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Covenant Theology:

Blessings, Curses, and Sanctions:

A Time Of Need

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

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



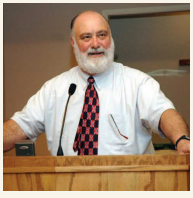
My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

PSALM 121:2

In times of need, covenant teaching raises questions about faithfulness, judgment, and dependence upon God. John Weaver considers blessings, curses, and sanctions through a collection of sermons grounded in biblical texts. These messages examine the relationship between confession and conduct, inviting readers to test the arguments by Scripture and reflect upon their practical implications.

“God has designed it and ordained it that blessings always follow obedience and curses always follow disobedience.”

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: A Time Of Need

Covenant Theology

John Weaver

Weaver Bible College

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Covenant Theology: Blessings, Curses, and Sanctions: A Time Of Need

John Weaver

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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

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CHAPTER 1

When the Heavens are Brass

April 29, 2018

Introduction: The Curse of Brass Heavens and Iron Earth

Deuteronomy 28, and we're going to read verse 23. It's not necessarily the verse I'm going to be expounding, but it will lead us to that passage just momentarily. So if you look in Deuteronomy chapter 28 and verse 23, the title of the message is "When the Heavens are Brass, and the Lord Will Not Hear Our Prayers." So, Deuteronomy 28 and verse 23, God says, "...and thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron." Deuteronomy 28, along with Leviticus 26, gives us the blessings and the curses. The passage that we just read in Deuteronomy 28, in verse 23, deals with a specific curse upon a disobedient people. And by the way, both the blessings and the curses come from God. These are divine sanctions. So God's blessings always follow obedience and God's curses always follow disobedience. In this particular curse, the Lord is withholding rain. Water does not penetrate brass, and water does not penetrate iron. Thus the heavens will not give their rain, because the rain cannot

penetrate brass, and the ground, or the earth that is under thee, He said, shall be iron.

So the earth would not ever be able to absorb anything, because it would be hard and packed. And if you look down in verse 24, you'll see how the Lord goes further and He says, "...the Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust. From heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed." So we're talking then about a drought, a physical drought.

If you would turn back to the book of Leviticus chapter 26. Again, this is another passage that deals with the blessings and curses. You'll see basically the same thing, but worded a little differently. Leviticus 26, beginning there with verse 18, he says this, "And if you will not yet for all this hearken unto me," that is, if you won't listen, "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, for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruit." So nothing is going to grow.

Now, if you would turn right over to the book of Haggai, which is the third book from the end of the Old Testament. It's Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. And look in Haggai chapter 1. Haggai chapter 1, and notice if you would please verses 10 and 11, because he amplifies this curse and gives a very practical illustration of it. Haggai 1 and verse 10, he says, "Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit."

"And I call for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountain, and the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." So when this curse comes, it is not simply physical drought. It is a drought applied in the sense that absolutely nothing produces and nothing works as it should.

Spiritual Application of the Drought

While we look specifically at Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 and understand that this is a real, literal curse of drought, may I point

out that it also has a spiritual application? Just as the rain would not penetrate brass, sometimes our prayers seemingly do not even get past the roof of the building we are in. Our prayers cannot get out; they would not, quote-unquote, penetrate the brass. Just as there is a spiritual application to a physical famine, there is also a spiritual application to a physical drought.

For instance, in Amos 8:11, God is speaking of a spiritual famine: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor thirst for water, but of hearing the word of God." Just as a real physical famine can illustrate a spiritual famine, a real physical drought can illustrate a spiritual drought as well.

Oftentimes, when prayer is involved and seemingly we cannot reach the Lord, it seems as if the heavens are brass. We cannot get through to Him, and seemingly He does not desire to get through to us. As for the earth under our feet becoming iron, during those times nothing goes right. We cannot produce, we cannot function, and we cannot find a resolution to our conflicts. Truthfully, the harder we try, the more we fail. I do not suppose any of you have ever experienced a time like that in your life, but I can assure you many people have.

The truth is this: We know that God hears prayer. We know that God answers prayer. We truly know that God is more interested in us than we are interested in Him. It would be beneficial to read through the book of Psalms and note how many times David said, "hear my voice," or "thou shalt hear my voice," or "hear me when I cry," or "my prayer shall come before thee." He is not only asking God for certain petitions; he is asking God specifically to hear his prayer as well.

God Hears the Righteous but Not the Wicked

We are told in the Bible that the prayer of the upright is His delight. Proverbs 15:8 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.” Anything that a wicked man sacrifices to God is an abomination, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. Proverbs 15:29 specifically says, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.” God is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayers of the righteous.

Moreover, God is designated in the Bible as the One who hears prayer. Psalm 65:2 says, "...O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." God, then, is the prayer-hearing God.

The question is this: If God hears prayer, if He desires to hear our prayer, and if He delights in hearing our prayers, why is it at times that it seems the heavens are brass, we cannot reach our Father, our prayers are bouncing back, and we are dull and dead?

There are probably many answers to that, but I am going to give you one of the main answers: sin in our lives. It is not just sin, but known sin, and actually open rebellion. Our sin stems, number one, from a lack of faith in God. Moreover, it includes pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and a desire to have our will and our way above and beyond God's will and God's way.

The Principle: When You Will Not Hear God, He Will Not Hear You

Let me make this statement, and I will prove it before I close this message: When you reach the stage that you will not hear God, at that point God will not hear you. It is called the lex talionis, the law of retribution, where God makes the punishment fit the crime. Moses gives us an apt illustration of this principle. Look in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 1, beginning with verse 39. Hold Deuteronomy and Numbers, because we will be looking at many passages in both books. Let me show you the truth that I am going to enunciate today: Deuteronomy, chapter 1, beginning with verse 39.

God says, "...moreover your little ones which you said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go and inherit, 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." Then you 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 you had girded on every man his weapons of war, you 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 you be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you," note carefully, "but you 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 you returned and wept before the LORD," watch now, "but the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you. So you abode in Kadesh many days according to the days that you abode there."

In Deuteronomy chapter 1, Moses is rehearsing what happened in Numbers chapters 13 and 14, while revealing something additional: they wept and cried before the Lord, but the Lord would not hearken to them, nor give ear unto them.

There comes a time when God is not going to hear our prayers. I preached a message many years ago entitled "When Prayer is Useless." Hebrews 12 shows what this means: "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Now look what God says.

"For you know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected. For he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." So God refused to hear his prayer, and Isaac could not bless him when he had already blessed Jacob. There comes a time when God is not going to hear prayer.

The Rebellion in Numbers 13–14

Moses had sent the twelve spies to search the land for forty days. They brought back its fruit, including grapes carried on a pole from the valley of Eshcol. Ten of the twelve spies brought an evil report against the land, and, I might add, against the Lord. Only Joshua and Caleb brought a true report. The ten spies' evil report discouraged the people. Numbers 13:30 says, "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it,

for we are well able to overcome it." Caleb and Joshua were the two who stood firm.

Numbers 14:6 says, "And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land rent their clothes." "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we pass through to search it, it is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us, fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel."

They had searched the land. Joshua and Caleb brought forth the good report, while the other ten spies brought forth the evil report. The congregation was upset because of the giants and the evil report that had been given. Joshua and Caleb said, in effect, No, let us fight and possess this land.

God has given it to us and commanded us to go. Let's go. You have a sin that is refusing to obey God, a sin in refusing to fight, a sin in refusing to possess that which God has given them, and then you have the sin in provoking God Himself. Their rebellion was so evil, so wicked, so vile that God was willing to totally disinherit these people, destroy them, and make of Moses a greater and a mightier nation. The only thing that stopped God from destroying them was the intercession of Moses.

SCRIPTURE READING - Numbers 14:11-20 (KJV)

> "And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke Me? And how long will it be, ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shown among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation, and a mightier than they. And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them. And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land, for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people, and that thou, Lord, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou

goest before them by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, in a pillar of a fire by night. Now, if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness."

"And now he beseeched thee, Let the power of my Lord be great according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according to thy greatness and thy mercy, as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word."

God was willing at this point to destroy all of these people and make of Moses a greater and a mightier nation. Moses interceded for them. He said, Lord, if you do this, then all these people are going to say you were not able to bring them into the land, and you were impotent to do it, and so you just killed them in the wilderness. And God said, all right, I've listened to you.

In all of this so far, I hope you have been able to ascertain what we would call self-will, unbelief, disobedience, rebellion, and a refusal to submit to the will and the Word of God. Moreover, included in this is a complete despisement of God and His gift. You are going to see where God talks about how they despised the land. Incidentally, you cannot despise the gift without despising the giver of the gift.

Look in Numbers 14, verse 35: “And I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation that are gathered together against me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.” Then Moses sent men to search the land, who returned and made all the congregation to murmur against him by bringing up a slander upon the land. Even those men that did bring up an evil report upon the land died by the plague before the Lord. So God slew those ten men who brought up the evil report.

Adding Sin to Sin and God's Sentence

We often speak of adding sin to sin. What we mean is that one sin begets another sin. If there is no real, genuine repentance, then sin will continue to multiply. It is just that simple, because sin does indeed beget sin.

The congregation refused to go into the land when God commanded them to go. They refused to fight when God commanded them to fight. You remember what they said when the ten brought back the evil report: "Would to God we had died in this wilderness." Many years ago, I preached a message entitled, "Be Careful for That Which You Pray, God May Give You That Which You Want." They said, "Would to God that we had died in this wilderness," and God said, in effect, "I'm going to let you have it. I'll give you exactly that which you want."

Look in Numbers 14, beginning at verse 26: "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me, saying to them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as you have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you."

God said, "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness, and all that are numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless, you shall not come into the land concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which you said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you search the land, even forty days, each day for a year shall you bear your iniquities, even forty years, and you shall know my breach of promise."

