If you want to be

horrified, look at our economy, our Congress, our government, and our judicial system. Look at the people in this land who have no idea who God is, what God demands of them, or what God's law demands. In Hosea 13:9, God said, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine hope.” Until you realize we're destroying ourselves and turning away from the only one who is able to help us, you will not understand. If you're not horrified yet, get ready, because you soon will be as you see more and more of the wickedness of the sinner and the wrath of the sovereign. The third application is this: We must learn to side with David and with the Lord.

If you will read Psalm 119—and I encourage you to do it—you will find a psalm of the Word. All through that psalm, David says, “I will obey thee. I’ll walk in my statutes. I’ll walk in thy judgments. Teach me, lead me, guide me, incline me, establish me in thy Word.” If you genuinely side with David and with the Lord, then you are not only going to obey; you are going to be continually and constantly bringing your life into conformity to the Word of God.

Our Lord said through Peter in 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 18, “And if a righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” As Job said, if he made it by the skin of his teeth, if God brings us through the mess that we are in by the skin of our teeth, where do you think the sinner and the ungodly are going to appear? What is going to happen to them?

It is time we say with Joshua, “Choose you this day whom you will serve. What is for me in my house, we will serve the Lord.” It is time to be horrified at the problem and not at the symptoms.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee. We ask you to help us, to build us up in the most holy faith, and to give us a genuine horror for those that forsake thy law and for the wrath that we know will inevitably fall. As David said, “Give us help from God, for vain is the help of man.” We trust thee, we love thee, we lean upon thee. Give us thy grace and thy mercy. In thy name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 16

You Really Do Not Want to Know God's Will

June 12, 2016

The Remnant's Request and Promise (Jeremiah 42:1-6)

Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant; for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us: that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do. Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you. I will keep nothing back from you. Then they said to Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee

to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.

Introduction: The Pious Claim of Wanting God's Will

In my 50 years of preaching, I've heard a multitude of Christians make a simple statement hundreds of times: I only want the will of God for my life. Or, its equivalent would be something like this: I only want the will of God in this matter. Strangely enough, those who say that they really genuinely and truly want the will of God never really seek it for their lives, or for the situation that they're involved in. And so I could only conclude that they really and truly did not want God's will, because they never really sought God's will. So what they were saying when they made the statement they wanted God's will for their life was nothing more than a pious platitude or spiritual exaggeration or simply a hypocritical statement.

Similarly, when most people come for counsel, they really and truly do not want counsel. They will tell you, I need counseling. I need help. I want your advice. I want to know what the Bible says. They will tell you that, and then you discover what they really want is not your counsel, not your advice, not what the Word of God says, but what they want is your stamp of approval upon what they've already determined that they're going to do. It's just that simple.

Jeremiah encountered such individuals in his ministry. We just read the first six verses of chapter 42. Taken alone, they would be enough to make any pastor's heart rejoice. Here were people who came saying, “We want the will of God. We are willing to do God's will whether we like it or not, whether it is good or bad. Just tell us what God's will is, and that is exactly what we will do.”

So they came to Jeremiah. Jeremiah said, “Fine, I am going to seek God's will for you, and I am going to give it to you.” Look at verse 4: “Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you. I will keep nothing back from you.”

These people professed to desire, covet, and want the will of God. Jeremiah said, "Wonderful. When God gives it to me, I am going to give it to you—full speed, full force. I will hold nothing back."

Then, after Jeremiah told them he would give it to them straight, look at verses 5 and 6: "Then they said to Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us; whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

Now, let me give you the background so you can understand the significance of this dialogue. What many people do not realize is that Judah and Jerusalem had basically been destroyed. The temple had been destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had come in; a multitude of Judahites had been killed, and a multitude had already been taken into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar took a Judahite named Gedaliah and made him governor over Judah and Jerusalem. Then he left just a few soldiers in the area. Gedaliah was to see that the people continued to support Nebuchadnezzar, but they could go about their business because he had left in the land the very poorest of the people.

Before they could get settled, begin farming, establish their homes, and get their lives back together, tragedy struck. Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, murdered Gedaliah, his assistants, and the Babylonian soldiers whom Nebuchadnezzar had left. These people realized that they were in danger and in a very volatile situation. The country had basically been destroyed, and before they had a chance to rebuild, this happened again.

They came to Jeremiah and said, "Look, we need to know God's will. We are in trouble. We are in desperate straits." I wish folks in America could come to that realization as well, of how desperate we really are, and that we really need to know God's will.

They promised Jeremiah that if he would seek God's will, and God revealed it to him and he told it to them, they would obey it whether they liked it or not. In fact, they called God to be a witness. Jeremiah 42:5 says, "Then they said to Jeremiah, The Lord be a true and

faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee unto us." They called God Himself as a witness. Stop and think about this: these people were in a dangerous situation. They had not murdered Gedaliah, his assistants, or the Babylonian soldiers, but they were assured that Nebuchadnezzar had probably heard by then and would take his wrath out upon the few people left. They were in an emergency, so to speak. That is why they were asking Jeremiah, "You better tell us what to do, and you better tell us what to do now."

God's Delayed Answer and Revealed Will (Jeremiah 42:7-12)

But look in verse 7. The Bible says, "It came to pass after ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah." Isn't that amazing? They are in an emergency situation, and God does not speak for ten days. This teaches us something: we may be impatient, but God is not; we may be frightful and upset, but God is not. It teaches us that God has absolute and total control, even over the heathen.

You remember the Bible says in Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." So God has the Babylonians, the enemy, in absolute control. Jeremiah understood that the people were afraid of Nebuchadnezzar. In verse 11, God says, "Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you out of his hand." God says, "You do not have to be afraid of Nebuchadnezzar. I have him under control as well."

They have now come to ask Jeremiah to seek God's will. Jeremiah said, "I'm going to do this, and I promise you I'm going to tell you exactly what God says." After ten days, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. He called Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, and said that the Lord, the God of Israel, had received the supplications they had sent through him.

This was the whole group: all the captains of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least unto the greatest. They came to him and said, "We

want you to intercede for us." Now he calls this whole group back and says, "I did."

The interesting thing is that Jeremiah is telling these people very plainly, "You have that which you asked for. I have the will of God for your lives and for your situation." He could have bluntly said, "You asked for it, and you got it. I am giving it to you. Here is what God has said."

God's will is revealed, and at the same time God gives a promise. Jeremiah 42:10–12 says, "If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you out of his hand."

I am going to be honest: I do not think it could be any plainer. God says, "Here is my will. I want you to abide in the land. As long as you stay in the land, I am going to build you, plant you, sustain you, provide for you, and protect you. That is all there is to it. It is my will that you stay in the land." Moreover, He not only wants them to stay in the land; He wants them not to be afraid of Nebuchadnezzar. Remember, he is called God's servant. In other words, God had him on a leash. He was God's servant; he could not do anything except what God allowed. So God says, "Here is my will: you stay in the land, you be obedient, and you do not be afraid. I am going to take care of you."

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 42:13-19 (KJV)

The Warning and Curse for Disobedience (Jeremiah 42:13-19)

> But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the Lord your God, saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: and now therefore hear the word of the Lord, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye

> feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there. They shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more. The Lord hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt. Know certainly that I have admonished you this day.
>
> God says, I'm going to give you a warning. My warning is this: you obey me, do not disobey me, do not go into Egypt. If you go into Egypt, you're going to be cursed. In fact, the curse is going to be the very thing that you're afraid of. The curse is going to be the very thing that you're running from right at this particular moment. Do not go into Egypt. You want to avoid the sword? Stay in the land. You want to avoid the pestilence? Stay in the land. You want to avoid the famine? Stay in the land. If you go to Egypt, you're running into it.

The Principle of Blessings and Curses (Deuteronomy 28)

I hope, just reading this passage right now, that it makes you think of two passages in the Bible. The first one is Leviticus 26, and the second one is Deuteronomy 28, because both of those passages deal with the blessings and the curses. I want you to turn to Deuteronomy 28. I will not deal with Leviticus 26, but I want you to see this.

By the way, when you hear the word Deuteronomy, deuteros is two or second, and nomos means law. It simply means a second giving of the law. The first time the law was given was in Exodus, and the second time was in the book of Deuteronomy.

Look at Deuteronomy chapter 28, verses 1 and 2. God says, “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice

of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God."

Note what God said: If you will obey me, then all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you. All those blessings are enumerated from verse 3 through verse 13.

Now look at verse 14. He said, "And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee."

If you put two and two together, go back to verse 2: "And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee." Then, in verse 15: "And all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." In other words, the wording is the same for the blessings and the curses. The blessings follow obedience, and the curses follow disobedience. If you obey, all these things shall come upon you and overtake you. If you disobey, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

Picture this in your mind: Here you are, obeying God to the best of your ability by His grace, and God is blessing you beyond belief. You say, "I just can't take it anymore. I have so many blessings. I don't need any more; I can't handle them. I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to run away from all these blessings."

Here you are running down the road as fast and furiously as you can. God says, "My blessings will only come upon you. They will overtake you." You cannot run from them. God said they will catch up with you, knock you down, and fall all over you. But He also said that if you disobey Him, these curses will do the same thing. You cannot outrun the curses of God; they will chase you down, knock you down, and fall all over you.

God’s Word has sanctions. There are negative sanctions and positive sanctions. The positive sanctions are blessings, and the negative sanctions are curses. This is exactly what Jeremiah is telling these people in Jeremiah chapter 42: If you obey, God will build you, plant you, protect you, promote you, and provide for you. But if you disobey and go into Egypt, everything you fear is exactly what you will encounter.

Now look at Jeremiah 42:20, after Jeremiah tells them that God says not to go into Egypt: “For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.”

The People's Deception and Rebellion Exposed (Jeremiah 42:20-22)

“Ye dissembled in your hearts”—what does that mean? It meant they erred, went astray, were led astray, were deceived, and played the hypocrite. They did not deceive God, and in all probability they did not deceive Jeremiah. They deceived themselves. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

He says in verse 9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,” and then asks, “Who can know it?” Yet I have heard preachers and Christians say, “Well, I know my heart.” The truth of the matter is, you do not know your heart.

If you are honest with yourself, there are times when you have been serving the Lord and doing certain things, thinking, “I am doing this for God's honor and glory. I am doing this for Him.” Then God pulls the veil back from your eyes, and you see your pride, wrong motives, and desire for vainglory. You have to confess, “Lord, I really was not doing this for You. I thought I was, but I am trying to get something out of this for myself.” That is what He said: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” Only God knows our hearts perfectly, totally, and completely. So the heart is deceitful.

These men deceived themselves. Isaiah 44:20 says, speaking about the wicked, “He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside.” That is what happened here. A deceived heart had turned them aside.

Let me be blunt with you. God knows our hearts. He knows our hypocrisy, when we are trying to deceive Him, and when we are not being truthful or honest. When we think we are going to deceive God, we are only deceiving ourselves. It is impossible to deceive the omniscient, sovereign God of heaven and earth.

What can you say about these people who came to Jeremiah and said, “Seek the Lord's will for us. You tell us what it is. We are going to do it, whether we like it or not”? They knew they were not going to do it. What a miserable, incorrigible people. Ingratitude, hypocrisy, rebellion, and cruelty were seemingly enthralled in their hearts. They could care less for God and His will.

Man may think himself wise, astute, and crafty, but you cannot fool the one true and living God. They assumed that, because of all the trouble in the land and the possibility of Nebuchadnezzar's returning, God would direct them to go into Egypt. When He did not, they could not reconcile themselves to that reality.

It should be made clear that they consulted God not in an effort to determine what His will was so that they might do it; they consulted God so that God could put His stamp of approval upon what they had already decided and determined to do, whether it was God's will or not. They said, “We want to go into Egypt. I know God's going to tell us to go into Egypt.” Consequently, when He did not tell them that, they lost their common sense.

Because these people were not going to obey God, the only thing left for them was the judgment of God. God was going to judge them and chastise them. Look in Jeremiah 42, beginning at verse 21: “Now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you. Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn.”

Jeremiah said, I told you what God's will was. You did not want it, and I knew you were not going to do it. “Now therefore know certainly”—mark it down; this is absolutely sure—you are going to die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. God's going to kill you. That's all there is to it.

When we disobey the Word of God, the only thing we are doing is condemning ourselves. When we despise God's blessings, the only thing left is His curses. When we refuse life, the only thing left is death. When we refuse to obey, the only thing left is disobedience. The only thing left is that we are to die in our sins.

Listen to what God said to these people through the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 33:11, God said, “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” When you refuse to repent, when you refuse to turn, the only thing left is death and judgment. That's it.

It would be wonderful if the people in this land could see that truth. What happens next would be absolutely hilarious if it were not so pathetic. By nature, man always tries to justify himself, his decisions, and his actions. I have had people tell me, when they have done wrong and been caught, “You would have done the same thing I did if you had been in my shoes. You would have said what I said if you had been there.”

“I had no other choice in the matter. I had to do what I had to do.” Really? That is justifying yourself. It is saying, “I did wrong, but, you know, I have this taken care of.”

Our Lord addressed this very thing. In Luke 16, He was speaking to the Pharisees. Verse 14 says, “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.” Then He rebuked them in verse 15: “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

He said, justify yourself all you want to. You can have all the praise and recognition of men that you want, but it is an abomination in the sight of God. Usually, when we sin, instead of

confessing it, acknowledging it, and repenting of it, we try to justify our actions.

How did these people try to justify their actions? They came to Jeremiah and said, “Pray for us, intercede for us, give us God’s will. We are going to do this. Whatever God says, that is exactly what we are going to do.” Then he came and told them, and they did not want to hear what he had to say. I want you to notice something.

Justifying Sin by Attacking the Messenger (Jeremiah 43:1-3)

This is why I said it would be hilarious if it was not so pathetic. How did they try to justify their sins and their rebellion? First of all, they tried to justify themselves by attacking Jeremiah and calling him a liar. Look in chapter 43, verses 1 and 2: “And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, even all these words, now watch verse 2. There's an interesting word that is found in verse 2: Then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there.” What? Now wait a minute.

On one hand, they come to Jeremiah saying, “Pray for us, intercede for us. You are God’s man, God’s prophet, God’s preacher.” Now they say, “You are lying to us. God never sent you to tell us not to go down into Egypt.” What did they do? They vilified Jeremiah, and their vilification was extremely insolent and reproachful. They had already testified that he was God’s man, preacher, and prophet, and now they called him a liar. He did not bring forth God’s truth. They accused him of substituting his word for God’s word. Basically, they told him off: “You are just lying to us. You are not God’s prophet. God did not send you to say this to us.”

Let me ask you a question: Why did they attack Jeremiah? You know the old concept: If you do not like the message, attack the messenger. Why did they attack Jeremiah? Here is why. Think about this: They were seeking to justify their rebellion and their sins. Jeremiah came and said, “God said, Do not go into Egypt. Stay in the

land." They said, "You are speaking this falsely. God did not say that, and God did not send you to tell us that." They denied that what he said was of God and God's word. Therefore, it could not be God's will.

They were justifying their rebellion and sins by saying, in essence, "We are not fighting against God. We are not resisting God or rebelling against God. What we are resisting is that preacher who is not telling the truth. It is all him. We are fighting against him, not against God." How do I justify my sin? How do I justify my rebellion? "That is his interpretation of Scripture. That is not what God said. I do not believe that. That is not the way I was taught. I have never heard that in my entire life. I have been in church all my life. I just do not believe that. I will keep doing what I want to do. God has not convicted me of it. He is just making that up." Thus, I am not in rebellion against God; I am merely resisting this preacher who is lying to me and not telling me the truth.

In essence, they were still trying to justify themselves. Men will often do that, and God's men often bear the brunt from a rebellious people who do not wish to appear to be in rebellion against God. I've known a number of godly men who were run off from churches because the people did not want the Word of God or the will of God, yet did not want to appear to be fighting against God. One woman said it this way after they had run their preacher off: "Well, 21 Holy Ghost people could not be wrong." Really? They could if they were going contrary to Scripture. Certainly they could.

So here is how they tried to justify their attack on Jeremiah. Look in Jeremiah chapter 43 and verse 3. After telling Jeremiah that he was preaching falsely and lying, it became even worse. They said: "But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon."

Mark this down: the greatest integrity in God's men does not absolve them from reproaches. "But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us." According to these people, Jeremiah was such a numbskull and so weak-brained that he could not even think for himself. It was Baruch who set him against the people. Baruch happened to be his scribe, his secretary, his amanuensis, and also a

much younger man. They were saying, “It's Baruch. He hates us. He hates his own countrymen. He wants to see us slain. He wants Nebuchadnezzar to kill all of us.”

Jeremiah's problem, they claimed, was that he had been listening to his scribe, this much younger man. In the Old Testament, and even in the New Testament, old men did not listen to young men; young men listened to old men. Read the book of Job. In our Lord's day, a man was not even considered a man until he was thirty years of age.

Thus they accused Baruch of setting Jeremiah on. They were no longer accusing Jeremiah merely of being a false prophet, speaking lies, and giving his own message instead of God's message; they were accusing him of fraud and misrepresentation, of allowing himself to be used for a villainous purpose. In actuality, he was impersonating a prophet of God.

Which, of course, merits a death penalty. I want you to understand something: this is not even logical. Their thinking was so perverted that they could not even think straight. Let me put it to you bluntly: rebellion and sin destroy even common sense. You cannot fight against God and be in your right mind. That is what these people were doing. They were fighting against God.

What was the result of their vile and vain accusations? They had previously determined to go into Egypt, and no matter what God said, they would go. Beginning in verse 4, Jeremiah 43 says: “So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the Lord, to dwell in the land of Judah. But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah; even men, and women, and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah. So they came into the land of Egypt: for they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: thus came they even to Tahpanhes.”

Forced Flight to Egypt and Consequences (Jeremiah 43:4-13)

They kidnapped Jeremiah and Baruch, and probably some of the other people as well. They forced them to go into Egypt. This was rebellion and sin with determined intent. The question has to be asked: What are the consequences for what they have done?

Here is what was going to happen. Jeremiah 43:8 says: “Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brickkiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them.”

And when he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt, and deliver such as are for death to death; and such as are for captivity to captivity; and such as are for the sword to the sword. And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captives: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd putteth on his garment; and he shall go forth from thence in peace. He shall break also the images of Bethshemesh, that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall he burn with fire.

In other words, God says, “Here’s the problem, folks. You are going to run into the very thing that you’re running away from.” You wanted to get out of Judah because of the war and the famine and the pestilence. Guess what? You’re going to meet it. You wanted to get out of Judah because of Nebuchadnezzar. Are you afraid of him? Guess what? He’s going to be in Egypt. He’s going to destroy Egypt, and he’s going to destroy you.

When you have disobedience, you have destruction. I read years ago a fable, a story that was very impressive to me. Its setting was in Persia, modern-day Iraq or Iran it is, and it concerned a man walking down the street of one of the cities who met Death. Death was walking the opposite way. The man and Death stared each other

in the eyes, and the man turned around and ran. Death looked shocked. When the man escaped, someone asked Death, “Why were you so shocked when you saw this man?” He said, “Well, I’m surprised that he was here, because I have an appointment with him tonight at midnight in Baghdad.” So he ran from death and ran right into death.

That’s what these people were doing. They said they wanted to know God’s will, but they didn’t. Most people really do not want to know God’s will. What we want to do is what we want to do. We want to do what we’ve determined in our hearts needs to be done.

These folks believed they needed to go to Egypt, get out of Judah, and get out of harm’s way. Yet they ran right into it. If they had listened to God, they would have been out of harm’s way. The safest place for any child of God is right smack dab in the middle of the will of God. That’s the safest place.

Two Applications

Applications: Genuinely Seeking God's Will and Repentance

Do you want the will of God in your life? Do you genuinely and truly want the will of God in your life? If you want the will of God, you will read, study, and listen to His Word and apply it. You will attend the preaching and teaching of His Word with an open heart and a prayerful attitude.

You will ask the Lord to lead you, guide you, direct you, order your steps, and establish your paths. You will have to say, “It is not in man, O Lord, to direct his paths.” You will have to say, “Order my steps in thy word, direct my paths, O Lord.”

Here is the truth: there is absolutely no excuse for a child of God not to know the will of God, because we have His revealed will right in front of us. We know what God's revealed will is. I may not know His secretive will, but right now that is none of my business. My business is His revealed will.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to

our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." I am not to concern myself with God's secretive will. He will work that out in His providence. I am to be concerned about His revealed will. Ephesians 5:17 says, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." He has commanded us to understand His will.

The second application is simple as well. When we sin, we must acknowledge it, confess it, repent, and turn from it. We cannot sit back and try to justify our actions, attitudes, or decisions. If they are wrong, they are wrong. The thing to do is to repent and acknowledge them. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

We cannot be like these people and try to justify those things which are wrong in our lives. We must acknowledge them, confess them, and repent of them. We must make sure that we stay right in the middle of the will of God. When we ask God for His will and He shows us, we need to do it and not make excuses. Let us pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we do ask for Your blessing and Your help and Your direction. Lord, we do need Thy will. We do want Thy will. And we know that Thou art too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. Help us to trust Thee because Thou art our Father. Thou art our God. We love Thee and confess our need of Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, help us to live for Thee. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 17

The Fruit of Sin Part 3 of 3 Rebellious Children

January 30, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 1:1-9 (KJV)

Introduction and Review

Isaiah 1 and verse 1:

"The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib. But Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corruptors. They have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger."

"They are going away backward. Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is

sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Your land strangers devoured in your presence, and it is desolate as overthrown by strangers."

"And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been a Sodom, and we should have been made like unto Gomorrah."

There are three main points. First of all, the witnesses summoned: God says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth." Throughout the Bible, God often calls heaven and earth as a witness against His rebellious people. Evidently everyone in Judah and Jerusalem was corrupt and rebellious, and therefore none would testify with the Lord, so He calls and summons heaven and earth to be witnesses.

Secondly, we saw in verse two the warning spoken. He says, "the Lord has spoken." Very obviously, once God speaks, we are to hear and listen, especially when God speaks in anger, which He is doing in Isaiah chapter one. Thirdly, we began looking at the wickedness stated.

The Harvest of Rebellious Children

God says, “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” In the first message, I covered only one sub-point under this: we need to consider the heartache of rebellious children. That is exactly what God says. He has nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Him. God places this in a situation that you and I can easily comprehend and explain.

In verse 3, we need to consider the haughtiness of rebellious children: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” The word haughtiness does not necessarily always mean being proud or high-minded. It also means being inconsiderate and undisciplined.

Once sin gets hold of an individual, it reduces him below an animal, because even the so-called dumb animals know their own master's crib and the place where they are fed.

Then, in verse 4, we saw the hatefulness of rebellious children. He says, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." And, fourthly, we saw the hardness of rebellious children, because He said in verse 5, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" They would revolt more and more: "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint."

There comes a time when God says discipline and chastisement simply will not work. That is why the Bible says, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."

The Harvest of Rebellious Children Introduced

Now we come to the last sub-point: the harvest of rebellious children. God pleaded over and over with His rebellious people, yet they would not hearken and would not repent. In Jeremiah 44:4, God said, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." He was talking about sin. In 2 Chronicles 36, beginning with verse 15, we see how wicked, rebellious, and disobedient the children of Israel really were.

"And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, that is his prophets, rising up betimes and sending because he had compassion on his people, on his dwelling place." Whenever God is going to exercise compassion, He always sends a preacher, someone to declare His Word. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against the people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with a sword, and the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man, or maiden, or old man, or him that stooped for age. "He gave them all into His hand."

The people refused to listen. God sent messengers over and over, but all they did was mock and ridicule. There comes a time when judgment is around the corner. God said in Psalm 81 in verse 13, "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways." They did not.

He grieved for that. They continued in their rebellion against Him. In Isaiah chapter 1, God says, "From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

He is going to show us the harvest of rebellious children in two ways: first, in the picture of a sick, beaten man; and second, in how that relates to the nation. Most people are willing, desirous, and even eager to sow their wild oats. They love the sin, the pleasures of the flesh, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes. The problem is that they want to sow those wild oats but leave before the harvest matures.

It does not work like that. If you really want to know why people are so wicked and evil, the Apostle Paul explains in Romans 3:18: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” When an individual does not fear God, he does not fear disobeying, dishonoring, or disrespecting Him. The problem with sowing our wild oats and doing that which is wicked and ungodly is that we always reap exactly what we sow. That is why God said in Galatians 6:7–8, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

The Picture of a Sick, Beaten Man and a Desolate Land

Now look again at verses 6 and 7. Verse 6 says, “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.” They “have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.” Verse 7 says, “Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land,

strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers."

Here the resemblance between a man who is sick, severely beaten, wounded, and entirely livid and sore, and a land perfectly desolate, destroyed, and devoured, is given as a picture of the harvest of rebellious children. When God says to Judah and Jerusalem, "Your country is desolate," it is an exceedingly emphatic Hebrew expression, literally meaning that the country is perfectly desolate, destroyed, and devoured—completely and totally in ruins. Here is also a perfect picture of Romans 14:7: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." What God is telling us in Isaiah 1 is that rebellious children basically destroyed the country.

Most people think, "It is my sin; sin does not affect anybody but me. It is my business; butt out. It is my life; leave me alone." What they fail to understand is that their sin always affects more than themselves. It affects their family, their church, their society, and eventually the nation itself. Did Adam's sin affect only himself?

And the answer is no. Did the sins of those antediluvians, those people who lived before the flood, affect only themselves? No. Did the sins of the people in Sodom and Gomorrah simply affect them? No. God not only destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, but the cities of the plain as well. What about the sins of Jacob? Did they affect only himself? The answer is no. What about the sins of Levi and Simeon? The truth of the matter is this: our sins always affect the lives of others.

No one ever escapes the destruction and devastation of sin. At the beginning of this message, I told you that there is an application and implication we can derive from Isaiah chapter 1. If, in America, we think for one minute that somehow we are going to escape the harvest we have sown, we need to think again. If we think that we are going to escape the just wrath and punishment of God for the sin of legalized murder through abortion; the sin of legalized fornication through sodomy and gay marriage; the overlooking of adultery and fornication; the continued theft, fraud, and deceit of the Federal Reserve System and the Fractional Reserve Banking System; the political sins of socialism, communism, and Marxism; and the

overall idolatry of America, we had better read Isaiah chapter 1 all over again.

Individual sins always break out into societal sins, and societal sins always break out into national sins. It is like God said in Hosea 8:7: "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

The Certainty of God's Judgment on National Sin

Unless there is individual repentance, leading to familial repentance, ecclesiastical repentance, and ultimately national repentance, then, as in Isaiah chapter 1, all we can expect is the righteous judgment of God. Why? Because God is not mocked. We are not only going to receive judgment; we are already under judgment. The more we refuse to acknowledge it, repent, confess, and turn from our sins, the more intense, frequent, and severe the judgment will become. Read Amos chapter 4, verses 6 through 13. God sent one judgment, and they failed to repent. He sent another, and they still failed to repent. Then He sent another judgment, over and over, and with each judgment there was an increase in intensity and severity. Obviously, they did not hear, answer, or turn.

Look around our country today. We have floods and droughts. An article recently reported that drought is affecting fourteen states in this country. Many individuals who work in the agricultural sector have totally lost their crops. We have floods, droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, plagues, pestilences, and famines. These are just some of God's judgments.

In Ezekiel 14:21, when God is going to send His judgment against Jerusalem, He says, “For thus saith the Lord God, How much more, when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beasts, and the pestilence to cut off from it man and beast.”

It may surprise you to understand that God has an arsenal and an armory, with many weapons He can use to destroy a nation. In Jeremiah 50:25, we read, “The Lord hath opened His armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of His indignation, for this is the work of the Lord in the land of the Chaldees.” The Lord hath opened His armory and brought forth the weapons of His indignation. Do

you think that God will not judge sin? Do you think that God will not judge our sin? Do you think that somehow America shall escape the judgment of God?

The Faithfulness of God in Judgment

The very faithfulness of God is at stake. The very faithfulness of God. Hold Isaiah 1 in mind, but look in Isaiah 11 and verse 5. Here we are reading about the Messiah, and the Bible says, "And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." Now the reins speak of the heart. So the very heart of our sovereign God is the heart of faithfulness. He is the faithful God.

Now let us see how that works out in light of Isaiah 1. Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 7, beginning with verse 9. I want you to note the word faithful in relation to God here. Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him, and keepeth His commandments to a thousand generations."

Now watch: "and repayeth them that hate Him to their face. To destroy them, He will not be slack to him that hateth Him, He will repay him to his face."

Now I want you to note that God is designated in verse 9 as the faithful God. May I ask you, in what area is God faithful? The answer is that He is faithful in each and every area. He is faithful in all areas. Verse 9 teaches us that God is faithful to His covenant in keeping mercy to those who love and obey Him. But when you get to verse 10, verse 10 teaches us that God is faithful to judge and destroy those who disobey Him and hate Him. Notice the phrase, "He will not be slack to him that hateth Him." Simply stated, God is not going to cut anyone any slack, and He is not going to be slack in judging His enemies. He will go ahead and destroy them. God is equally faithful in sending His judgment as He is in sending grace and mercy. He is the faithful God. God is faithful in disciplining and chastening even His own children. God does not fail.

As parents, many times we threaten to discipline our children, but we never do it. We fail to follow through. But God is not like that. David said in Psalm 119:75, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are

right, and in thy faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." It is the very faithfulness of God that guarantees not only God's mercy and grace, but also guarantees His judgment as well.

Strangers Devouring the Land

Now, if you will go back to Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 7, look at what God says: "Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Your land strangers devoured in your presence. And it is desolate as overthrown by strangers."

Consider some verses with me. Turn first to the book of Leviticus, chapter 26. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. Begin with verse 22. God is pronouncing His curses upon a disobedient people. He says, "I will also send wild beasts among you which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, and your highways shall be desolate." Then, in verse 33: "and I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you, and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste." Verse 43 continues, "The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lie desolate without them. And they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes."

Turn to the book of Deuteronomy 28. Note how God is saying, this is what is going to happen to you when you disobey Me, when you violate the covenant and violate My law. If I had time to read all of Deuteronomy 28, it would surprise you, because God is telling them exactly what is going to happen. Beginning with verse 49: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flyeth, a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young."

"And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kind, or flocks, or sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustest throughout all the land. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all the land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee." So

God is saying, look, here is a picture of entire destruction and desolation that's going to befall your land, your cities, because of your rebellion.

The same thought appears in Micah, chapter 6, verses 14 through 16: "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied. And thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee. And thou shalt take hold, but thou shalt not deliver. And that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap. And thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with oil. And sweet wine, but thou shalt not drink wine."

"For the statutes of Omri, who is the father of Ahab, for the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and you walk in their councils, that is, in their statutes, that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof a hissing, therefore, you shall bear the reproach of My people."

Note what God has done. God has faithfully warned. God has faithfully described the judgment that would befall a rebellious people. When they refused to hear His Word and refused to repent, He faithfully sent that judgment. We're told in Hebrews 6 and verse 18 that it is impossible for God to lie. That is true. But it is also impossible for God to fail. He said in Isaiah 46 and verse 10, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." Whatever God decrees and determines to be done, it shall be done. He will not lie and He will not fail.

Go back to Isaiah 1 and look at verse 7. He gives you a parallel between a man that is sick and beaten and bruised and left for dead in verse 6. Then he tells you this is what your country is like, or it's going to be like with this judgment: "Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Your land strangers devoured in your presence. And it is desolate as overthrown by strangers."

There is one part of this judgment that God pronounced against Israel that I want to particularly emphasize. It is particularly distressing, and I might also add, particularly applicable to our situation in America. He says in verse 7, “your land, strangers devoured in your presence. It is desolate as overthrown by strangers.”

The word stranger in the Hebrew is the word zur, which literally means a stranger, a foreigner, an enemy, and it also refers to a prostitute. In Proverbs 2:16, God says, “...to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words.” So a harlot is referred to as a strange woman. Throughout all the Bible, a harlot is referred to as a stranger.

Do you remember Jephthah? Jephthah was cast out from the family. Why? Because in Judges 11:2 we read this: “And Gilead's wife bare him his sons, and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah from them, and said, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house, for thou art the son of a strange woman.” Very obviously, here was a strange woman that Gilead had had Jephthah by, so the family basically cast him out.

Whenever you read the word stranger in the Bible, it refers to an enemy, to a foreigner, someone who was not of the family, someone who was not of the kindred, someone who was not of the nation. In fact, in Exodus 30:33, there was a holy anointing oil that was made only for the priests. God said, “whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall be cut off from his people.” In other words, death—to use the holy anointing oil upon a stranger.