"I, the Lord, have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation that are gathered together against me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

All that brings us right back to Deuteronomy chapter 1. Look again, beginning at verse 40, and consider several things in these verses. God says, "But as for you," after He said they were going to die in the wilderness, "turn you and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea. Then you 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 you had girded on every man his weapons of war, you 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 you be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you, and you 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." This is not recorded in Numbers 13 and 14: "And you returned," that is, after you were defeated, whoever was left, "and you returned and wept before the Lord. But the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you."

Think about these sins. God commanded them to go in and possess the land. They sinned, rebelled, and refused. God commanded them to fight. They refused to fight. They refused to possess it. They refused to turn into the wilderness. And then, when they said, “We’re going to go up,” God said, “Don’t go.” They just so fade there. They said, “We’re going to fight,” but God said, “Don’t fight.”

In other words, here is what was happening. Even though God had originally told them to go and fight, now, because of their sin and rebellion, God said, “Don’t go and don’t fight.” But they said, “We’re going to do it. We’re going to do it.” What they were going to do was what you and I would call going it on their own. Self-will, pride, rebellion, and disobedience were written all over their actions.

Look carefully at Deuteronomy 1:41: “Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the Lord.” Here is a clear admission of their sin, a clear admission of their rebellion: “We have sinned against the Lord.”

Mere Admission Is Not Biblical Confession

Mouthing a confession and mouthing a repentance is not necessarily the same as biblical confession and biblical repentance. They were willing to acknowledge that they had sinned. They were willing to acknowledge that they were sinners, but they were not willing to turn from their sin, submit to God, and obey Him. Christendom suffers greatly from this attitude today.

We have misinterpreted 1 John 1 and verse 9. If you have not been able to memorize that passage, you probably should. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But our problem is that we do not understand what it means to confess. We have interpreted confession to mean merely to acknowledge.

If I were to go up to Steve, who was distracted talking to David, while both of them were grabbing M&M’s, and, while he was distracted trying to beat David to them, reach into his pocket and steal a hundred-dollar bill, I could acknowledge that I had done it without truly confessing in the biblical sense.

Lorraine says it is not there. She already knows. But I reach into his pocket, steal a $100 bill, slip into the bathroom, and say, "I just stole $100 from Steve. Thank you for letting me get it without getting caught." Did I acknowledge that I stole it? I most certainly did. But then I come back and try to get another $100 bill from David's pocket without getting caught. If I succeed, I say, "Well, Lord, I got another one from David, you know."

I may be acknowledging that I am a thief and that I stole the money, but am I really, genuinely confessing my sin? The answer is no. The word for confess is the little Greek word homologeo. Everybody knows what homo is: it means one or the same. Lego is “I say.” Actually, the word confess means, “I say the same thing that God says.” Or, “I agree with God.” Or, “I take the same attitude that God takes.”

Suppose I stole that $100 bill from Steve. I go into the bathroom, look at the bill, and my conscience is smitten by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. I say, “O Lord, I stole this money. Your Word says, ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ Your Word says, ‘the wages of sin is death.’

Your Word says sin is an abomination to you." I begin to see my sin as God sees it—as wicked, vile, and abominable. What do I do if I agree with God? I repent. I return the money to Steve and ask, "What else can I do to make restitution?" Then I ask him to forgive me. That is confession.

If I keep acknowledging the fact that I have stolen something while continuing to steal, I have not really confessed, because I have not agreed with God or taken the same attitude that God takes. When we agree with God and take His attitude, we will turn from sin because we see it as God sees it—as hateful and vile. Therefore, failure to repent and failure to turn from that which is contrary to God, no matter how much we say that we are sinners or that we sin, is not biblical confession. I have encountered many people who are more than willing to admit that they are sinners, and some of them very proudly admit that they are sinners. They will even admit that they have sinned, but they are not willing to turn from that sin and submit to God. Simply admitting that we are sinners is not the same as truly confessing our sin.

Delayed Obedience and Presumptuous Self-Will

Now look back at verse 41: "Then you answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the Lord." We understand that. Then they said, "We have sinned against the Lord. We will go up and fight according to all that the Lord our God commanded us." Wait a minute. Yes, God had originally told them to go up, fight, and possess the land. But now He had put a curse upon them and said, "I'm giving you what you want." Look at the last command in verse 40: "But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea."

God now says, "You're not to fight. You're to go into the wilderness." Here is the principle: listen carefully—delayed obedience is disobedience. You follow that? Delayed obedience is disobedience. We understand this. If you have a child and command him, "I want you to do this, and I want to have it done by such and such time," then you come back later and it is not done. You ask, "Why have you not done it?" The child may answer, "I was just busy about other things and I didn't find time to do it."

Would you consider that an excuse? No, because you told him to do something. He should drop whatever he is doing and go ahead and do it because you are the authority figure. You are the father. You give the orders, not the child. And here it is: God has given the orders. He is the authority figure. He is the authority, period—not just a figure. But now they are saying, "Well, we will go up and fight."

Watch this. They were disobeying God's second command in order to obey His first command. When they said, "We will go up and we will fight," God gave another command: "Go not up. Do not fight. For I am not with you." And here is what they are saying: "We're going to do it. We're going to do it. We're going to obey that first command, regardless of the other commands that God has given us."

Delayed obedience is disobedience, that is for sure. But now they are flying in the face of God to do exactly that which they want. You may weep and cry and flail and pray before the Lord when you take this attitude, but God is not going to hear you. God is not going to answer your prayer, because that is what He said. Deuteronomy 1:45 says, "And ye returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not hearken unto your voice, nor give ear unto you." Why would God not listen to them? The answer is because they would not listen to God. They were full of self-will, full of sin, full of wickedness, and full of rebellion, and God said, "I'm just not going to listen to them. That's all there is to it."

Scriptural Warnings: Sin Separates from God

Look at Isaiah 55, verses 6 and 7. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." The implication is that there is a time when God cannot be found. So he says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." Then, "Call ye upon him while he is near." The implication is that there is a time when He is not near. So he 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." So, pardon then is based upon the wicked forsaking his ways and

forsaking his wicked thoughts and returning and submitting to the Lord. If we want pardon, those are the prerequisites.

Isaiah 59:1–2 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is 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."

Note how clearly this is enunciated. The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. God is just as omnipotent as He ever was. Neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. God has not gone deaf; God is still omniscient. What, then, is the problem? "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 not that He cannot hear. He will not hear.

When you are in such a situation, when you are filled with your iniquities, your sins, and your rebellion, heaven is brass to you. You cannot reach God because of your sins and your iniquities. He will not hear.

Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Of course, iniquity is sinful. It is that which is contrary to God; it is a transgression of His law. The Hebrew word for regard is ra'ah, which means to look at, to regard, to esteem, to apprise, to have respect to, to give attention to, to gaze at, or to look at. So what is he saying? If I regard, if I gaze at sin and iniquity, if I regard it, if I esteem it, if I place it up on a pedestal somewhere, if I just do that, God will not hear me.

If the mere regarding or esteeming of something contrary to God and His law places us in a position where God will not hear us, how much worse is it if we engage in it? If we regard it, that is sufficient for God not to hear us. If we engage in that which He expressly forbids, that is more than sufficient. David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

We cannot hold iniquity there. We cannot prize it, value it, or gaze at it longingly, lustfully, and covetously. We cannot do that, because that is regarding iniquity.

Proverbs 28:9 says, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination." The word

abomination literally means a stench in God's nostrils. He that turns away his ear from hearing the law refuses to listen, rejects it, declines from it, and turns from it.

Think about the illustration Moses gave us. What did those people do? God said, "Go up and fight." They answered, "No, we're not going to do that." God said, "Turn into the wilderness." They replied, "No, we're not going to do that. We're going to do what you told us to do to begin with." God said, "Do not go up that hill." They said, "But we're going up that hill." He said, "Do not fight," and they answered, "But we're going to fight."

They were turning their ear away from that which God had demanded. After they were deceived, they came back and cried, wept, and wailed, but God would not hear them. There comes a time when God is not going to hear our prayer. If you want heaven to be brass for you, merely regard iniquity and engage in it, and you will find that God is not deaf. It is not that He cannot hear; He will not hear your prayer.

Applications: Repentance and the Lex Talionis

The first application is simple: we may weep, cry, howl, scream, and pray, but if we do not turn from our sins, God is not going to hear us. When we hold His Word in contempt and refuse to hear and obey Him, it is a rebellious attitude, clearly demonstrated by these Israelites in Numbers 13 and 14 and Deuteronomy chapter 1.

Someone says, “I know what I’ll do. I’ll sacrifice something to God and He’ll hear me.” Really. It seems to me like God said it—I think it’s Psalm 55—“If I were hungry, I would not tell thee. The world is mine, and everything that’s in it.” What could you ever give to God that He has not first given to you?

In Hosea 5:4–6, God is talking about the sin of Israel and Judah: “They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God, for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord. And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face. Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity. Judah also shall fall with them. They shall go with their flocks and with their

herds to seek the Lord, sacrificing. But they shall not find him, for he hath withdrawn himself from them."

Wow! They were going to take sacrifices, but they were not going to find God. Because of their iniquities, because of their sin, He had withdrawn Himself from them.

Everywhere we go in this country, we see signs posted in yards that say something like, "It's pray 2 Chronicles 7:14," or "We need 2 Chronicles 7:14," or "Pray for this country." May I remind you what 2 Chronicles 7:14 actually 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 forgive their sin, and heal their land." It's not just praying and crying and weeping and humbling; it's turning from our wicked ways. How in the world can we expect God to hear us when we're regarding iniquity, engaging in that which is displeasing to Him, and acting contrary to His law?

If we want heavens to be brass, we need only continue in sin, and God will not hear us. This brings me to the second matter already mentioned. What you see in Deuteronomy 1:45 is the lex talionis of Scripture, simply the law of retribution, where God makes the punishment fit the crime.

What happened in Numbers 13 and 14 and in Deuteronomy 1? They would not hear God, and God said, "Therefore, I will not hear you." When we turn a deaf ear to God, His law, and His Word, in biblical justice God may turn a deaf ear to our prayers, and heaven will be brass. Our prayers would seemingly bounce back from the ceiling of the room. If we do not want the heavens to be brass to us, we must repent of our sins and turn from them.

We must not regard iniquity in our hearts or let it dwell there. We must not maintain thoughts that we know are contrary to God; we must repent of them and spit them out. Job was a righteous man who eschewed evil. The word eschewed means "to spit out." He could not stomach it. Therefore, we must spit out that which is evil and say, "No, I am not going to think that, act like that, or do that. I will submit and obey God." Then the heavens will not be brass, the land beneath us will not be iron, and we will be blessed of God.

The curse is upon disobedience; the blessings always follow obedience.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, Your grace, and mercy. Father, help us and enable us not to regard iniquity in our hearts, for without Thee we can do absolutely nothing. Help us, Lord, to love Thee, turn from that which is contrary to Thee, and honor Thee in all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Charging God Foolishly

November 8, 2020

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 6:24-33 (KJV)

Introduction: The Sin of Charging God Foolishly

To 2 Kings chapter 6. 2 Kings chapter 6, and we're going to read verses 24 through 33. 2 Kings chapter 6, beginning there with verse 24. The title of the message is "Charging God Foolishly." Charging God Foolishly. So, 2 Kings chapter 6, and let's begin reading there with verse 24. "And it came to pass after this that Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, gathered all his hosts and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria, and behold, they besieged it until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king! And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barn floor, out of the winepress. And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we

> boiled my son, and did eat him. And I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him. And she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes, and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh. Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day. But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him, and the king sent a man from before him. But ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head today? Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. Is it not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him, and he, that would be the king, he said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer? Now look at verse 33, the latter part. "Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer?"

Sin, rebellion, exasperation, frustration, and ignorance oftentimes motivate us to charge God foolishly and wickedly as the source of our problems, afflictions, and destructions. We seldom think of our own wicked ways, sins, and rebellion as a source of our problems. No, we've learned like Adam to shift the blame. When God asked Adam, "What is now done?" he answered, "It was the woman that thou gavest to be with me." Eve said, "Well, it was the serpent and he beguiled me and I did eat." Neither one was willing to confess that they had sinned and violated the law of God. So like Adam, when we are in situations beyond our control with no way to work them out, we foolishly blame God and charge Him. We've not sufficiently grasped that to do such is a slap in the face of God—a denial of His goodness, justice, and wisdom, and an attack upon His sovereignty and providence.

The Example of Job: Not Charging God

Obviously, most Christians today do not have the faith or patience of Job. Job lost all his possessions in one day. The Bible tells us Job was the greatest of the men of the East; when you read of all his oxen, camels, asses, and sheep, he lost everything in one day,

including ten children. He went from a multi-millionaire to absolutely broke. Job 1:20–22 says, "Then Job arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground in worship and said, Naked came I forth from the womb and naked shall I return. The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." The next verse says, "In all of this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." The loss of all our possessions in one day would be enough to drive the average Christian insane and into absolute denial, especially if you added the loss of all his children and our grandchildren.

On top of that, it would be almost an insurmountable grief. But not only was Job attacked by losing all his possessions and children, his body was also attacked: he was smitten from the top of his head to the bottom of his foot with sores. The Bible tells us he took a potsherd and sat down in the ashes to scrape himself. Evidently his body was being eaten of worms, and he was scraping them off and out as they would stick their head out. In such misery and grief, in Job chapter 2 and verse 9, his wife said, "Dost thou still maintain thine integrity? Curse God and die." In other words, get over this. Just curse God and allow God to kill you. And verse 10, Job answered, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not receive evil?" Then the next verse says, "In all of this did not Job sin with his lips." So he lost everything and was smitten, and he still did not charge God foolishly.

Israel's Provocation in the Wilderness

How often have you and I whined and complained about our situation, circumstances, and trials? We bellyache, become sullen, morose, and insolent. We think, if we have not said it, well, God doesn't love me. God doesn't care about me. God is not concerned with me, because if He loved me and was concerned about me, He wouldn't let this happen to me. I wouldn't be going through this situation. Woe is me, poor little me. So in one instant, we simply deny the great grace of God, His mercy, kindness, love, providence, and wisdom. We become like those Israelites in the wilderness who constantly and consistently provoked God. Let me just read this passage to you. God said concerning these Israelites, "But as truly as

I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Because all those men which have seen my glory and miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers."

Neither shall any of them that provoked me see it, but my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land where he went, and his seed shall possess it. God said these people provoked me ten times, tempted me ten times. Yet the Bible also says they saw His glory, His miracles, His power. They knew who God was and what He could do, and still they bellyached, whined, complained, and did not trust God.

Most Christians have never learned to control their thoughts or emotions, to reject unbiblical and ungodly thoughts, or to live by biblical principles. They always give in to their feelings, get under the situation, and forget biblical principles. Ask someone how they're doing and they respond, "Well, all right, under the circumstances." Then you must ask, "What are you doing under the circumstances?" You should be above the circumstances. Circumstances and situations are not to control us; we are to control them.

When we don't, we end up despising the Lord, denigrating His word, and dishonoring Him. Our text demonstrates such a spirit in the king of Samaria. That's why in verse 33 he said, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Now, you're going to ask me, who was this king of Samaria? And I'm going to respond, I really do not know.

The King of Samaria's Wicked Charge

It could have been Ahab, but in all probability, it was his son Jehoram. If you look back in your Bibles to 2 Kings 3 and verse 1, you'll see Jehoram is beginning to reign: "Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria, the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and reigned twelve years." So if everything is in chronological order, in all probability, it would be Jehoram. However, if you look down in your Bibles to verse 32, some have suggested that this may be an answer. In reality, it's not an answer. But if you look in verse 32, where the king of Samaria is

called the son of a murderer, the Bible says, "But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him, and the king sent a man from before him. But ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head."

It is true that Jehoram was the son of a murderer. Ahab had Naboth and his sons murdered, and probably a whole lot of other people as well. But then also Ahab was the son of Omri. And Omri murdered Tibni and a whole lot of other people as well. So both Ahab and Jehoram were both sons of murderers. Both were exceedingly wicked kings and defied the Lord and they worshipped idols. Now it is true that they tried to worship God under the two golden calves that Jeroboam had built. But in reality, they were worshipping and serving Baal.

Now, what has happened in 2 Kings chapter 6 is this. Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, has attacked. He has surrounded Samaria. No one can go in, no one can come out. And so it does not take long then for starvation and famine to stalk the city and reduce the city to what you and I would call desperation.

Now, when we stop and think about a famine like this, we tend to think today it's impossible for something like that to happen in our land. I mean, look at all the stores that we have and look at all the food that is stored in Walmart and Costco and all these other Sam's Clubs. It's just impossible. What we don't understand is this. Most of our grocery stores, the ones that we see every day, do not have a warehouse stocked with food in it or items of necessity. Most of these grocery stores today have what is called just-in-time delivery.

If I'm stocking twenty boxes of grits and have plenty, when I get down to five boxes my computer kicks in and says, order more. I order them just in time, so when the last five are purchased, twenty more sit on the shelf. But when the trucking industry goes down, when the power grid goes down, the grocery stores will not be resupplied and restocked. Look at the food lines now in New York, California, Oregon—two miles long, four, five, six cars wide—people begging for food. We used to think a famine like that could never happen in this country. All it takes is a drought, a flood, a failure for the Lord to send rain upon the crops. Yes, we will have a very severe failure of crops in this country, and we would have a famine. Now

the famine was stalking this city, and the people were starving, eating whatsoever they could eat. In verse 25, the Bible says, "And there was a great famine in Samaria, and behold, they besieged it until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver," that's eighty pieces of silver, "and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver." Asses or donkeys were unclean, so such a food item would only be eaten as a last resort. The head of the donkey had to be not only the worst but also the cheapest part. How much meat could you get off the skull of a donkey's head? Hardly any at all, yet it would cost eighty pieces of silver. Donkeys were unclean—I mean, breedless. Leviticus chapter 11, verse 3: the clean animals parted the hooves and chewed the cud. A donkey may chew the cud, but he didn't part the hoof. So now you're paying eighty pieces of silver for something that is not only unclean and unwholesome, but probably not very nourishing either. Secondly, they talk about the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung sold for five pieces of silver. First of all, a cab, in our text, is a unit of measurement.

It is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible except in this passage. But based upon historical writings, a cab is a dry measure, called the sixth part of a seah, about a third part of an ephah, or in our language, about a pint. So you are paying four pieces of silver for a pint of dove's dung. Now, what in the world was dove's dung? Sometimes it was called sparrow's dung. Certain commentators tried to say it was a type of very sorry pulse—pulse being nothing more than peas, like a wild field pea. You remember Daniel, when he was fasting, did a partial fast: he ate nothing but pulse and drank water. The pulse he ate happened to be peas. Some say it was a pea. But I believe it was real, genuine dung from birds, whether doves, sparrows, or pigeons. The record of sieges shows that both animal and even human excrement were used as food under the most extreme circumstances and necessities. In fact, in 2 Kings 18, verse 27, Rabshakeh was threatening the people of Judah for the king of Assyria. He said, if you don't surrender, every man on this wall will be eating his own dung and drinking his own urine. That was the threat—a real difficult siege. John Trapp, the old Puritan, said on this verse: "An ass's head sold for fourscore pieces of silver, for four or five pounds or ten, some would say," talking about English

pounds. "When Hannibal besieged Cassilene, one mouse was sold for 200 pence." One mouse. You say, I've never eaten mice. I've never eaten a rat. Really? Years ago, we had Harlan Popov in our home. Our girls were young and the twins came running out and said, "Look, Mr. Popov, look at our gerbils." Popov was in a Romanian prison for, what, 14 years. When he saw those gerbils, he said, "Rats." "No," they said, "Mr. Popov, they're gerbils." "Rats," he said, "I know what they are. I had to eat them for 14 years just to stay alive."