Do you realize that part of the curse and the judgment of God upon the wicked is that strangers will devour his goods? In Psalm 109:11, we read, “Let the extortioner catch all that he hath, and let the stranger spoil his labor.” A stranger, again, is someone who is not of the family, not of the kindred, and not of the nation.

Now, let me point out several passages for your consideration, and I want you to listen and pick up on the word stranger. In Ezekiel 11:9, look what God says.

"And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and I will execute judgments upon you." I will deliver you into the hands of strangers. In Ezekiel 28:10, God says, "Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers. For I have spoken it, saith the Lord God." In Ezekiel 30:12, He says, "And I will make the rivers dry and sell the land into

the hand of the wicked, and I will make the land waste and all that is therein by the hand of strangers. I, the Lord, have spoken it."

In Hosea 7:9, God says concerning Israel, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not. Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." Notice what He said: strangers have devoured his strength. Then, in Hosea 8:7, He says, "They have sown the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind. It hath no stalk, the bud shall yield no meal. If so it yield, strangers shall swallow it up."

Strangers are foreign enemies that invade the land, eat up its resources, destroy its productivity, confiscate, use, and abuse the inhabitants, and could care absolutely nothing about the land. When strangers come into a land, the only thing they consider is getting what they can get, taking what they can take, and destroying whatever is left. Their attitude is this: If I can have it, no one can. I will destroy it.

In Judges 6, we hear about the Midianites. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel, and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains and caves and strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them."

Look what the strangers do to the land: "And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou cometh to Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass, for they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude."

"For both they and their camels were without number, and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites." What did they do? They literally destroyed the land.

I want you to go back to Isaiah chapter 1. Look at verse 7. I want you to think with me about America. See if the judgment that God applied to Judah and Jerusalem is not happening in our own land

because of our sin and our rebellion. "Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Strangers devoured in your presence, and as desolate as overthrown. Notice, by strangers."

Here is an extremely agitating and calamitous situation. Look again at verse 7: “Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire, your land, strangers devour it in your presence.” You can see it, but you cannot stop it or hinder it. You can do nothing about it. You simply watch your country, your society, and your home destroyed by strangers.

Undoubtedly, Isaiah 1:7 referred to the invading Babylonian army. They were strangers, the enemy, foreigners, and they came to destroy. You can read in Jeremiah and Lamentations what they did to Jerusalem: they broke down the wall, burned the temple, destroyed the city, murdered the people, carried some away into captivity, and literally pillaged and ruined absolutely everything. But have you understood that strangers can devour your country without a war? Have you considered that strangers can make your land desolate without a war?

Some of you have seen what the illegals have done in Southern California and Southern Arizona. If you have not, I urge you to look at the pictures, which are all over the internet. You are talking about a trashed country, filth, murder, and mayhem. Even the federal government put up a sign warning the people of Arizona not to go into southern Arizona because of the illegal immigrants who are destroying and murdering and killing everything and everybody they can find. It is amazing.

Have you looked at the pictures of Detroit, Michigan? Go on the internet and look at the cities in Michigan, especially Detroit. Look at the buildings and the towns, and see how everything is absolutely desolate. I just received an email with a link; you can click on it and hear for yourself that Michigan is now sending out food applications in English, Spanish, and Aramaic. They now have “Press 2 for English” and “Press 3 for Aramaic,” because there are so many Muslims who have basically taken over Michigan. I never will forget when Alice and I were driving through, a number of years back, and saw this humongous mosque right by the interstate. You stop and

think, how in the world could something like that happen in supposedly a Christian land?

You say, "Oh, we're tolerant." You try to build a church over in Iraq or Iran. No. They kill Christians there. The point I'm trying to make is this: strangers are devouring our land in our presence. Just look at the foreign nationals in our own government who have dual citizenships. Israelis? Muslims?

Everyone now knows Congressman Weiner's wife. Do you realize she's a Muslim? She is exceedingly close to Hillary Clinton. Do you realize her mother and her brother are tied to the militant Muslim Brotherhood? Here is a Muslim working with the Secretary of State who is now privy to state secrets. All I'm trying to show you is this: we have multinational people with dual citizenships, and they're more loyal to a foreign government than they are to our government, more loyal to a foreign country than they are to our country.

I hope you realize that the state of Texas just executed a Mexican for murder and rape. Washington, D.C., tried to get the state of Texas to pardon him, but the state of Texas did not. He should have been executed. But do you realize he was in this country for fifteen years? His last words right before he died were, "Viva Mexico." He was more concerned with Mexico than he was with America.

Our country is being destroyed before our eyes, and the sad thing is that we are absolutely helpless. All we can do is sit back and watch with horrified and shocked expressions while our constitutional liberties and freedom are slowly and gradually being destroyed and taken from us. What God said to Judah and Jerusalem through Isaiah, in Isaiah 1 and verse 7, is happening here in this country.

We've lost control of our lives, our families, our churches, our states, and our nation. Strangers—those who are enemies to the faith of Jesus Christ, enemies to the foundation upon which this country was built, Christianity, and opposed to our Constitution—seek our destruction and overthrow.

The Desolation of Jerusalem and America

Unless God supernaturally and sovereignly intervenes, all we can do is sit back and watch it. Since God sent this judgment upon Judah

and Jerusalem, how were they left? Look in verse 8: “And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.” You say, “I don’t understand that verse.”

Matthew Henry explains verse 8: “Jerusalem itself, which was as the daughter of Zion, the temple built on Zion was a mother, a nursing mother to Jerusalem, or Zion itself, the holy mountain, which had been dear to God as a daughter, was now lost, deserted, and exposed as a cottage in a vineyard, which when the vintage is over, nobody dwells in it or takes care of it, and looks as mean and despicable as a lodge or a hut in a garden of cucumbers, and every person is afraid of coming near it, and solicited us to remove its effects out of it as if it were a besieged city.”

He continues: “National impiety and immorality bring national destruction. Canaan, the glory of all the lands, Mount Zion, the joy of the whole earth, both became a reproach and a ruin and sin made them so.” It is the great mischief maker. The wonderful, glorious Jerusalem, the city of David, is left as a cottage in a garden of cucumbers. It is absolutely desolate.

America has just about become like that. America the beautiful has basically become America the ugly. The land of the free has become the land of the serf and servant and slave. The land of the brave has become the land of cowards, wimps, apathetic and lethargic couch potatoes who refuse to stand for righteousness, truth, liberty, or anything. We sit back and allow it all to happen.

That is what he said in verse 7: “Your country, strangers devour it in your presence.” What was the ultimate end of Judah and Jerusalem? What will be the ultimate end of America unless there is repentance? Look in verse 9: “Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom and we should have been made like unto Gomorrah.” What did God do in Sodom and Gomorrah? He sent fire and brimstone and destroyed them. Only Lot and his two daughters got out; everyone else was totally wiped off the face of the earth.

The Remnant and Call to Repentance

Isaiah 1:9 says, “except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant.” Those who do escape, escape only by the grace of God. Unless God has mercy upon us, we should be like Sodom and Gomorrah.

The most awful judgment that God can bring upon any people is when He no longer speaks to them or disciplines them. What would you think as a child if your father never spoke to you and never disciplined you, but simply left you alone? You would think, “That is an unusual father.” But when God refuses to speak to us and refuses to discipline us, He is leaving us in our own incorrigibility, in our own rebellion, to the day of judgment.

What does He say in Revelation 22:11? “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” In other words, when God is ready to destroy a people, He is silent toward them. When God refuses to speak, there is nothing but judgment.

The evidence of a nation under the extreme and severe judgment of God, and of a nation about to be destroyed by God, is when the people of that nation are made worse by the things or methods God would use to make them better. It is just as He said back in verse 5: “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more.” In other words, discipline no longer works; all discipline does is make you more rebellious.

Romans 2:4–6 says, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds.” The goodness, grace, and mercy of God should make us better. The discipline of God should make us better. But when we fail to respond to the discipline, goodness, and grace of God, the only thing left is judgment.

Then he said in verse 9, “Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant.” Here is where we can rejoice. God will never leave Himself without witness. He will always have His elect,

His remnant, and His seven thousand who have never bowed the knee to Baal. God will spare those who are faithful unto Him.

We should do as some of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles did: look back and say, “Wow, God was so good to us. God delivered us.” We need to glory in God’s deliverance and in the fact that what He has done in time past, He may do again now. And what did our Lord say? “Turn ye, turn ye, turn ye, for why will you die?”

That is true of individuals, families, society, and nations. Our response should be one of repentance and faith. The harvest of rebellious children is awful. I do not want that kind of harvest in my life, or in my family, or in my church, or in my nation. If we do not want it, we need to repent.

Do you remember? As wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah were, God was willing to spare them if He found ten righteous people. There are far more than ten in this room. What can you do to be as holy, godly, obedient, and righteous as you can be by the grace of God?

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We are so thankful that You are on the throne and that You are our sovereign God. Father, we are in a desperate situation in our nation, and strangers are indeed devouring our land before our eyes, and we are seemingly helpless. Help us, Lord, to know what to do and where to turn. Above all, help us, Heavenly Father, to turn to Thee and to be obedient. We commit ourselves unto Thee and ask Your blessings, not only upon the preached word, but upon the fellowship meal and the celebration that follows. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

The Covenant Applied

February 3, 2012

Introduction: The Covenant Applied

The message I am going to bring today is exceedingly applicable to our day and time. The title of the message is “The Covenant Applied.” If you look in Jeremiah 15 and verse 4, you have heard me quote this verse probably many times, but I have never really explained it. Here it is, Jeremiah 15, verse 4.

God says concerning Judah, “And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.” We should look very closely at that verse because God says plainly that He is going to cause Judah, that is, the people of the land, to be carried away into captivity. Why? Because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

Understanding Sanctions

I want to talk to you today about sanctions. Sanctions is a term probably everyone understands. Usually, when we think of

sanctions, we think of them in terms of our government. If you listen to the news, you will hear that we have sanctions against North Korea, Venezuela, Iraq, and Iran. What in the world are the politicians talking about when they use the word sanctions?

When our government uses the word sanctions, it usually means that it is displeased with another government because that government fails to act in a desirable way that we would prefer. Since they are not acting the way our government thinks they should act, our government pronounces sanctions against them. Usually, when politicians talk about sanctions against a foreign government, it means that we are not going to give them as much money as we used to, or extend to them the credit that they want.

I am not concerned today about governmental sanctions. However, I am concerned about God's sanctions. Governments play; God does not. Governments are duplicitous; God is not. Governmental sanctions are not real sanctions. God's sanctions are real, and they are always serious.

It is interesting that we get our English word sanction from the Latin sanctio, which literally means "to make holy." The word sanction literally is a solemn decree, a formal agreement, and something that makes an oath binding. Thus, sanction has both a positive and a negative meaning. If we sanction something positively, that means we approve it, condone it, and bless it. When we say, "I'll sanction that," we mean, "I'll put my stamp of approval upon that act or upon that covenant." But we also use it negatively.

We can say that we are pronouncing sanctions. In that sense, it means that we are judging, condemning, disapproving, perhaps even cursing it.

When I talk about sanctions, especially in light of God's sanctions, I hope you have already thought about Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Although we are not going to turn there, if you take the time to read those chapters, you will find that God pronounces sanctions both positively and negatively. He promises His approval and blessings upon those who obey Him, but He also pronounces negative sanctions, promising His disapproval and curses upon those who disobey Him. Incidentally, sanctions, biblically speaking,

always apply individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. That is, they apply to each of us as individuals, to each of our families, each of our churches, and each of our nations.

Principles are important in the Bible. These principles are illustrated for us in the Word of God, demonstrating the actions of God in time and history. When you find a principle in the Word of God, it simply means this: This is the way God has acted in times past; it is how He will act in the present, and it is also how He will act in the future.

When we read Jeremiah 15:4, the principle being enunciated is that of sanctions, and I might emphasize negative sanctions at that. When we think of sanctions and the Old Covenant—which is what most people refer to when they hear Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26—they say, "Well, that was in the Old Covenant. That is in the Old Testament."

Sanctions in the New Covenant

We fail to grasp a simple truth. We talk about the Old Testament and the New Testament. Did you know that the word testament is just another word for covenant? Actually, then, we are talking about the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, but it is still a covenant. If you would hold Jeremiah 15 but look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 8, I want to point out the fact that the old covenant—that is, the old way of worshiping God, with the tabernacle and the temple, all the rituals, and all the cleansing and

All the sacrifices, all that has passed away. In its place now, we have the New Testament, or the New Covenant. Hebrews chapter 8 and verse 13 says, "In that he saith, A new covenant. He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." That is why we do not have the priesthood as we did in the Old Testament, and why we do not have the sacrifices. That Old Covenant has vanished away in its ceremonial aspects. In the New Covenant, we have the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the true Lamb of God. But I am simply pointing out that it is the New Covenant, and it is still a covenant.

Everyone can tell you that God used sanctions in the Old Testament, in the Old Covenant. There were positive and negative sanctions as well. So let us ask the question: Are there sanctions in the New Covenant?

The answer is most definitely yes. The easiest way for you to prove to yourself that there are sanctions in the New Covenant is to try dying one time without Jesus Christ. Just once. That is all. You will find out. If that is a little too difficult for you, try living a disobedient, ungodly, unholy life in rebellion to God and refusing to bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Your life is going to be full of heartache, turmoil, and trouble over and over and over. On the other hand, you can prove that there are positive sanctions. Live holy, godly, and obedient, and you will find blessing after blessing after blessing. There are sanctions in the Old Covenant, and there are sanctions in the New Covenant.

Earlier, I introduced the subject of principles. A principle is the way to understand what God is doing in time and in history. The Bible says in Malachi 3:6, "I am the LORD, I change not." God is immutable and unchangeable. The way He revealed Himself in the Old Covenant is exactly the same way He will reveal Himself in the New Covenant. What God did 2,000 years ago is exactly what He is going to do today, next year, for the next 10, 20, or 30 years, and for thousands of years—however long He lets the earth continue.

Look back to Jeremiah 15:4. I want to read it again and point out two things, although I am dealing with only one of them today. God says concerning Judah, "And I will cause them, the people, to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem."

Covenantal Nature of Government

There are two very important truths in this verse. The first truth is that of sanctions, which I am going to deal with today. Sanctions—that is the first truth. The second truth is the covenantal nature of government. Note how God intimately connects the civil rulers and the people. God sends the people into captivity for what Manasseh, their king, did. In other words, both are responsible and accountable. The people allowed their king to do what he did, and

therefore God judges the people with the king. Here, the covenantal nature of government is demonstrated plainly from Scripture.

Jeremiah 15:4 says again, "And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah." Manasseh was the king of Judah and the son of Hezekiah. He was also the father of Ammon. Manasseh began to reign when he was 12 years old, and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. His actual date was from 698 BC until 643 BC.

The Wickedness of Manasseh

Manasseh was the most wicked and vile king in the southern kingdom. Ahab held that infamous position in the northern kingdom. If anyone asks who were the most vile and wicked kings in the northern and southern kingdoms, the answer is Ahab in the north and Manasseh in the south. Note that Manasseh is specifically called, in verse 4, the son of Hezekiah.

What difference does it make that Manasseh is called the son of Hezekiah? He is called the son of Hezekiah for the purpose of enhancing and exacerbating his wickedness and his crime. Hezekiah was a godly man. He instituted a great reformation under his rule and exerted great labor and toil to restore the true worship of God in Judah and Jerusalem. Manasseh, his son, was obligated to follow in the steps of his father, but he did not. I am going to show you in just a few moments how wicked Manasseh really was.

He not only built altars; he also polluted the whole land with superstitions. He even put altars in the temple of God. It was a horrible and completely diabolically wicked thing that Manasseh did. His father Hezekiah had delivered unto him a godly heritage, and he purposefully and deliberately threw that heritage away and overthrew everything that his father labored to build. So undoubtedly Jeremiah is mentioning that Manasseh is the son of Hezekiah to the dishonor of the son. The name of Hezekiah intensifies the horribleness and the wickedness of the son. Manasseh is named here as the son of Hezekiah for his shame, because of his degeneracy, because he threw away that which was handed to him.

Here is a very important point: good men do not always produce good children. Anyone may have a fool for a child. A fool in the Bible is not a mentally deficient person. A fool in the Bible is someone who will not listen. Children who forsake their godly parents and the heritage that was handed to them will always receive the heavier and weightier judgments, because they are turning their backs upon light and truth and knowledge.

Now, to amplify the wickedness of Manasseh, consider some of the things that he did. In Second Kings 20:21 we read, “And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.” Then Second Kings 21:1 says, “Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem, and his mother's name was Hephzibah.” That is where the Bridges live, by the way, in Hephzibah, Georgia. It is a biblical name.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 21:2-7 (KJV)

> And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. And he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed.
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> And he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, which was an Asherah. And he did as did Ahab king of Israel, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem I will put my name. And he built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.
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> So what he is doing here is putting idols in all the house of the LORD. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name forever.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 21:7-18 (KJV)

Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day. Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzzah: and Ammon his son reigned in his stead.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 33:1-10; 2 Kings 23:12 (KJV)

2 Chronicles 33, verse 1. "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he built

again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD."

"And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel."

"And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken."

Now let me point out just a couple of things. Manasseh was not only a very wicked and ungodly man, he was an idolater who placed multitudinous altars in the house of God. Look in 2 Kings 23 and verse 12. Josiah was the man who tore these down. "And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of

So all these altars that Manasseh and all the kings of Judah had made were later destroyed by Josiah, who happened to be the grandson of Manasseh. This shows again how wicked Manasseh

really was. Concerning the grove, which was the idol of Asherah, 2 Kings 23:6 says, "And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people."

Asherah was a sex goddess. Josiah also "brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove," for the Asherah. Evidently, Manasseh had all these sodomites and prostitutes there for religious sects, much like the pagans did in their pagan temples, especially in those temples found in Corinth, Greece. These houses were torn down by Josiah. It is important that we do not underestimate the wickedness of Manasseh.

Second Kings 21:11 says, "Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly, above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols." Manasseh not only did these things; he also caused Judah to do them, exceeding all that the Amorites had done before him. The Amorites were a people who lived in Canaan. They were also Canaanites.

But remember Genesis 15. God told Abraham that his seed was going to go down into a strange land, Egypt, for four hundred years. In the fourth generation, He was going to bring them out. God then told him why His people were going down into Egypt for four hundred years: "Because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He put a sword in their hand and told them to go into the land and kill every inhabitant in it.

That is how wicked and vile the Canaanites were. God says in Leviticus 18:24–25, “Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.” They were so wicked and vile that the land itself was puking them out.

In Leviticus 20:22, God warned His people not to follow the Canaanites: “Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell

therein, spue you not out." In other words, God said that the land vomited out its inhabitants for Israel. If Israel became wicked and vile, it would spew them out as well.

So, when God brought Israel out of Egypt, He said, "I want you to kill every one of them." Someone will say, "Oh, that's horrible that God would kill every man, woman and child." R. A. Torrey, a preacher of the last century or so, said concerning this passage: "It is appalling that any people should be utterly put to the sword. But it is even more appalling that a society of people should have become so corrupt and debased that such treatment is deemed necessary in the interest of humanity. The Canaanites were a moral cancer threatening the very life of a whole human race. The cancer had to be removed in order to save the body, just as a surgeon inflicts pain and suffering in order to remove a malignant growth in the body."

Can you imagine a wicked, vile people so rebellious and wicked that God said every one of them should be put to death?

The magnitude of Manasseh's sin is evident in 2 Kings 21:11: "Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him," and "hath made Judah also to sin with his idols." So Manasseh, as king, not only sinned himself, but also made Judah, that is, the people, to sin. Verse 9 adds: "But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel."

Notice how God charges Manasseh. God charges him with seducing the people, leading them into more wickedness than the Amorites whom God destroyed. It was Manasseh who seduced them. It was Manasseh who caused them to err, to wander out of the way, and to apostatize by intoxicating them with his whoredoms, idolatry, and witchcraft. He was the king. He led them astray. The responsibility rested upon him because he was responsible to biblically follow the example of his father and the commands of the Word of God, but he did not.

God sent His prophets, but neither the king nor the people would listen. In 2 Kings 21:8, God said, "Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only

if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. But they hearkened not." In 2 Chronicles 33, He again says that He sent prophets unto them, but they would not listen. What is God doing? God is rightly charging Manasseh not only with his own wickedness, but also with the crime of purposely and deliberately leading the people away from God.

This was a common practice in the Old Covenant. It is also a common practice in the New Covenant; we simply do not recognize it as such. Let me show you another illustration. Look in 2 Chronicles chapter 12. I am showing you how many kings purposely and deliberately led the people astray. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 12:1, "And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD."

Who was Rehoboam? He was the son of Solomon, David's grandson. He pretended to serve God until he got everything just the way he wanted it; then he forsook God and carried the people with him. The same thing was done by Jeroboam, and the same thing was done by Solomon in his old age. Now Manasseh is charged with purposely and deliberately leading the people astray into idolatry.

Look at 2 Kings 23:26–27. The Bible plainly tells us that one of the reasons Judah went into captivity was because of the sins of Manasseh. We read it in Jeremiah 15:4, and here it is in 2 Kings 23:26–27: "Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there." There it is, plain as day: "Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal." God was angry with Judah for what Manasseh did.

Why is God angry at the people for what Manasseh did? We are responsible for what we allow our leaders to do. That is the covenantal nature of government. In Jeremiah 15:4, God said, "And I will cause them, that is Judah, to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem."

In 2 Kings 21:16, the magnitude of Manasseh's sins is made plain: "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD." The Bible says that God charged him with shedding innocent blood—not a little, but a lot. Enough, He said, to fill Jerusalem from one side to another.

In 2 Kings 24:3–4, we read: "Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon."

He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon. Innocent blood not only refers to the children that were sacrificed. In 2 Chronicles, Manasseh sacrificed his children in the valley of the son of Hinnom; he made his sons pass through the fire. Sometimes that was purification, an act of dedication to Baal, but sometimes it was child sacrifice.

Nor were children the only innocent ones sacrificed to these false gods. Think of the innocent men and women who were persecuted because they would not go along with what Manasseh did. Think of the prophets; generally probably, he prosecuted and persecuted them as well. Anyone who would not go along with Manasseh faced simply death.

There is an interesting thing about Manasseh. As wicked and vile as he was, when you read about him in the rest of Scripture, there is the possibility that in the end he may have been genuinely converted. He repented.

Manasseh personally may have been forgiven, but the nation still reaped the consequences of his sins. He seduced many people, and

the nation went into idolatry with him. They participated in the same things that he had participated in. Understand that, when it comes to the law of sowing and reaping, you may be forgiven for your sins, but what you have sown, you are still going to reap.

For example, if I went out and committed adultery, would God forgive me for adultery? Yes. But what if, in committing that act, I contracted the HIV virus? If God has forgiven me for committing the act of adultery, does that get rid of the HIV virus? No. I am still going to reap the consequences of my sin.

The law of sowing and reaping is very plain: You sow it, you are going to reap it. That is it. Manasseh led the people into sin, idolatry, and wickedness. God may have saved him at the end, but the people still reaped everything that they and Manasseh had sown. Sanctions are real.

God's paydays are not always on Fridays. Many people ignorantly suppose that because God does not smite them down instantly, He is not going to strike at all. God will strike in His time. The judgment is in His hands, not in ours.

Delayed Judgment: Reprieves Are Not Pardons

Look in Jeremiah chapter 1, beginning with verse 1. Jeremiah is writing this about Manasseh: "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Ammon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month."

When did Jeremiah begin prophesying? In the days of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah. Jeremiah began prophesying in the reign of Manasseh's grandson and continued until the destruction of Jerusalem. The Babylonians captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Manasseh died in 643 B.C. Therefore, it was approximately fifty-seven years later when God sent His judgment against Jerusalem—fifty-seven years after Manasseh was probably dead. Yet

everything we are reading is because of that which Manasseh did. Manasseh was dead and gone, and yet fifty-seven years later Jerusalem was destroyed. The reason for the captivity, given in 2 Kings 23 and Jeremiah 15:4, is because of the sins of Manasseh. If you had been grown during the reign of Manasseh, fifty-seven years later you would probably have been dead.

In other words, a great many of that generation had already died. Yet his sin was brought into account, and God righteously brought that innocent blood upon those people. God judged them and destroyed them. Let me point out one simple truth: reprieves are not pardons. Simply because God gives you a short respite, or a short reprieve, does not mean that God pardons you.

Now look in your Bibles at Jeremiah 15. Although God says constantly and repeatedly, “All this came upon Judah because of the sins of Manasseh,” Judah also had sufficient sins of its own to merit judgment. Manasseh led them into sin, and after Manasseh quit his sinning, the people continued in their sin. Watch it in Jeremiah 15, beginning with verse 1.

“Thus saith the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me,” two of the greatest prayer warriors in the world, “yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the LORD: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy.”

"And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem. For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee."

"I am weary with repenting. And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways. Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas: I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday: I have caused him to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city."

"She that hath borne seven languisheth: she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded: and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the LORD."

Look at what God is saying. It was not just Manasseh. Yes, he was bad enough, but he seduced the people, and the people continued in their sins. They had forsaken God; they had gone backward. Manasseh sowed the seed, and the people reaped the harvest.

It is like Hosea 8:7 says, "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

Now, I want you to understand how idolatry unfolded in Manasseh's time and how idolatry unfolds today. Think about what is happening in our land in light of what happened in Judah. Here are five simple points. How did idolatry become so prevalent in the land of Judah?

The Progression of Idolatry

First, idolatry is tolerated by the people and their rulers. We have been so politically correct as to swallow multiculturalism, hook, line, and sinker. No one thinks about idolatry.

Secondly, idolatry is promoted both ecclesiastically and governmentally. How many of you heard Obama say, and George Bush say, that Islam is a wonderful, peaceful religion? First, it is tolerated; secondly, it is promoted both ecclesiastically and governmentally.

Thirdly, idolatry is supported and funded by the government. Fourthly, the true worship of God is undermined, maligned, ridiculed, found offensive, repulsive, and unlawful. Let me ask you: Where is Christianity today? It is maligned and found offensive. Because everybody as a whole is politically correct, when you try to

stand up for biblical truth, you are too narrow-minded, bigoted, racist, and everything under the sun. Idolatry is first tolerated, then promoted, then supported, while the true worship of God is ridiculed. Fifthly, the true worshipers of God are finally persecuted, prosecuted, and murdered.

I know everyone here has heard about the hate crime legislation. It is going to be a hate crime to talk against the sodomites. It will be a hate crime to talk against anyone who slams Christ in the Word of God. Let us see how this goes: first, idolatry is tolerated, promoted, and supported; the true worship of God is maligned and ridiculed; the true worshipers of God are persecuted, prosecuted, and murdered; and sixthly and finally comes the judgment of God on the land.

That is exactly what happened in all of these passages that I just read today. As it was in the days of Manasseh and in the land of Judah, so it is today in the land of Obama and America. We have come to the point where we are tasting the judgment of God. Let me make a couple of applications. The first is this: God does not change His methods of dealing with the sin of idolatry. He has always judged both the rulers and the people together, because both are guilty. Both have violated the Word of God.

Applications for America

I stated earlier that reprieves are not pardons. When Elijah came and pronounced judgment against Ahab, wicked, ungodly, reprobate Ahab put on sackcloth and ashes and walked lightly before the Lord. God said, "See how Ahab hath humbled himself before me?" "I'll not destroy him now." He gave him a little reprieve, but a little later God did destroy Ahab. Reprieves are not pardons, folks. Just because God lets you slide for another fifty years does not mean that you have gotten away with your sins. God's paydays are not always on Friday. Just because God delays His full judgment does not mean that it is not coming.

Secondly, God does indeed hold His people accountable and responsible for what they allow their rulers to do. Silence is consent. When we remain silent, we tacitly give our consent. God says in Psalm 50:16–18:

"But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers."

How, when you see a thief, do you consent to what he is doing? How can you be partakers with adulterers? When you know what they are doing and do not rebuke them, reprove them, or expose them, by silence you are agreeing with their act. You are condoning what they do. Thus, there is a sin by silence.

Thirdly, consider this: "Well, Brother Weaver, God sent Judah into Babylonian captivity. You think He's going to send America into Babylonian captivity?" He does not have to send us to Babylon. God may indeed cause us to be removed, either by death, by imprisonment, or by being plain old captives in our native land through martial law, where you cannot do anything and cannot go anywhere.

Did God judge Judah? Yes. Did God judge Israel? Yes. Is God judging America? Yes. Will it get worse? Yes. The only way it will not get worse—the only way—is this: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

But we must turn from our wicked ways. Judah never turned, and God destroyed her. Israel did not turn, and God destroyed it. If America does not turn, we will be destroyed.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace and mercy. Lord, impress upon our hearts this simple truth: there are sanctions in the Word of God, both positively and negatively, and government is indeed covenantal in nature. Help us to be as holy, godly, and obedient as we can be by the grace of God. Give us grace to bring our lives into conformity to your Word and turn from our wicked ways. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 19

Unlikely Revolutionaries

February 3, 2012

Introduction: Unlikely Revolutionaries

In 1 Samuel chapter 22, we read: “David, therefore, departed thence and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.”

“And David went thence to Mizpah of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold.”

The Christian Duty to Resist Evil

It is important that we learn to think not only of what is, but of what might be as well. We are so accustomed in this day and age to being

cynical and unbelieving that normally we cannot even see the forest for the trees. It does not matter where you turn in this day and time, you always hear of the power of the one-worlders and our powerlessness before them. We hear of their weaponry and our lack thereof. We hear that we are helpless and powerless, and therefore it is useless to resist them. We hear that they have the wealth, the power, and the plan, and therefore it is useless simply to fight against evil and wickedness.

What we have forgotten as Christians is one simple truth: It is our duty, our responsibility before God, to resist, expose, and fight against all kinds of wickedness and ungodliness.

Biblical Call to Hate Evil and Rise Up

The Bible says in Psalm 97:10, “Ye that love the Lord hate evil.” Do you realize that these are two sides of one coin? If you love the Lord, you are going to hate evil. If you hate evil, you are going to love the Lord. It is impossible to love the Lord without hating everything that is contrary to Him. Then in Psalm 94:16, the Word of God asks, “Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?”

Who will stand for me against the workers of iniquity? God is looking for individuals who will rise up against the evildoers and stand for Him against the workers of iniquity.

Unhappily, modern-day Christendom has adopted the attitude of the Israelites in Numbers 13:33. You remember when Moses sent the spies out? They came back and said, “There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.” It is interesting to note that, first of all, those men said, “We were in our own sight as grasshoppers.” In other words, compared to them, we were absolutely nothing. That was their estimation from their own perspective: We were as grasshoppers.

The Grasshopper Mentality vs. Fear of God

But secondly, they assumed that they were also grasshoppers in the sight of the sons of Anak. The Bible does not say they were, but they assumed that since they believed they were grasshoppers in the eyes

of the sons of Anak, the sons of Anak saw them as grasshoppers as well.

Do you realize that the giants could actually have been trembling because of the God of Israel? God could already have smitten them with His fear. The fear of God could have fallen upon them, just as it fell upon the people of Jericho. In fact, Joshua chapter 2, verses 9 through 11, records what Rahab the harlot confessed to the spies when she hid them: "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."

Now notice what she said: "The time we heard of you, the fear of God fell upon us. We knew that we were whipped. We knew that it was over. Who can stand before your God?" The fear of God had already fallen upon those people. The Philistines also trembled at the God of Israel. In 1 Samuel chapter 4, when the ark of God was brought into the camp of the Israelites, the Philistines said, "What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?" When they understood that the ark of the Lord was coming into the camp, they were afraid: "God is coming to the camp."

"And they said, Woe unto us! For there hath been not such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us! Who shall deliver us out of the hands of these mighty gods? These are the gods that smoke the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness." They were fearful. What did the Apostle Paul say in Romans 8:31? "And what shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" In other words, it is God, his grace, his power, and his mercy that make us successful and victorious. When we fear God, we have no need to fear man.

The American Revolution as an Example

The American colonies were and are an example of unlikely revolutionaries. The Revolutionary War, also known as the War for Independence, was fought by farmers, merchants, and artisans—not trained military men. At the outset, the thirteen colonies had neither a professional army nor a professional navy. Each colony provided its own defense through the local militia. Militiamen were usually lightly armed and slightly trained, had no uniforms, and served for only a few weeks or months. They were reluctant to go far from home because they had gardens and crops to care for, so they were usually unavailable for extended operations.

Militia lacked the training and military discipline of the more experienced soldiers, but they were actually more numerous than the soldiers, and on occasions the militiamen did indeed overrun and overwhelm the regular troops. I find it interesting that in the beginning of 1776, George Washington only had about 20,000 men under his command. Two-thirds of those men were in the Continental Army; one-third were local, various state militias. Who would have ever thought that such a ragtag army of untrained men could take on the most powerful army and navy of that era and come out successfully? They were indeed unlikely revolutionaries in every sense of the word. The American armies were unlikely to fight, unlikely to stay, unlikely to succeed, and very unlikely to defeat the greatest military power on earth at that time. But when you look in 1 Samuel 22 and verse 2, you will also find another group of unlikely revolutionaries.

The Men Who Came to David

After we read in verse 1 that David's father's house came to him—that is, his brethren—in verse 2 we read, “and everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented gathered themselves unto him, and he became a captain over them, and there were with him about 400 men.” Notice verse 2. Who was it that came to David? Those who were in distress, those who were in debt, and those who were discontented. Upon first glance, one is tempted to think, What a bunch of rabble-rousers, what a bunch of losers, what a bunch of angry men. Who in the

world would want to be captain over such a group? Moreover, what in the world could you possibly do with 400 men against thousands?

May I remind you that in 1 Samuel 13 verse 2, the Bible says that Saul, who was king, had chosen him out 3,000 fighting men. He had multitudes more than 3,000, but he chose out 3,000 select fighting men. David now has 400. David is going to be fighting against what you and I would call a well-oiled fighting machine. David himself knew what the soldiers of Saul could do. In 2 Samuel 5 and verse 2, when the elders came to David to anoint him king over Israel, they said this: “also in times past, when Saul was king over us, Thou was he that led us out and brought us in Israel.” David was a captain over all of those soldiers. He knew their fighting ability; he was the one who led them. Now you have to ask yourself who it was that came to David. Who wanted to help David?

Obviously, first and foremost, it was David's family. The Bible tells us in verse 1, “David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam. And when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him.” Thankfully, David had at least three brothers who knew something about fighting. In fact, 1 Samuel 17:13 tells us that three of David's brothers followed Saul: “And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.” We know, then, that three of David's brothers had some fighting ability because they were in Saul's army.

It is always good to have your family on your side, and it is good to have family members who can fight. It is even better when family members are willing to encourage, uphold, support, and give you understanding. But it is not David's family that I want to deal with today. I will point something out about the family a little later. It is the men who gathered around him.

The Bible tells us in verse 2 that they were those who were distressed, in debt, and discontented. What a strange company to seek God's anointed! No mention is made of the captains of the army flocking to him, the men of state, or the princes of the realm. The only one we really know who came to David and had any power at all was Jonathan, and he could not really help David because he was

Saul's son. But he at least encouraged David and entered into a covenant with him.

All these big, important men preferred the palace to the cave. Note that the men who sought David were men who needed salvation—physically, politically, economically, and even spiritually. These men were unlikely revolutionaries. Who would ever have thought that God could use such a group of men? Yet they flocked to David. When they came to him, remember that David, in one sense, is a type of Christ, because at this time he was despised and rejected of men. This group came to David not only to help him, but also to be helped by him. So let us look momentarily and find out exactly what these men were.

Distress, Debt, and Discontent Defined

In 1 Samuel 22:2, the Bible says, “And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented.” I want to take those three points and look at them. First, there were men who flocked to David who were in distress.

Family and friends knew that David was being unjustly persecuted by Saul. I would imagine that those who also believed themselves to be unjustly persecuted would flock to him as well. You must understand that distress takes many forms. Those who came to David were in real anguish of soul.

The word distress in the Hebrew refers to straightness, distress, and anguish. This same word, translated distress in 1 Samuel 22:2, is also translated as straight or straightness in other passages, as well as being chafed. God’s people must recognize the full force of this condition.

Deuteronomy 28 uses this word as straightness or straight. Remember that Deuteronomy 28 is the passage concerning blessings and curses. God said, “If you obey me, blessings are going to follow you. If you disobey me, curses are going to follow you.” The distress described there is part of the curse. The surrounding context shows the seriousness of being brought into straightness under God’s judgment.

The enemy shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustest throughout all thy land. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straightness wherewith thy enemy shall distress thee.

What did God say? God says you are going to be besieged, shut in, and in such a state that you are starving, ultimately eating your own babies, killing and eating your own children. There are instances in the Bible where they actually did that. Notice the phrase, "in the straightness," which is the same word as distress: "For the straightness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee."

Look in verse 55: "So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat, because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straightness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates." Then skip down to verse 57. Speaking of the delicate woman, verse 56 says, "And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straightness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates."

Do you think you would be distressed if you were besieged by the enemy, starving, and killed and ate your own child? I would say that is some type of distress, some type of pressure, some type of anguish.

Turn to Jeremiah 19 and verse 9. Let me give you one other passage where the word distress is used, showing you what distress actually means. "And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons, and the flesh of their daughters; and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straightness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straighten them."

The words distress and straightness refer to extremely difficult circumstances. Those circumstances may be brought on through the oppression of men, poverty, afflictive providences, or as a result of one's own disobedience or just plain stupidity. In the passages from

Deuteronomy 28 and Jeremiah 19, most of this was brought upon the people by their own disobedience, sin, and rebellion. But distress and straightness can arise for other reasons as well.

For instance, Job was in a straight place because of God's sovereign providence. He had lost his ten children and everything that he had, and he was afflicted from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. It was God who allowed Satan to afflict Job, yet in each affliction there was a limitation placed upon Satan. You have to understand that Satan cannot do as he wills; he can only do what God allows. Job was in a straight place, but not because of his own disobedience.

Men can also be in a straight place because of the oppression of the enemy—not just because of their own disobedience, and not simply because of God's sovereign providence. In 1 Samuel 13, verse 6, the Philistines were about to attack the Israelites. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a straight, that they were in a distressed place, the people hid themselves in caves, thickets, rocks, high places, and pits.

Now, let me ask you a question. If you are facing a huge, well-trained, well-armed group of men who are intent on destroying you and everything that you have, while you have nothing with which to fight them, humanly speaking, would you consider yourself in a straight place? Would it be something to be distressed and concerned about? The answer is yes, very obviously.

All kinds of danger cause distress and anguish. It does not matter whether that distress is caused by economics, health issues, danger, family problems, or just plain old everyday fear. The distress and straightness are real; they are not imagined. Who was it that was flocking to David? Men who were in a straight place. They were distressed, in anguish, and hurting. They were flocking to David not only to help David, but also to be helped by David. Go back to 1 Samuel 22 and look at verse 2 again, because here then is the second group that came to David.

Those who came to David included everyone who was in distress and everyone who was in debt.

Frankly, I do not believe that David would countenance anyone trying to escape what you and I would call just debts. I believe David was a stickler for the payment of debts. You will remember when Araunah offered him his threshing floor, oxen, and instruments freely, so that David might offer a sacrifice to the Lord and stop the plague. In 2 Samuel 24:24, David said, "Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

The Bible has a great deal to say about debt. Long-term debt is forbidden in the Bible because we are not to mortgage or sacrifice our future for present gratification. There was a limitation on debt: you could be in debt for six years. In the seventh year, you were to come out free; debts were supposed to be forgiven, making one debt-free again. Moreover, when you study the Bible, you find that usury, or interest, was not to be charged to a brother. Deuteronomy 15 makes this issue clear: you were not to charge usury or interest to your brother. However, you must remember that the Jews have always loved money, and frequently disobeyed the law of God.

The Bible teaches that a Hebrew could sell himself into slavery for six years, but no longer; in the seventh year he was to be free. A man could also be sold into slavery because of debt. But there is a difference between a just debt and an unjust debt. One is sanctioned by the Word of God, and the other is condemned by the Word of God.

When the Bible says that these men fled to David because they were in debt, I cannot say that everyone who fled to David was escaping unjust debts. The Bible does not say that, so I could not make that statement without qualification. But based upon other Scriptures, in all probability most of the debts from which they were fleeing were unjust debts. Let me show you what I mean.

Here was the propensity of the Jews down through the ages. Nehemiah 5:1 says, "And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews."

For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters, are many; therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat and

live." Some also said, "We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn because of the dearth." There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards." Yet now, they said, "Our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants"—that is, to be slaves. "Some of our daughters are brought into bondage already. Neither is it in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

Now notice what Nehemiah said: "And I was very angry when I heard their cry of these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles and the rulers, and said unto them, You exact usury every man of his brother." He set a great assembly against them and said, "We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen. And will you sell, even sell your brethren, or shall they be sold unto us?"

Then they held their peace and found nothing to answer. Nehemiah said, "It is not good that you do. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? I likewise in my brethren and my servants might exact to them money and corn. I pray you, leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them even this day their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses, and a hundredth part of their money, and of the corn, and the wine, and the oil that you exacted them." Then they said, "We will restore them and require nothing of them."

So will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priest and took an oath of them that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap and said, So God, shake out every man from his house and from his labor, that performeth not this promise. Even thus he shall be shaken out and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise. What happened? Some of these people had escaped and left Babylon and had come back.

Ezra, of course, was rebuilding the temple, and Nehemiah was rebuilding the wall. But the Jews got there and started lending on usury, stealing the houses, land, and vineyards of their own brethren, and bringing them into slavery and bondage. They knew

what the law of God had said, but they were disobedient. These people were crying, “We have to borrow money just to pay taxes, and we cannot even redeem our children who have already been sold into slavery, because we have nothing. They have taken our vineyards. They have taken everything.”

Look in Jeremiah chapter 34, beginning with verse 8. This was a standard, common practice—nothing more than pure wickedness, disobedience, and sin. This is the word that came into Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were Jerusalem to reclaim liberty under them.

The same thing was happening. Since the siege was upon them and the enemy was about to come, they would do what was right now. Maybe the Lord would avert the judgment of God if they did what was right. Jerusalem proclaimed liberty to those who were enslaved: every man should let his manservant and maidservant, being a Hebrew or a Hebrewist, go free, and none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jewish brother. When the princes and people who had entered into the covenant heard this, they obeyed and let them go. Sounds good, doesn’t it? But read the next verse.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 34:8-17 (KJV)

> But afterwards they turned and caused the servants and the handmaids whom they had let go free to return and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids. Therefore, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel, I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of Badman, saying, At the end of seven years, let you go every man his brother in Hebrew, which hath been sold unto you. And when he had served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee. But your fathers hearken not unto me, neither incline their ear. And you were now turned and had done right in my sight in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbor. And you had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name. But you turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant and every man his handmaid, whom you had

> set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

Therefore thus saith the Lord, you have not hearkened unto me in proclaiming liberty every man to his brother, and every man to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, and to the pestilence, and to the famine, and I will make you be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. What were they known for? Disobedience.

All I am trying to point out is this: in all probability, those men fleeing to David who were in debt were probably fleeing from what you and I would know as unjust debts. It is like the loan sharks in our day who are willing to lend you money at about 25 percent interest, or like credit-card debt. If you do not pay the entire card off each month, the interest they charge may be 10 percent of your monthly balance. They may say 18, 19, or 21 percent, but if your monthly balance is $3,000 and you pay $2,500, you are going to receive a bill the next month for $800. Do you realize how much interest that is?

I could apply this same thing to what you and I know as the national debt. It is not a national debt. It is a fraud. It is theft, pure and simple.

Everyone who was in debt was, in all probability, fleeing from unjust debt. You have to remember that there are various kinds of slavery: economic slavery, mental slavery, emotional slavery, and physical slavery. You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 22 and verse 7: “The rich ruleth over the poor and the borrower is servant or slave to the lender.” When you go to the bank and borrow money, you actually become a slave to that bank until you pay it off. You are working for them, not working for yourself.

So those who were distressed, those who were in a tight, straight place, those who were in anguish, and those who were in debt were now, thirdly, those who were discontented. The Hebrew word marah literally means bitter, bitterness, chafed, angry, and discontented.

Do you remember in the book of Ruth, it was Naomi who said that she went out full and came back empty? Naomi, her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, went into the land

of Moab. There her husband died, and her two sons died. She finally went back home, and Ruth went with her. When all the people saw her, they said, “It’s Naomi.” And Naomi said this, in Ruth 1:20: “Call me not Naomi, call me Marah, for the Lord have dealt very bitterly with me.” The name Marah means bitterness.

Now, look at several passages that explain the word discontented, because the word discontented is translated in our Bibles as bitter and as chafed. Each one of these verses uses the same Hebrew word, discontented; it is simply translated in different ways. The same word is being shown in each passage, although our English Bibles use different words to express it.

In Exodus 1:14, we read: “And they made their lives bitter or discontented with hard bondage in mortar and in brick and in all manner of service in the field. All their service when they made them to serve was with rigor.” Here the Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites. They were made to slave away, and their lives were made bitter and discontented. Their bondage included mortar and brick, all manner of service in the field, and service imposed with rigor. This was not something they had freely chosen; they were being made to serve.

Would you be contented to work from 4 o’clock in the morning to 10 o’clock at night? I don’t imagine you would, especially if you were not getting anything for it, and if you were being forced to do that contrary to what you desired and wanted. Here was bitterness; here was discontentment. The hard labor, the compulsion, and the fact that they received nothing for it all explain why their lives were bitter.

Look in Exodus 15:23. The children of Israel had come out of the wilderness and came to Marah. “And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it is called Marah.” The Hebrew word Marah means bitter. That is why they called the waters Marah. The same word appears again in 2 Kings 14:26.

For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter, very discontented. For there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any help of Israel. The LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was

very bitter; that is, the people were very discontented. There was no one to save them.

One last passage: go back to 2 Samuel 17:8. Absalom has run his own father off the throne. He has asked counsel of Ahithophel and then of Hushai. Hushai is trying to buy David and the men with him some time, but he makes this statement concerning David: "For said Hushai, Thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people."

The word chafed is the word discontented. They were discontented in their minds, and Hushai gives the illustration of a bear robbed of her whelps. How many of you would be willing to go up to a big black bear or a big grizzly and say, "My, what cute cubs you have. Let me take them from you"? Do you imagine that Mama Bear is going to be content to let you have her babies? Most people killed by bears somehow get between Mama and the baby, and the mother turns around and protects.

This is what Hushai said of David: These men are chafed in their minds. They are discontented, angry, and bitter.

Those who fled to David were men in distress, men in debt, and men who were discontented. The word discontented itself has rolled up in it all the constituent parts necessary to make revolutionaries. It has in itself one who is bitter, angry, hurt, chafed, and discontented. In other words, he is fed up and ready to do something about the problem. These men were tired, upset, and angry with Saul's tyranny, greed, usurpation, and injustice. Saul was persecuting and harassing David unjustly. David had done no wrong.

It is certainly not any stretch of the imagination to figure this out. If Saul was persecuting David unjustly, was he not also doing that to a multitude of other people who disagreed with him? Do you not remember in 1 Samuel 15, which we read last week, how Samuel charged Saul with flying upon the spoil? Saul had become an arrogant, greedy, despotic monarch, concerned only with his politics.

What did he say to Jonathan over and over? “If we don't kill David, you will never be established on the throne.” In other words, he wanted Jonathan to follow him, and he was willing to murder David to establish him. He cared little what the will of God was or what the will of the people was. Invariably, such people grow weary of tyrants and become ready to do something about it. God had rejected Saul and his kingdom, and now the people were beginning to reject Saul and his kingdom.

David's Leadership and the Transformation of the Misfits

The men mentioned in 1 Samuel 22:2 are unlikely revolutionaries. Probably you and I would call them a small band of misfits. Who would want to lead such men? We would expect them to bring nothing but turmoil and trouble. Yet they came to help David and to be helped by David. David became a captain over them. The word captain indicates a general, a governor, a ruler, a lord—someone who executes and exercises authority. David evidently exercised authority very well, because this band of 400 men, who were distressed, in debt, and discontented, never appear in Scripture as plundering or murdering. On the contrary, they were always under good discipline, employed only in service of a beneficent nature and in defense of their country.

Whatever they were before they came to David, David succeeded in civilizing and training them and making them profitable. A wonderful example is found in 1 Samuel 25, where we read about Nabal. You remember that the word Nabal means fool.

Nabal was a very wicked and foolish man, and also very rich. He was shearing his sheep during a time of plenty. David sent servants to him, saying, “We’ve come in a good time. Would you please give to your servants whatever comes of your hand?” But Nabal spurned David’s men, saying, “There will be many men who break away from their masters these days. Who is David, that I should give to the son of Jesse?”

The servants went to Abigail, Nabal’s wife, and told her what had happened. They said, “But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt. Neither missed we anything as long as we were

conversant with them when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us, both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."

What did they just say? They protected us and helped us. If someone were bent upon murder, theft, and plunder, what better opportunity could there be than a rich man's herds out in the fields with only a few servants watching them? Yet, while David and his men were there, they never missed one sheep. These servants confessed that David's men were a wall about them day and night.

Moreover, when God delivered King Saul into David's hands, David refused to kill him and would not allow his men to kill him. In 1 Samuel 26:8–11, Saul was asleep, and Abishai said, "Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day."

Abishai said, "Now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him a second time." David answered, "Destroy him not, for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" David continued, "Furthermore, says the Lord, liveth the Lord shall smite him, or the day shall come for him to die or he shall descend into Babylon perish the Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. But I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster and the crews of water, and let us go."

Abishai wanted to kill him immediately. He said he would strike him only once, and it would be over so quickly that Saul would never wake up or know what hit him. David said no. Abishai did not argue, complain, or whine; he simply obeyed. David was a real captain, one who exercised his authority in a biblical manner. He was also respected by all his men.

Later, in 1 Samuel 23:13, David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah. He had begun with four hundred, and now he had six hundred. Yet some of these men were unbelievers; some were called men of Belial. In 1 Samuel 30, after David returned from capturing the people and goods taken by the Amalekites, the sons of Belial wanted to give every man his family while keeping all the goods for themselves.

Watch what the Bible says in 1 Samuel 30:22. “Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them all of the spoils that we have recovered, save every man his wife and his children, and they may lead them away, and depart.” Two hundred men were so worn out and weary with weeping, so distressed because their families had been taken, that they could not even go with David. They stayed by the brook.

“And David said, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came up against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike.” And so it was from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.

Now listen to what David said: “Who will hearken unto you in this matter?” Nobody is going to listen to you. You will do what I tell you.

A valid point should be made here. Unbelievers may fight with believers for liberty and freedom because their liberty and freedom are just as dear to them as they are to a believer. However, unbelievers must be held in check by a Christian ruler in authority who will not allow them to violate the Word of God. That is exactly what David was saying: No, you are not going to do this. That is wicked; that is wrong. David was a man after God’s own heart. David was the authority, not the unbelievers. They may have fought with David, but they were not in authority. They were now David’s servants and soldiers. They had turned away from Saul’s evil influence and were to be in subjection to David; that is what David demanded.

Go back to 1 Samuel 22 for a moment, before tying things together and making this applicable for today. We read in verse 1: “David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father’s house heard it, they went down thither to him.”

So David's family now comes to him, along with those who were distressed, who were in debt, and who were discontented. David had

some well-known nephews that helped him immensely. In all probability, these nephews were persecuted simply because they were part of David's family. You remember David took his father and his mother to the king of Moab and said, “Let them stay with you until I try to work things out.” Who in the world were the nephews?

David's Mighty Men and God's Power

You may have never made this connection, but 1 Chronicles chapter 2 shows us who David's nephews were. In verse 15, you have the names of all of Jesse's sons, seven of them. David was the seventh. The passage says, “Owes him the sixth.” He was the sixth son of Jesse; David was the seventh. Then it names David's sisters, Zeruiah and Abigail. The sons of Zeruiah were Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, and Abigail begat Amasa; the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite.

Now look at this: Joab, Abishai, Asahel, and Amasa were all nephews of David. Joab was the captain of the host. Abishai was the mighty man. Asahel was the one who got killed chasing after Abner.

Abner put the spear in the back, and it was Abishai and Joab who killed Abner because he killed Asahel. After that, David made Amasa captain of his host because he was so upset with Joab. As the army was being gathered to put down another little upheaval, Joab came up to Amasa to kiss him. Amasa did not notice the sword in his hand, and Joab put it under the fifth rib and cut it out of his heart; Amasa fell off, killed. So when Joab murdered Amasa, he murdered his own cousin.

Now watch this. In 2 Samuel 23, I want to try to tie this together for you. I want you to see this because it is very, very important. Begin reading with verse 8. These four hundred misfits finally got up to six hundred.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 23:8-17 (KJV)

Undoubtedly, some others came to David as well. But look, if you would, please, in 2 Samuel 23 verse 8.

These be the names of the mighty men whom David had. The Tachmonite that sat in the seat chief among the captains, the same was Adino the Eznite. He lifted up his spear against 800 whom he slew at one time. And after him was Eleazar, the son

of Dodo, the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there, gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away. He arose and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword, and the Lord wrought a great victory that day, and the people returned after him only to spoil. And after him was Shammah, the son of Agee, the Hararite, and the Philistines were gathered together in a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentils, and the people fled from the Philistines. But he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it, and slew the Philistines, and the Lord wrought a great victory.

And three of the thirty chiefs went down and came to David in the harvest time into the cave of Adullam. And the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in the hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was at Bethlehem. And David longed and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate. And the three mighty men break through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David. Nevertheless, he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Is not this the blood of these men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men.

Abishai, the brother of Joab and the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. He lifted up his spear against three hundred and slew them, gaining a name among the three. Was he not most honorable of the three? Therefore, he was their captain, although he did not attain unto the first three.

Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel who had done many acts, slew two lion-like men of Moab. He also went down and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in a time of snow. He slew an Egyptian, a goodly man; the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff, plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These

things did Benaiah, who had made his name among three mighty men. He was more honorable than the thirty, but he attained not unto the first three. David set him over his guard.

The passage then names the thirty, including Asahel, the brother of Joab; Elhanan; Shammah; Elika; Helez; Ira; Abiezer; Mebunnai; Zalmon; Maharai; Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; and Uriah the Hittite—thirty-seven in all. First Chronicles 11 and 12 reveal more concerning David's mighty men. Thirty-seven are named here, some of whom were among the first four hundred who fled to David: Abishai, Joab, and Asahel.

Now look again at 2 Samuel 23:10, speaking of Eleazar: “And he arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword.” And the Lord wrought a great victory that day. Verse 12 says of Shammah, “But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines,” and the Lord wrought a great victory.

All I am trying to show you is this: this small band of misfits, these unlikely revolutionaries, became mighty men through the power and grace of God.

Applications: God Uses the Weak to Confound the Mighty

Fewness in number, smallness in size, lack of strength, and lack of ability mean nothing in the contest of God against Satan, of good versus evil, and truth versus error. What matters is the blessing and the power of God. In 1 Samuel 14:6, Jonathan and his armor bearer were about to face a whole host of Philistines. The Scripture says, “And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armor, Come, let us go over into the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.” God did not need the whole army to whip these Philistines. Jonathan and his armor bearer could do it. And he slew about thirty of them at that particular time.

Here is the second application. God delights in taking that which is despised and hated to confuse and confound the mighty. Notice 1 Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 21: “For after that in the wisdom of

God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

You know whom God is going to use to overthrow the wicked? Those small, despised, hated individuals called Christians, who are powerless and helpless in and of themselves, who have nothing and can do nothing. And yet God will bring them and us to victory, because God delights in taking that which is despised and hated and overthrowing the might and power of the wicked.

There is no reason for depression, despair, or discouragement. God is quite capable of giving victory to the most unlikely revolutionaries in order that He may be glorified. When we are weak, that is the perfect time for God to do something. Why? Because we cannot steal His honor or His glory. We cannot say it is by our power, our might, or our plan. We did not have anything, and we still do not have anything.

God raised up such men as Ehud, David, and Samuel. When the people cried to Him, what we need to do is repent of our sins, turn to Him in faith and obedience, and obey His Word. The war against evil will not be won by our power, plans, program, or ability, but by the power of God.

You remember what the Bible says in Zechariah 4 and verse 6? “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, not by might or power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord.” We will win only as we go in the strength and power of God. When things look helpless, that is when we need to look to the Lord, His grace, His strength, and His power. Let us pray.

Teach us, Lord, build us up in the most holy faith. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Fill us with Thy Spirit, empty us of ourselves. And may we go in the strength of our Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

Where is thy God

March 14, 2012

Introduction: The Question 'Where is thy God?'

Joel chapter 2, beginning there with verse 15: “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breast. Let the bridegroom go forth out of his chamber and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people.”

The title of the message is “Where is thy God?” We look particularly at the latter part of verse 17: “Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is thy God?” There was a serious warning, a solemn witness, and a startling wonder in these verses.

Let me begin by asking a question: Where is your God? There are probably many answers to that question, yet the answer we must

seek is the one anticipated by Joel. We could answer, “Where is your God?” as David did in Psalm 115:3: “But our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

We know that God is sovereign, that he rules over everything. God is in absolute and total control, and absolutely nothing comes to pass apart from God and His providence, because His providence rules over everything. We can also answer this question, “Where is your God?” in a theological sense, in light of the New Testament revelation that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us.

The Bible teaches us in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16, "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory." We could also quote John 1:14, where the Bible said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So we know that Jesus Christ is our God. We know that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. We know that Jesus Christ came, that He died, that He was buried, and that He was raised from the dead. We know that now He has ascended into heaven, and He's seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us, because according to Matthew 28 and verse 18, all power and all authority in heaven and earth has been given unto Him. So we may answer that question, "Where is your God?" the way David did; we may answer it theologically.

But it is important to note in Joel chapter 2 and verse 17 exactly who asked that question and why that question was asked. The answer to those questions should be obvious. The question, "Where is thy God," was asked by the heathen. The reason the heathen were asking that question was because they were reproaching the people of God. God's judgment was against them, and here they were claiming to be the people of God, yet they were in such bad straits that the heathen said, "Uh-huh, yeah, you're God's people? Where is your God? Let me see what He's doing for you now."

Historical and Biblical Examples of the Taunt

This was the same exact thing that Gideon was asking. Notice in Judges chapter 6, beginning with verse 11, because the angel comes

to call Gideon to the work of deliverance: "And there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak, which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite, and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites." "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." And Gideon said, verse 13, unto him, "O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?"

"And where be all these miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us and delivered us into the hand of the Midianites." Gideon's question is this: If the Lord is genuinely with us, why is all this happening to us? Why are we defeated and forsaken? Why are our enemies in our land, eating our substance and ruining us? Where is God if God is really with us?

Israel's boast was that God was their Creator, benefactor, protector, and defender, and that He had given them a land flowing with milk and honey, a land abounding with blessings. What, then, had become of all those blessings? Where was the land flowing with milk and honey? As we saw in Joel chapter 1, the locusts, caterpillars, and palmerworms had eaten everything. The land was stripped and bare, famine was stalking it, and now God was threatening a more imminent judgment.

He was going to send the Babylonians and destroy them. Then the heathen would ask, "Where is your God? You're claiming to be God's people. Where is He?" Such a taunt was not only reproachful and hurtful to the people of God; it was extremely cutting to anyone who genuinely believed in the Lord and wanted to honor Him. It is the nature, habit, and custom of the wicked to mock, ridicule, and deride God and His people.

Since the wicked cannot get at God, the only ones they can get at are the people of God. Therefore, they mock and ridicule them. Jeremiah tells us what happened during the fall of Jerusalem. In Lamentations 1:7, he said, "Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries, all of her pleasant things that she had in the days of old."

When her people fell into the hand of the enemy, none did help her. The adversary saw her and did mock at her sabbaths. Israel, in all of this judgment, remembered all the pleasant things and all the blessings she had, but now she was under judgment and had absolutely nothing. What were the heathen doing? They were mocking at her Sabbath. The prime emphasis on the Sabbath was rest, and the people had no rest because they were in a state of famine and under judgment. The enemy was in control, and so they mocked the people.

Do you remember how, in the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ was mocked? They mocked Him; the Bible says they derided Him. Even David, a man after God's own heart, was mocked. We have to stop and think about this. If the heathen would mock the Lord Jesus Christ, they would not hesitate to mock His people.

When David fled from the tyrant Saul, he had been cut off from the tabernacle and from Jerusalem. In Psalm 42, David said, "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually saying to me, Where is thy God?" David, you are righteous? Why is not God doing something for you? You are supposed to be a man after God's own heart. Why are you fleeing? Why is Saul after you? You must have done something wrong. David, where is your God? If God is your God and you are right, why is He not working against Saul?

David also said, "As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" If you are right with God, where is He? Why is He doing something to you? Why is He not protecting you? Why is He not restoring you? We may ask the same questions in a historical setting or even in a present-day setting. One of the most frequently asked questions I have as I travel around is this: If the South was right during the war of Northern Aggression, why did the South lose the war? Some of you will remember the series I did on where we are and how we got here.

Application to Modern America

The last two messages have been two hours answering that question. Let me try to apply this to our present-day setting. If we are God's

people, the chosen of the Lord, and if we are obedient—or want to be obedient and are trying to be obedient—why are we persecuted? Why are we cast down and downtrodden? Why are we counted as the scum of the earth and considered by all around us to be forsaken by our God?

Look in Psalm 79:10. I want to return to this verse, Lord willing, before I close, and consider it in more detail. Look what Asaph says: "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?" Then he responds, "Let him be known among the heathen in our sight, by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed."

Notice the question, "Where is their God?" David says the same thing in Psalm 115:2: "Wherefore do the heathens say, Where is now their God?" Ask yourself a few questions and stop to think with me: Where is your God? Why do the heathen rage? Why are we so defeated and conquered as a nation and as a people? Why do the heathen have dominion over us?

I am not just talking about our Muslim president. Look at the heathens in Congress and in the judicial seats of power, who are not concerned in the least with God and God's law. Why are there so many unchristian, unbiblical, and ungodly laws, rules, statutes, and regulations laid upon and enforced upon us when we neither desire nor want them?

I could answer all of these questions with two Scriptures, but I want to go further. Turn first to Leviticus 26, and then to Deuteronomy 28; you may want to find both passages. Why are the heathen in charge? Why are we defeated and cast down? Look in Leviticus 26, beginning with verse 14, and read through verse 21. God is speaking to the people as a whole: "But if you will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all of these commandments, and if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that you will not do all My commandments, but you break My covenant, I also will do this to you."

SCRIPTURE READING - Leviticus 26:14-21; Deuteronomy 28:15, 43-48 (KJV)

Covenantal Disobedience as the Cause

> "I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague that shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set My face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies. They that hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when none pursueth. And if you will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."
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> "And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass, and your strength shall be spent in vain, and your land shall not yield or increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if you walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me, I'll bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins." He goes on and tells you a lot of other things that will come upon a disobedient people.
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> In Deuteronomy 28, God gives further warning concerning the curses that would come upon a people who would not hearken to His voice. He says: "But it shall come to pass if thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee."
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> These curses are listed all the way down to verse 43. He says: "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high, and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, thou shalt not lend to him. He shall be the head, thou shalt be the tail."

"Moreover, all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed. Why? Because thou hearkenest not unto the voice of the Lord thy God to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee. And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder and upon thy

seed forever, because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things. Therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee in hunger and in thirst and in nakedness and in want of all things, and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck until he have destroyed thee."

So you want to know why we are under the rule of our enemies? The answer is because we have been disobedient. Do not hand me the old cop-out: "Well, those verses apply to ancient Israel." They did apply to ancient Israel, but they also apply to modern Israel.

Who is modern Israel? The truth is that Christians, true believers, are indeed God's Israel. The New Testament is the old covenant and the new covenant. Look at how plainly God says this in Galatians chapter 3, verse 7: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham." Who are the children of Abraham? They which be of faith.

Not those who are of the flesh, but those who are of faith. You say, "But I am a true descendant of Abraham physically." Whether you are or whether you are not does not really matter. What really matters is whether you have faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham's true seed are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. That is what he says: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."

Look in verse 9: "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Who do the blessings come upon? Those who are of faith. Look down to verse 16.

Everybody can say, “We know Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those were Abraham’s seeds, so to speak.” But to whom were all the promises given? Look in Galatians 3:16: “Now to Abraham and his seed, singular. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not unto seeds as of many, but as of one, and thy seed, which is Christ.”