So he is saying that in this siege, one mouse sold for 200 pence. And then he goes on to say this. Listen carefully. "Puddings made of dogs' guts were dear bought at the siege of Skrodra." Can you imagine eating a pudding of dog guts? Well. Let me tell you why I think that when he talks about dove's dung, it is indeed real dung from birds. If you will skip down to verse 27. When these women asked for help, look what he says in verse 27. "And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barn floor or out of the winepress?" The dung of roosting birds would be on the barn floor. It doesn't matter if it's a pigeon, a dove, or a sparrow. It would still be the dung of a roosting bird. And so obviously it's talking about real bird dung there and not some type of pea.

Now, when the woman asked the king for help, what really set him off was verses 28 and 29. He said, "If the Lord do not help thee," in verse 27, "whence shall I help thee out of the barn floor or out of the winepress?" And the king said unto her, "What aileth thee?" The Lord said, "What are you griping about? What are you hollering about? Everybody's suffering." And she answered, "This woman said unto me, Give thy son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him. And I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son that we may eat him, and she hath hid her son."

Cannibalism as God's Judgment

So here, these two women were engaged in cannibalism. Now, cannibalism often occurred during times of famine and military sieges. You must remember that such a practice is the judgment of God upon an individual, upon a society, upon a people, upon a

nation. Let me show you. I want you to hold 2 Kings, but turn in your Bibles, first of all, to the book of Leviticus, chapter 26. Leviticus, chapter 26. And notice, if you would please, beginning there with verse 27. Leviticus 26 and verse 27.

SCRIPTURE READING - Leviticus 26:27-29; Deuteronomy 28:49-58 (KJV)

> Look at the Bible. Leviticus 26, beginning there verse 27. He said, "And if you will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrary unto Me, then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury. And I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. Now watch this judgment. And you shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters you shall eat." So God said, if you walk contrary to Me, if you violate My law, I will judge you. And one of the judgments is you will eat the flesh of your own children. If you would turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy 28, you will see this curse expanded beginning there with verse 49. We'll read through verse 58. But here you have Deuteronomy 28, verse 49. God says, of course, all of this is curses for disobeying Him. Verse 49, "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far and from the end of the earth as swift as the eagle flieth, 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 kine, or flocks of thy 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. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, here it is, 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 straitness wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee."

Now watch verse 54. "So that the man that is tender among you and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother and toward the wife of his bosom and toward the remnant of his children, which he shall leave, 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 straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground, for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, 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 straitness wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in the gates, if thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the LORD thy God." So God says, part of the penalty for rejecting Me and refusing to walk in My law is that you will end up engaging in cannibalism, eating your own children. Turn to Lamentations, right after Jeremiah, chapter 2 and verse 20. "Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long?" That's the little newborn child. "Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?" Then skip to Lamentations chapter 4 and verse 10: "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children. They were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people." So during the siege of Jerusalem, women killed, cooked, and ate their own children. Horror of horrors. How could such a thing happen? How could a man kill his own son and eat him? How could a woman kill her own child and eat that child? What we don't understand is how desperately low people can sink when they refuse and reject God and His law. Without God's law, anything goes. Anything. Thus, here you have the curse of God and the judgment of God.

Cannibalism was not confined to the Old Testament. Everybody has heard of Jeffrey Dahmer, a modern-day murderer and cannibal, and many others have engaged in cannibalism, not just people from Africa or other foreign countries. Consider the Donner Party in 1846 and 1847: the wagon train snowed in in the Sierra Nevada mountains turned to cannibalism to survive that fierce winter. And in 1972, Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, later known as the Andes flight, crashed into the Andes mountains. Some were killed instantly; others died a short time later. The wreckage and survivors

were not found until 72 days later, high on a mountain full of snow, and the 16 survivors ate their dead compatriots.

I do not know how anyone could ever escape the mental, emotional, and spiritual horror over such an act, whether it is your own children or just some dead body you find somewhere. I do not know how you could ever overcome that. So when the king of Samaria heard that these women had engaged in cannibalism, he went into an absolute rage.

The King's Attack on Elisha as an Attack on God

Look at 2 Kings 6:30–31: "And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes, and he passed by upon the wall. And the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh. Then he said, God do so, and more also to me, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, shall stand on him this day." In other words, the king said, I am going to kill Elisha today. I will take his life.

Now here is a very important question: Why did the king want to kill Elisha? Elisha had nothing to do with the famine or the cannibalism of the women. In fact, Elisha was in the city suffering with the rest of the people; he had a house there. So why does the king want to kill Elisha?

Look at verse 32 again. "But Elisha sat in his house," so he had a house there in Samaria. "And the elders sat with him, and the king sent a man from before him. But ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? Look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto them." They held the messenger, and then the king came in and said, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer?"

Several things stand out. First, Elisha knew the king was coming for him. Seated with the elders of the city, he knew this foolish, wicked, raging king would send a messenger to take his life as well. Second, see the wickedness, impetuosity, unbelief, and impatience of

the king in his statement, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer for?" Third, the king acknowledged that this evil is from the Lord.

Let me spell this out. The king said God sent the famine. He understood that in one sense it was the judgment of God. He understood the extremity of the famine when these two women were eating their own children. Amos 3:6 says, "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city and the people not be afraid? And shall there be evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" God is a just God. He does judge and does send that which is afflicting, chastening, and destructive upon individuals.

Because of their sins and their wickedness. Look at the bottom part of verse 33. The king says, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord. What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" He is saying, God has sent this famine. I know that God has sent it. Why should I temporize with Him? Why should I submit to Him? Why should I wait patiently upon Him? Why should I pretend to believe? This famine is going to get worse and worse, and I'm weary with waiting. I'm not willing to wait any longer for things to get better. I do not think it's going to get better or end. I think it's going to get worse and worse. God sent it, so God must be evil. Why should I be waiting any longer on Him?

Let me paraphrase this in modern day vernacular. Summing up, the king is saying, "To hell with God." I don't need Him. I don't want Him. I don't believe Him. I don't trust Him. He is the one responsible for all of this. So to hell with God. That's exactly what he's saying.

Why then was the king coming after Elisha? The answer is very simple. Because he could not strike at God. He could not smite God. He could not take God's life, but he could take the life of God's servant. So he is showing his disdain, his impatience and his distrust of God by seeking to murder the servant of God. Here's what is actually being said: I can't get my hands on God, but I can get my hands on Elisha. And if I could get my hands on God, I'd do to Him what I'm going to do to Elisha. I'd kill Him too. That's exactly his attitude.

Mark something down in your mind and remember it. Any attack upon one of God's children or one of God's servants is an attack upon God Himself. The Scripture said, God said, "He that toucheth thee toucheth the apple of my eye." And the apple is the pupil in your eye. It's a tender spot in your entire body. So when I say any attack upon a Christian is an attack upon God, it does not matter if that attack is verbal, physical or violent. It is still an attack upon God.

When the king of Assyria was trying to get Hezekiah and the people of Judah to surrender without a fight, he sent Rabshakeh, who was absolutely trying to destroy Hezekiah. Rabshakeh told the people, "Trust not in Hezekiah. Don't listen to his words. Hezekiah's not going to defend you or deliver you." He attacked Hezekiah, the people of God, and in essence, God Himself. Listen to what Hezekiah asked Isaiah to pray for the remnant: "It may be the Lord God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, who the king of Assyria, his master, had sent to reproach the living God and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard. Wherefore, lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left." Hezekiah said the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh to reproach the living God. How did he reproach the living God? By reproaching Hezekiah and the people of God. So, obviously, he is now attacking God.

The average Christian never thinks of such a thing. "I'm not going to reproach God. I'm not going to attack my Heavenly Father." Really? Look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, beginning with verse 21. Our Lord said, "You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, you stupid, ignorant empty head, shall be in danger of the council. But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire."

Stop and think of the Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, that we have called names. We've doubted their integrity, their honesty, sometimes even their salvation. We never stop to think that when we attack a brother or sister in Christ, we are attacking God Himself, our Heavenly Father. We're displeased with His providence in their lives, with their ignorance and lack of understanding,

displeased that they do not grasp what we grasp. Consequently, we're grumbling at the providence of God in their lives, taking a proud, haughty, arrogant stance and elevating ourselves above God.

Suppose I looked at Marshall and said, "Marshall, why don't you raise your children the way I raised mine? Why don't you teach your children what I taught mine? Why are you doing this?" And I just go on and on and really tear him apart. First, I am not the standard. God is the standard and His Word is the standard. But if God gave Marshall fifteen children, how he educates, instructs, and disciplines them is his business. It is between him and the Lord, and he will answer to the Lord. As a pastor, I could say, "Marshall, look at the Scripture. Here's what the Scripture says." But as a natural man, I have no right to say, "Marshall, you need to raise your children like this." They're not my children. They're his children. He's responsible and accountable.

So when we attack our brethren in Christ, here's what we're doing: "God, why don't you educate these stupid children of yours? Why don't you discipline them? Why don't you give them the understanding that I have?" We're elevating ourselves. Whether physical or verbal, it's still an attack upon God. Let it settle in your mind: we have no right to tell God how to educate, instruct, and discipline His children. That's His business. Romans 14:4 says, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand." And certainly God is able to make you stand.

Blaming Others Instead of Accepting Responsibility

There's a proverb that fits the king of Samaria and Christians as well. Proverbs 19:3 says, "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." So the foolishness of man perverts our way and causes our hearts to fret against God. Here is another specific truth: the king of Samaria was willing to blame Elisha and take his rage out on him when Elisha had absolutely nothing to do with it. He was just the messenger and servant of God.

So here's what we've got to learn. We have to see how normal and natural it is to lay the cause of our sufferings and our afflictions on

anything and on anyone other than ourselves. Do you realize most of our suffering, most of our affliction, we do bring upon ourselves? It's our sins, it's our disobedience, it's our ignorance, it's our stupidity. I mean, we do it to ourselves. But it's so much easier to say, "It's Gary's fault." "Steve should have known better. Steve should have helped me. Steve should have told me." It's easy to blame. And very difficult at times to assume responsibility. I want you to look in the book of Lamentations chapter 3 at the question that is asked. Lamentations 3 look in verse 39. Lamentations 3 verse 39. God asked, "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" In other words, if we have sinned, if we've done wickedly, if we've been disobedient, why should we complain about the punishment? We know we're going to reap exactly that which we've sown. Why should we bellyache and gripe when God punishes us for our sin when we understand that the wages of sin is death? And so he asked that simple question, "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" See, both Ahab and Jehoram had sufficient iniquity and sins in and of themselves to bring the judgment of God not only upon them, but also upon their nation as well. And the king of Samaria never thought at one time of assuming responsibility and saying, "I forsook God, I forsook His law. I've been worshiping Baal. I led the people to worship Baal." No, no, no, no. He never assumed any responsibility and never assumed any accountability. It's God's fault. And there's Elisha. I'll make Elisha pay because I can't get my hands on God. That was it. You remember, it was Ahab was on the throne. When Elijah, the man of God, said, "As I live, thus saith the Lord, there shall not be rain or dew these years, but according to my word." And there was a drought for three years and six months. And afterwards, God sent Elijah back into the land. And when Ahab met him in 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 17, the first thing Ahab asked Elijah was this, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"

Or aren't you the one that brought all this on us? Look at the drought, the hunger, the suffering. Elijah gave him a classic answer in verse 18: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed Baalim." In other words, politely speaking, he said, "It's not me, you stinking reprobate, it's you and your wicked

household. You're the ones that are the troubler of Israel." Ahab was not willing to accept responsibility.

The truth of Isaiah 59:1-2 is still relevant for us today: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you." God says the problem is not with me; the problem is with each of us. So we must learn not to shift blame, but to accept responsibility and say, "I'm willing to do that for my life, my actions, my words, my deeds, and I will hold myself accountable. I'm not going to blame shift."

Now let me make some applications and show you the impact of this passage. First, we must learn not to fret against the Lord no matter what our situation or circumstances. I know some people today in very dire situations, and the tendency is always to fret. When evil, afflictions, temptations, and testing occur, we must learn to patiently wait upon God and patiently accept whatever God sends our way.

Applications: Waiting on God and Not Fretting

You remember Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were wicked men, and he restrained them not. When little Samuel was coming along, God spoke to him and said, "I'm going to do a thing in Israel that's going to make everybody's ears tingle. When I begin with the house of Eli, I will make an end." In other words, God said, "I'm going to finish what I start. Hophni and Phinehas are both going to die in one day, and I'm going to take the priesthood away from Eli and his clan." The next day Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, you better tell me what God said to you."

Samuel told Eli exactly word for word what God said. When Eli heard that his sons would die and the priesthood would be taken from his clan, he said, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seemeth Him good." He was willing to accept responsibility for his sins and failure; if he was to be chastened or judged, let God do what He will.

We would do well to memorize Job 1:20, 22: "So Job arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground

and worshiped and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And in all this Job sinned not with his lips, nor charged God foolishly." James 5 says, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, as an example of suffering and patience." Look at the prophets and everything they've gone through; yet they did not fret against the Lord. They simply endured and said, "Lord, we will wait upon You, we will trust in You."

We must learn not to fret against the Lord, but rather to wait on Him. The second application is this: we must learn not to look to man, but to look to God for our needs. I still get tickled reading when the woman said, "Help, O King!" And the king, not just a normal man, said, "If the Lord do not help thee, from whence can I help you? Out of the barn floor or out of the winepress?" The king was saying, "I'm just as helpless as you are. I don't have anything." Do you know what the middle verse of the Bible is? Psalm 118, verse 8, with verse 9: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." So don't trust in government or in man; trust in the Lord. We need to learn to seek first from God and not from man.

The third application: it is an unreasonable thing to be weary of waiting upon God, for God is a God of judgment. He has decreed over and over in Scripture, blessed are those that wait upon Him. Psalm 27:14: "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord." Psalm 37:34: "Wait on the Lord and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land. When the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it." Psalm 69:6: "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed. Let not those that seek thee be confounded." If you wait upon the Lord, you're not going to be ashamed or confounded. Proverbs 20:22: "Say not thou, I will recompense evil, but wait thou upon the Lord and He shall save thee." It's far better to wait upon God. I would encourage you.

I would challenge you to go through the Bible and look up the word wait, wait upon the Lord, and see how many times that phrase occurs. It is easier to wait upon the Lord than to charge Him foolishly and blame Him for things we do not understand, and

oftentimes things we have brought upon ourselves. The author of Hebrews said plainly in Hebrews 10:36, "But you have need of patience, that after that you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise." Most of us are like a woman who realized her impatience was sin. She prayed, "Lord, I'm impatient. I want patience. And I want it right now." That is the way we are. But He said, you have need of patience. Think of the situation in this country now. We have need of patience and need to wait upon the Lord. We cannot charge God foolishly. The Lord Jesus Christ sits upon the throne of this universe, working everything out after the counsel of His own will. Whatever happens will ultimately end to His honor and glory. We need to be patient and wait upon Him, not charge God foolishly. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word. Help us apply this to our lives. Each of us has situations, circumstances, afflictions, testings, trials, and temptations. Lord, may we not charge Thee foolishly. May we learn to accept responsibility for ourselves, our lives, our words, our actions, our deeds, and learn to wait upon Thee. Thou art God and Thou art sovereign. We bow before Thee and give Thee honor and glory, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Impotent Christians and an Impotent Church

September 18, 2022

Introduction: The Problem of Powerlessness

In Deuteronomy 28:32, God says, “Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all the day long, and there shall be no might in thine hand.”

Have you considered, first, your life as a Christian? And then, secondly, have you considered the church of Jesus Christ as a whole? Have you considered the fact that basically today, individual Christians, as well as churches, are absolutely powerless? I do not know if you have ever really considered the truth that God spoke to Jacob in Genesis 32:28. He said, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” So He said, “Thou hast power with God and with men and hast prevailed.”

You may say, “But that was given to Israel.” And, of course, the Bible tells you in Galatians 6:16, “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” So the Israel of God are those who walk according to this rule.

The Early Church's Power and Esteem

So you have to ask yourself these questions: Where is our power, and where is our might? Why is it that Christians generally today have no power and no might, either with God or with man? If we compared our lives to the early Christians, if we just looked in the book of Acts and examined ourselves in the light of how they lived and what happened in their lives, I think each of us would come to the realization that we really do not even measure up in any sense of the word.

In fact, if you will hold Deuteronomy 28 and look in your Bibles to Acts chapter 2, there is an interesting illustration here of how these Christians moved and lived. Notice Acts chapter 2, beginning there with verse 42. Look what the Bible says: Acts 2:42.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.” Right there would separate most Christians, because most Christians know nothing about doctrine whatsoever. But the Bible said they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

These Christians continued in doctrine, fellowship, and prayer. The Bible also says that they sold everything they had and gave as every man had need.

That was certainly not communism. It was certainly not socialism by any stretch of the imagination. When you look at Acts chapter 5,

the Bible tells us that no one was obligated to sell and no one was obligated to give. Ananias and Sapphira sold a certain part, or a certain land, and then came and gave to the church and pretended that it was all of the price. They had kept back some.

Peter asked them, “When you had the land, was it not yours? And when you sold it, was it not yours? You didn't have to do anything.” But he said, “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” In that particular passage, God killed both of them for lying to the Holy Spirit. The interesting thing is that he said they did not have to sell it at all. No one required them to do it. So it was not communism, and it was certainly not socialism by any stretch of the imagination. But they were in one accord.

Acts 5, verses 13 and 14, gives another statement concerning them: “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” Note that the Bible says the people magnified them.

The word “magnified” is from the Greek word “megaluno,” which means to magnify, to esteem highly, to extol, to celebrate, and to praise. “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” We should be able to ask a few very pointed questions at this particular time: Why is the church of Jesus Christ not magnified today? Why is it not feared? Why are Christians not magnified? Why are they not held in high esteem? And why are they not feared in one sense of the word?

The Fear of God as Protection

You remember back in Genesis chapter 35, after Levi and Simeon had gone into Shechem and killed all of the male Shechemites. They took all their property and left because of what Shechem had done to Dinah, their sister. Basically, Jacob was outnumbered and outgunned. There is a principle here: You can win a battle and lose a war. Jacob said, “Look, you've made me odious in the eyes of all these people, and they're going to gather together and they're going to exterminate us.” But the Bible says in Genesis 35 and verse 5, “And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that

were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob."

It was the fear of God, the terror of God, that fell upon people, preserving Jacob and keeping them from literally chasing them down and killing them. There is another point in Deuteronomy chapter 11 and verse 25. As Israel was going into Canaan to conquer that land, God says, "There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you."

That is exactly what happened. In Joshua chapter 2, when the spies went to Rahab's house, she confessed, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us." She continued, "and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you." Everyone feared them and knew that God was with them. They had heard that God had delivered them from Egypt, dried up the Red Sea, and even dried up the Jordan so they could cross over. It is astounding.

Trading Power for Materialism

Where is our power? Where is our might? Why is it that Christians today are impotent, anemic, helpless, powerless, and despised? Why is the Church of Jesus Christ basically impotent and despised as well?

Look in Acts chapter 3, because I read an illustration years ago that really fits what I am about to tell you. That illustration was based upon this text. The Word of God says, "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us."

"And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and

immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."

The illustration I read concerned a conversation between a Roman Catholic priest and a Baptist pastor. The priest said to the Baptist pastor, very gleefully and happily, "No longer do we have to say with Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none,' for the church has plenty." The Baptist pastor responded, "While that is true, neither can we anymore say with Peter, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'"

We basically traded our power, in one sense of the word, for materialism. If you do not believe that, look at the emphasis the average professing Christian places upon church buildings. It seems as if we are more concerned with our edifice, with our building, than with the people who really and truly are the church. We are more concerned with the buildings than with the poor, the orphans, the sick, and the afflicted. In other words, our church buildings have basically become our ministry, and we have somehow equated larger or nicer buildings with greater success.