When God gave Abraham all those promises—that his seed should inherit the land and everything else—the seed was Christ. How do I know that? Not only because Scripture tells us, but even Christ said He had been given all power and jurisdiction and authority in

heaven and earth. He inherited all things. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not as to seeds of many, but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ.” Every promise God gave to Abraham, He was giving to the true seed of Abraham, which is Jesus Christ.

I do not see how this can be any plainer or made any simpler. Galatians 3:29 says, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.” If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham’s seed. What does that mean? You are heirs according to the promise. All those promises are ours in Christ.

Now, one other passage. Look in Galatians 6:16: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy upon the Israel of God.” Here the Israel of God is identified specifically. Who are the Israel of God? They are those who walk according to this rule. The word “rule” is the Greek word kanon, from which we get our English word canon.

The canon of Scripture—the Old Testament canon or the New Testament canon—is not cannon, the kind that shoots. The word canon, or rule, literally means a measuring stick or measuring rod. Here is what the Apostle Paul was saying: “They that walk according to this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy upon the Israel of God.” Who is the Israel of God? They that walk according to this rule. In other words, God's true Israel obeys Him; they walk according to the Word of God. We are God's Israel, and we are just as covenantally bound to obey God now as the old covenant people were covenantally demanded to obey in the Old Testament.

When you get to 2 Corinthians 3, Paul says the difference is this: the old covenant was written upon tables of stone; in the new covenant, His law is written in our hearts and in our minds. So we are indeed the Israel of God. Circumstances may change, but principles never change. We are obligated to obey God's law. I am so tired of people telling me, “Well, I don't have to obey God's law. I'm under grace.” Listen, that's what grace does: grace gives you the ability to obey. What did Paul say? “What? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!” Don't even think that thought.

There is no such thing as a holy, sanctified adulterer, a holy, sanctified fornicator, a holy, sanctified thief, or a holy, sanctified profane person. It's impossible to be holy when you're violating God's law. You cannot obey God's law and be holy and righteous. Righteousness is not only defined by God's law; righteousness is in conformity to God's law. If we want to be holy and obedient, we must obey.

The Need for Preparation: Solemn Assembly and Fasting

Therefore, a people, country, nation, or race that thumbs its collective nose at God's righteous laws, statutes, and judgments, and refuses to execute rapists, murderers, kidnappers, and others who merit and deserve the death penalty, will only produce a society of death. A nation that refuses to honor the Lord and enforce His law will always fall prey to idolatry, socialism, demonism, witchcraft, communism, and Marxism. You want to know where we are?

Preparation

This country has sired a generation of thieves, pagans, idolaters, fornicators, and lazy, indolent, ungrateful, and unthankful children who believe that everything is owed to them and that, if it is not given to them, they are ready to take it. All the violence and anarchism we have seen in recent days and months are simply a reaping of what we have sown over all these years. To use the good old South Georgia lingo, you ain't seen nothing yet. I believe it is going to get so much worse.

So we have to ask the inevitable question: What can we do? What shall we do? Joel informs us concerning the correct course. In verses 15 and 16, he tells us that, first of all, there must be preparation. Look in verse 15:

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts, let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet."

First of all, note what he said. There was to be a blowing of the trumpets. Without taking you through all the Scriptures showing how the trumpets were used, let me summarize it. The trumpets were blown to call a solemn assembly and to assemble the people together. They were blown to sound an alarm, in preparation for battle and during actual battle. They were also blown over sacrifices and special feast days, and for a number of other special activities. But in this context, these trumpets are being blown to announce a solemn assembly.

Joel 1:14 says, “Sanctify you a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land of the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord.” How do you call a solemn assembly? By blowing the trumpets. Joel 2:1 says, “Blow ye the trumpets in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord cometh, and it is nigh at hand.”

In Joel 2:1, the trumpet is not simply being blown for a solemn assembly; it is now the sound of an alarm, because the judgment of God is about to fall on the land. Here is the preparation: first of all, blow the trumpets. That is, sound the alarm and voice the cry. God's judgment is imminent.

There must be some preparations made if we are going to avoid His judgment. Secondly, Joel says, “Blow the trumpet in Zion. Sanctify fast. Call a solemn assembly.” There must be a sanctified fast, and a sanctified fast must be announced and accomplished by a solemn assembly. What he means is this: God's judgment is real and serious, and therefore it must be taken seriously.

The impetus behind this is simply that God was willing to show mercy if the people would repent. That is why they were to call a solemn assembly and sanctify a fast. How do you sanctify a fast? Although this message is not on fasting, and I have preached on it in times past, there is an absolute fast, a normal fast, and a partial fast. But when he says that we are to sanctify a fast, how do we do that?

The Nature of a Sanctified Fast

The way you sanctify a fast is not simply by performing an absolute, normal, or partial fast, but by doing that which God commands. Isaiah 58:1 says, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Israel their sins.” Now look what God says about the people.

"Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God. They ask of me the ordinance of justice. They take delight in approaching God." Of course, all this is hypocritical. "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not. Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?"

In other words, they had gone through their ceremonies and rituals, fasting and afflicting their souls, yet God had not paid attention to them. God's answer was, "Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labors." They fasted "for strife and debate and to smite with the fist of wickedness." God said, "You shall not fast as you do this day to make your voice to be heard on high."

If they wanted God to hear them, they had to fast His way, not theirs. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush? and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, an acceptable day of the Lord?"

Simply going through a ceremony was not what God wanted. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, then thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go forth before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer. Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and

speaking vanity, if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light arise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noonday."

“And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones. And thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places. You want restoration? Here it is: “Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.”

If you are going to fast, you had better do it the way God tells you to do it. His fast is not merely to knock yourself down, make yourself sick, put sackcloth under you, and ashes on your head. No. His kind of fast is to obey Him, do what is right, and honor Him according to His law.

God not only says, “Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly”; He also says, “Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breast.” Let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber, and the bride from her closet. Everyone is to participate. None are exempt, because everyone has an obligation and duty to repent, seek God's mercy, and seek to avert God's judgment.

So that none may think themselves exempt, the people are precisely defined as old men, children, and sucklings. Even the bride and bridegroom are to give up the delight of their hearts and take part in penitential and mournful worship. No age or rank is to stay away, because no one, not even the suckling, is free from sin, and all without exception are exposed to the judgment of God.

There could not be a deeper proof of the corruption and sinfulness of the entire nation than God's command to bring even the sucklings, the babies. They are just as much exposed to God's judgment as you are. In other words, everyone is to share in the humiliation for almost since the judgment, and no one will be exempt when it does come. Therefore, every age and every rank is to come.

The Need for Prayer: Specific Petitions

There must be preparation. Look in Joel 2:17, because here is the second thing: there must be prayer. He says, “Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is thy God?”

Although the priests and ministers of the Lord are singled out, all of God’s people were to pray. The priests and Levites, however, were to pray between the porch and the altar, a place reserved for the ministers of God alone. There, with their faces toward the Holy of Holies, which God had filled with His own glory, they were to weep, mourn, and pray. Thus, all the people were to pray, but the priests were given a specific place and particular petitions.

A form of prayer is provided for the priests and the people. What were they to pray? “Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them. Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is thy God?” First, they were to pray, “Spare thy people.” The word spare literally means to have pity and compassion upon, to look upon, and thus to spare. It is a petition beseeching God for mercy, grace, and compassion.

The second petition is intimately connected with the first: “Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them.” The sparing requested is that God’s heritage not be given over to the heathen, that the heathen should rule over them.

Remember, throughout Joel there have been judgments—famine and all this. But the people have not yet been instantly defeated and conquered; it is imminent. Joel is saying, to avert this judgment, begin praying, “Spare thy people and give not thine heritage, so that the heathen should rule over them.” You know what we tend to forget?

We are God's portion and God's heritage. According to Romans chapter 8, our inheritance is the Lord Jesus Christ and everything that belongs to Him. God's heritage is His people. I think we got the

better part of the bargain. Deuteronomy 32:9 says, "For the Lord's portion is His people. Jacob is the lot of His inheritance." The Lord's portion is His people. Why, then, should the people pray, "spare thy people, and give not thine heritage to the heathen"?

Psalm 94 shows what happens when the heathen have dominion over God's people. It begins, "O Lord God to whom vengeance belongeth, O God to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth, render a reward to the proud." Then it asks, "Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?" How long shall they utter and speak hard things, while all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces God's people and afflict His heritage.

They slay the widow, the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, "The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob record it." When they are in charge, they break in pieces God's people and afflict His heritage. The weaker ones are always murdered and assaulted by those in charge.

This is what Joel is addressing in Joel 2:17, when he tells the people and the priests to pray, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach of the wicked that they should rule over them." You are being shut up to the absolute mercy of God. You must flee to God and seek Him for His grace and for His mercy. There is nothing else left for us.

We cannot trust in our righteousness, for we have none. We cannot trust in our obedience, for we have been disobedient. We cannot trust in our goodness, because it evaporates like the dew. We cannot trust in our good deeds, for we do not have any to trust in; and if we did, all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. What Joel is saying is this: if God does not have mercy on us, we are sunk.

So he is telling the people to pray, "Spare thy people, and give not thine heritage to reproach that the heathen should rule over them." What Joel is saying is this: if you do not repent, the final axe is going to fall. You have been under God's judgment thus far, and it has been bad. But you have seen nothing yet. Once God resolves to totally consume you, there is no health and no hope.

Have you ever prayed a prayer like this? Has it ever really entered your mind that you should pray, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach that the heathen should rule over them"? Does it bother you that we have such an unbiblical, ungodly, and unchristian economic system? Does it upset you that we have such an unbiblical and ungodly foreign policy? How about all of the unbiblical, ungodly, and reprobate laws that have been passed and are being passed?

How about the murder of all the babies in the womb? How about the rise of the sodomites, and not just their rise, but the protection and promotion our own government gives them? Should I mention the absolute total corruption of our own governmental system? How about the fact that our own government is spending millions and millions and millions building and repairing mosques? Does it bother you?

Does it make you want to pray, "Lord, spare thy people and give not thine heritage reproach that the heathen should rule over us"? I believe that particular judgment has already befallen us. The truth is, professing Christians are not the least bit concerned. We have been conquered, dominated, and are on the verge of being exterminated, and we are still asleep. There is no urgency, begging, beseeching, prayer, or pleading.

For all practical purposes, humanly speaking, in America we are just waiting for the axe to fall and chop our heads off. We fail to heed the warnings of Scripture and fail to obey. So here is my question: Where is your God? Where is your faith? Where is your repentance and obedience? Let me quote these for you. I want you to listen to what Solomon, outside of Christ, the wisest man on earth, said: Proverbs 28, verse 12.

“When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory. But when the wicked rise”—that is, rise in power—“a man is hidden.” Why do you have to hide when the wicked get in power? Because they will steal everything you have, and they will murder you and your family. Proverbs 28:28 says it again: “When the wicked rise, men hide themselves, but when they perish, the righteous increase.” When do the righteous increase? When the wicked perish. Proverbs 29:2 says,

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn.”

All I am trying to say is that, based upon the truth of Joel, it is time to sound the trumpets. It is time to call for a solemn fast and a solemn assembly. It is time to mourn, weep, and call upon the Lord. It is time to repent. It is time to seek the Lord. And it is time to say, “Spare thy people, O God, and give not thine heritage a reproach, that the heathen should rule over them, lest the heathen say, Where is thy God?”

Why does Joel say that? Because Joel is giving us another reason why we should pray: the glory of God. You cannot reproach the people of God without reproaching God Himself. When the wicked begin to mock and ridicule and ask, “Where is thy God?” they are not only mocking and deriding God’s people; they are slandering and blaspheming God as though He is not the true God and cannot do anything.

Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 9, because this is exactly what Moses knew and had in mind when God was going to kill all those people and make of Him a greater nation. Deuteronomy 9:25 says, “Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first, because the Lord had said He would destroy you. I prayed therefore to the Lord and said, O Lord God, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin, lest the land which thou broughtest us out of, say, Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them”

Moses said, “Lord, you can’t do this. If you kill all these people, the enemy will reproach Thee and Thy power and Thy glory.” This is exactly what Joel is saying: we must be concerned with God’s glory. It is not just our rear ends that we are to be concerned about. It is not just our economy, our possessions, or our lives. It is the glory of God. We do not want our God blasphemed, reproached, mocked, or ridiculed.

We must understand that there is no salvation apart from God and no salvation apart from His will. Thirdly, there must be pardon. After the people begin to repent and pray, verse 18 says, “Then will the Lord be jealous for His land and pity His people. Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto His people, Behold, I will send you corn and wine and oil, and you shall be satisfied therewith, and I will no more make you reproach among the heathen.”

The Need for Pardon: God's Promised Response

“But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the East Sea, and the hinder part toward the utmost sea. And his stink shall come up, and his ill savor shall come up, because he hath done great things.” God will destroy him. Then God says, “Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord will do great things.” God’s pardon is based upon his grace and his mercy.

He is the one that must give us repentance and thanks. We must understand that there is no deliverance apart from Him. If He does not turn us, we will not be turned. We should pray not only that God would spare us and not give His heritage to reproach, that the heathen should say, “Where is your God?” Not only should we pray for God’s honor and glory, but that God would indeed turn us.

David prays in Psalm 80 and verse 19, “Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” There will be no salvation until God turns us. In Psalm 85 and verse 4, he said, “Turn us, O God, of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.” Finally, in Lamentations 5 and verse 21, Jeremiah prayed, “Turn thou unto us, O Lord, and we shall be turned. Renew our days as of old.” When God turns to us in mercy and grace, we are turned to Him in repentance and faith.

Praying for Judgment on Enemies

In Psalm 79 and verse 10, Asaph prays, “Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?” You want to know where our God is? “Let him,” that is, let God, “be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which He shed.”

We need to pray that God will arise in judgment and vengeance, and that God would indeed destroy His enemies.

And notice, if you would, verses 19 and 20. Psalm 9, verses 19 and 20. Look again at what David prays. Remember, David is a man after God's own heart. Psalm 9, verse 19: "Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail. Let the heathen be judged in Thy sight. Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." In other words, here's what David is praying: Show them who's boss. Show them who is God. They want to know where our God is? You show them. You teach them. And if you look in Psalm 68, again, David prays it like this. Psalm 68, beginning there with verse 1 and reading through verse 3. So many scriptures, but watch this. Psalm 68, verse 1. What does David pray? "Let God arise. Let His enemies be scattered. Let them also that hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away. As wax melted before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad. Let them rejoice before God. Yea, let them exceedingly rejoice."

And let me point this out, please. You can never have deliverance without judgment. Any and every time God delivers His people, He judges His enemies. When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He destroyed Egypt. When God delivered Lot, He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. When God delivered Noah, He destroyed the others. Judgment and salvation go together. You cannot have one without the other. So when you're praying, "Spare thy people, O God. Give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathens should rule over them," what you're praying is this: deliverance for God's people, and destruction for God's enemies.

Now, I want to show you just three verses. One of them you don't have to turn to; you can quote it. I want you to turn, if you would, to Isaiah 54 and the little book of Micah toward the end of the Minor Prophets. Go ahead and find the book of Micah, right before the book of Nahum and right after the book of Jonah. Go ahead and turn to Isaiah 54 first. We'll read that, and then we'll go to Micah. I want to show you the promises of God to the individuals, to the families, to the churches, and to the people that obey Him.

Promises of Victory for the Obedient

Although Joel is dealing with judgment, here's what he's telling these people: now's the time to repent. Watch Isaiah 54 and verse 17. I love this passage. God says, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Are you looking? "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." What's God saying?

I have appointed you to victory, if you will obey Me. There is no weapon that is formed against thee that shall prosper. I do not care how many secret weapons the enemies have, or how much mind control and electronic control they possess. No weapon that is formed will prosper against you if you obey God.

Micah says, “Therefore I will look unto the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.” He also says, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall, I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause and execute my judgment for me. He will bring me forth the light, and I will behold His righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which saith unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eye shall behold her, now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.” My God will give me victory and allow me to conquer.

Second Chronicles 7:14 says, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” Joel said there must be preparation: prayer, which includes repentance and faith; then there will be pardon.

God will restore all the years that the Palmer worm has eaten. That is what He promised in the book of Joel.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Thy truth, grace, and mercy. Help us, O Lord, to live for Thee and to pray. Spare Thy people, O God, and give not thine heritage a reproach, that the wicked, the heathen, should rule over us, lest they

say, Where is thy God? Make them know who is God. Arise, O Lord, and make

CHAPTER 21

Something is Going to Get a Hold on You

June 19, 2012

Something Will Get a Hold on You

Introduction: Something Will Get a Hold on You

Zechariah chapter 1 is the text from which I will be preaching today. Look in Zechariah 1, verses 1 through 6.

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Turn you unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, turn you now from your evil ways and from your evil doings, but they did not hear nor hearken unto me, said the Lord.

Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants, the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned and said, like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, according to our doings, so hath He dealt with us.

Have you ever tried to grab a hold of something, only to discover that when you grabbed it, you had been grabbed yourself? That is, something had taken a hold on you.

I am sure that everyone remembers the old Jerry Clower story about the fellows who were coon hunting. They thought they had the coon treed, and one man decided to climb the tree and deal with it. When he got up there, he discovered there was not a coon, but a lynx, which is a souped-up bobcat. The lynx jumped on the man, and as he tried to fight it off, the man up the tree kept telling his buddy down there, “Shoot us! Shoot! Shoot!” The man said, “I can’t. I might hit you.” Finally, the man up the tree shouted, “Just shoot up here amongst us. One of us has got to have some relief.”

Obviously, something did have a hold on him, and he could not let go. Years ago, when we were teenagers, my cousin Ned Day and one of our very best friends, Gene Waller, went cooning for fish.

Today they called it noodling. We always called it cooning. We called it that because raccoons dip their paws down in the water and feel under rocks and things like that to catch crawfish. In preparation, we would find a little puddle of water in a creek somewhere where it was nearly dry. We would have our shoes off and our pants rolled up above our knees, get into that little puddle of water, and walk all over it, stirring up all the mud we could and making the water thick with mud. This, of course, forced the fish to come up to the top for air. At that particular time, you could either scoop them up with a net or reach down and pick them up with your hands. As boys, we never used a net; we just always caught the fish with our hands.

Ned and Gene were doing that, and they had the little pool of water sufficiently muddied up when Ned saw the back of a huge catfish. “Oh, Gene, look what I’ve got,” he said, and he reached down

and grabbed the back of what he thought was a big black catfish. When he came up, he had a very angry, extremely large moccasin. Thankfully, he had caught the snake right behind the head. As Ned was holding the snake, it very slowly began to wrap its body around Ned's arm. Ned kept hollering to Gene, "Shoot it, shoot it, shoot it." Gene kept saying, "I can't shoot it until you put it down." Of course, Ned could not put it down, so Gene had to come up and help unravel the snake from around his arm. Finally, when Ned let go and threw the snake down, there was no reason to shoot it, because he had literally choked the life out of that snake.

He had grabbed hold of something, and something had grabbed hold on him, and he simply could not let go.

Zechariah tells us about something far more powerful and far greater than a lynx or a moccasin. It is something that will grab hold of men, and they cannot let go of it, and it certainly will not let them go. They will not be able to shake it off, put it down, or escape. Zechariah was a colleague of Haggai, and both of them worked together on the building of the second temple.

You'll find that in Ezra 5:1. Zechariah began to prophesy sometime after Haggai. However, he continued longer, soared higher in visions and revelations, wrote more, prophesied more, and especially concerning Christ than Haggai had done. His ministry was very practical. He begins by giving us a central truth in chapter 1 that must be understood and applied.

In verse 1, he establishes divine authority by expressly stating that the word of the Lord came to him: "In the eighth month and the second year of Darius came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet saying." Thus, he establishes his prophetic authority and gives us some of his ancestry, referring to himself as Zechariah the son of Berechiah. Many scholars believe that this is the very Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, who was slain between the temple and the altar, probably many years after the rebuilding of the temple.

Our Lord refers to him in Matthew 23:35. Speaking to the Jews, He said: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of

Zacharias the son of Barakias whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." Many scholars say that this Zachariah who wrote the book of Zachariah is the one to whom our Savior referred. We know that Zachariah was a prophet and that he did indeed speak the word of the Lord.

Prophets were not very popular people, because people do not by nature wish to hear that they are wicked sinners under the judgment of God. Neither do they like to be reminded of their sins, especially their past sins. Zechariah begins his ministry by reminding the people of God's controversy with them and their constant, consistent rebellion against God. In Zechariah chapter 1, beginning with verse 2, we see the controversy recalled.

The Controversy Recalled (Zechariah 1:2)

He says, "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers." The word controversy illustrates the ongoing disobedience and rebellion of Israel. It designates a quarrel, a strife, a bone of contention, and a dispute. The God of heaven did indeed have a bone of contention with His disobedient and rebellious people. Let me show you how the word is actually used in Scripture.

Hold Zechariah, but turn back to the book of Hosea. Look at Hosea chapter 4 and verse 1. You remember that the Lord had been sore displeased with your fathers. So here is this controversy. Hosea says: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." He calls this a controversy. It is a dispute, a problem that God has with the children of Israel.

Then look in Hosea chapter 12, verse 2. God says it again very clearly: "The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him." The Lord hath a controversy with Judah. Micah chapter 6, verse 2, says: "Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel."

Over and over, the Bible says that God had a controversy, a bone of contention, a dispute, and a quarrel with them. Why? Because of their sin and rebellion. Ultimately, it will be the righteous judgment of God that ends that quarrel, dispute, and controversy. Isaiah 34, verse 8, says: “For it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.” When there is no repentance on the part of God’s people, the controversy will be resolved by God’s judgment.

Now, looking back in Zechariah chapter 1 and verse 2, he says: “The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers.” Zechariah is talking about everything that happened from Israel’s being called out of Egypt. All of this is brought to mind. When God says, “The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers,” the Hebrew is very emphatic. It literally means that He has been displeased with a displeasure, or displeased with a very grievous displeasure. That is, He is vehemently displeased. It is no common displeasure.

It is something that arouses a righteous anger. Let me give you one little quote. Listen to what John Calvin said upon verse 2: “Zechariah mentions here to his own people a signal evidence of God's wrath which ought justly to have smitten all of them with terror. He does not then speak here of a thing unknown, but reminds them seriously to consider how terrible is God's vengeance.”

As proof of this, their fathers had been deprived of their perpetual inheritance. They had suffered many degradations and had also been harassed and oppressed by tyrants. In short, they had been nearly sunk in the lowest depths. Since God had so severely dealt with their fathers, the prophet bids them to know that God ought to be feared, lest they should grow wanton and indulge themselves in their usual manner, but that they might from the heart repent and not provoke God's wrath, of which their fathers had such a severe experience.

That is exactly what Zechariah is doing. He is warning them that if they do not repent and change their ways, they are basically going to end up like their fathers.

Deuteronomy 29:27-28 shows what sore displeasure is: “And the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: And the Lord rooted them

out of this land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day." God rooted them out in anger, wrath, and great indignation.

Deuteronomy 32:22 gives another picture: "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains." A fire is kindled in His anger and shall burn unto the lowest hell. We should not antagonize, wish to antagonize, or displease in anger the sovereign, omnipotent, majestic, eternal, immutable, and righteous Judge of all the earth. Do you realize that Moses asked this simple question in Psalm 90:11? "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Who knoweth the power of thine anger?

When Zechariah says that the Lord had been so displeased with their fathers, he reminds the people of the past while warning them about the present. In essence, he says, "If you continue as your fathers did, you will meet the same displeasure of God that your fathers met." The prophet thus refers to the severity of the punishment visited upon their fathers, so they might understand that God does not play around with sin.

All those who despise His word shall be punished. Sin provokes God to anger; it angers and displeases Him. Sin is a challenge and a dare to God to do His worst, worse than saying, "I double dog dare you." It is literally a spitting in the face of God, a denial of God as the chief good. Sin says, "God, You are insufficient to supply my needs. You are insufficient to satisfy me. I must have this sin. I must violate Your law in order to appease and satisfy myself." Sin is an affront and insult to God, creating a controversy which we cannot possibly win. I do not wish to be an individual who challenges the Son of God.

The Conciliation Reissued (Zechariah 1:3)

He gives you here the controversy recalled. Look in verse 3 in Zechariah chapter 1. Here is the conciliation reissued: "Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." Amazingly, the offended God of heaven offers reconciliation.

God is the One who has been sinned against, rejected, and cast off. Yet, in grace and mercy, He offers to be reconciled to a sinful and disobedient people, only if they will repent and turn to Him.

Zechariah speaks of God's vengeance when he says, “The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers.” Yet now there is an opportunity to turn to Him, because God is offering reconciliation. If you will turn to Him with your heart, then God will turn to you. The old adage is, “Fools by adversity become wise.” You may have been a fool, but if you will consider what happened to all your fathers in past history, it ought to teach you something and make you wise. The lesson is simple: you cannot sin against God and escape His righteous judgment. If you do not wish to be chastised, do not sin and rebel against Him.

Consider how wickedly the people did exactly that. Jeremiah 2:11 says, “How the nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods; but my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.” It is amazing that these people had sinned against God, and yet God still offered reconciliation.

“Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” God says this people is a very obtuse, stupid people. They changed the true and living God for no god, for an idol. They left the fountain of living water and hewed out a broken cistern that could hold no water.

In Jeremiah 2:32, God asks them questions: “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.” The people not only forsook God; they forgot God.

In Malachi 3:7, the book right after Zechariah, God says, “Even from the days of your fathers, ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.” But they said, “Wherein shall we return?” He has been sore displeased with the Father, yet

God is continually offering reconciliation, while the people are continually refusing to be reconciled.

We cannot enjoy the favor of God, even when He kindly offers to be reconciled, except we repent from the heart. Sin is a turning away from God; repentance is a turning to God. Therefore James 4:8 says, "Draw nigh to God, ye sinners, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." In other words, if you repent, God will turn to you. It is not enough for you and me to turn from sin; we must turn to God as He commands. It is not enough to be separated from sin; we must be separated to the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. So return to Zechariah 1:4.

The Counsel Restated (Zechariah 1:4)

The controversy is recalled, the conciliation reissued, and now the counsel is restated. Look at verse 4: "Be not as your fathers." This hits me right between the eyes. What an example of fatherhood! If you want to understand what it means to be a failure as a father, look at verse 4 again: "Be not as your fathers."

It is true that each of us is a sinner, and each of us has failed. We have failed in many ways as fathers, but if we fail to repent and turn to God by faith in Jesus Christ, we have failed totally and completely. If we fail to listen, hear, heed, and obey the Word of God, we have failed totally and completely. We have failed as fathers by not setting a proper example. That is why he says, "Be not as your fathers."

There is not a father alive, probably, who does not want his children to honor and obey him. But have you ever stopped to think: if we want our children to honor and obey us, why do we dishonor and disobey our Heavenly Father? I want you to see from Scripture why there are so many rebellious children in the land. Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Everybody can quote that part of the verse, but listen to the whole statement: "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, seeing thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." Did you hear what he said? "Seeing that thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

Now, the truth of Hosea 4:6 is known as the lex talionis, the law of retribution. What are our children? They are an expression of our wills. We wanted them, desired them, and had them. Do you know what God's law is? God's law is an expression of His will. If we disobey and dishonor His law, which is an expression of His will for our lives, then He will dishonor and forget our children, which are an expression of our wills. Thus you have perfect retribution.

The punishment fits the crime. Over and over, God warned the fathers, but no one listened. The question is, are you listening? I want you to hold Zechariah 1 and see this from the Scripture. Turn back to 1 Samuel, chapter 12 and verse 15: “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandments of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you as it was against your fathers.” What did God say? If you act like your fathers, then the hand of the Lord is going to be against you as it was your fathers.

Turn right over to 2 Chronicles, chapter 30, and begin reading with verse 7. He says it again: “Be not as your fathers, and like your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as you see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you.” Do not be like your fathers.

Turn right on over to Jeremiah, chapter 11, and look at verses 7 and 8. Remember, here is the counsel: “Be not as your fathers.” Jeremiah 11, verse 7: “For I earnestly protested under your fathers in the day that have brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even in this day, rising early and protesting, saying, obey my voice.”

Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked everyone in the imagination of their evil heart. Therefore, I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do. And they did them not. Be not as your fathers.

In John 6:49, our Lord said, “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.” The statement poses two questions: Where are they, and what happened to them? Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and they are dead.

When Stephen was stoned to death, he looked at those who were stoning him and said, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). The counsel Zechariah gives is, “Be not as your fathers.” Do not be disobedient, hard-hearted, stiff-necked, rebellious, or self-willed. Do not be determined to have your own way. When one chooses his will over the will of God, he chooses death and destruction. What Zachariah is saying is, Do not destroy yourself the way your fathers did.

This counsel needs to be repeated over and over today because, in essence, that is exactly what is happening in our land. The people are destroying themselves exactly the way their fathers did because they refused to listen to God.

The Caution Required (Zechariah 1:5)

Look at Zechariah chapter 1, verse 5: “Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?” After saying, “Be not as your fathers,” whom the former prophets cried to, he asks, “Your fathers, where are they?” The abrupt solemnity of the question seems to imply an unexpected close of life, cutting short their hopes, plans, dreams, and promises to themselves.

Those who think they can sin against God and get away with it are deceiving themselves. One may promise himself all kind of pleasure and prosperity, but those promises are worthless, useless, and fruitless because they do not include God and His righteous vengeance. As 1 Thessalonians 5:3 says, “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” When they promise themselves peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes. Make sure you do not end up as the fathers. Do not think that if you commit the same sins, somehow you will escape. You will not.

When I was in college in Greenville, South Carolina, out of all the banks that were robbed, not one bank robber ever got past the city limits. Always caught before they ever got out of the city limits. Yet banks were robbed repeatedly. Why? Each robber thought the one before him was stupid, had made a stupid mistake, and had been caught; but he was smart and would never be caught.

The same is true when someone thinks we can commit the same sins our fathers committed, yet somehow escape. But consider the question: Your fathers, where are they? Where are your disobedient fathers? Are they not buried in a strange land? Did they not die of awful and horrible diseases? Were they not consumed by famine and the sword, as was prophesied against them? Where are the fathers?

The answer is this: they are dead, judged, and gone. That is where they are. What did their rebellion gain them? What did their self-will accomplish? Their own death and destruction. It is like the question our Lord asked in Matthew 16:26: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

So, if we are not cautious, we are going to end up on the wrong end of the stick. You say, “What are you talking about?” Micah 6:9 says, “Hear ye the rod, and him who hath appointed it.” Now look back at verse 5. The first part is very simple: “Your fathers, where are they?” They are judged, dead, and gone.

But then He asks, “And the prophets, do they live forever?” How do we deal with that question? Basically, there are three ways to interpret it—there could be more, but these three fit the context. The first is this: some scholars read the question as, “And your prophets, do they live forever?” The emphasis would then be upon “your prophets,” referring to the false prophets whom the people embraced and whose teaching they believed. You remember Jeremiah 5:31: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so.” The people always embraced the false prophets; they hated the true prophets.

Hold Zechariah, but turn back in your Bibles to Jeremiah 28. There were indeed false prophets, and certainly God judged them. Beginning with verse 15, Hananiah was one such false prophet: “Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah, The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD.” So Hananiah died the same year, in the seventh month.

Jeremiah 29:32 mentions Shemaiah, another false prophet: “Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehilamite, and his seed…because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD.” When you look at Zechariah 1:5, “Your fathers, where are they?”

“And your prophets, do they live forever?” He could be referring to the false prophets. I think that is an alright interpretation, but I do not think it really fits the context. We may also consider that the prophets mentioned here are indeed the true prophets of God, the ones whom God sent and who faithfully proclaimed His Word. In this sense, Zechariah would be saying that the prophets who had ministered to them had passed away—some naturally, and some by martyr’s death. Many of them did not see their own words fulfilled, yet they knew that their words were of God. It could simply be saying that prophets die just like everyone else.

But here is the interpretation that I believe is accurate and dead on, especially in light of the context. This third interpretation is closely connected with the second, because it allows that the prophets were indeed the prophets of the Lord. Zechariah is admitting the fact that these prophets died as well. However, what he is saying is this: their teaching has not perished.

God’s Word through them is still functioning. Their predictions remain. The events that have taken place according to those predictions prove that God sent them. Men may die, but God’s Word never dies. Zechariah could be saying, “Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?” No, they do not live forever. But the words that they preached and taught are still true, and they still live forever.