It is like that passage in Hosea 8 and verse 14, where the Bible said, “Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples.” And so that is what we have done. We have basically forgotten God, and we are building temples. The more blessed we are when that in reality is not true.

The Context of Deuteronomy 28: Sanctions

Remember also the words that our Lord spoke to the church at Laodicea, in Revelation 3, verse 17. Our Lord said, “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Here was a church that said, “We are rich. We have everything we need. We do not need anything.” And our Lord said, “You do not really understand. You are really poor, blind, miserable, and naked.”

While materialism is a problem, I do not think it is our only problem, and I certainly do not think that it is our largest problem. It

is a problem. But when you look at the context of Deuteronomy chapter 28, you can understand why God's people are so impotent and why the Church of Jesus Christ is impotent as well. Deuteronomy chapter 28 is the chapter that deals with sanctions, and sanctions may be either positive or negative. Deuteronomy 28 includes both positive and negative sanctions.

Sanctions are authoritative permission or approval, or authoritative disapproval and condemnation. But there is an easier definition: sanctions may also be defined as a provision of the law enacting a penalty for disobedience and a reward for obedience. In Deuteronomy chapter 28, naturally, the positive sanctions are known as blessings, and the negative sanctions are known as curses. Verses 1 through 14 deal with the positive sanctions, or the positive blessings, and verses 15 through 68 deal with the negative sanctions, or curses. There are four times as many verses dealing with the negatives, or the curses, as there are dealing with the positives, or the blessings.

I believe there is a reason for that. God is placing an emphasis upon the negative, telling us that we need to beware and make sure that we watch our attitudes, our actions, and our conduct as well, because there are consequences for disobedience. God has designed it and ordained it that blessings always follow obedience and curses always follow disobedience.

Look at Deuteronomy chapter 28. If you understand the impact of the Hebrew word "nasag," translated as "overtake" in verses 2 and 15, you will understand the consequences of obedience or disobedience. The verb enforces the idea that you cannot outrun either the blessings or the curses of God. You may try to run from them, but God tells you that they will run you down and fall over you. There is absolutely nothing you can do to thwart, hinder, or stop them. In verse 2, God says, "And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee."

"...if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God." That means they are going to run you down. In verse 15, he 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, that all these curses shall

come upon thee, and overtake thee." It does not matter who you are or where you are: God is saying that you cannot outrun either the blessings or the curses.

Matthew Henry said this regarding the word "overtake," especially in reference to the curses: "In general it is declared, 'All these curses shall come upon thee from above, and shall overtake thee, though thou endeavour to escape them, it is to no purpose to attempt it. They shall follow thee, whithersoever thou goest, seize thee, overtake thee, and overcome thee.'" That is true. While I was reading through Deuteronomy, especially chapter 28, it was verse 32 that caught my eye: "Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might, no power, no strength in thine hand."

The Helplessness Described in Deuteronomy 28:28-35

In this context, we normally think of war and captivity, of children being kidnapped and taken. Certainly that is included, because God speaks of them being overcome by their enemies. But notice the phrase, "given to another people." Look at what is happening in the realm of government education: drag queens, gay pride, quote-unquote statism, and transgenderism are being forced upon our children as early as kindergarten. These children are being given to another people because their parents are losing control over them. Once they leave, they may not be coming back at all.

Do you understand that one of life's sorest and worst sorrows is helplessness and powerlessness? One of the greatest heartaches, particularly for a father, is to see his child going astray and realize that there is absolutely nothing he can do about it. You may teach, educate, counsel, advise, and warn them, but you cannot live for them. When someone is determined to do that which is wicked and wrong, there is no way in the world you can stop them.

It is impossible to make anyone do that which is right. We cannot do so. When we talk about seeing our children suffer and helping, I am not talking only about our children, but about people in general. Nor am I talking necessarily only about financial help. What about

physical health, and what about spiritual health as well? So I can ask these questions: Do you want to see your children suffer?

The answer is no, of course not. Do you want to see your elderly mother or father suffer? No. Do you want to see a brother or sister suffer? No. Do you enjoy seeing husbands and wives torn apart, families destroyed, and the agony that proceeds from those things? No. The question is, why do you not help in those situations? The answer comes back: because we are powerless to do so. We have no might.

So in verse 32, the children are either stolen, kidnapped, or captured by an enemy nation. Their parents are longing, waiting, wishing, and hoping for their safe return, but there is absolutely nothing that can be done about them. They have no might, no power to redeem them, no way to get them back, and no way to have them returned. While thinking about this verse, I also thought about the children of professing Christians who are lost and unsaved, wicked and rebellious. They will not listen; they refuse to repent and refuse to do that which is right and biblical. Their parents have no might or power to get them to see the light and the truth. Thus, in this Word is the fruit of what I would call absolute, utter helplessness. To show you the impact of verse 32, I want us to go back, begin reading at verse 28, and read through verse 35, so you can see how absolutely helpless and powerless people are in their disobedience to God.

Watch verse 28. He said this: “The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: 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. Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand. The

fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway: so that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."

"The LORD shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head." Can you imagine being blind, hopeless, and helpless, oppressed and spoiled with no hope of prospering or changing the situation? Everything you do either fails or simply falls apart.

Consider the implication: no marriage, no home, no farm, no garden, no way to maintain yourself, and no way to survive, so to speak. On top of that, your stored-up food is confiscated. Your implements for farming or gardening are stolen and not returned to you. You end up with nothing. It is kind of like the Great Reset: "You will own nothing and be happy," they say. But if I own nothing and you own nothing, somebody owns everything. It may not be you and I; it may be the elite who want to control everything.

Notice that everything is taken from you, even your children. There is no hope of preserving your seed, so to speak, because you have no idea where your children are. You are defeated, frustrated, and destroyed, smitten on every hand. Moreover, you are smitten yourself with diseases. You cannot even help yourself, much less your children.

Three Reasons for the Curse: Disobedience, Desertion, Despisement

When God draws us this awful picture, we have to ask: What actually happens to bring a people, a society, a nation into such a situation? What have we done? How did we get into this situation? What is the cause of that desolation and destruction? If you look around at where we are in the land of the free and the home of the brave, you will find that we are in judgment up to our eyeballs, and most people have no idea what is happening.

The Bible in Proverbs 26:2 says, "As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come." In other

words, there is always a cause for the curse of God. You can mark it down and underline it in your heart: curses do not happen by accident. They are not something that just pops up out of nowhere. There is a reason; there is a cause. The Bible tells us plainly that the cause of these curses is that we have disobeyed God and certainly defied God and His law. God and His law are one.

They are inseparable. You cannot maintain one idea toward God and a different idea toward His law. You cannot say, "I love God, but I don't like His law," or, "I love His law, but I don't like God." God and His law are inseparable. He is King of kings and Lord of lords and God of gods, and every king rules by his law. A rejection of God's law is also a rejection of God.

If we do not keep His commandments, we come short of the blessings of God and incur His curses. As the curses are full of absolute misery, we are also missing the absolute happiness and blessings that stem from obedience. God is our creator, judge, lawgiver, and king. He has the absolute right to tell us how to live and what we may do and may not do.

Isaiah 33:22 says, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us." God is judge, lawgiver, and king. James 4:12 tells us, "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy," and that is the one true and living God.

The first reason we are in such a state—in our nation, our churches, our society, our homes, and our individual lives—is this: we are under His curse because we have disobeyed God. God's law is His rule for our lives. When we transgress and disobey, we violate His law and bring ourselves under a negative sanction; that is, we bring ourselves under a curse.

First John 3:4 says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." You cannot sin without violating God's law. Have you disobeyed God's law? Have you violated God's law? Have you transgressed His commandments? Have you done that which God said not to do? Or, to ask it another way, have you failed to obey that which God has commanded? Every

question answered in the negative places one under God's righteous anger and judgment.

Now look at Deuteronomy 28:62. It is amazing that we are hearing about all the people dying from all the shots, all the vaccines. I heard the head of Pfizer say that by 2025, 50 percent of the country would be dead. Why? Look at verse 62. God says this is part of the curse: "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God." You will be left few in number because you would not obey.

In Nehemiah 9:17, Nehemiah said concerning Israel, "And 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." They refused to obey. They were not mindful of God's wonders, but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain so they could return to Egypt.

In Job 36:12, God said, “But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.” If they obey not, there is definitely a curse for disobedience. In Jeremiah 12:17, God said, “But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD.” Not just an individual, not just a family, not just a church, but a nation. When Stephen was giving his witness in Acts 7:39, he said, “To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.” So, we are under God’s curse because we refuse to obey God. We have disobeyed Him.

But sin is not only disobedience. It is more awful than just disobedience because sin is also desertion. We are under God’s curse because we have disobeyed Him; secondly, we are under God’s curse because we have deserted Him. In reality, it is the height of stupidity and insanity to forsake the one true and living God. He holds our souls in life. Our times are in His hands. He is the source of all blessings and happiness, and without Him we are absolutely nothing.

You say, “I don’t need God. I don’t need anything He provides. I’ve got enough strength. I can take care of myself.” Really? Just try

taking care of yourself for five minutes without breathing His air. Let us see how far you get. Our Lord said in John 15:5, “Without me ye can do nothing.”

Here is a principle from Scripture: when we disobey God, we desert Him. When we desert and forsake Him in righteousness and justice, He deserts and forsakes us. It is called the lex talionis, the law of retribution, where God makes the punishment fit the crime. One of the greatest judgments that can befall anyone—a nation, an individual, a family, or a church—is for God simply to leave us alone. Do you realize how simple it is for God to destroy a people? All He has to do is leave them alone.

In Matthew chapter 15, after our Lord had preached, the disciples came to Him and said, “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” Our Lord answered, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” When God leaves someone alone, that person is in trouble.

In Deuteronomy chapter 31, verse 16, God said through Moses: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?”

They will forsake Me, and I will forsake them. Disobedience becomes desertion. When we disobey, we desert God. Deuteronomy 28:20 says, “The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me.” Disobedience, in reality, is also desertion. In Judges 10:13, God said, “Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.”

You want to be left alone? You want Me to leave you alone? Fine, says God, I can do that. Remember 1 Samuel 8, when Israel demanded a king. Samuel prayed to the Lord and was very upset because he knew it was wrong. God said to Samuel, in verse 8, "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." When a people forsake God, they also forsake His preachers, His prophets, His truth, and His Word. Disobedience is also desertion.

Look through the book of Jeremiah, chapter 2. There we see the absolute insanity of deserting God. In verse 12, He says, "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD." Why? "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."

Why would someone leave a fountain of living water and cut out a cistern with holes and cracks that can hold no water? You would have to be insane to trade a fountain of living water for a bucket that could not hold anything. But God says that is exactly what people have done to Him. They have deserted Him for something absolutely worthless. That is why the idols in the Bible are always called vanity: they are worthless and useless.

Jeremiah demonstrates the absolute insanity of deserting God. The curse comes because we have disobeyed God. But disobedience is more than disobedience; it also becomes desertion. That is not the worst part of sin. There is not only disobedience and desertion, but, thirdly, despisement. We are under the curse of God because we have despised God. Disobedience leads to desertion, and desertion leads to despisement.

Suppose Steve has a very handsome knife, perhaps one of a kind, and I see it and really want it. He puts it down and walks away. I say, “This is my opportunity,” and steal the knife. Have I disobeyed God? Yes, because God says, “Thou shalt not steal.” But I have done more than disobeyed God. I have deserted God. In essence, I have said, “You are not my God. I am my own god because I want that knife, regardless of what You say.” And, thirdly, I have not only disobeyed

and deserted Him; I have despised Him, treating Him with absolute contempt. I want what I want, and I do not care what He says.

Deuteronomy 28:15 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; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee."

Note that there is not only disobedience and desertion; there is actually a despisement of God. Despising God is the highest contempt imaginable. When we refuse to hear Him and obey Him, we desert Him, and in that desertion is the highest contempt of despising Him.

To show you that I am not making this up, consider 2 Samuel 12. Everyone is familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba. David not only committed adultery with Bathsheba; he had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, murdered with the sword of the children of Ammon. God sent Nathan the prophet to David, and Nathan told him about the rich man and the poor man who had one little ewe lamb. When a traveler came, the rich man spared taking from his own flock and took the poor man's lamb instead, preparing it for his visitor. David was furious and said, "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold." Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man."

In 2 Samuel 12:9, look what God says to David: "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 go back: "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD?" Look at the commandments that David despised. He despised the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." He despised the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." He despised the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." He despised the fifth commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother," because what he did was very dishonorable to his family. He certainly despised the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," because he treated God with contempt and acted as if he was his own God. Yes, he despised the commandments.

But note verse 10. After asking, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD?” God says, “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.” I told you earlier that God and His law cannot be separated. They are one. God rules by His law. So in verse 9, you despise His law; in verse 10, you despise Him. That is why you cannot maintain one attitude toward God and a different attitude toward His law. No. Sin is not just disobedience. Sin is not just desertion. It is a despisement of God.

In 1 Samuel 2:30, God is dealing with Eli and his house, especially Hophni and Phinehas, his sons. God says to Eli, “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” What were Hophni and Phinehas doing? They were violating God’s law. What was Eli doing? He was violating God’s law by not restraining his sons. And God says, “They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” In other words, God said, if you despise me, I’ll despise you. It is just that simple. That is the lex talionis, the law of retribution.

Now, in Isaiah chapter 30, verse 12, let me quote it: “Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon.” You despise His words. How do you do that? By disobedience? By deserting Him? By doing that which He tells you not to do?

Then He said in Jeremiah chapter 23 and verse 17, “They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.” No, that is not true. He said that you despise Him when you violate His Word, when you disobey Him, and when you desert Him. The truth of the matter is that there is no peace for the wicked. He said in Isaiah 57, “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” They are like the troubled sea that casts up dirt and mire. There is no peace for the wicked. So, if we desire peace, if we desire blessing, we must be

obedient to His Word. We must honor Him, praise Him, and cleave to Him.

The Call to Choose Life and Return to God

Now I want to tie this together. I want you to think about this, because my question is, Where is our power? Where is our might? The truth is, we are helpless. We cannot disobey, desert, and despise God and continue to prosper and live. We cannot disobey, desert, and despise God and expect to have His blessing, His power, and His might upon us. It is impossible.

I want you to look in Deuteronomy chapter 30 at what Moses warned the people concerning. Let us begin with verses 19 and 20. He said, "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 had given and explained the law, and said, "I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose life, that thou and thy seed may live." Now look at verse 20. If you choose life, here is the path: "That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." If you choose life, he says that you are going to obey. If you choose life, you are not going to desert Him, but you will cleave unto Him.

If you choose life, you are not going to despise Him. Why? "For he is thy life, and the length of thy days." Life involves obedience, faithfulness, and loving the Lord. That is why it is said, "that thou mayest love the LORD thy God." Disobedience involves desertion and despisement. One reason that we are absolutely powerless is because even most professing Christians have chosen death instead of life, because they have chosen disobedience.

We have to understand that the Lord alone is our strength, our power, and our might. Consider Isaiah chapter 40, verse 26: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one

faileth.” God is great in His might, strong in power, and nothing fails. Verse 29 says, “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”

"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; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." So He giveth power to the faint, to those who are helpless and have no might. He increases their strength. Our might and our power is in the Lord.

Why in the world are Christians, and why is the Church of Jesus Christ, so impotent, so anemic, so helpless, so powerless, and so despised when we have the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, almighty, invincible God of heaven and earth as our God? The answer is because we have disobeyed, deserted, and despised Him.

Nehemiah 8 says, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." If you are rejoicing in the Lord, you are obedient and faithful; you have not deserted or despised Him, but are loving and cleaving unto Him. We have not realized our extreme helplessness. The Bible says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD." We cannot do one thing in and of ourselves. As our Lord said, "Without me ye can do nothing."

The reason for our impotence as a whole is our disobedience, desertion, and despisement of God. When we repent and come back to Him, we will be like those early Christians, and the fear and dread of us will be upon all men. But right now, we are the laughingstock of the world because of our helplessness and impotence.

We need a real, genuine awakening and revival. The joy of the LORD is to be our strength.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You, Father, for Your Word. We realize our sins, our disobedience, our desertion, and our despisement. O Lord, forgive us for our multitudinous sins. May we choose life, love Thee, cleave to Thee, obey Thee, and be faithful unto Thee. May we love Thee with all of our heart, mind, soul, spirit, and being—everything that we are. We cry, Lord, that You will turn us, and we shall be turned. Quicken us,

O Lord, and we shall call upon Thy name. Give us Your grace and mercy, for Thou alone art power, might, and strength. We praise Thee and ask for Your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 4

The Spirit of Whoredoms

April 30, 2023

Introduction: The Spirit of Whoredoms Defined

Hosea chapter 4, verse 12, gives the title of the message: “The Spirit of Whoredoms.” It may not be exactly what you think. We will return to the context shortly, but God says, “My people ask counsel of their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them, for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God.” Then, in Hosea chapter 5 and verse 4, the Bible says: “They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God, for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord.” One prevalent spirit that manifests itself in every sphere of life and in the world is a spirit of whoredoms.

It is not just in America, England, Europe, Asia, or Africa. It is everywhere, in every one of the nations. We see it daily and hear of it often, and we have become insensitive to it. In fact, we have become so sensitized in the sense of the word that we tolerate it. Simply because we tolerate it, we tend to think that it is normal and therefore acceptable as well. To understand what I am going to preach, look around, and you can see for yourself.

In Isaiah chapter 19 and verse 14, God speaks about the spirit of whoredoms, but it is here called a perverse spirit. The Bible says, "The Lord had mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof, and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit." Note that this perverse spirit has caused every man to err in every work. In other words, here is something so pervasive and so perverse that it actually affects everything. In that passage, the Hebrew word for perverse means that which is perverse, distorting, and warping. There are multitudes of warped, distorted, perverse people in this world and in America. I tend to think that many of them probably congregate around Washington, D.C., as well as some of the state capitals.

In 1 John 4:6, the Bible calls this the spirit of error: "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." The spirit of truth, then, is those who hear the word of God. The spirit of error is those who do not hear the word of God. Connect, if you would, a spirit of whoredoms with a perverse spirit and with a spirit of error. The spirit of whoredoms is a perverse, distorted, erroneous spirit that leads multitudes astray.

Spiritual Adultery Precedes Physical Immorality

When we hear "the spirit of whoredoms," the very first thing we usually think of is adultery, fornication, and every lust of the flesh. We think of prostitution, both male and female, pedophilia, and sex trafficking that abounds not only in the world, but in the state capitals and in our national capital also. If you have been paying attention to the news lately, there is a whistleblower saying that sex trafficking now involves our government as the middle man in all of this, which I would not doubt at all. That is normally what we think of.

But it may surprise you to learn that in the Old Testament, the word adultery refers to the physical act only about six times, and two of those times have the implication of spiritual adultery as well. Usually, the Old Testament word adultery refers to what we would call spiritual adultery, spiritual fornication, or simply idolatry. In the

New Testament, the word relies more on the physical, but the spiritual is there as well.

The spirit of whoredoms deals directly with fornication and adultery against God and His law because it involves idolatry. Idolatry is spiritual fornication and adultery against God. It is a perversion. It is a spirit of error because it is a denial of God and His authority—a denial of His Creatorship, His Lordship, and His ownership of the world and everything therein. Now go back to Hosea 4:12 and consider the context: “My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them, for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God.”

"They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under the oaks, and poplars, and elms, because the shadow thereof is good. Therefore your daughters shall commit whoredoms, and your spouses shall commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery, for they themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots. Therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall." In other words, the people as a whole are given to idolatry.