This very fact that Zechariah is proclaiming should justly terrify the people to whom he was preaching. Why? Because if that Word took care of their fathers, the same Word will take care of them. Here is the truth: you cannot escape the Word of God. You will either bow to the Word of God in salvation, or you will bow to it in condemnation, but you will bow to the Word of God. Zechariah is saying, You had better beware, lest you share the fate of your fathers.

The Bible says in Psalm 119:89, “Forever, O Lord, is thy word settled in the heavens.” In 1 Peter 1:25, he said, “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.” The prophets may have died, but their predictions, prophecy, teaching, and truth were still alive and well, for they were preaching God’s Word, and God’s Word does not die.

The Capture Revealed (Zechariah 1:6)

Everything I have preached up to this point was to get you to verse 6. You remember the title of this message: Something Will Get a Hold on You. As I pointed out in the introduction, sometimes you have heard the old adage, “He’s got a tiger by the tail.” He cannot do anything with him and cannot turn loose. God’s Word is far more powerful than any tiger, moccasin, or lynx. Here in verse 6 is the capture reveal. Look at it: “But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?”

And they returned and said, “Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.” I believe that verse 6 contextually verifies the third interpretation that I gave you of verse 5: it does indeed refer to the Lord’s prophets. Yes, they died, but their words did not die. The word that they preached was very much alive. The death of the prophets did not nullify the threatenings, warnings, punishments, or promises of their preaching. Everything that happened to the fathers happened according to the prediction of the prophets, and the people were obliged to acknowledge this. Yet, in spite of that, they would not turn from their wicked ways.

This is absolutely astounding: “But My words and My statutes which I commended My servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?” The fathers returned; here is their confession and acknowledgement: “Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath He dealt with us.” We heard what He said, and we did not repent. Now God has done with us exactly what He said He would do. Something got a hold of them, and they could not get loose. It is like an enemy pursuing a man or a group of men. When the enemy overtakes them, he destroys them and spoils their goods. And that is what God asks.

Did not my word overtake you? Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 28. Mark this passage, because we will probably come back to it shortly. Look first at verse 15: "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee."

When you read the rest of the chapter, you find all these curses coming upon and overtaking them. Verse 45 says, "Moreover, all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed. Because thou hearkenest not unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee."

Again, verse 45 says, "All these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed." The word overtake is mentioned not only in Deuteronomy 28, but also in Zechariah 1:6: "Did they not take hold of your fathers?" Overtake, or take hold on, means to catch, to lay hold on, to take hold upon, and to fall upon.

Here is the picture God is giving us: someone, a group of men, or even a nation is sinning and rebelling against God. They are running down the road as fast and as furiously as they can, trying to outrun the curse and judgment of God. God says, "My curse shall outrun you; it will overtake you, knock you down, and fall upon you, and you cannot stop it." That is why verse 6 says, "But My words and My statutes, which I commanded in My service to the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers?" They got hold of them.

Isaiah 14:24 says, "The Lord has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass. As I have purposed, so shall it stand." Whatever God purposes is going to come to pass; whatever God says is going to come to pass.

Jeremiah watched Jerusalem being destroyed. In Lamentations 2:17 he wrote, "The Lord hath done that which he hath devised, he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old, he hath thrown down, he hath not pitted, he hath caused the enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries." As

Jeremiah watched Jerusalem destroyed, he said, God is doing exactly what He told us He was going to do. The Word got a hold of them.

I could say to James, “I’m going to whip you and mash you in the floor and make a greasy spot out of you.” That might be big talk and empty talk on my part toward a big fellow. But if God said that to him, it would not be empty. Man can talk big and say many things, but he cannot always produce. When God speaks, it is not an empty threat or an empty punishment that He proclaims. God fulfills what He says He is going to do. He does not give utterance to words of none effect. When God speaks, He executes whatever He declares.

Applications: Blessings Also Overtake the Obedient

Did they not take hold upon you? The fathers had to turn around and say, God said He would do it, and that is exactly what He did. Let me make a couple of applications. God's Word is not an adversary to any but such as are adversaries to themselves. If you want to sin against God and disobey His Word, then His Word will become an adversary to you. The Word of God does not condemn any but those who are assuredly condemned of the Lord.

Many do not understand what will condemn men in the day of judgment. In John 12:48 our Lord said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him. The word that I've spoken shall judge him in the last day.” The Word of God is going to get a hold of some folks.

And it'll either end in salvation or damnation. But the Word of God will get a hold, and it will not turn loose. This is a warning for our day and age, for our posterity: You cannot outrun God.

The second application is this: We need not fear false prophets; however, we must fear the Lord. There are so many false prophets today, just like there were in Jeremiah's time. Jeremiah 23:28 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?” False prophets are nothing but chaff, and their words are nothing compared with the Word of God. The

warning in Zechariah is this: something will get a hold of you one way or the other.

Turn to Deuteronomy 28 for the final application, for which I am extremely thankful. Verses 1 and 2 say: “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments, which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come upon thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.”

Just as you cannot outrun God’s curses, you cannot outrun God’s blessings. If you obey God, His blessings will come upon you; they will chase you down, knock you down, fall all over you, and you cannot stop them. I am thankful this is equally true: God’s blessings are as real and true as His punishments. His Word, whether in blessing or cursing, will take hold, and you cannot shake it loose. God said His Word will overtake you.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee and thank You. We acknowledge Your love, grace, and mercy, the severity of Your punishments, and the graciousness of Your promises. We want Thy Word in obedience and submission. Help us live for Thee; give us grace to obey and bring our lives into conformity to Your Word. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 22

To Teach Them War

October 31, 2013

Judges chapter 3, beginning with verse 1:

"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; namely, the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath. And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites."

Introduction: War Is Not Inherently Evil

When we hear the word "war," we automatically think of death and destruction, and by implication, we think that all war is evil simply because it brings death and destruction. So let me begin this

message with a shocker: War is not evil in and of itself, even though it is associated with death and destruction. Moreover, death and destruction are not evil in and of themselves. When you stop and think, death is a part of living.

One cannot die unless he has lived. We understand that the wages of sin is death. Death, therefore, is not evil; it is a form of justice, which is indeed the consequence of sin. Moreover, for the child of God, death cannot be evil, because death is our entrance into the eternal state. You have to remember that our Lord died. So death certainly is not evil. It cannot possibly be evil.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 1 through 4, the Apostle Paul talks about death: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

The Apostle Paul is saying that, by nature, the child of God groans in this tabernacle, waiting for the putting off of this tabernacle, that we might be in the eternal state. Death is not evil and cannot be evil in and of itself. Destruction is not evil in and of itself. God has used various forms of judgment upon the wicked, and He has also used various forms of judgment to afflict the righteous.

Biblical Evidence That War Is Not Evil

In Amos 3:6, this question is asked: "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" The word "evil" there refers to affliction, trouble, adversity, distress, misery, and calamity.

God is holy and just. Therefore, when God brings death and destruction upon the wicked, it is not evil, nor is it wicked or wrong. He brings His judgments for various reasons. Recently, there has been what you and I would call tragic tornadic activity in Oklahoma, as well as hurricanes and tornadoes in Florida and hurricanes and

tornadoes in Louisiana. When you consider the hurricanes and tornadoes, you have to understand that God is absolutely sovereign and in control.

In Job 37:13, speaking about the weather, the Bible says, "He causeth it to come for correction, or for his land, or for mercy." God can bring judgment through weather. He is the one who causes it to come. Sometimes He causes it to come for mercy, sometimes for correction, and sometimes for the benefit of His land.

Moreover, Habakkuk speaks of war in Habakkuk 1:12, referring to the Babylonians who would attack Judea and Jerusalem. He asks, "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die." Then he says of the Babylonians, "O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." The Babylonians would come upon them because it was their judgment, and God would use that judgment to correct and chastise them.

Death and destruction are not evil in and of themselves. War is not evil in and of itself. War can be evil when it is instituted and initiated for purposes that are unbiblical and ungodly. In fact, in relationship to man, most wars are unbiblical and ungodly, but war does not necessarily have to be that.

The very first time the word “war” appears in the Bible is Genesis 14:2, where five kings make war with four kings. They make war to conquer, exercise dominion, collect more booty, and gain fame and honor for themselves. It is interesting that the first use of the word “war” is man against man. The last time the word “war” is used in the Bible is Revelation 19:19: “And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.” In the last verse of the Bible, the beast and all the kings of the earth are warring against Jesus Christ and against His people.

Does our Lord engage in war? The answer is yes. He engages in war; He fights. Revelation 19:11 says, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” In righteousness He doth judge and make war.

God is immutable; that means God does not change. God was a man of war in the Old Testament, and God is a man of war in the New Testament. In Exodus 15:3, Scripture says, “The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name.” He is still a man of war. Therefore, war cannot be evil in and of itself, if God Himself is a man of war and our Lord Himself engages in war.

Remember also Ecclesiastes 3:8, where God says there is “a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” Let me also give you the counsel God has given concerning war. Proverbs 20:18 says, “Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.” Proverbs 24:6 says, “For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.”

War Is an Assumed Fact in Scripture

In these passages, God is saying that if you are going to make war, you must have wise counsel and good advice—godly advice and biblical counsel. War is an assumed fact in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 20:19, God tells His people, “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege.” God says in the next verse that they may cut down any tree that is not good for food, but they shall not cut down trees that are good for food. Notice the wording: “when thou shalt besiege a city a long time.”

And then he said in Deuteronomy 21 and verse 10, “When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands…” Here are two passages that I just quoted. Note that in each of those passages God said “when” and not “if”: “When thou goest to war.” War is therefore an assumed fact in Scripture, and war is not evil in and of itself.

If war was evil in and of itself, that would mean that defensive wars would be wrong in and of themselves. It would be wrong for a people to get together and defend their lives and their families. If corporate defense were wrong and evil in and of itself, individual defense would also be evil in and of itself. If individuals, families,

communities, and groups of people could not defend themselves, evil would be unchecked, and evil would triumph because good and godly men did nothing to stop it.

Just Wars: Defensive and Offensive

Augustine, who was one of the early theologians, in the fourth century defended and defined just wars as defensive wars. Since the time of Augustine, many scholars and theologians have said that war is not evil in and of itself, especially if it is a just war, and by that they mean a defensive war. While it is true that defensive wars are just and holy, it is equally true that oftentimes offensive wars may be just and holy.

Let me show you an example. I want you to turn in your Bibles, holding Judges 3, but turn to the book of Numbers chapter 31. Numbers chapter 31. And let's look here at the first three verses. In this passage, God is telling Moses to avenge themselves of the Midianites. Now, the Midianites have not attacked the children of Israel. It is true that earlier in this book, the Midianites seduced some of the children of Israel into fornication and idolatry. And there was a plague, and about 23,000 Israelites died because of the judgment of God upon them. But the Midianites now have not attacked them. But look in Numbers 31, verse 1: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian." Now I want you to note, in verse 2, God tells Moses to avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites. And in verse 3, when Moses arms the people, he says, "avenge the Lord of the Midianites." So it was a holy and just war. God commanded it. It was an offensive war in this sense of the word, that Israel had not been attacked by the Midianites.

Afterwards thou shalt be gathered unto thy people. And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian. Now I want you to note, in verse 2, God tells Moses to avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites. And in verse 3, when

Moses arms the people, he says, avenge the Lord of the Midianites. So it was a holy and just war. God commanded it. It was an offensive war in this sense of the word, that Israel had not been attacked by the Midianites.

True, they had been seduced earlier. True, they had committed fornication earlier because of the Midianites. But now God says, you go in and wipe them out. Look in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 15. Here's another illustration of an offensive war that is obviously just and holy because it too has been commanded by God. Look in 1 Samuel chapter 15 verse 1: "Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel."

Samuel was commanded: “Now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

Notice that God said, “I remember that which Amalek did to Israel.” He commanded Israel to go up and utterly wipe out the Amalekites. What they had done to Israel had occurred 400 years earlier. If you read Deuteronomy 25:17–19, you will see their wickedness and subtlety: they attacked Israel in the hindmost part, taking the weak, the faint, and the weary, and they fought by ambush.

God's Design That His People Learn the Art of War

God says, “I just remember what they've done.” This is an offensive war: Israel starts it. It is also a just war and a holy war because God has commanded it.

As you go back in your Bible to Judges chapter 3, understand that war is often necessary. It should not surprise us that one of the reasons God has allowed some of Israel's enemies to remain in the land is so that He might teach them war. Judges 3:1 says: “Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; only that

the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof."

Point 1: God's Design to Teach His People War

Namely, the five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath. Here are some that God left. The Bible is teaching that those who had conquered the land under Joshua understood the art of war, the necessity of fighting, reliance upon God, and obedience to His word. Those who were born after the conquest of the land knew nothing of the art of war; they knew nothing of fighting; they knew nothing of relying upon and trusting in the Lord during a time of war or a time of danger.

It is God's design that His people learn the art of war. It is God's design that His people learn the art of war. We are specifically told in verses 1 and 2 that God left some of the enemies in the land to teach them war. They did not know how to fight, and God said, "I'm going to leave some there to teach them war."

Interestingly, God had to teach the Israelites who came out of Egypt to fight. They had been slaves for 400 years. They had been kowtowed by their enemies. The truth is, they were so servile and so cowardly that God could not lead them directly into the promised land. To lead them into the promised land, He would have to take them through the land of the Philistines. And God said, "You know, they'd probably turn back when they saw war. They're so servile and so cowardly."

Look in your Bibles at Exodus chapter 13, beginning with verse 17:

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt."

When the Bible says that "the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt," all that means is that they went

up in a military manner. They walked in ranks of five. Although they went up out of the land in a military manner, they were not prepared to fight. They were not ready to fight; they were weak, inexperienced, and cowardly.

Not only did they provoke God oftentimes as He was leading them, but when they got to Kadesh Barnea, in Numbers chapter 13, God said, “Alright, go in, and conquer the land, I’m giving it to you.” They refused to fight. They said, “Man, we saw the people of that land, and those cities are walled up to heaven, and there are giants there, and we are just grasshoppers in their sight. We’re just grasshoppers.” And so they refused to fight.

God had led the children of Israel the long way around, lest they see war, become afraid, and return to Egypt. When God brought them out of Egypt, if He had taken them directly into the promised land, do you know how long it would have taken them to get there? Eleven days. You will find that in Deuteronomy chapter 1, verse 2. It was an eleven days’ journey—an eleven days’ journey. And they spent forty years in the wilderness. Why? Because they refused to fight. They did not want to fight.

Learning to Fight in All Dimensions

I can hear people beginning to make objections as I teach this message, because it is “to teach them war.” Someone is going to say, “But pastor, you don’t understand. The children of Israel had enemies that were seeking to destroy them. And we don’t have enemies that seek to destroy us? We don’t have enemies that want to take our lives, our liberties, our families, and our freedoms?” Someone will say, “Well, you don’t understand. If it meant I would, if I had to.” Well, let me tell you something.

The sixth commandment is, “Thou shalt not kill.” The positive is, “Thou shalt preserve life.” We have a duty, an obligation, and a responsibility to preserve our lives, the lives of our family, and the lives of our neighbors. Someone objects, “But I’m not in the military, and I’m not inclined to be in the armed service. Therefore, I have no experience in fighting, nor do I even have a desire to learn how to fight.”

You do not have to be in the military to learn how to fight. May I remind you that David was a boy and a shepherd? He herded sheep. He was not trained militarily, nor was he even able to wear military accoutrements when he went to fight Goliath of Gath. Saul armed him with his armor, but David hesitated to go because he told Saul, "I haven't proved these things."

David took them off and faced a well-armed giant, covered from head to toe with military armament and the latest equipment, carrying nothing but a sling and five smooth stones. David defeated the giant. He did not merely hit him with a rock in the forehead; he did that, but when he knocked him out, he went up to Goliath, put his foot on his chest, pulled out Goliath's sword, and cut off Goliath's head with his own sword. That had to be humiliating, Robert—to have your own weapon used against you like that.

Let me ask you a question. Everybody in this room knows that David became one of the greatest warriors in the Bible. From whence did David learn his military skills and prowess? Let David answer: "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms" (2 Samuel 22:35). David says, "God taught me to war, and He made me so powerful that a bow of steel is broken in my arms." Then, in Psalm 144:1, he says, "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight."

The same God who taught David to fight is quite capable of teaching us to fight. The problem is not with God; the problem is with us. We are not interested in learning the art of war or learning to fight. And the few who are interested in learning the art of war and learning to fight are not interested in learning to fight biblically and scripturally.

We must make war biblically and scripturally. Why did God leave these enemies in the land? Judges chapter 3 says, "to teach them war." God could easily have destroyed all of those enemies; He could have wiped them out instantaneously. Yet He did not do so. He left them in the land so that His people would learn to fight. Do not tell me that you do not have enemies. You do. Even the holy God of heaven and earth has enemies.

Psalm 21 is sufficient to establish this. Very obviously, it refers to God Himself. David writes: “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger. The Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform. Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them. Be thou exalted, Lord, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.”

Here God Himself has enemies. You say, “But I don’t have any.” Turn to Psalm 139, and the answer is yes, you do. You not only have enemies of your own making; you have enemies who belong, and properly speaking, who are the Lord’s enemies. David says: “Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God.”

"Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain." David says, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies." Then he says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

What did David say? "I hate them with perfect hatred." Who is he hating? God's enemies. Then he says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and see if there is any wicked way in me." It is not wicked to hate God's enemies, because God's enemies are our enemies. We do have enemies. Do you not remember what our Lord said in John chapter 15? "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you." "If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you." Obviously, we do have enemies.

We must know the art of war in order to fight mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually. There are many dimensions to the art of war, and we must learn them in order to prepare ourselves so that we can be holy and godly. Consider 2 Corinthians 10:3–4: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war

after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."

When Paul says "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," he is not denigrating guns, knives, grenades, and that kind of thing. He is saying that, in the warfare he is discussing, physical or carnal weapons are not going to do you a bit of good. Again, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they're mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."

Verses 3 through 5 comprise a military text. Your stronghold is your place of defense, where you hide to protect yourself. If someone came through that door, blasting away with a .357 Magnum, I'm going to jump behind that chair over there. You say, "Well, that's not much protection." No, but it's better than what everybody else has.

If I got behind that chair, then that chair would be my stronghold. I want to show you where man's stronghold is. Look in verse 4 again: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." What is man's stronghold? It is primarily his mind. The Apostle Paul says that we must use spiritual weapons to assault our minds, so that every thought and imagination would be brought into subjection and captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a constant struggle to keep your mind clean and pure, to keep your mind in the book, and to think scripturally and biblically on every subject and in every area of your life.

You have to learn to fight. You have to learn the art of war mentally and emotionally just to fight this fight. That is why the Apostle Paul said, “I die daily.” Sometimes we have to die hourly, sometimes minute by minute.

Why did God leave these enemies in the land in Judges chapter 3? Why did He leave them there? Wouldn’t you say, “I know the answer. You said to teach them war”? Yes, that is the answer. However, there is another truth equally obvious in that answer, and I am going to prove it to you from the Bible. No one really values, appreciates, or esteems that for which he has not worked or fought.

The Value of Fighting for Liberty

Without blood, sweat, and tears, and without a great cost to us, we cannot and will not appreciate anything. When we struggle, sacrifice, and suffer, we begin to realize the value of something, whether it is a prized possession or liberty and freedom. Let me give you an illustration. Look at our children and the modern-day family. When everything is handed to children and provided for them from hand to mouth without costing them anything, they despise it and disregard their parents' sacrifice. I could give you illustration after illustration of how Alice and I sacrificed for our children and grandchildren. Did they appreciate it?

Sometimes they did, probably; sometimes they did not. But let me tell you something: take those same children to whom you hand everything, let them get out work, sweat, and tears, and let them start buying something, and all of a sudden they put a little more value in it. In other words, it is easy for you to spin off on that car when your dad is buying the tires, but when you start buying them, you take care of that rubber. You do not want to burn rubber anymore after that.

The same is true with liberty and freedom. It is easy for us to take our liberty and freedom for granted. Why? Because we really have not had it taken from us. Now it is being slowly taken from us, I understand that. But no one has simply walked up to us and said, "From now on, you have no freedom of speech. From now on, you have no freedom of travel. From now on, you have no freedom of worship." No, no, no, no. We can still do that in some degree and in some way.

But you do not appreciate some things until you lose them or until you fight for them. D.H. Lawrence said, "Men fight for liberty and win it with hard knocks. Their children, brought up easy, let it slip away again, poor fools. And their grandchildren are once more slaves."

Now let me tell you something. We do not value that for which we have not fought and worked. And when we don't value these things, we turn into another generation which takes everything for granted and we know nothing of sacrifice and suffering. Let me show you.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Judges chapter 2. Judges chapter 2. And look if you would please at verses 10 through 13. Judges chapter 2, verse 10.

Now we're talking about the death of Joshua and all of those who fought with Joshua. So Judges chapter 2 verse 10: "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers." So that's Joshua and the people who were with him. "And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."

How could they do that? Well, they never had to fight. They didn't appreciate Canaan land. They knew nothing of war. It was handed to them on a silver platter. And so what do they do? They just forsake it. They forsake God. They know nothing of His miracles. If we do not learn to fight for truth and righteousness and liberty and freedom, we will become just like those people in Judges chapter 2. We'll become rebels against God and His law. We will become another generation, which I might point out, basically in this country we already have become another generation. John Stuart Mill said this: "War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling that thinks that nothing is worth fighting for is much worse."

"The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself." We either have to learn to fight or we become a kept people. We're only free and we only have liberty because someone else is better than we are.

The Art of Worship

Point 2: God's Design to Teach His People Worship

It is God's design to teach us to war. It is also God's design to teach His people the art of worship, and these two purposes are tied together.

Judges 3:4 says, “And they were to prove Israel by them,” explaining why He left those enemies in the land: not only to teach them war, but “to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.”

Our enemies are left in the land to challenge us in obedience. Will we compromise? Will we capitulate? Will we conquer? Do you realize that our enemies really do not change us? They just reveal us. If we compromise and capitulate, we were never real to begin with. We did not truly have any real interest in worshipping and serving the Lord.

If we are so quick to run into idolatry, that is evidence again that we are not real and genuine.

The main application based upon the context of Judges chapter 3, verses 1 through 5, is this: When we fight—and I do not care if we are talking about fighting mentally, emotionally, physically, financially, or spiritually—we must learn to fight in faith and obedience. That is, we have to learn to fight biblically. We cannot fight as humanists fight, and we cannot fight as anarchists fight. We have to fight based upon the Word of God and the principles of war that God has taught us in His Word.

The second point is that it is God's design that His people learn the art of worship. You must also learn the art of worship in the art of war. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Joshua, chapter 5. Joshua follows Judges, so go back just one book. Here Israel is about to fight and conquer Jericho. Undoubtedly, Joshua is out meditating, praying, and thinking before the battle for Jericho. Look in Joshua chapter 5, verse 13: “And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there

stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him." Now Joshua had to be a brave man.

Somebody had already got the weapon out. Joshua went unto him and said unto him, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." And Joshua did so.

This is a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearing of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament before Christ was ever made flesh. Joshua sees Him standing there with a sword in His hand and asks whose side He is on. Our Lord said, "Nay;" He had not come for a side, but as captain of the host of the Lord. He was in charge of this war. Joshua immediately fell on his face and worshipped.

Worship and Warfare

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 20:1–6 (KJV)

I want to show you how intimately worship is connected with warfare. In 2 Chronicles chapter 20, we read:

"It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is En-gedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen?"

Note that God is sovereign over all of the heathen. He rules over them. They may not acknowledge Him or recognize Him, but He is

still sovereign. He says, "Rulest not thou over the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us," quoting from 1 Kings 8, "as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir," that is Edom, "whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them?"

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 20:12–17 (KJV)

> "For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." We don't have wisdom, discernment, or sense to know what to do. We don't have any might.
>
> "And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation; and he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's."
>
> "To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the

ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 20:20–24 (KJV)

And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped.

When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away. They were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much. On the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah, for there they blessed the Lord; therefore the name of the same place was called the valley of Berachah unto this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. They came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord. The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they had heard that

the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest round about.

Fighting in Obedience

Now I want to call your attention to the latter part of verse 15, where the prophet said, “Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.” And what did Jehoshaphat do? He appointed singers to lead the army, to praise the Lord. I didn't notice any of that when I was in boot camp. Did you see any, Henry, when you were there? Stanley, did you? No. But what happened when they began to praise the Lord? The Lord set ambushments, and the enemy killed themselves. You see how intimately worship here is tied in with warfare.

In 2 Chronicles 25, King Amaziah of Judah hired 100,000 Israelites to help him fight the Edomites. For the hire of the 100,000 Israelites, he paid 100 talents of silver. A prophet of God came to him and said, “Amaziah, don't let the Israelites go with you, for God's not with them.” The text says: “But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the Lord is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it.”

"Be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down. And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this. Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again."

Amaziah had a choice. God said, in effect, "You can obey me and send the Israelites home and win the battle, or you can disobey me and carry them with you and lose the battle." It is just that simple. Amaziah could fight in obedience and win, or fight in disobedience and lose.

I do not care what kind of problems or enemies we are facing: a financial enemy, an emotional enemy, a mental enemy, a physical enemy, or a spiritual enemy. The only way to fight is to fight

biblically, scripturally, and in obedience. If we do not fight in obedience to God, there is no way that we are going to win, period. When you get home, take the time to read Deuteronomy 20. There are regulations and rules for warfare there—principles that God has laid down and that are to be followed if we are going to fight.

Judges 3:4 says, "And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses." Verse 1 explains, "Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them." Judges 2:22 says, "that through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not."

Here is the purpose: God not only wanted to teach them war; He wanted to teach them worship, so that as they fought, whichever way they fought, they might worship the Lord in obedience. Judges 3:1 says, "Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan."

How did the fathers gain the victory in Canaan? It is true that they fought, and it is true that they used weapons. However, it was not their weapons nor their fighting ability that gave them victory. It was God who gave them victory.

The psalmist spells this out clearly in Psalm 44: “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. Thou art my King, O God. Command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.”

The children of Israel got not the land in possession by their fighting ability or by their weapons. It was God who gave it to them. The next generation failed to learn not only how to fight, but how to fight trusting and relying upon God. That is what we have lost individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and even nationally.

Applications and Conclusion

If you go back to Joshua chapter 7, you remember the only time that Israel lost was when Achan had sinned and violated God's law. And what did God say to Joshua? “Neither will I be with thee anymore until this sin is dealt with.” If we're going to fight, we must fight in obedience.

Israel had to learn one major lesson, one which they had forgotten. It is the same lesson that you and I have forgotten: it is not our bravery or our weaponry that saves us; it is God that saves us. We must come to Him, submit to Him, fight in His might and His power, and trust Him.

Until we do, we do not really know the art of war. We do not know how to fight. If we fight in and of ourselves, if we fight in the flesh, we are going to lose. Victory is always in Jesus Christ. He is the captain of the host, the head of the army, and the one who always wins.

Secondly, God wisely leaves enemies in our midst that we may learn to fulfill our covenantal duties. In Leviticus chapter 26, beginning with verse 6, God says, “And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you.”

This is if we obey. But skip down to verse 15. This is when we do not obey: “And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that

ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart."

"And ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you."

Deuteronomy 28 gives the blessings for obedience: "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee." One of those blessings is this: "The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways."

Here are the curses: "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." The Lord would cause them to be smitten before their enemies; they would go out one way against them and flee seven ways, be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, and their carcases would be meat unto all fowls of the air and beasts of the earth, with no man to fray them away.

What did God say? You can obey Me and have victory. You can obey Me and defeat all your enemies, or you can disobey Me and die, and your enemies will reign over you. We tend to forget the price of liberty and freedom. Liberty and freedom are given to us only in the blessings of God. We call it freedom, but it is not free; it costs lives, families, and fortunes.

Thomas Jefferson said to William Stephen Smith in 1787, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion. What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve

the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms." Benjamin Franklin said, "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

To teach them the art of war, and in teaching us the art of war, He teaches us the art of worship. It is in God we win. It is through our Lord Jesus Christ that we have the victory. We must learn to fight and fight in faith and obedience in every area of our lives.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You. We know that Thou art indeed a God of war. Lord, we pray that You would teach us the art of war, that we may also learn the art of worship, obedience, and faith. God, give us grace, divine power, and divine might. Help us to fight, that we may win and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by trusting in Him and giving Him all the honor and glory. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 23

Heaven on Earth

November 17, 2015

Deuteronomy 11:18–21 provides the setting: “Therefore shall you lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the doorpost of thine house, and upon thy gates, that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven.”

The message is not primarily about eschatology, although it could easily dip into eschatology, the doctrine of last things. In one sense, it is almost impossible to preach or teach without eschatology, because eschatology is not only a theology; it is also a worldview. Whatever you preach or teach, certainly your worldview comes into play.

Introduction: The Meaning of 'Heaven on Earth'

When we think of heaven on earth, we normally think of some utopian society that has been planned by fallen man, seeking to restore innocence based upon some humanistic perspective or endeavor. Such utopian communities have been tried by the Quakers, the Socialists, the Communists, and even some Christians. For years I preached in Cahuilla, California, a little town that began as a socialistic utopian society. Of course, it closed down, but the town then continued.

Henry David Thoreau, of Walden Pond fame, sought such an existence, although his existence was certainly not utopian by any stretch of the imagination. I have told you in time past, and I am going to repeat it right now because it is amusing: I came across the word “utopia” in the second year of my Greek class, and I remember laughing the very first time I discovered the meaning of this word. The Greek word “utopia” is made up of two Greek words: “ou,” a negative meaning “no,” and “topos,” meaning “place.” So the word “utopia” literally means “no place.” There is no such place that exists. In other words, all of these socialistic, communistic, and fascist utopian societies are nothing more than a figment of fallen man’s imagination.

Reality is not determined by man; reality is determined by God. Obviously, there is no such thing as a socialistic or communistic utopia. Man without God and apart from Him can produce only what is known as a society of death. How can I say that? The answer is based upon Proverbs chapter 8, verses 35 and 36. In Proverbs chapter 8, Jesus Christ is wisdom personified; that is, He is into a person and He is speaking.

In verse 35 He says, "For whoso findeth Me findeth life, and obtaineth favor of the Lord." That certainly is true. Whoever finds Jesus Christ finds life and obtains favor of the Father. But verse 36 says, "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death." Stop and think about that. All they that hate Christ love death. Thus, the only society that fallen man can produce is a society of death. Fallen man always tries to seek in himself that which can be found only in the one true and living God, Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Therefore, reality and the only

order that will work is a biblical order rooted and grounded in obedience to God. Fallen man will never find his utopia, for a fallen man's utopia exists only in his depraved imagination.

The New World Order crowd happens to be barking up the wrong tree. That does not mean they are not going to kill a lot of people or that they are not going to try. It does mean that their utopian society and view will ultimately fail. There will be a New World Order, but it will not be man's New World Order; it will be the New World Order fashioned and ordained by God the Father through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eschatological vs. Present Experience of Heaven on Earth

The phrase “Heaven on Earth” could bring to mind an eschatological position based upon Revelation 21. If you will hold Deuteronomy 11 and look in your Bibles to Revelation 21, verses 1 and 2, you can see the concept of Heaven on Earth: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem,” coming down from God out of heaven, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Jerusalem, the Eternal City, is coming down out of Heaven from God. Based upon this text and others in the Bible, many believe that literally Heaven will indeed be here on earth. Thus, one could refer to Heaven on earth eschatologically speaking.

However, there is another sense in which we can speak of Heaven on earth: when a home, church, community, or society lives in obedience to God, each individual fulfills his responsibility, keeps his heart, and is easily entreated. Before we finish Deuteronomy 11, I am going to show you that, in essence, this is what Canaan land was supposed to be. According to Deuteronomy 11, Canaan land was supposed to be a little bit of heaven on earth as Israel obeyed God and God's blessing rested upon the people.

The Gift of Canaan as a Picture of Heaven on Earth

Let me tie these thoughts together. In Deuteronomy 10, beginning with verse 20, we read through chapter 11 and verse 1. God says:

“Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. For he is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons, and now the Lord thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for a multitude.”

He gives a command to fear the Lord, serve Him, cleave to Him, and swear by His name. He is to be their praise and their God. They are to remember the great things He has done. In fact, verse 22 tells how He has multiplied them.

“Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments always.” God is saying very clearly here that godly fear produces service, loyalty, faithfulness, gratefulness, and obedience. A first-hand knowledge of God’s grace, greatness, and chastisement is designed to strengthen the bond that godly fear produces.

Let me explain. “And know you this day, for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, His greatness, His mighty arm, or His mighty hand and His stretched out arm, and His miracles and His acts which He did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and unto all this land. And what He did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, unto their chariots, how He made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, how the Lord destroyed them unto this day. And what He did unto you in the wilderness until you came into this place. And what He did unto Dathan, and to Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben. How the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all their substance that was in their possession in the midst of all Israel. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which He did.”

This passage clearly indicates and teaches that fearing, serving, and knowing God is serious business. It is not something that you do flippantly or half-heartedly. He is telling us in verses 2–7 that the judgment and chastisements of God are real and effective. He judges and destroys His enemies, and He chastens His people.

If you have known and seen first-hand the judgment and chastisement of God, it should make you fear and submit, lest it fall upon you. Had you been in Egypt when God was smiting the firstborn or sending all those plagues, wouldn't you think, "Well now it'd be a good time to really get close to the Lord"? When He drowned Pharaoh and all his chariots, you would think, "Well I'm thankful I'm not an Egyptian at this particular point in time." It should make you thankful.

Hold Deuteronomy chapter 11, but turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12. God's chastisement is designed to teach us submission, obedience, righteousness, and holiness. Hebrews 12:5, which is a quotation from Proverbs, says: "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." God says, "Don't despise it." "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons.

Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. When my daddy wore me out, I always said, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir." It may have been temporary, but I certainly said it at that particular time. "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits and live? For they," that is, earthly fathers, "verily for a few days chasten us after their own pleasure. But he," God, our Heavenly Father, "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness."

"No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth a peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The result of your firsthand knowledge of God's judgment and chastisement should not make you weak or cowardly. It should make you strong and encourage you. According to Hebrews chapter 12, it should give us a more submissive spirit and attitude. It should make us more holy and more righteous, and consequently make us strong and encouraged.

You say, “How can you be strong and encouraged in chastisement?” Stop and think about this: If God is not against us, then God is for us. God would not be chastening us if He was not for us. Now go back to Deuteronomy chapter 11, verses 8 and 9. He has just said in verses 2–7, “Your eyes have seen His judgment. Your eyes have seen His chastisement.”

"Therefore," that is, in light of what you have seen and what you know, "shall you keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither you go to possess it. And that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that is full of milk and honey."

So, if you understand God's judgments and God's chastening, He said it is indeed to make you strong. In fact, Deuteronomy 29:9 says, "Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do." So, obedience then is designed to make us prosper.

God is saying, if we have no desire to be judged, if we have no desire to be chastened, what are we encouraged to do? Keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that you may be strong. So, obedience strengthens us, and obedience encourages us.

In this passage God is talking to Israel. Here is another reason given to them to be encouraged: the gift that God gave them. He says: “For the land which thou goest into possess, it is not as the land of Egypt from whence you came out, where thou sowest thy seed, and waterst it with thy foot as a garden of herbs. But the land whither you go to possess it is the land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven, a land which the Lord thy God careth for. The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year.”

God is saying, “Look, I am giving you a gracious gift. I’m giving you the land of Canaan.” Don’t stop and think, “Well, it’s like Egypt.” No, in Egypt it was dry, it was a desert, it was barren. Yes, you could grow things, but you had to have a water wheel, paddle with your foot, and water your little garden just to produce something. But God said, “This land is not like this. This land has hills, and valleys,

and mountains, and rain comes and drinks in the rain. Moreover, my eyes are upon this land from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." So this is a special land.

The Greater Gift to New Covenant Believers

Do you think, in light of Deuteronomy chapter 11, that Israel got the best of the deal? The answer is that for that time they certainly did, because God gave them the best of the land. But do you realize that as Christians and in the New Covenant we have far more than He ever gave Israel? For instance, in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning at verse 29, the Apostle says: "That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of Him," that is, of God the Father, "are you in Christ Jesus, who of God has made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Now why in the world would we be glorying in the Lord like this?

Why should we praise Him and serve Him constantly and consistently? Well, if you will notice in verse 21, Paul says, "After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." So God has saved us by His Son, in His grace through faith.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 1, 2, and 3, the Corinthians were fussing and fighting over preachers. Believe it or not, they were. Some of them were saying, "Well, I like Paul. He's scholarly." Some would say, "I like Peter. He's impetuous and he's fiery." Some would say, "I like Apollos. I mean, that guy can really preach." And some would try to be a little more sanctimonious and say, "Well, we just like Jesus." Of course, the Apostle Paul is saying, "Who is Paul? Who is Peter? Who is Apollos?"

One sows, one waters, but God gives the increase. In other words, you do not have to pick and choose. Paul tells them in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, beginning there with verse 21, "Therefore let no man glory in men," for "all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." We did not receive a little, puny land. We received the world, life, things present, things to come, and Christ.

Look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. I want you to think about this: if Israel had reason to serve and worship God for the gift that God gave them, how much more reason do we have to serve and worship God for what He has given us? Romans 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” We have not received “the spirit of bondage again to fear,” but “the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

“If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be it that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” If we are children, then we are heirs. What do we inherit? We inherit God. We are heirs of God, and, on top of that, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

I have four children. If Alice and I died in a wreck and I left a will, I could say, “To my daughter Wendy I give this, to my daughter Leah I give this, to my daughter Laura I give this, to my daughter Rebecca I give this.” I could say all that, but what I could say is, “Look, they’re all joint heirs. All of them get everything, and then they can divide it as they please.” We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ; we get everything that He gets.

That is a little bit better than just that little strip of land over the Middle East. Moreover, Romans 8:32 says, “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” If Israel had reason to serve, worship, and obey God because of that gracious gift of Canaan land, how much more do we have a far better reason to serve, worship, and obey Him because He has given us His only begotten Son, and everything we are and everything we have is in Him.

Covenant Sanctions: Blessings and Curses

God gives them this land, but when God gives them this land there are sanctions because there is a covenant. The sanctions are both positive and negative. You get a positive sanction—that is, you get a blessing if you obey. You get a negative sanction—that is, a curse if you disobey. It is impossible to have any covenant without sanctions. I do not care if you are talking about the Old Testament or the New Testament. Every covenant has sanctions.

Deuteronomy 11:13 says, “And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and in thy wine, and in thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the LORD’S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.”

God says, “If you obey Me, you are going to be blessed. If you disobey Me, you are going to be cursed.” Even in the New Testament there are curses. Notice the eternal state in Revelation 22 and verse 3: “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of his Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him.” Stop and think about that: there shall be no more curse, the throne of God and of His Lamb shall be there, and His servants shall serve Him.

According to Revelation 22:3, what will we be doing in the eternal state? If you want to use the word Heaven, fine. What will we be doing in Heaven? The answer is that we will be serving God. It will be a perfect service. The quality and the quantity will be absolutely phenomenal.

Eternal Life Defined as Knowing God

Here is what I am trying to show you. What is eternal life? Most people say that eternal life is simply living forever. That is not true. If you interpret eternal life as merely living forever, then, if you believe in eternal punishment, those who are punished forever in the lake of fire would also have eternal life, because they are forever being punished but never dying. Do you want to know what eternal life really is?

Look at John 17:3. This is our Lord’s high-priestly prayer, and He is telling us exactly what eternal life is. He says, “And this is life eternal.” He is defining it; He is telling us what it is. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus

Christ, whom Thou hast sent." What is eternal life? Eternal life is knowing God. It is a personal, intimate relationship with the one true and living God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

You do not have to wait until you die to experience eternal life. Eternal life can be experienced right here because it is a personal, intimate knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. You will not have it here to the extent that you will have it in the eternal state, but it can be here.

So many people think that professing Christians, when they die and go to heaven, will automatically love there what they hated here, or hate there what they loved here. Really? If you do not love to worship, honor, serve, and obey God now, what makes you think you will love it when you get to heaven, where it is there in perfection? Eternal life is knowing the one true and living God. Obviously, we are going to be servants of His. What we are doing here is practice for what we are going to be doing there. Eternal life is therefore far more than merely living forever.

In Deuteronomy chapter 11, verse 18, he says: "Therefore shall you lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes, and you shall teach them your children, speaking of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, when thou risest up, and thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thine house, and upon thy gates, that your days may be multiplied, and that the days of your children in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give thee as the days of heaven on earth."

Requirements for Heaven on Earth: Heavenly Word, Wisdom, and Walk

There is a continuity of thought and action revealed in these verses. In order to have a little bit of heaven on earth in your home, your church, your society, and your community, each individual must function biblically. What is required? If we are going to have a little bit of heaven on earth, lives must be filled with the heavenly Word.

God says, “Therefore you shall lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.” In other words, our lives have to be consumed with God's Word. His Word is not simply to be memorized. There is nothing wrong with memorization; I encourage everybody to memorize the Word. But there is more to Scripture than memorization. Just because you can spout off Scripture does not mean that you love it, honor it, or esteem it. So God is saying that you must lay these words up in your heart and soul, there to be loved and cherished. Such laying up has to be serious business. What we normally do is foolishly let the truths of God slip from our minds and memories; therefore we suffer very serious consequences.

One of the biggest problems in Christendom today is that most professing Christians take doctrine lightly and receive it carelessly. We are much like those Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 5, verses 11 and 12. The apostle said of Christ, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing you are dull of hearing. For when the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."

The apostle was saying, "You should be a teacher, and now you have to be fed and burped and swaddled. You're just a little baby." You have no idea what reality is all about. Stop and think of it. That is where most professing Christians are. They have no idea what reality is really all about.

God says we have to bind these words in our hearts. The knowledge of God and all that lies in His will should always have a place with us and govern us. When we speak of God's Word being in our lives, we are not talking merely about a Sunday meeting or special meetings during the week. We are talking about twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

It is only right that Christians should live by the Word of God, and that by their general countenance, bearing, and conduct, everyone should know that they are indeed Christians. We are not only expected to live by His Word; we must live by it. One old brother used to say that some Christians ought to carry a board around on

their backs saying that they were Christians, because otherwise no one else would ever know it. That is the truth today as well.

God says that we are to bind His words for a sign upon our hands, and that they may be as frontlets between our eyes. Have you ever noticed how many times a day you look at your hands? How many times you use them? Your hands are always present and readily seen. You use them in work and in play. So God says they should be on your hands. Then He says they should be as frontlets between your eyes.

Some of us who are a little bit older remember the days of farming and mule power, before tractors came along. On the old mule's halter, you had blinders. Those blinders went around that halter, and they kept the mule looking straight ahead. The mule couldn't see to the left or to the right; the only way it could see was straight ahead.

This is what God is saying: these have got to be frontlets in our eyes. We've got to see them everywhere we turn, in every way we turn. They're to guide us, lead us, and govern us. They're to be frontlets for our eyes.

That's not all. Look in verse 19. He said, "And you shall teach them your children, speaking of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up, thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thine house, and upon thy gates." God is saying that care and diligence are to be used, and pains are to be taken, to instruct our children as soon as they are capable in the knowledge of God and His commandments, that they might learn to love Him, fear Him, serve Him, and worship Him.

It's basically the same truth that the Apostle Paul gave us in Ephesians 6:4: "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." In reality, what he is saying there is that we are to wet them or sharpen them in His Word. It's expressive of diligence and industry in teaching His Word by frequent repetition, inculcating these truths in their minds, and endeavoring to imprint them there, so that our

children will be sharp, ready, and expert in the things of God. God is simply saying that His Word is basically to consume our lives.

That's why He said that we are to talk about them when we walk by the wayside, when we sit in the house, when we lie down, and when we rise up. We are to write them upon the doorposts of our house and upon our gates. In other words, you can have the Law of God hanging on your wall in the Ten Commandments. I've been in many homes where I've stayed as I go to certain places and preach.

Sometimes you go in the bathroom and there, on the windowsill, is a little verse of Scripture. Then there is one sitting on the back of the toilet, and one pasted on the wall right up over the sink. I see them in kitchens everywhere. I remember when I was at the University, many, many moons ago, they had these Scriptures posted everywhere. One that I really remember was over the water fountain. It said, "John 7, whosoever drinketh this water shall thirst again. But he that drinketh the water that I give him shall never thirst." You could not take a drink of water without seeing that Scripture there.

This is what God is saying: our lives should be consumed with His words. Heavenly words should order and direct our lives. Such inculcation and devotion to His Word will lead to my next point. Our lives must not only be filled with heavenly words; our lives must be filled with heavenly wisdom. I want you to turn in your Bibles to James chapter 3. As you are turning there, listen to what Proverbs 2, verses 6 and 7, says: "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly." What is walking uprightly? It is walking obediently. So let me ask you a question: Would it not be decorous, holy, and right for each of us to exhibit and exude heavenly wisdom?

I pointed out earlier that, when it comes to heavenly words, one of our problems is that we are dull in hearing and receive doctrine lightly and carelessly. In James chapter 3, another problem is exposed. I would say that here is the problem in the average home, in the average church, in the average community, and in the average society; you might even say in the average nation. What is it? There

is a distinction and a contrast given in James chapter 3 between hellish wisdom and heavenly wisdom.

I will say this: probably most professing Christians are full of hellish wisdom, not heavenly wisdom, because you cannot get heavenly wisdom apart from the heavenly Word. Watch James chapter 3, verse 13: "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?" Who is a wise man? Where does wisdom come from? It comes from knowledge. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of God and His Word. "Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

James contrasts these two kinds of wisdom: “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” But “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”

As you take notice of the contrast between hellish wisdom and heavenly wisdom, which wisdom do you exhibit? Which wisdom do you prefer to be around? Would you prefer to live in a home where there is constant fussing, fighting, arguing, envying, strife, railing, criticism, hatefulness, arrogance, and pride? Or would you prefer to live in a home where there are love, kindness, gentleness, purity, and peace?

What kind of church would you want to be a part of? I have news for you, folks: most of our churches today could just about contend for the championship in the UFC, because they are full of fighting and strife all the time. Think about your community. Here we are in this room. There is an old saying, “No house is big enough for two families because ultimately somebody's going to be in somebody's throat.” You understand that?

What if we all lived in one community, and I saw you every day? It's all frank every day, and we have to interact every day. If we want such a community to work, each of us must be filled with the Heavenly Word and with heavenly wisdom as well. Otherwise, it is

not going to work. Each of us would have to be careful to be biblical, keep our hearts, and do that which is right. Thus, when he speaks of heavenly wisdom, he says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle.”

“Easy to be entreated” means that you are not hard to get along with, that you have a workable and an agreeable spirit, and that you can work together with others for a greater good and a greater benefit. Do you know what that literally means? It means that you are not selfish, demanding, manipulating, and controlling. No. He says, “Heavenly wisdom is easily entreated.”

So I could come and say, “Frank, could you help me on this?” “Yes, brother, I’ll be glad to.” “Steve, I hurt you; would you please forgive me?” “Yes, I’m more than willing to.” “David, I need some help here; will you help me?” “Yes.” That is easily entreated, but I need to be the same way. In other words, when you have just this one grace, it is absolutely remarkable what happens in homes and churches.

This grace is not natural. Man cannot produce it. It is supernatural. I want you to understand that it is supernatural. It only comes from heavenly wisdom, which comes from the heavenly Word.

Our lives must not only be filled with the Heavenly Word; they must be filled with Heavenly Wisdom. And thirdly, they must be filled with a Heavenly Walk. I hope you see the progression as well as the connection between these points. If your life is filled with the Heavenly Word, inevitably you are going to have Heavenly Wisdom. If you have Heavenly Wisdom, inevitably you are going to have a Heavenly and a Holy Walk.

There are multitudes of Scriptures in the Old Testament and in the New Testament that deal with our walk. Our walk is how we live. It is our conduct. It is our behavior. It is what we are every day. In Deuteronomy 5:33, the Scripture says: “You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”

It is amazing to me, as I read these verses, especially about walking with the Lord, how many times God connects living a long life or prolonging your days. You remember the passage, “Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him.”

Noah walked with God. Moses walked with God. But God is saying here, “You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God commanded you, that it may be well with you, and prolong your days.”

In Deuteronomy 8 and verse 6 He said it like this: “Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to fear Him.” What is to fear Him? It is to walk in His ways. What is to walk in His ways? It is to keep His commandments.

Psalm 84 verse 11: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” What is it to walk uprightly? It is to walk obediently. It is to love Him and to fear Him.

David said in Psalm 86 and verse 11: “Teach me thy way, O Lord, and I will walk in thy truth. Unite my heart to fear thy name.” How do we know that our hearts are united to fear God's name?

We walk in His truth. What is walking in His truth? It's obedience. David said in Psalm 89 and verse 15: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance." "Walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." In other words, God is smiling upon them as they walk obediently to His Word.

When you get to the New Testament, in Galatians chapter 5 and verse 16, the Apostle Paul wrote: "This I say, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." Walk in the Spirit. Galatians 5 and verse 25: "If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit." Galatians 6 and verse 16, one of my favorites: "And as many as walk according to this rule," that is God's Word, "peace be upon them and mercy upon the Israel of God."

Paul is praying for these Colossian Christians. He says, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." I hope you see this point

now. We are praying for you that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. So you have a heavenly Word, you have a heavenly wisdom.

Now watch in verse 10. Here's a heavenly walk: "That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might and according to His glorious power unto all patience, and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

But note, if you would, we are to walk worthy. You cannot have a heavenly walk unless you have heavenly wisdom. And you cannot have heavenly wisdom apart from the Heavenly Word. All of these things simply go together. One connects to the other and you progress from one to the other.

Applications: Obedience Brings Dominion

Now, let me make some applications. The first one is this: a little bit of Heaven on Earth can be ours if we live and act obediently. Have you ever thought about a heavenly home? I am not talking about some home up in glory; I am talking about a home between husband and wife and children.

Years ago, I told Alice, when we had not been married too long, “Listen, I can take all the trash the world throws at me. I can take all the hatred and all the fighting the enemies throw at me. That does not bother me. But when I come home, I do not want any fussing and fighting and feuding at home because this is my refuge. This is where I come to rest and relax and refresh.” And she said, “I understand.”

Look at the average home today. It is full of fussing and fighting and feuding, one right after the other. If you are an obedient child, you may have a little bit of Heaven, even if the world is in turmoil and confusion, war drums are thundering on every side, and the wicked are up in arms. Yet the godly, obedient child of God can, by the grace of God, possess His mind and His frame, as well as His soul, in his home, his community, and his society: peace and

prosperity, because there is a little bit of heaven on earth in his life. He lives by that heavenly wisdom, not by hellish wisdom.

The second application is this: Biblical dominion is tied to obedience. Domination by the wicked is tied to disobedience. In Deuteronomy 11:22, God says: "For if you shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave unto Him, then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and you shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves." If you will love Me, obey Me, keep My commandments, do them, and walk in them, I will drive out all these nations for you. You can conquer. You can have dominion.

You will be the ruler. You will be on top. You will be the head. It is just that simple.

Deuteronomy 28 deals with blessings and curses. We are dealing with the curses, particularly beginning in verse 43. This is when we disobeyed God, and here is what happens: "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, thou shalt not lend to him. He shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail."

"Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed, because thou hearkenest not unto the voice of the Lord thy God to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee. And they shall be upon thee for a sign, and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever, because thou servest not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things. Therefore thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and the want of all things, and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck until he have destroyed thee."

We are where we are today in our nation because of the disobedience of the children of God. God has promised us that if we would obey, we would conquer. If we disobey, we would be conquered. The problem is not in the White House, although the White House is wicked and wrong. The problem is not in Congress,

although Congress is wicked and wrong. It is not in the judicial system, although the judicial system is wicked and wrong. The problem is with God's people being disobedient. Stop pointing fingers. That's the truth.

If we want it reversed, we need to be filled with the heavenly word, heavenly wisdom, and exhibit a heavenly walk. God has promised He'll enable us to conquer and have dominion.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to you this day. We thank you for your word and your truth. We do pray for these on the prayer list, Lord, again. We pray for our brother Dale, Lord, that you would help him and help the family. Give grace and mercy there. We think of Henry Klingler today and Ernest Allen. We think of John Sutton today, our brother Chris, and so many, Lord, that need our prayers. We hold them up to thee and ask that you would undertake for them. Give us grace now, Lord, that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In thy name we pray, Amen.

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CHAPTER 24

Reality, Faith And Obedience

June 16, 2016

In Psalm 81, verses 10 through 16, the Word of God says:

"I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels. Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him, but their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."

Introduction: The Rude Awakening of Reality

Reality oftentimes comes with a very rude awakening. We usually live in a dream world, and we like to fantasize. We may do that for a short period of time until, all of a sudden, reality runs us over,

knocks us down, and wakes us up. I remember, as a teenager, fantasizing about my future. I could hardly wait to leave home.

I had a wonderful relationship with my parents. I did not hate them, despise them, or fight with them, and I loved them. Believe it or not, for the most part, I did obey them. But the simple truth is, I wanted to get away so that I could do what I wanted to do. Oftentimes I had to work when I did not really want to work. I figured that if I could get off on my own, I could live my own life, do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it, and do whatever pleased me.

When Alice and I got married at eighteen, it hit me hard that, all of a sudden, I had a wife. Then we had a child, and I had a wife and a child to support. During that first year or two, I often thought that I had been mighty stupid and foolish. All I had to do was stay home, obey, and do some work, and Dad would take care of all the bills.

I would have had no responsibility, but now everything was forced upon me. In the first year or two of marriage, I found that I did not have time to do what I wanted to do. My time was consumed with doing what I had to do. Reality woke me up.

I also remember when the Lord saved me. Salvation was fresh in my mind, and I was happy and joyful. I thought, “This is so wonderful, because everybody is so eager now to know about sin and salvation and Jesus Christ.” I wanted to tell them, and I did. After being laughed at, mocked, scoffed at, and ridiculed, it dawned on me that most folks do not want to hear about Jesus Christ. They do not want to hear about sin and salvation because they are condemned, and they do not want to hear about their condemnation. Reality sank in, and it sank in deeply.

I began then to understand the old Puritan adage that a sinner is a sacred thing; only God can make him so. Stop and think about that. There is a vast difference between intellectually understanding that you are a sinner and being shown that you are a sinner by the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Those are two totally different things.

Most people live in a fantasy world, even today. Most professing Christians tend to think that, as long as they live decent lives, try to

do what is right, and do not sin too much, somehow they are going to make it into heaven. Reality will set in at death, and it will hit hard at the judgment. You may fantasize temporarily, but reality will soon set in. Most professing Christians never genuinely serve the Lord. Spiritual truths, biblical truths, and biblical principles never really enter into their minds, hearts, and lives.

Reality, Faith, and Obedience

They may be good church members. They may fellowship with one another and visit friends. And yet usually that is the extent of their Christianity. Reality will set in at death, and especially at the judgment seat of Christ. Living a Christian life is far more than going to church and listening to a few sermonettes.

We are living in a fantasy land when we think that this nation will never suffer the righteous judgment of God. When we consider the aborticide, the fornication, the sodomy, the theft, the fraud, the deceit, the idolatry, and the rebellion, and think that all this will be overlooked by God, we are deceiving ourselves. All you have to do is look around. The truth is, we are already under judgment.

God Determines Reality, Not Man

If you read Amos chapter 4, you will find that when individuals refuse to hear God, repent, and turn to Him, each additional judgment increases in intensity and severity.

Man does not determine reality. God is the determiner of reality. Reality is not what I think, desire, or wish; reality is what God determines. Denial of God's reality does not negate reality. Whether people like it or not, agree with it or not, believe it or not, or deny it or not, His reality is still real. Man fantasizes, lives in his own dream world, and thinks that somehow he can determine and make his own reality. That is impossible.

One of my favorite words to talk about is the word “utopia.” You have heard about the socialistic utopia, the communist utopia, and the hedonistic utopia. The word “utopia” in our English language is derived from the Greek. It is made up of two Greek words: first, “topos,” which means “place”; and secondly, “u,” which is a negative.

Our English word “utopia” literally means “no place.” It does not exist. It is not reality. The only place that a utopia exists is in someone's depraved, humanistic brain. There is no such utopia. The only reality is God's reality, and reality is determined by God.

The Reality of Redemption

Psalm 81 is of special importance to the church because it reminds us of past mercies that God has shown us and our obligation to praise Him for them. It also tells us about our present sins and rebellion, as well as the blessings and benefits of faith and obedience.

Point 1: The Reality of Redemption (Psalm 81:10)

First, consider the reality of that which was—the reality of redemption. In verse 10, God says, “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Interestingly, the Lord God identifies Himself in Psalm 81:10 exactly as He identified Himself when He gave His law in Exodus 20:2: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” Notice the words, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out.” In Hosea 13:4, He says it again: “Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt. Thou shalt know no other God but me, for there is no Savior but me.” God is telling Israel, “I am the one that brought you out. I am the one true and living God.”

God is speaking of an undeniable fact: the deliverance of His people from Egypt. Why does He repeat this over and over in the Bible—“I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt”? The Exodus was an undeniable fact. It is history. It is real. God actually delivered His people out of Egypt and destroyed the Egyptians.

Furthermore, God’s deliverance of those people from Egypt was a claim upon their allegiance. They owed God. He delivered them, brought them out, and was their Savior. Anyone who has been delivered, like Israel, should have pledged obedience to God a thousand times over. God marvelously and miraculously delivered

them, not only from Egypt, but through all the miracles He performed in the desert.

Finally, that great and glorious deliverance was proof that God was able to provide, protect, and promote them as He had promised. If God had done the greater for them in delivering them, should He not have done the lesser as well?

The answer is absolutely yes. The Exodus was and is an objective fact, something real and genuine. Nothing can change it or alter it. It was accomplished by the power of God and the power of God alone. We must remember, however, that the Exodus was a picture and a type, an emblem of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. If we understand the type and the emblem, we ought to be able to understand the reality.

What did the children of Israel do before the Exodus? They slew a lamb and placed the blood on the doorposts and on the lintels. Every one of those lambs was a picture and representative of Jesus Christ. That is why the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." Deliverance from Egypt was therefore a picture and type of the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ.

Now hold Psalm 81 and look in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 9. Mark this passage, because we will come back to it. They slew a lamb, but Hebrews 9:12 says, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." All those calves, bulls, and lambs that were slain were mere pictures. Jesus Christ is the only One who obtained eternal redemption.

Verse 13 says, "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh"—and that is all it could do, ceremonially speaking. But verse 14 asks, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Just as the Exodus is an objective fact of history, the salvation, person, and work of Jesus Christ are also great historical and objective facts. Jesus Christ lived, died, was buried, was raised from the dead,

ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God. These truths are reality. Jesus Christ is salvation, and He is salvation alone.

Romans chapter 1, verses 3 and 4, tells us how Jesus Christ is declared to be the Son of God: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.” He was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, “and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” What, then, declared and manifested that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God? The answer is the resurrection from the dead.

Men may deny reality, denigrate it, or denounce it, but that does not change reality. Men can say, “I would like to be saved in another way. I don’t want to trust in Jesus Christ. I don’t want to see His finished work. I want to do this.” You can imagine whatever you want to imagine and fantasize whatever you want to fantasize. You can have your own salvational utopia in your own mind, but it is not real.

The only reality we have is God’s reality, because reality is determined by God and not by man. Jesus Christ, in His person and His work, is the objective basis for our salvation. Just as in the Exodus, what God did outside the children of Israel, so Jesus Christ and the work He did are outside of us. It is an objective fact, an objective reality, and that cannot be changed.

We must understand that there is a subjective basis of our faith, but the subjective is dependent upon the objective. The subjective basis of our faith happens to be the faith and repentance that God gives us, and we experience it through the power of the Holy Spirit. The subjective has its foundation in the objective. If there had not been the objective work of Jesus Christ in His person and His work, there would be no subjective work. There would be no grace. There would be no mercy.

So nothing subjective can change the objective. I have heard people say, “Well, I don’t feel saved.” There is a good reason for that: salvation is not a feeling. Salvation is an objective fact. It is something that was accomplished by Jesus Christ. It was accomplished outside of us. It is true that He applies that work in us,

and that is subjective, but the reality is that our Lord said, “It is finished.” And it was done. It is an objective fact. This is why the distinction between the objective and the subjective matters: the work is accomplished outside us, and then applied in us.

Acts 5:30–31 shows how important this is. The Bible says it like this: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Now note that Jesus Christ, the great objective reality of salvation, is the one who actually gives repentance.

Hebrews 9:14–17 says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.”

Let me explain it like this. Suppose Steve is a multimillionaire who has been hiding that fact from Lorraine and all of us for years. Steve comes to me and says, “Brother Weaver, I have made my last will and testament, and I am going to leave you two million dollars.” I say, “Thank you, brother. I really appreciate that.” Do not be upset; he is leaving you twenty million. He leaves me two million and Lorraine twenty million. Now, since he has told me he is leaving me two million dollars, can I go out and spend it? Can I enjoy it? I do not have it. Although that might be his last will and testament, it does not go into effect until he dies.

Suppose he dies, does have all this money, and leaves me two million and Lorraine twenty million. An unscrupulous lawyer gets hold of it. What can he do? He can divert most of it to himself. I might end up with five hundred thousand, Lorraine with only two million, and he would steal everything.

What did our Lord do? Through His person and work—the objective basis of salvation—our Lord made a new covenant. The new covenant could not be put into effect until He died. He gave His life to put it into effect. Then He rose from the dead that He might administer the covenant He made. In this covenant there is no fraud, corruption, or misapplication. There are no slip-ups. No one is going to slip in or slip by, because He is the divine advocate. He is risen from the dead and is now administering His own covenant.

Remember what I told you: In the Exodus, Israel owed allegiance to God because He delivered them out of Egypt. How much more so in the New Covenant? Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20? “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”

What is reality? Reality is that God has provided redemption, and that redemption is in Jesus Christ. Whether people like it, agree with it, or believe it, it is reality. There is no other reality. You will either be saved through Jesus Christ or you will never be saved. It is just that simple.

The Reality of Rebellion

The reality that was, and is, is redemption. But the reality which is also present is rebellion. After He said in Psalm 81, “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,” verses 11 and 12 continue: “But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels.”

Point 2: The Reality of Rebellion (Psalm 81:11-12)

Is it not strange that those whom God has created, and even many whom He has delivered, will not hearken unto His voice? The truth is, we are a most ungrateful, unthankful, and unappreciative people. We refuse to acknowledge the goodness and graciousness of God.

Isaiah chapter 1 is so illustrative of exactly where we are today. God says: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger. They are gone away backward.” Notice again: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”

Every dumb animal that we call dumb recognizes its owner. They know who feeds them. If you do not believe that, come to the farm and let me call my cows. If you stand in their way, you will get run over, because they are coming when I call. They not only know my voice; they know where the feed comes from.

I remember as a boy seeing my dad drive into the cow pasture in his truck. Those cows could be scattered hither and yon, but when he stopped that truck, almost 200 cows would gather around him, because they knew who fed them and knew his voice. This is what God said: “But my people don't know. They don't consider.” The reality is simply this today: we are a sinful, disobedient, rebellious, and wicked people.

We claim to be Christians and revel in the fact that we are a Christian nation, and at the same time we are in the deepest rebellion and apostasy against our Lord and against His law. We claim to be His, and yet we do not want Him. We claim to be the people of the book, and yet we never read it and never study it. We claim to be His children, yet we will not hear and will not obey. We claim to be His servants as preachers, but we will not preach and teach the whole counsel of God.

I was reading this morning in the book of Jeremiah. I am probably going to be preaching a message in the not too distant future titled “Teaching Rebellion.” God was condemning a false prophet, and God killed him. He said, “Because he taught rebellion against the Lord.” So it is possible to teach rebellion.

The reality is very clear. We really do not want God. We do not want to repent, be holy, be godly, or be obedient. We love our lust, our flesh, the pride of life, and our material possessions. We love

everything more than we love the Lord. We are idolaters in the worst sense of the word, because we profess to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, and we really and truly only worship ourselves and our lusts.

In Colossians 3 and verse 5, covetousness is idolatry. God says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Jeremiah 44 and verse 2 says, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah.”

"And, behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, neither they, ye, nor your fathers." God said, "Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate."

So God refers to idolatry in specific and sin in general as that abominable thing which He hates. God hates idolatry because it is a denial of His person and a usurpation of His throne rights. Each time you and I violate the law of God, we do so by first violating the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." In that, we dethrone God and enthrone ourselves.

Ralph Venning, an old Puritan, wrote a book entitled The Plague of Plagues, concerning sin. Listen to what he writes: "Sin, first of all, sin is contrary to all the names and attributes of God. It sets itself in opposition to them all. It deposes the sovereignty of God as much as in it lies. It will not that the King of kings should be on the throne and govern this world which He has made. It was by this instinct that Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice and let Israel go? I know no Lord above me. I will not let Israel go.' The voice and language of our sin is, 'Our lips are our own. Who is Lord over us?'"

"It was from hence that the Jews of old said, 'We are lords; we will come no more to thee.' Thus it attempts to dethrone God.

"Secondly, listen to this: Sin, it denies God's all-sufficiency, as if there was not contentment and satisfaction enough to be had in the enjoyment of God, but that vanity and wickedness had more pleasure and profit than He, whose ways are all pleasantness, and whose service is the health of man. Every prodigal who leaves a father's house says, in effect, 'It's better to be elsewhere.'"

Sin denies the all-sufficiency of God. Anytime I say, "Well, I want that," when it is contrary to God and contrary to His law, what I am saying in essence is, "God, You are insufficient to satisfy me. I must have that sin. I must have that lust. That will satisfy me when You cannot." Thus, sin is not only a denial of God's sovereignty; it is a denial of God's all-sufficiency.

Thirdly, he says, "It challenges the justice of God and dares God to do His worst. It provokes the Lord to jealousy and tempts Him to wrath."

If I had in this room a 6'4", 250-pound martial artist who was absolutely the best in fighting, in health, and in everything, would some of you come up, slap him in the face, spit in his face, and say, "I dare you to jump on me"? You would not be so stupid. He would tear you apart. None of us would do anything like that. And yet we will thumb our nose at God. We will challenge God and dare God to judge us. That is what sin does. It challenges God: "God, I do not believe You. Let us see what You can do. Let us see if You will really slap me down." I am not interested in tempting Him like that.

Sin disowns God's omniscience: “Fools say they, God does not see, nor does the Most High regard.” Most people think that God does not really see their sins and, consequently, that they will not be judged for them. Sin also despises the riches of His goodness, turns His grace into wantonness, and makes bold with God and sin because grace abounds.

In short, sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love. It is the upbraiding of His providence, the scoff of His promise, and the reproach of His wisdom. As it is said of the man of sin, who is made up of sin, it opposes and exalts itself above all that is called

God and above all that God has called, so that it is as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing itself as if it were God.

In essence, sin dethrones God and enthrones itself. No wonder God says, “Oh, do not that abominable thing which I hate.” Rebellion therefore merits only the judgment and justice of God. One of the worst judgments God could pass upon us is to leave us to ourselves. Psalm 81:11 says, “But my people would not hearken unto my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels.”

God does not have to rage in arms against us to destroy us. All He has to do is leave us to ourselves, and we will destroy ourselves. The reality is that America is on a collision course with the divine hand of judgment. We have thumbed our collective noses at God, denounced Him, denied Him, ridiculed Him, mocked Him, hated Him, and turned from Him. And what is God doing? He is leaving us to our own lust.

Now we have a president who proclaims June as Transgender Month. Reality is going to set in. God slaps us down, and we begin to understand Deuteronomy 28. We have seen the reality of that which was—redemption in verse 10—and the reality of that which is—rebellion in verses 11 and 12. Very quickly, consider the reality of that which could be: revival. In verse 13 God says, “Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!” What would have been the result?

Point 3: The Reality of Revival (Psalm 81:13-16)

"I should have soon subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him, but their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."

Think about all of that for which most Christians are really striving. You could actually say, think about that which most unsaved and yet ethical worldly people are striving for. Most people, regardless whether they are saved or unsaved, want peace. They

want provision. They want prosperity. They want protection. They want preservation.

But do you realize that all of those things are only found in Jesus Christ? They're not found in politics, government, socialism, communism, Marxism, or any other ism. They're certainly not found in either the Republican or the Democratic parties. These things are fruits, and they are spiritual fruits. They can only be found in faith and obedience.

Look in Micah chapter 4, verses 3 and 4. Just notice that our Lord is in the context: "And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

So here's the peace and the prosperity that we're looking for. "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

Now God says, look, if you want peace and prosperity and provision, preservation, it's found in obedience to Me. I really love that illustration, every man sitting under his own vine and under his own fig tree. I love figs, and I've got plenty of fig trees. Sometimes I get discouraged because they only come in the last of June and then July, and then they're gone. But God says obviously here this would be His blessing.

Now, let me show you what could be with faith and obedience. Psalm 85, verse 4: "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease."

"Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" There is an ecclesiastical or corporate revival. "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation. I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints. But let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."

If we want glory to dwell in our land, if we want to be revived, awakened, and turned, it has to be by the grace of God. We must turn, and He must turn us. He must give us grace and mercy, repentance, and a reviving. Glory will only dwell in our land when we have repented and turned back to the Lord. There is a corporate, congregational reviving, but a personal reviving comes from God as well.

In Psalm 138:7, David says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me." He says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me."

We often think and pray, "Lord, send us a revival. We need an ecclesiastical revival. We need a national revival." That is true. But all of that ecclesiastical and national revival begins with individuals, because the nation is made up of individuals, and the Church is made up of individuals. David says, "Lord, revive me."

Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy."

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. God says, “I'm holy and I dwell in the high and holy place, but I also dwell in the hearts of the humble and contrite ones to revive them.” While we pray, “Lord, revive Thy people,” we can also pray, “Lord, revive me.”

In Habakkuk chapter 3, verse 2, Habakkuk says, “O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.” So God can, by His infinite grace, revive His work.

Spurgeon said, “Pastors are to be shepherds to feed the sheep. If we do not teach and preach the whole counsel of God, we will become clowns to entertain the goats.” That is just about where we are today. Obviously, we need to pray, “Revive Thy work.”

When you look at Psalm 81, especially this latter part where God says, “Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!” what would have happened? God said, “I should have soon subdued their enemies, turned my hands against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves. I would have fed them with the finest of the wheat and with the honey out of the rock.” In other words, God said, “If you had just obeyed Me, all of these blessings, all of these benefits would be yours.”

Have you ever really considered the blessings and benefits that you are missing, and that your family is missing, from your lack of faith and obedience to God? Have you ever considered what your church is missing? Have you ever considered what our nation is missing?

Applications: Thankfulness, Repentance, and Considering Lost Blessings

The truth of the matter is this: We can change our lives, our churches, and even our nations by the grace of God through obedience to Him and His Word. All this would be ours if we would simply obey. We are never going to have these things apart from Him and apart from faith and obedience.

We must first of all be thankful, grateful, and rejoice in the fact that our Lord's salvation is an objective reality. It is history. It is fact.

As He said in John 19, “It is finished.” There is not one thing that we can add to His salvation, and not one thing that we can take away. The only thing that we can do is rejoice in Him, trust in Him, love Him, serve Him, honor Him, and be thankful for His salvation. I have often thought, “What if I had been born in another country? What if I had been born to unbelieving parents?” God in His infinite grace and mercy placed us where we would hear the gospel. He gave us faith and repentance that we might embrace Jesus Christ. We should be thankful for that.

Secondly, our sins—personal, ecclesiastical, familial, or national—must be dealt with, and we must turn from our sins and disobediences. David prayed, “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy

face to shine; and we shall be saved." Again, "Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." And again, "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." How will we be saved? Only when God turns us. In Psalm 85:4, he said, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease." Our hope is only in the grace and mercy of God.

The third application is this: We need to genuinely consider all the blessings and benefits that we are missing because of our sin and disobedience. We think, "I want that lust. I want that desire. That will satisfy me." But it does not. The only One who can genuinely satisfy is the Lord. When we are obedient to Him, He puts all these blessings upon us. When you read Deuteronomy 28, you cannot outrun the curses of God. Neither can you outrun the blessings of God.

We need to understand the reality of that which was—His redemption; the reality of that which is—our rebellion; and the reality of that which could be—a real, genuine revival and awakening where we could again enjoy the blessings and benefits of God. Reality is what God says it is, not what man desires.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth, and ask, Lord, that You would indeed, as David prayed, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved." Turn us individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. Help us see Your reality, the only reality there is, and give us grace to serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 25

Rejected And Forsaken

September 30, 2016

Introduction: The Pain of Rejection

Turn in your Bibles today to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 7. Some of you may have received this outline, but I have never preached this message here. I did preach it to our people in Waycross about a month ago, and I was thinking this morning that it probably needs to be dealt with. Most of you are quite aware of where we really are in this land today, but I want to show you a theological concept that most people have never really considered. Look in Jeremiah 7 and verse 29. Just one verse; we will come back and get the context.

God says, “Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up lamentation on thy places. For the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath.” The words “rejected” and “forsaken” sound ominously hurtful and despicable to all who hear them. When we hear these words, we cannot help but think of men and women who have rejected and forsaken their spouses. I have known couples who had been married anywhere from thirty to fifty years, and for some reason one simply forsakes and leaves the other.

I suppose that is the apex of hurt, disappointment, and embarrassment, as well as a sense of inability and frustration in human relations. I cannot conceive of anything more hurtful. It is not only men who leave their wives; some wives leave their husbands as well. Alice and I have often laughed at this in one sense of the word, saying that when some people reach a certain age, they just go stark-raving crazy. They are no longer concerned about their spouses, their family, or anything else, but only themselves and their desires.

I have known women who walked out on their dying husbands and left them to die alone. Likewise, I have known men who left their sickly wives, divorced them, and ran off and married a younger, healthier woman. Coping with such tragic rejection, even within marriage vows, is quite difficult, to say the least. It is probably one of the most difficult things anyone could ever face.

The individual who is forsaken has to deal with many issues. They begin asking themselves, “Am I a horrible person? What is wrong with me? Why cannot I sustain a healthy relationship?” Sometimes it literally takes a year or two before they recover their self-confidence and their ability to communicate and socialize.

But the point I am trying to make is this: it is strange that while we mourn over and are concerned about forsaking and rejection in a human relationship, seemingly such rejection and forsaking from a divine perspective does not bother us. When is the last time you heard anyone proclaim fear and mortification over the fact that our sins separate us from God? When have you heard anyone mourn or be concerned about a theological or divine rejection? When have you heard anyone complain with frustration and discouragement that God simply could not be found? When you think about forsaking from a theological position, may I remind you that this was what sent horror into the divine soul of the Son of God.

For in Psalm 22:1 it was prophesied, and, of course, fulfilled in Matthew 27, where He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And why art thou so far from the voice of my roaring?” It was deep in His heart and soul. David prayed in Psalm 38:1, “Forsake me not, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me.”

Now, it is certainly not God who is unfaithful to His covenant, because Scripture tells us that He is indeed the faithful God. What has happened? Isaiah 59:1–2 shows us: “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

It cannot be stated more clearly. The problem is not with the Lord. His hand is not shortened; His ear is not heavy. No, it is your iniquities and your sins that have separated you and hidden His face from you. Consider also 2 Chronicles 12:5, and then chapter 24. The testimony is that the Lord is faithful; it is His people who, through their sins, experience separation and rejection.

"Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak." In other words, you forsook me, so I forsook you. And in 2 Chronicles chapter 24 and verse 20, we read: "And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you."

If you will go back in your Bible to Jeremiah chapter 7, this is exactly what has happened: the people have forsaken God. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these." Do not depend upon the remnant, the artifacts, whatever you have around you, or your religiosity. "For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in

the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit."

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 7:9-23 (KJV)

"Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord. But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh.

But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all

the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not,

Nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: but they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, "This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth. Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath."

Biblical Basis for Divine Rejection

Do you realize that God's rejection of persons may be singular and individual? What do I mean by that? Romans 9:13 says, "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." So God chose Jacob and rejected Esau. In 1 Samuel 15:23, Samuel said to Saul, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee." That is singular and individual.

Secondly, God's rejection of persons may be what you and I would call governmental and vocational. In 1 Samuel 16:1, God said, "I have rejected him from being king." That is a vocational rejection.

God's rejection can also be governmental. In Hosea 4:6, everybody can quote the first part: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." But then he goes on to say, "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me." So that is a vocational rejection.

Then you have to stop and think. In Numbers 16, God rejected Dathan, Abiram, and Korah. Then, of course, God also rejected Eli and his house in 1 Samuel 2. God's rejection can be individual and

singular; it can be governmental and vocational. Thirdly, God's rejection of persons may be societal, national, and generational.

This passage in Jeremiah 7—look in verse 28: "But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation." Then, if you skip down to verse 29, the latter part says, "for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath." God oftentimes does indeed reject an entire society, an entire nation, or an entire generation.

In 2 Kings 17:20, we read, "And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight." How many did he reject? He rejected all the seed of Israel.

In Jeremiah 6:30, the context concerns Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeremiah is prophesying to Judah and Jerusalem: "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." And in Jeremiah 7:29, he says, "for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath."

The Hebrew word for "generation" here is translated as "generation" 133 times in our Bibles. But the Hebrew word actually means a period, an age, generation, or a period of time, or those who are living during that period of time. Hence, it could also refer to a society or a nation. So, God here has rejected the generation of His wrath.

In Jeremiah 7:2, God tells Jeremiah, “Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord.” He is talking to the Judahites, all the people in the southern kingdom, and to all of Israel who would come to worship there as well.

In verse 12, He says, “But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.” God says, You want an illustration of what it looks like to be forsaken and rejected? Go to My place that was in Shiloh.

The Example of Shiloh

In verse 14, He says, “Therefore will I do unto this house”—that is, the temple—“which is called by my name, wherein ye trust”—they did not trust in God. They trusted in the temple—“and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.” God said, I am going to do to this temple exactly what I did to Shiloh.

In Jeremiah 26:6, God again says, “Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.”

Shiloh was where the tabernacle was first set up when the children of Israel came into the land of Canaan. It was where Joshua and the elders divided the land for possession to the children of Israel. It was also where God's ministry and worship were neglected and perverted under the hands of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. Thus idolatry, fornication, corruption, perverseness, and rebellion flourished at Shiloh.

Psalm 78 gives a further account of what Israel did to God: “For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.”

“When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand.” God said that He forsook the tabernacle at Shiloh and would have nothing to do with it. Why? Because the people had forsaken God. They had turned to idolatry, corruption, and rebellion, doing their own thing. In Jeremiah chapter 7, from verse 3 through verse 29, we see exactly the same thing: a society, a nation, a generation of people who had forsaken God and His worship and turned to idolatry, corruption, rebellion, and their own way.

Look in Jeremiah chapter 8 and verse 6. Jeremiah had been preaching to the people, and he said, “I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.” No man repented of his wickedness, saying, “What have I done?” Interestingly, our day is much like

Jeremiah's day. Hardly anyone acknowledges sin. Very few actually admit to sin, confess his sin, or even recognize his sin.

Parallels to Modern Society

Stop and think about this. We are living in a generation when anything goes and everything goes. "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" Instead, "every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." When a horse is excited—and I have been on a fast horse in my life—you can hardly believe how fast it runs. My horse could run so fast that the tears would come out of your eyes and go back. She could start off so fast that, if you were not holding on, you would be on the ground. So what is God saying? Everyone turns to his own course like a furious, agitated horse, caring less about the consequences, who is involved, or what is involved.

This is what our society wants. Look at and analyze our society and our generation today—individually, corporately, and even governmentally. We are absolutely corrupt. Our own government not only condones but subsidizes and magnifies sodomy, transgenderism, and a host of other perversions and sins. It not only subsidizes them; it legalizes them. If you have been reading anything on the educational front, you know that they are now taking kindergartners and first graders and teaching them the transgender lifestyle and that everything is acceptable if somebody is a sodomite. So-and-so has two mommies; so-and-so has two daddies. Is it any wonder that most people in this day and time cannot distinguish right from wrong? Look at what they have been taught all their lives.

One of the problems in our generation is the same problem Jeremiah faced: we have an idolatrous civil government. Look in Psalm 94, verses 20 and 21: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" Note the word "throne," meaning a government, a power, or authority. The question concerns a throne of iniquity—a wicked government and authority. Shall that wicked civil government have fellowship with God when it frames mischief by law? In the Bible, "mischief" is another word for sin. So the question is, shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with

What does God do when that wicked civil government makes sin legal? The answer is no, because Psalm 94:21 says, “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.”

Why would our government condone, promote, and praise abortion, sodomy, a transgender lifestyle, pedophilia, socialism, fascism, communism, and Marxism? Can there possibly be a logical reason why they are doing and promoting these things? Why are churches doing some of the same things? Why are corporations doing the same thing? Is there an answer? Yes, and it is very simple. The reason we are in the mess that we are in today in America is the same reason Judah and Jerusalem were in their mess in Jeremiah’s day.

Jeremiah 9:13 gives the answer: “And the Lord saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; but have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them: therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. And I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.”

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come: and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion,”

"How are we spoiled? we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out." Why did their dwellings cast them out? Why were they confounded, confused, and spoiled? The answer comes in verse 13: "Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them."

Man has to have a standard—an objective standard, something outside himself. When you discard God's law as the objective

standard, then anything goes. If God's law is no more, and Gary wants to do whatever Gary wants to do, who can say it is wrong? If James wants to do what James wants to do, who can say it is wrong? There would be no objective standard. Mama might say it is wrong, but the reason she would say that is because she has an objective standard.

This is like an interview I heard years ago. We were in a motel, and I was flipping through the channels trying to find some news. The talk-show host was interviewing a pretty teenage girl who was already a movie star. She was living with a married man—another woman's husband. The host asked her, "Well, don't you think that's wrong?" I have never forgotten her answer: "It may be wrong for other people, but it's all right for me. I'm a law to myself. I do what I want to do. God's law does not apply to me."

That is exactly where we are today. I hope you are beginning to understand why Jeremiah 7:29 says, "For the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath." In Isaiah 34:5, they are called "the people of my curse." If you think for one minute that God is not serious about what He says—that He is going to forsake the generation of His wrath—look in Jeremiah 23. He is speaking to the same people. Beginning with verse 39, He says, "Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you,

God says, “Behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.” Thus, when you look at Jeremiah 7:29, God is forsaking and rejecting the generation of His wrath.

What happens to a society, a nation, or a generation that God rejects and forsakes? Go back to Psalm 78, because God says, “I’m gonna do to this house, to this temple, I’m gonna do to this generation, to this society, to this nation, exactly what I did to my house in Shiloh.”

Consequences of Being Forsaken

Psalm 78:58: “For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.” What is God doing? He is destroying the people, the generation of Israel. He is delivering them over to destruction.

Read the book of Judges. Every time the people committed idolatry and sin and rebelled against God, He delivered them into the hands of their enemies—sometimes seven years, sometimes fourteen years, sometimes longer. Then the people began to cry, beg, and repent, and God would send a judge, a savior.

In Leviticus 26, God told them exactly what would happen if they rebelled. Beginning at verse 14, He tells His people, “But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;

SCRIPTURE READING - Leviticus 26:15-17 (KJV)

> and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies:

“They that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.” If you analyze verse 16 and try to make an application, look at the sicknesses and diseases we have in our land. I am not saying that cancer is entirely new, but there are more cases today than there have been since I was a boy. You hardly ever heard of people dying of

cancer when I was a boy. I am sure some did, somewhere. So God says, “I’m gonna send all this upon you.”

Then He said, “You’re gonna sow your seed in vain, and your enemy shall eat it.” Do our enemies have to invade us in order to eat up our gain? Of course not. Look at all the tax monies being confiscated and given to the enemies of God, with all their sins being promoted. God said, “I’ll set my face against you, and you shall be slain before your enemies.”

Try to have a war without a just cause and without God involved in it, and see what happens to you. With all of our corrupt, evil, wicked politicians trying to poke Putin and Russia in the eye, just hang on. We have sired a generation that is so pathetic it is unbelievable. This is what is going to happen. In Deuteronomy 28, verses 25 and 26, it is the same thing: if you do not obey God, you are going to fall. It is just that simple.

So here is what you have to ask: Did God fulfill His judgments? Did God fulfill His promises? The answer is yes. He used the Babylonians to take care of Judah and Jerusalem, for instance. Look in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 36, and notice particularly what is said when God sent the Babylonians. Beginning with verse 15: “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age:

He gave them all into his hand. Then he talks about all the vessels and all the temple that was destroyed as well. Did God deliver them into his hand? Yes. He used the Assyrians to judge the ten northern tribes, Israel. In Isaiah chapter 10, verses 5 and 6, He said, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the

spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." He called them "the people of my wrath."

God's Immutable Judgment

So my question is this: Does God change? The answer is no. God is immutable. He does not change, and consequently His judgments do not change. The same God that took care of Judah and Jerusalem, the same God that took care of Israel, is the same God that will take care of America. If you believe in American exceptionalism, just wait and see. You cannot thumb your nose at God and get by with it. We are already under the judgment of God. Most people simply do not recognize it.

Jeremiah 23:33 says, "And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the Lord? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the Lord." What burden? What is the burden of the Lord? God said, "I don't have one. I got rid of you. I'll forsake you."

Pastor Bob McCurry, a friend of mine for many years, used to publish a written letter called "The Temple Times," now electronic and called "The Wake-Up Herald." Brother Bob is now in his 80s. He and Evelyn were married for 67 years, and he preached for probably nearly 70 years. In one of his articles in the Wake-Up Herald, titled "Asleep," he wrote: "There is nothing more to say. There is nothing but destruction to come on this once great nation. We have put the enemy into public office to destroy us from within and still the churches are silent. I know from my study of history that the churches were once a power in America. No longer. They've been infiltrated by the enemies of Jesus Christ and the gospel perverted. And while all this was going on, Christians sat in their pews asleep." Is he right? Of course he is right.

So you have to ask this question: What is it like to be rejected and forsaken by God as a society, as a nation, as a generation, even as a church or as an individual? The answer is nothing less than destruction and devastation. You remember, I preached a message many years back that I entitled "The Perfect Enemy." Of course, the perfect enemy is God Himself.

He knows all of our weaknesses. He knows all of our plans. He knows everything. How can you fight against someone who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent? It is impossible. And yet men try to fight against Him. Have you ever stopped to think that, if God really wanted to destroy us, all He has to do is leave us alone, and we will destroy ourselves? But can you imagine what it will be like when God comes in arms against us because we are the generation of His wrath?

The Terror of Divine Wrath

"God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

Call to Repentance

Which leads me to this: Individually, corporately, societally, governmentally, nationally, if we want to avert the judgment of God, we must repent. We must repent. In repentance, we turn back to Him. We evidence that our repentance is true and genuine by obedience to Him and by worshipping Him and Him alone.

So the point of this message is very simple. If you look around at our society, our nation, and our government, or at individual lives, we have reached the place where it is either return or burn, repent or perish. It is just that simple.

When it comes to repentance, obedience, and worship, we have to start with ourselves. I might count Steve a good friend and a dear brother in Christ, just as I would all of you. But I cannot repent for him. I cannot live for him. I cannot make him do anything. The only

one over whom I have control is this one. If I am not willing to repent and obey, why should I expect you to repent and obey? Why should I expect you to do what is right if I am unwilling to do what is right myself?

We have to come back to individual responsibility. Once we have individual responsibility, then we can say that there is family responsibility, corporate responsibility, societal responsibility, governmental responsibility, and national responsibility. But it all has to start with number one. Our families, churches, society, government, and nation are made up of individuals. If individuals are not willing to do what is right, we must determine in our hearts that we are going to do what is right. I know one thing for sure: I do not want to stand before His fury and indignation, nor be the recipient of His righteous anger and vengeance. Therefore, I must personally repent, be obedient in my life, and worship Him and Him alone.

What did He say concerning these people whom He rejected and forsook? “The generation of his wrath.” And He identified that as a nation. I think it puts our predicament, our situation, in more of a theological light than thinking, “Well, this is just happening.” Yes, it is happening, but it is because God is either leaving us to ourselves or getting ready to judge us mightily.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We pray and ask for Thy grace and mercy. We do know, Lord, that Judah and Jerusalem were classified as the generation of Thy wrath and the people of Thy curse. Thou abhorred them and set them aside. Thou didst to Judah and Jerusalem exactly what Thou didst to Shiloh. Thou art God, Thou art immutable, and Thou dost not change. Give us wisdom to know what is happening. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind to understand and comprehend. Give us, Lord, a heart that beats for Thee, that loves Thee, worships Thee, adores Thee, and stands for Thee in Thy truth. Help us to be obedient in every area of our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 26

There Is A Price To Pay For Forsaking God

January 12, 2017

A Price to Pay for Forsaking God

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 28:1-9 (KJV)

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. But he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover, he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria, and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel,

who smote him with a great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. And Zechariah, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he delivered them into your hand, and you have slain them in a rage that reacheth up to heaven. And now you purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you. But are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?"

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 28:15-24 (KJV)

Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which you have taken captive of your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, and said unto them, You shall not bring in the captives hither, for whereas we have offended against the Lord already, you intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass. For our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation.

And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren. Then they returned to Samaria.

> At that time did King Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Aijalon, and Gederoth, and Shokoh with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also with the villages thereof, and they dwelt there. For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord. And Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the Lord, and out of the house of the king, and out of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria, but he helped him not. In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord, this is that King Ahaz.
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> For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him. And he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord.

And he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. In every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers. The rest of his acts and all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem. But they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel, and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Introduction: The Question for the Nation

In light of the new year approaching, here is the question: Where are we, and where will we go as a nation? Shall we continue down the path of destruction, or will we return to our Christian foundations? There has been a glimmer of hope since Trump was elected. However, he continues to fill his cabinet with the very ones who have

been leading us down the wrong path for decades. A few good choices have elicited a small glimmer of hope, but overall it looks like it is going to be the same as always.

Each of us should understand by now that salvation is not in politics or politicians. There is no man who is a Savior except the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to give you a couple of articles in light of what I am going to teach from 2 Chronicles chapter 28. The first was written by Susan Duclos of the All News Pipeline, and its title is “We are facing the most important battle of all at the most dangerous moment in history.” The article shows what we are up against and cautions against optimism in the magic fix of Trump’s victory over Clinton. Here is one paragraph:

The Illusion of Political Salvation

“We at ANP are noting a lot of optimism from investors, with stocks soaring, to economic confidence reaching new highs, to small business owners, to household spending, and even prepping has hit a multi-year low. All the articles I am reading are crediting the election of Donald Trump as reason for all this optimism. But as much as I hate to rain on everyone’s parade, now is the most dangerous time in history, not a time to assume just because one man was elected, all the wrongs will be made right. The failing economy will automatically just magically fix itself.”

Jeremiah Johnson also wrote this: "The globalists need the illusion of the two-party system to enable a reprieve in the minds of the people with the rise of a Bush or a Trump. But the reprieve is merely an illusion. If these Marxist traitors force their agenda on the people all at once, there would have been a revolution in its inception. They alternate. Destroy the society and the culture to the maximum under a Democrat administration, and then scale back a bit under a Republican administration, while still nipping away at the edges with an act here or a piece of legislation there." This is very perceptive.

Opposition to Truth and the Threat of Revolution

With that understanding, we must also consider that many today in our country are absolutely opposed, not merely to Christianity or the

Constitution, but basically to truth. They are dead set on overthrowing all of the recent changes. Mike Adams, known as the Health Ranger, wrote an article titled "The Next American Revolution Begins January the 20th." A portion of it reads: "The anti-American, communist-leaning website DisruptJ20.org—that means Disrupt January the 20th, which is the inauguration day—is openly organizing a popular uprising against the legitimate new administration of the United States of America. January the 20th, 2017, Inauguration Day, is being targeted as a day for people to block, obstruct, disrupt, and do whatever they can to prevent the onslaught that is going to happen with Donald Trump," said alt-left organizer Michael Moore. The Disrupt J20 website calls on all people of good conscience to join in disrupting the ceremonies.

A Disrupt J20 tweet, relishing in the kind of delusional paranoia that now typifies the mentally ill left in America, says the effort is being waged to confront white supremacy and other forms of oppression. Disrupt J20 is a thinly veiled call for a communist uprising and the overthrow of the Trump administration. The effort is, in reality, a communist uprising and a coup attempt disguised as a peaceful protest. Yet the website describes it in military terms, characterizing it as a bold mobilization against the inauguration of Donald Trump on January 20, 2017.

The site says, "If you can't make it to Washington, D.C. on January the 20th, the organization encourages you to join the communist uprising wherever you might live. Take to the streets wherever you are," clearly inciting mob violence everywhere across America. This is totally against the law, but nothing is being done.

Will the American people sit idly by and allow the Communists to overthrow the Constitution, Christianity, and the states? Will it really take another revolution to awaken the American people? The truth of the matter is that we have already forsaken God. If this comes down as the left wants it to, we will be driven further from God and further from His law.

America Has Forsaken God

The title of the message is, “There Is a Price to Pay in Forsaking God.” America, like Israel of old, has forsaken our God. We left the

Mayflower Compact and the Constitution. We have mocked and ridiculed the Word of God. We have turned our backs upon the founding fathers of this country and the principles for which they stood. We have also rebelled against biblical Christianity. Anything and everything that resembles a covenant, especially a covenant in relationship to God and His Christ, we have broken willingly and readily. It is like Hosea said concerning Israel in Hosea 8:7: “They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.”

As you can tell from the life and reign of King Ahaz—and, I might add, the politician Ahaz—if Trump turns out to be another demagogue and we allow further deterioration, then we might as well batten down the hatches, for our whirlwind is going to come in power and strength.

The sins of King Ahaz are outlined specifically in 2 Kings 16. When we come to 2 Chronicles 28, it does not rehash all those sins in detail; instead, it details the punishment of Ahaz for his sins. The depiction is one of holy indignation against Ahaz and the punishment God inflicts upon him and his people because they have forsaken God and His covenant.

Ahaz was humiliated and suffered, but the sad truth is that his people suffered far more than he did. Matthew Henry, commenting on 2 Chronicles 28, said: “The people suffered by these judgments. Their blood was shed, their country wasted, their families ruined. For when they had a good king, though they did corruptly, yet then his goodness sheltered them. But now that they had a bad one, all the defense has departed from them, and an inundation of judgments broke in upon them. Those that knew not their happiness in the foregoing reign were taught to value it by the miseries of this reign.”

When you consider King Ahaz, the opportunity he had before him, and what he did with it, it is absolutely astounding. You may not understand what was bequeathed to King Ahaz. Everything that was bequeathed unto him, he squandered and wasted. So you are going to have to ask, will Trump turn out to be another Ahaz or a Jeroboam? Trump now has the opportunity to drain the swamp and overthrow the money changers. But will he do so?

King Ahaz was the son of King Jotham and the grandson of Uzziah. Uzziah and Jotham were godly kings who built their reigns upon God, obedience to His covenant, and obedience to His law. In 2 Chronicles 27:6, concerning Ahaz's father Jotham, we read: "So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." His grandfather was Uzziah, who reigned for 52 years. Jotham reigned for 16 years, and Ahaz reigned for 16 years. Thus, in 16 years, Ahaz overthrew and destroyed everything his father and grandfather had built in 68 years. Ahaz had an excellent example to follow, but he turned out to be an idolater, a tyrant, and an imbecile.

Ahaz's Perverse Religion

First, note that Ahaz followed a perverted religion. You will find that in the first four verses:

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. But he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover, he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also, and burned incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree."

We start with a negative in verse 1: the Bible tells us that he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father. He was a transgressor. He was disobedient. He was rebellious. He was sinful. He violated not only the covenant, but the commandments of God as well.

All men are religious in nature. Every man serves some god. It may not be the one true and the living God. It may be the god of money, the god of prosperity, the god of pleasure, or the god of self, but all will worship a god. When someone turns from the one true and the living God, it does not mean that he ceases to be religious. It means that he has turned to another god.

Verse 2 gives a positive description: “For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim.” Ahaz was positively an idolater. It is important to understand that the test God lays out as to whether or not we are faithful to Him is in relationship to His law. When an individual refuses to obey God’s law, he is refusing to obey God. When he turns from God’s law, he is turning from God Himself.

In 2 Kings 17:7–8, the Bible says, “For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods.” How do we know that they feared other gods? What was the evidence? Not merely that God said so—that would certainly be sufficient—but verse 8 gives the evidence: “And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel, and in the statutes of the kings of Israel, which they had made.”

God says that the evidence they were idolaters was that they rejected His law and walked in the laws of the heathen and in the laws of the kings of Israel. When you look at Ahaz, the God of Israel meant nothing to him. He rejected God, and he rejected God’s law.

However, he did worship Baal, and he did worship Molech. He worshipped all these false gods. Verse 3 says, “Moreover, he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.” The same thing is recorded in 2 Kings 16:3–4: he burnt his children in the fire.

There were two ways to sacrifice children to Molech. Molech was a huge, hollow, solid brass statue with his arms extended. The priest would go inside and build a roaring fire, making the brass red-hot and glowing. They would then take a baby and lay it in the palms of his hands. Since his arms were raised, the baby would roll down them into the fire and be consumed. That was a sacrifice to Molech, and Molech worship was a state religion.

The other way was for the priest of Molech to build a fire, take the baby in his hands, and pass it over the fire. This was called purification, or dedicating the baby to the service of Molech. King

Ahaz took his children and burned them in the fire. The very first thing we find, then, is that Ahaz was perverted in his religion.

He followed a perverse religion. Christianity is the true religion; all others are perversions. If you will not follow God and His Word, then you will follow anything or anyone. We reject God and His Word at our peril. Second Thessalonians 2:11–12 says, “And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” If you will not believe the truth, you will believe a lie. If you will not follow righteousness, you will follow unrighteousness. The rejection of God and His law carries its own punishment. Men who reject God and His law believe a lie, and they will be damned.

For a covenant people, there is always a judgment in time and history as well. Remember when Elijah said, “There is not going to be rain or dew these years but according to my word.” For three and a half years, God sent a drought upon Israel. When Elijah returned to the country and faced Ahab, Ahab asked, “Art thou the troubler of Israel?” In 1 Kings 18:8, Elijah responded, “I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.” In other words, who is the troubler of Israel? It is you, certainly not me. Idolatry troubles a nation and angers God because God is a jealous God. Exodus 34:14 says, “For thou shalt worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” One of God's names is Jealous.

That is why He said in Isaiah 42:8, “I am the Lord, and beside me there is no other. I will not give my glory to another, neither my praise to graven images.” When a nation denies God, forsakes His law, and turns from His righteous standards, there will be judgment. Deuteronomy 4:24 says, “For our God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.” God judges a people when they forsake Him. There is always a price to pay in forsaking God.

The very first thing you find about Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28 is that he followed a perverse religion. Secondly, Ahaz was militarily defeated. You will find that in verses 5–15. Verse 5 says, “Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria,

and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them unto Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter."

Ahaz's Military Defeat

Before I go further, let me make this statement: might does not make right. Military armaments, military preparation, and military skill are absolutely worthless when one forsakes God and His law. Our true protection and defense is in God alone. One of my favorite passages is Proverbs 21:31: "The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord." Psalm 33:17 says, "A horse is a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." You could paraphrase that and say that a tank, by its great strength, is not going to deliver anyone. It is vain to trust in your bombers or in anything militarily. Everybody in this room probably could quote Psalm 127:1.

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Thus, what you have in verses 5 through 15 is his military defeated. Do you understand that part and parcel of God's judgment, not only upon a civil ruler but upon a nation, is the fact that they are defeated militarily?

Look back at verse 5: "Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria." God purposely and deliberately handed him over to the king of Syria and the king of Israel.

Now, let me try to answer this question. Verse 5 says, "Wherefore the Lord his God." How could the Lord be called his God when he was an idolater and had rejected God? First, God was his God by right, in the sense that God still had dominion over him. He was a creature, and God has absolute control over every one of His creatures. Secondly, the nation was still in a covenant relationship with God, and he was the king of that nation. Therefore, God is rightly referred to as his God. Moreover, Ahaz probably confessed God to be his God, although in a hypocritical manner. It is like when Jeroboam built those two golden calves. They professed to worship

God but worshiped Him only through the calves. That is why it is referred to as “the Lord his God.”

Secondly, I want to point out that there were two military defeats: one by Rezin, the king of Syria, and one by Pekah, the king of Israel.

2 Kings 16:6 names these two kings: Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath from Ahaz during this particular war. Pekah, the king of Israel, defeated him dramatically as well. Verse 6 shows the defeat: "For Pekah the son of Remaliah, who was king of Israel, slew in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men."

It does not surprise us when we hear that 120,000 people were killed by dropping an atomic bomb on them or by carpet-bombing a city. But when you think about 120,000 men killed with a sword, archery, and spears, you are talking about something up close and personal. One hundred twenty thousand in one day. What was it all the time that we were in Vietnam? Fifty-eight thousand?

Why? Verse 6 says, "For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers."

There is a price to pay for forsaking God. In 2 Chronicles 24:20, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada said to the king and his princes: "And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you."

Ahaz was perverse in his religion, and, secondly, he was defeated militarily. People speak continually about Russia, how powerful they are and how many people they have, and fear that Russia or China will attack us. When you forsake God, it does not take a great nation. Little Cuba could wipe us off the face of the map.

2 Chronicles 28:17-18 says: "And again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Aijalon, and Gederoth, and Shokoh with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages

thereof, and Gimzo also with the villages thereof, and they dwelt there."

A little tiny Edom, and the Philistines, who had been defeated many times, now simply walked in, conquered, and did whatever they wanted to do.

Individuals, families, churches, men in general, and nations cannot prosper when they forsake God and God's law. His judgment rests against them in every way, including military defeat. In 2 Chronicles 12:5, we read: “Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, who happened to be the king of Egypt, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.” Wow! We forsake God, and God forsakes us, turning us over to a country that will militarily defeat us. Look in 2 Chronicles chapter 21 and verse 10.

The Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand. Why? Because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers. The revolutions and rebellions often arise because we have forsaken God.

Look in 2 Chronicles 24 and verse 24: “For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand.” Why? “Because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers, so they executed judgment against Joash.” The Syrians came with a very small company, but God delivered a very great host into their hands.

Do you know what happened in 2 Chronicles 28? Ahaz lost his son, he lost his counselors, and he lost 200,000 people in one day, not counting the 120,000 men who were killed. These 200,000 were captured and taken captive to Samaria. Stop and think about this: 320,000 people—120,000 dead and 200,000 captured.

Here is my point: It is impossible to stand militarily when you forsake God. I do not care about your technology or what armaments you have. Once you forsake God, you are going to be defeated militarily.

Ahaz's Political Shame and Failed Diplomacy

The third thing about Ahaz revealed here as part of his punishment is this: Ahaz was politically shamed. Look, if you would, at 2 Chronicles 28:16: “At the same time did King Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him.” Why? The Edomites were coming in and smiting them, and the Philistines were walking all over him. Ahaz had no control over his own kingdom. He could not function. He could not even stop the smallest kingdoms from attacking him and simply taking what they wanted. He was powerless, impotent, and incompetent. No one feared him, and no one respected him, much like our modern-day Obama.

I still think it is absolutely hilarious. Some time ago, Obama kind of halfway threatened Putin. Putin’s response was, “Should I be afraid of such a skinny man? I wrestle bears.” What kind of respect is that? That is Ahaz. No one respected him. He was sending off for help because all these little countries were coming in and walking all over him. It is amazing.

It was God that brought Judah low for their rebellion against Him. Look at verse 19: “For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel. For he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.”

Now, if you want a real understanding, all you have to do is read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Those two passages contain the blessings and the curses. In those passages, God promises nations and people that, if we obey, He will make us the head; if we disobey, He will make us the tail. Ahaz and Judah were disobeying, and God was making them the tail. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 29:9, “Keep therefore the words of this covenant and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.” If we want to prosper, we obey God; if we do not want to prosper, we disobey God. There is a price to pay in forsaking God; it is just that simple. Second Chronicles 7:22 says, “And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them, therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.”

So obviously, Ahaz not only followed a perverted religion; he was militarily defeated and also politically shamed. He was a failure in foreign diplomacy. Look at verses 20 and 21: “And Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the Lord, and out of the house of the king, and out of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria. But he helped him not.” His alliance with the king of Assyria came to absolutely nothing.

He wanted help, but all he got was trouble and heartache. God had forbidden alliances with the heathen. God had commanded that we make no covenants with them—Deuteronomy chapter 7 and Exodus chapter 34. The Assyrians were known for their ruthlessness as well as their wickedness. Ahaz believed that he could use them and that they would help him, but all it did was cost him, and it cost him his kingdom as well.

Tiglath-Pileser came, but he helped him not. Interestingly, the very first place from which Ahaz stole was the house of the Lord.

A government that is unafraid to steal from God will have no compunction against stealing from its people. Think about it like this: Malachi 3:8 asks, “Will a man rob God?” And God answers, “Yea, ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee?” Then God answers, “In tithes and offerings.” If God considers it theft and robbery not to give Him His tithes and offerings, how much more is it theft and robbery to take that which has already been given to God and dedicated to Him and steal it? How much worse is it to take that which has already been given to Him and dedicated to Him, steal it, and give it to an ungodly king?

And that is exactly what he did. He stole it and gave it to the king of Assyria. He stole it from the house of God and from the princes. A government that steals from God and His people will face the judgment of God, because such actions deny God, His sovereignty, and His right. There is a price to pay for forsaking God. No man and no nation will ever prosper that continually violates the law of God.

Ahaz's Economic Destruction and Further Sin

Fifthly, Ahaz was economically destroyed. Look, if you would, in verse 22: “And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord. This is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him. And he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord. And he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.”

And of course, in the last two verses he dies. Please remember what God said to Joshua and the people in Joshua 1:7: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest." Want to prosper? It is through obedience.

David encouraged Solomon in 1 Kings 2:3: "And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself."

So what did Ahaz do? Instead of obeying God and obeying God's law, he turned from God. In his distress—look at verse 22—"And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." Here is a man who is in trouble. His kingdom is in trouble, his family is in trouble, and everything about him is in trouble. Instead of stopping and thinking, "Why am I in trouble? Could it be that I've forsaken God? Could it be that I'm not obeying God?" he turns more and more to idolatry. He takes the vessels of the house of God and cuts them in pieces, and gives them to Tiglath-Pileser.

Look at verse 24: "And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and

shut up the doors of the house of the Lord." That is, he closed down the temple. Nobody could get in. The temple was closed until his son Hezekiah took control; later there was a great revival under Hezekiah, the doors were opened, and all the trash was cleaned out of the temple. Notice verse 25: "And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers." His economic distress drove him to steal even more from the house of God. It is impossible to prosper when you're dishonoring God or doing that which is contrary to God and His Word. This imbecilic king, when he closed down the house of God, reserved a room in it for the king of Assyria to stay in. You're talking about an imbecile. He was indeed an imbecile.

Ahaz Made Judah Naked

Look again at verse 19 and think about what happened then and what is happening now: “For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel.” This verse sums up everything about Ahaz and his kingdom. It is true that the people were wicked, but Ahaz was extremely wicked, and God brought Judah low because of Ahaz.

What did Ahaz do? “For he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.” God brought Judah low because of her sin and rebellion, yet the leading cause of her demise was King Ahaz. The phrase is that King Ahaz made Judah naked and transgressed sore against the Lord. God brought Judah low because of her sin and rebellion, but the leading cause was King Ahaz. He made Judah naked.

That phrase is important. When one is stripped naked publicly, it is a time of shame, humiliation, contempt, helplessness, and danger. Ahaz made Judah naked as his sin debased the people, and it also exposed them. He made them naked to their shame and exposed them to contempt, as a man is unclothed. He made them naked to their danger, for it exposed them to assaults, as a man is unarmed.

Why could the people not fight against the Edomites or the Philistines? Because they were made naked. They were ashamed and helpless. Aaron made the people of Israel naked to their shame as well when he made the golden calf in Exodus 32:25: “And when

Moses saw that the people were naked, (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies)."

So sin strips men. It disturbs, degrades, and destroys. It does not matter if it is done by an individual, a president, a king, or a government; it still does exactly the same thing. What is happening in our country is that we are being made naked and humiliated. Once they try to take our weapons, we will be unarmed and helpless. Look at 2 Chronicles 29:8: "Wherefore the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes." God delivered them to the trouble they were in. Now look at 2 Chronicles 34:25.

Here is why the judgment was coming: "Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched." Do you understand that God is on the throne? He is absolutely sovereign, yet man is responsible. When our leaders lead us into idolatry, and we follow willingly, we will be judged along with our leaders.

Conclusion: Repent or Perish

If you understand the Bible and history, it all boils down to one simple thing: We must either repent or perish. Where are we going? What road are we going to take? Unless we turn back to God, no matter who is in the White House, it is still going downhill. If everybody else in this country does what is wrong and wicked, determine in your heart that you are going to do what is right, biblical, holy, and godly. You will have to stand when no one else will stand, and do what is right when no one else will do what is right. We will not only be a witness against the enemies of God; we will be a witness to the people of God for that which is right and holy.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace and mercy. We pray that you would teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. Give us grace that we might serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear, and courage to stand and do that which is right. In Jesus Christ's name, amen.

CHAPTER 27

Judgment and Redemption

October 3, 2017

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 1:21-31 (KJV)

"How is the faithful city become a harlot? It was full of judgment. Righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water. Thy princes are rebellious and companions of thieves. Everyone loveth gifts and followeth after rewards. They judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come before them. Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty one of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies. And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning.

"Afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you shall be

> confounded for the gardens that you have chosen. For you shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as a tow, and the maker thereof as a spark. And they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."

Introduction: The Uncommon Pairing of Judgment and Redemption

> When you talk about judgment and redemption, the average Christian does not associate judgment and redemption. We either think of judgment or we think of redemption, but usually we do not think of them together. Usually, when redemption is mentioned, someone merely thinks of an item that has been pawned and then purchased back. When you go to the pawn shop, the item is pawned, money is borrowed, and later the money is brought back plus interest, and the item that was pawned is said to be redeemed. There was no judgment involved, with the exception of the interest, sometimes exorbitant, but everything was restored as it was previously. But when the Bible speaks about judgment and redemption, it speaks in different language. Biblically speaking, judgment and redemption go together.

In fact, I am going to show you later from Scripture that it is almost impossible to have one without the other. The Bible says in verse 27—and this is the text—"Zion shall be redeemed with judgment." The word "redeemed" in our text is the Hebrew word "padah," which literally means to redeem, ransom, rescue, and deliver. It is translated as "redeemed" forty-eight times in our Bibles, as well as "deliver," "ransom," and "rescued." The word "redeemed," or the Hebrew word "padah," is used in Scripture in two senses.

The Hebrew Word 'Padah' and Its Two Senses

It always carries the idea of deliverance from captivity, danger, punishment, slavery, and sin. Sometimes it refers to what we would call deliverance or rescue without a ransom being involved. At other times, it refers to rescue or deliverance where a ransom price is paid. Consider first its use where it is simply translated "delivered."

In Genesis chapter 14, Abraham rescued his nephew Lot. After the rescue, the Bible says, “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered”—there is the same word—“delivered thine enemies into thine hand.” And he gave him tithes of all. In this instance, the Hebrew word “padah” is translated simply as “delivered.”

Then, in Genesis chapter 37 and verse 21, Joseph had been taken and cast into a pit, and his brothers were considering murdering him. Reuben wanted to deliver him, and the Bible says, “And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.”

The word “delivered” there is the same Hebrew word, “padah.” In each of these instances, it is rightly translated as “delivered,” because no ransom was paid. Abraham destroyed his enemies without a ransom price, and Reuben delivered Joseph without a ransom price.

In Hosea, however, the word is used with a ransom price. God instructed Hosea to marry an impure woman, first to show what Israel had done to God and, second, to show the great love that God still had for His people. Hosea 1:2–3 says, “The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.” Hosea and Gomer had several children. But in Hosea 3, Gomer had left him, committing adultery and ending up in the slave market. Hosea went and bought her back, or redeemed her.

Hosea 3:1–3 says, “Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and for an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also

be for thee." Gomer was redeemed; she was bought back out of the slave market.

Here, then, is a picture of redemption in which a price is paid. Normally, one would not concede a judgment in this instance unless it was upon the one who did the purchasing, because it obviously cost Hosea something. Many know that William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. What many probably do not know is that William Booth and his wife also purchased people who were being sold as slaves; they redeemed them in order that they might free them.

The same practice is being carried on even today. There are people being sold into slavery in multiple lands, and people are being redeemed out of slavery. If you want to examine this idea, go to the Internet and type in "modern day slavery and redemption." You will be surprised at how many people are still buying other people back out of slavery; numerous sites will appear on the subject.

In Isaiah chapter 1, redemption is being accomplished upon a people who had previously been redeemed. These people are the Judahites, the people of Judea and of the southern kingdom. Isaiah 1:1 identifies the context: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." We are talking about the Judahites, the southern kingdom, part of the Israelites who had been delivered out of Egypt. Now, of course, they are going to be redeemed again.

The Condition of Judah and Jerusalem

Verses 2 through 15 give an overview of the situation, an overview necessary to understand the truth enunciated in verse 27. God describes Judah and Jerusalem as rebellious children. In verse 2 He says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." Thus Judah and Jerusalem are called rebellious children.

Their sin had basically made them dumber than an animal. Verse 3 says, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” They did not know which side their bread was buttered upon, or who buttered that bread. They were as ignorant as they could be.

Verse 4 identifies Judah and Jerusalem for what they actually were: “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.” It reminds us of what is going on in America today and how this could aptly describe us as well. Verse 5 reveals that these people would not receive correction or chastisement: “Why should ye be stricken any more?”

“Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.” Verse 6 shows how absolutely perverted, depraved, and debauched they were as a nation: “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.”

Verses 7 and 8 show the result that sin, rebellion, and depravity have upon a nation, a society, and a culture. “Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.” That is us. “And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.” In other words, there is just a little space, not much; everything else is besieged and basically destroyed.

To show the absolute extent of the corruption, Isaiah says in verse 9, “Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” God would have been just to destroy all of us, but He did indeed leave us a remnant.

God's Reasoning and the Depths of Apostasy

In verse 10, God is addressing Judah and Jerusalem: “Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye

people of Gomorrah." He is calling the rulers the rulers of Sodom and the people the people of Gomorrah. They were so totally, absolutely corrupt; and, of course, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

To show the wickedness of the people, look at verses 11–15. Although they were enemies of God—sinful, wicked, and rebellious—they continued to observe the ceremonies and sacrifices which God would not acknowledge or accept. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting."

"Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."

So you have to stop and ask this question: Did not God appoint those feasts, solemn days, new moons, and Sabbaths? Of course He did. But these people had turned all of these things into ceremonies and rituals, and their lives were absolutely opposite of what God demanded. God said, "I am not going to have that." Now, when you look at verses 16–20, God tries to reason with an unreasonable people. Look at what He says in verse 16: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well."

"Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

The interesting thing is this: He asked the people to reason with Him. Looking back in verse 5, He asks, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." Usually, a people who ignore the rod will not listen to reason, logic, or argument. He says, in effect, I've tried the rod, and that didn't work. I'll try reasoning; it won't work either, probably. But if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land.

If you refuse and rebel, you'll die; it's just that simple. To show the depths to which Judah and Jerusalem had fallen, look at verse 21: "How is the faithful city become a harlot? It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers." Jerusalem was once faithful, pure, righteous, and obedient. Now God says it is a harlot. It is full of injustice, murder, fraud, deceit, graft, materialistic, unconcerned, and uncompassionate.

The poor, the widow, the fatherless, and the homeless did not matter to any of these people. Their attitude was much like that of individuals today who say, "I'm looking out for number one. It doesn't really bother me about all these other people. I'm just looking out for myself." God calls Jerusalem basically a harlot, full of injustice, unrighteousness, and murder. That pretty well sums up Chicago and Washington, D.C., as well as a lot of other states.

Undoubtedly, there were some righteous people left in Judah and Jerusalem. God always has a remnant. You remember the days of Elijah? When Elijah said, "They've torn down thine altars, and they've destroyed your prophets," and so forth, God told Elijah, "I've got 7,000 that have never bowed the knee to Baal."

Those 7,000 were scattered throughout all of Israel. Even Elijah thought, "There's not any." What is 7,000 compared to an entire nation? But there was a remnant, a small group that was still believing. Even in Ezekiel's day, according to Ezekiel chapter 9 verse 4, there were still some that sighed and cried for the abomination of Jerusalem.

Judgment as the Means of Redemption

But here is an observation to follow in light of what Scripture shows us. In Elijah's time, God did not send a revival. He sent judgment. He sent a drought, a famine, and death. In Ezekiel's time, God did not send a revival. He sent the Babylonian army, and famine, death, and captivity. In each of these instances God sent judgment.

Look at verse 27. God says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." Zion shall be redeemed with judgment. Do you realize we are not going to escape the consequences of our sins? We are not going to escape the consequences of our sins. God may deliver us, but it may be through judgment. Moreover, He says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness."

In other words, those who turn to the Lord, or those who are spared, will be made absolutely righteous. That is, they will be walking in obedience according to God and His Law. They will walk according to His Word. He keeps saying, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts." In other words, there are going to be some who will be made righteous. The promise is not that everyone will respond, but that some will be converted and made righteous through what God brings upon them.

Judgments Teach Righteousness

Isaiah 26:8 says, "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee." Why are they desiring His name and desiring to remember Him? Because of His judgments. "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee."

"With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Not all of them, but some are going to learn righteousness. "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but

they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them."

"Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." Interestingly, he says in verse 9, the latter part, "for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." What inhabitants? He is not talking about the wicked, because he says in verse 10, "let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." There are going to be some who will learn righteousness. What will happen to those who will not learn righteousness, who will not obey, and will not walk according to the Word of God? Isaiah 1:24 says, "Therefore thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies."

God's Enemies Are His Professing People

God says that he is going to ease himself of his adversaries and avenge himself of his enemies. In this context, who are his enemies and who are his adversaries? We are not talking about pagan people or the heathen. We are talking about Judah and Jerusalem, his professing people, a people who claim to be in covenant with him.

They were not in reality. That is why he was rejecting all of their worship and would have received none of their oblations and none of their sacrifices, because they were absolutely wicked and contrary to him. These adversaries and enemies were people in his own nation, in his own group. Isaiah 1 shows how pained and grieved God was because of their sins and rebellions. His patience had been put to the utmost trial, and now God says, "I'm going to ease myself. I'm going to take care of this. I'm going to destroy my enemies."

A similar expression appears in Ezekiel 5:13, where God brings judgment upon his people: "Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I the Lord have spoken it in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them."

Was God comforted by accomplishing His fury upon these people who were so wicked and depraved? Moses gave us this same truth in Deuteronomy 28:63: “And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought.” In other words, if you disobey Him, God calls it an easement when He destroys His enemy. It is a comfort, a rejoicing, when He destroys His enemies. And those enemies happen to be His own people.

Isaiah 63:9 says, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.” Here are the people whom He brought out of the land, who rebelled against Him; and now He has turned to be their enemy and is fighting against them. That is why He said in verse 24, “Therefore thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies,” who happen to be in His own land.

How will God do that? He said, “And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.” When He says, “I will turn my hand,” or, “I will stretch out my hand,” understand that the turning or outstretching of the hand can be for affliction and punishment, or for deliverance and salvation. I can stretch out my hand and hurt you, or I can stretch out my hand, take your hand, and help deliver you. So which is it? It is both. God is going to turn His hand against His enemies, and at the same time He is going to save His people. The adversaries here were His own professing people.

Have you ever stopped to think about this? It is like America. We, in this day and time, have betrayed our founding fathers' principles upon which they built this nation. We have also turned our backs upon and betrayed the God who gave us this nation. What did Judah and Jerusalem do? They betrayed the founding principles, and they also betrayed the God who gave them that nation.

Now God says, "I'm going to straighten things out." When He says in verse 25, "and I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge

away thy dross," the verse refers to the process of smelting or purifying metals in the fire. It means that God would remove all the dross—that is, all the sin and filth that had accumulated. Look back at verse 22: "Thy silver is become dross." In other words, there is no purity. It is adulterated, watered down, weakened, and not what it was supposed to be. Smelting is commonly done by fire. The idea God presents in verse 25 is that He would render His own people pure by those judgments that would destroy His enemies intermingled with His people. He says, "and I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin."

John Trapp, the old Puritan, rightly said that the tin compares to their hypocrisy: "Thine hypocrisy, for tin hath a show of silver." That is, it looks like silver; it is the same color, but it is not so. "Nay, it is a deadly enemy to gold and silver, saith one, making them hard and brittle. It is also a tyrant over them and will hardly be separated from them." He adds, "Hereby I figure your most noted, rooted, and inveterate sins."

Thus, the heat and fire of God's judgments purify and purge His people from this dross. When God restores, rejuvenates, revives, and removes the impurities that would destroy us, at the same time He destroys His enemies and gives us what we need. In verse 24 He says, "I'm going to ease myself of my adversaries." Verse 25 tells us how He will do it. Then, in verse 26, He says, "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city." Why do we need new judges and counselors? Look back at verse 23: "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards."

They judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. In other words, they are not interested in justice. They are interested in perpetuating themselves, their own party, and their own plans, and that is about it. So he says, “You need new counselors. You need new judges.” That is for sure.

I do not think the average Christian has ever really perceived, understood, and comprehended the influence of wicked, ungodly, reprobate rulers. By the same token, most Christians have never

really perceived, understood, and comprehended the influence of godly, righteous rulers. In fact, we have not had one in so long that we would probably be hard-pressed to recognize one when we saw one.

When you read through the Bible, take note of this fact: every major idolatry in the Bible was begun by a wicked civil ruler—Jeroboam, Manasseh, even Solomon. Solomon was a good man until you get to 1 Kings chapter 11, where he introduced Baal worship, Moloch worship, and all of this into the children of Israel. He built altars for Ashtoreth for all of his strange gods and his strange wives.

Every major revival in the Bible took place under a godly ruler: Josiah, Hezekiah, Uzziah. We have not really comprehended how wicked rulers influence a people and how godly rulers influence a people. This is why God says, "I'm going to restore your judges as at the first and your counselors as at the beginning."

The Destruction of the Wicked and Establishment of the Righteous

The destruction of the wicked is needed and necessary for the establishment of the righteous. Look in verse 27 through verse 31. He says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." What is going to happen when Zion is redeemed with judgments and her converts with righteousness? "And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together." In other words, it is going to happen at the same time. "And they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. And they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired," that is idolatry, "and ye shall be confounded for the gardens," that is idolatry, "that ye have chosen."

"For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth," you will be dead, "and as a garden that hath no water," you will be dead. "And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them." When He redeems Zion with judgments and her converts with righteousness, He is going to destroy the wicked. Is this just something that Isaiah

came up with, or is this clearly taught in the Bible? The answer is that it is taught over and over and over in the Bible.

Because idolatry, sin, wickedness, and rebellion must be dealt with. It must be rooted out, and it must be destroyed. God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet. In Jeremiah chapter 1, verse 10, God says concerning Jeremiah, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." He has to do three times as much destroying as he does building and planting. You cannot build and plant on a bad foundation or a bad soil. It has to be torn down.

So, with that in mind, let us consider what the Scripture says concerning the wicked. Let me show you a number of verses. It does not matter whether we are talking about the heathen, the pagan, the religious wicked, or the hypocritical wicked. Notice Psalm 34, verse 21: "Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate." Psalm 34, verse 21 says, "Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate." So evil shall slay the wicked, and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

Then consider Psalm 37, verse 10: "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be." Psalm 37, verse 10 says that for yet a little while, the wicked shall not be; we may diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

"But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." The word meek, especially as it is used in the New Testament, does not mean a wimp, someone who lets others use them as a foot mat and wipe their feet all over them, or a ninety-pound weakling. The word meek refers to those who are broken to yoke, submitted and in submission to God, obedient to Him, and following His law. The wicked are going to be destroyed, but the meek—those who have been broken to yoke—are going to inherit the earth.

Psalm 37:17 says, "For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous." Your arms speak of your power

and ability. God says, “I’m going to break their power and will break their arms,” but the Lord will uphold the righteous.

Verse 20 says, “But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.” Verse 28 says, “For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.” Verse 38 says, “But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off.”

Psalm 92:7 says, “When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.” I could multiply Scriptures, but you are getting the idea: God says that the wicked will be destroyed, while the righteous are upheld and preserved.

God says the wicked spring up and flourish just to be cut down. In Isaiah 1:27, He says, “Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.” Yet people, even Christians, will say, “I don't like to hear about judgment. I don't like that idea. I don't like to talk about that.” Some try to be very pious and say, “Well, I just want the Lord to come back and that'll take care of it.” That is true, but look at what will happen when our Lord returns.

Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10: “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

What is our Lord going to do when He returns? He is going to come back in judgment and destroy the wicked. You cannot have judgment without redemption, or redemption without judgment. When He destroys the wicked, it is the redemption of His people. Judgment and redemption go together; you cannot have one without the other.

Stop and think about this. When God delivered Noah and his family, He judged and destroyed the old world. When God delivered the Israelites from bondage, He judged and destroyed Egypt. When God delivered the land of Canaan into the hands of the Israelites, He judged and destroyed the Canaanites.

The greatest proof of this truth is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. When God the Father delivered us from our sins, when He redeemed us, it was because His judgment fell upon His Son, who is our surety, our substitute, and our sacrifice.

The Cross: The Ultimate Proof of Redemption Through Judgment

I want you to look in your Bibles, if you would, first of all, to 1 Peter chapter 1. 1 Peter chapter 1 and let's begin reading there with verse 18. It is 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 18. Look what he says. 1 Peter 1 verse 18: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." Note, we were redeemed not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, without spot. Now if you will turn to the book of Romans chapter 3, Romans chapter 3, and look if you would please at verses 24 through 26. Romans 3 verse 24: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"

"to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Now go back to verse 25, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation." The word propitiation literally means to appease, to placate, to satisfy. Do you realize that Jesus Christ our sacrifice appeased and placated and satisfied the holiness, the righteousness, and the justice of God because God's wrath fell upon him instead of falling upon us? When we were redeemed, it was through judgment. You cannot have

redemption without judgment. If you will look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and look at verse 21, you will see it again. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." We were made righteous because He was judged in our stead.

We were redeemed through judgment. I believe that when God graciously turns Himself to us and He turns us to Himself, it will be through judgment. He says, "Zion shall be redeemed through judgment."

Applications: Judgment as Friend, Call to Holiness, and Righteous Prayer

Now, let me make some applications, and I want you to listen to this first one very closely. Okay? Here we go. You got your seatbelts tightened. Here we go. Judgment is not our enemy. It is our friend. Judgment is not our enemy, it is our friend. It is by means of judgment that the wicked are purged. And it's by means of judgment that we are refined. You know what David said in Psalm 119 verse 67, listen.

He said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.” Before I was afflicted, I went astray. The Lord is saying, “You whipped me, and I learned something.” We can identify with this, especially the older ones, because when we were children and did wrong, our dad wore us out. And we learned. When he spoke, we obeyed. When he told us not to do something, we found out we had better not do it. David said, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” Psalm 119, verse 71: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.”

Now he said, “that I might learn thy statutes.” He said, “You whipped me really good and I learned your statutes. I'll learn to walk.” You can tell someone something, and they can sit there, shake their head, and say, “Yes, I understand. I grasp it.” Then they go away and forget it. But let them learn the hard way through experience; let it cost them in some measure, in some way, and they never forget it.

Judgment is not our enemy. Judgment is our friend. Secondly, if you understand that God uses judgment in reviving and restoring His people, it should make us live more holily and righteously. How so? If I know that God uses judgment, I do not want to be judged. I do not want to do anything that will bring His wrath and anger upon me. I do not want His rod across my back.

In other words, when we were children, we said, “We don't want another whipping.” And the interesting thing is this: when you study and read Hebrews chapter 12, the Bible tells us that “he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” “Now if ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” Then it says, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” God's judgments, chastisements, and weapons always work. If we do not want any of them, we need to learn to do what is right, obey, and please our heavenly Father. It is just that simple.

The Third Application

The Third Application

If we understand this principle, it should make us more holy and more godly.

It is a righteous and holy prayer for the destruction of God's enemies and the elevation of God's people. Psalm 7, verse 9, says, "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end." God, stop it. Judge it. Destroy it. Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the righteous. Jesus Christ is called the righteous one.

I want to see His throne established. I want to see His kingdom established. I want to see His people established. So it is a righteous thing to pray, "Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the just," and usually God will do so through judgment, because redemption and judgment go together. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment. When God's judgments are in the earth,

the righteous will learn, pay attention, and become more righteous and more obedient.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word, your truth, and your righteousness, Lord, and the fact that you do judge us and judge others. We pray, Father, that you'd help us to be more holy and more godly. Father, we do pray, as you've taught us in your Word, "Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous Lord trieth the hearts and reins." We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray, amen.

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