Here is a good illustration of what is known as the Lex Talionis, the law of retribution. It is where God makes the punishment fit the crime. When God says, "I'm not going to punish your daughters and your spouses when they commit adultery because they're separated with whores, with adulterers already," He is saying that what you are doing to Him, your spouses and your daughters are going to do to you as well.

Once he talks about spiritual adultery and spiritual fornication, it is spiritual adultery and spiritual fornication that lead to physical adultery and physical fornication. If someone is unafraid to whore around on the sovereign, holy God of heaven and earth, how much less will he be afraid to whore around on his or her spouse? If someone is not afraid to sin against God openly, blatantly, and violently, he will certainly not be afraid to sin against his spouse as well.

The physical immorality that is rampant in this country, whether adultery, fornication, pedophilia, or transgenderism, is a consequence and result of theological immorality. The spiritual always precedes the physical.

The Unclean Spirit and Idolatry

Look momentarily at the book of Zechariah, while holding Hosea. Zechariah is right before Malachi, next to the last book in the Old Testament. In Zechariah chapter 13, verse 2, God talks about an unclean spirit, and that unclean spirit happens to be the spirit of whoredoms, which is a perverse spirit and a spirit of error. He says, "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered, and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land." So the unclean spirit is connected with the idols and the names of the idols, which would go to the spirit of error, the spirit of perversion, and also the spirit of whoredoms.

Now look at a verse that you could quote. Turn in your Bibles, holding Hosea, to 2 Chronicles chapter 7, verse 14. There is a purpose for asking you to do this. Everyone could probably quote this verse; it has been quoted multitudes of times by many people. Look carefully at what it 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 will heal their land."

God's People Are the Idolaters

I want to emphasize something. Note that he said, "if my people." He is not talking about the wicked, the ungodly, or the unsaved. He said, "It's my people." "If my people," which are called by my name, "will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I'll hear from heaven and I'll forgive their sins and heal their land."

Do you realize, in one sense of the word, how simple this is? How easy this is? You almost have to ask yourself this question: Why in the world are Christians not humbling themselves and praying and

seeking his face and turning from their wicked ways, so that God will hear from heaven and heal our land and forgive our sins?

There is a good reason why 2 Chronicles 7:14 is not being applied. Most of you know this verse, and most of you could quote it. But there is a vast difference between knowing and quoting and doing and applying.

In verse 14, God said, "if my people." In Hosea chapter 4 and verse 12, He said, "My people ask counsel of their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them." This is astounding. "My people"—the same wording in 2 Chronicles 7:14; the same Hebrew word for "my people" is exactly the same Hebrew word here in Hosea 4:12. The point being made in Hosea chapter 4 is that it is God's people who are the idolaters. It is God's people who have the spirit of whoredoms. It is God's people who have the perversion of spirit. It is God's people who have the spirit of error. It is God's people, according to Zechariah, that have the unclean spirit.

In our text, of course, we are talking about Israel. Israel was the covenant people of God. God had entered into a covenant with them. God had given them His law. God gave them the priesthood. God gave them the Levites. God gave them the prophets. But by extension, this refers to all of God's people. Practically speaking, today it would be the people of God who profess His name, who claim to be Christian, while at the same time having the spirit of whoredoms, wandering from Him, refusing to obey Him, and treating Him as if He had no authority over their lives.

Hosea 4:12 says, "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them," and then, "for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God." They have gone a-whoring from under their God. So, as painful as it may sound, and as painful as it truly is, what God is actually saying here is that it is His people who have left the yoke of obedience. It is His people who have left His precincts and His protection. It is His people who are committing spiritual adultery and spiritual fornication against Him. He uses the illustration of a wife who would wickedly depart from her husband and commit adultery and fornication as well. God is saying that this is what His people are doing to Him.

"Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend, and come you not to Gilgal, neither go you up to Beth-Avon, nor swear the Lord liveth." In other words, do not mix My name with your idolatry. Do not claim to be Mine while worshiping your idols. Idolatry was prevalent at Gilgal and Beth-Avon as well. Here is Israel, the covenant people of God, who have the spirit of whoredoms.

Matthew Henry writes, "So Hosea 4:15, Israel has played the harlot. Their conduct in the worship of their idols was like that of a harlot, wanton and impudent. And Hosea 4:16, Israel slid back as a backsliding heifer, an untamed heifer, or some, or as a perverse or refractory one, so others. As a heifer that is turned loose and runs madly about the pasture, or if put under the yoke, will draw back instead of going forward, will struggle to get her neck out of the yoke and her feet out of the furrow. Thus unruly, ungovernable, untractable were the people of Israel. They had begun to draw on the yoke of God's ordinances, but they drew back as children of Belial that will not endure the yoke. When the prophets were sent with the goads of reproof to put them forward, they kicked against the pricks and ran backwards. The sum of all of it is Hosea 4 and verse 17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.'"

That is, Ephraim is perfectly wedded to them; his affections are glued to them, and his heart is upon them. He goes on to say that God has given us two instances of their idolatry in this case, which he will point out. Before making the application to Hosea, consider this truth throughout the book of Jeremiah.

When people leave God and abandon His law, the only direction they can go is in the direction of error and untruth. That is why they would have the spirit of error. That is why they would have a perverse spirit. That is why they would have an unclean spirit. That is why they would have a spirit of whoredoms.

The Torah usually refers at least to the first five books of the Bible, the books of the law written by Moses. Sometimes the word Torah is applied to the totality of God's Word, because Torah means authoritative instruction and direction. When you leave God's authoritative instruction and God's authoritative directions, the only

place left for you is error, perversion, and a spirit of whoredoms. It is just that simple.

Jeremiah 10:23 says, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

Stop and think about that. Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself." You and I, by nature, will not come up with the best route, the best direction, or the best instruction. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. How many people have said, "Well, I know what's best for me and I know what's best for mine"? How many of us have said it? The truth of the matter is that you really do not know what is best for you. You really do not know the best way. You do not know the best route, the best direction, or the best instruction by nature.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” When you think you know the best way and have the best idea, your heart can deceive you so easily. I have heard pastors and Christians say, “Well, if I know my heart...” The truth is, you do not know your heart. It is deceitful. You may think you know your heart, but you do not. There have been times in my life when I really thought I was doing something for the Lord, until the Lord opened my eyes and I saw that I was doing things for myself, not for Him. The heart is deceitful all the time.

Proverbs 6:18 says, “An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief.” Once you have a heart that devises wicked imaginations, once you have thoughts in your mind that are wicked and that is what you want, then you have feet. You put plans to those thoughts. You have feet that run into mischief, and you cannot wait to get into mischief.

Let me show you what is happening. When you reject God and refuse to walk in His law and commandments, the only thing left is the imagination of your own heart. Jeremiah 7:23 says, “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 did not obey: “But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went

backward, and not forward." Anytime you reject God's Word for what you think, you are going backward and not forward.

Jeremiah 9:13-14 says, "And the Lord said, 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."

Any time you refuse God, you are going to walk after the imagination of your own heart, and the imagination of your heart will end up in idolatry. Jeremiah 11:7 says, "For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I 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 every one in the imagination of their evil heart. Therefore, I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant," that is, the curses of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. "I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did them not."

If they will not be blessed, they will be cursed. But note that they were walking after the imagination of their own heart. Jeremiah 13:10 says, "This evil people which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart and walk after other gods to serve them and to worship them shall even be as this girdle which is good for nothing." He speaks of this evil people who walk in the imagination of their own hearts and after other gods.

Someone will object, "I don't see any Christians walking around trying to worship Baalim, or Baal, or Zeus, or Mohammed, or whoever. I don't see that among Christians." What you don't understand is this: You don't have to bow down before an idol or have a false idol to be an idolater. All you have to do is place your will ahead of God's will, your word ahead of God's word. God said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." You cast God down and set yourself up, saying, "I'm going to do what I want and what I will, regardless." Very clearly, you don't have to bow down before an idol.

Jeremiah 16:11–12 says: "Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the Lord, and have walked after

other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law, and you have done worse than your fathers. For behold, you walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me." Anytime you walk after your own imagination, your own will, or your own way, you are refusing to listen to God.

The Insanity of Idolatry

Now turn back to Hosea 4. I want you to see the absolute stupidity and insanity that is in the heart by nature. You cannot trust your own heart. Your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Hosea 4:12 speaks of a covenant people—people who had been given the law, ordinances, priesthood, and prophets of God. They had everything. Yet God says, "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them, for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a-whoring from under their God."

What in the world are God's people doing? The truth is, I am afraid that most Christians—if you prefer, professing Christians—never really read or study the Bible. Some read and then get up and forget; they never apply the truth or study to find it. They will read horoscopes, listen to false prophets, and do all kinds of things to gather information, direction, and insight. This shows how stupid and insane people become when they refuse God in His Word. He said, "My people ask counsel at their stocks." Do you know what a stock was?

A stock was a wooden statue or idol consulted either by the people or by a priest to obtain help, instruction, or direction. The Hebrew word for stocks is 'ets, literally meaning a tree, stick, stump, piece of wood, or timber. How dumb must you be to ask a stump for directions or a piece of wood for help?

Here was a people who were supposed to be God's covenant people. They would not hear God speaking from heaven, but they would listen to a spirit speaking from a stump.

A plank, a piece of timber. I could understand an ornately carved piece of wood. I could even understand a piece of wood covered in

silver or gold—at least it would be a little more expensive. But both are absolutely worthless, because it does not matter: they are dead and dumb. Yet people consult with a piece of wood. Maybe these were the first greenies; I do not know.

Whether it is a stump, an ornately carved idol, or one made of silver or gold, look at what God says in Psalm 115: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.” Men made them. “They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not. Neither speak they through their throat.”

Now watch verse 8: “They that make them are like unto them.” So is everyone that trusts in them. You are insane. That is what he is saying. You are dumb. You cannot speak, think, walk, or talk. Clearly, then, God is saying, “My people have forsaken Me. They have whored against Me. They have played the harlot against Me because they have run out from under My law.”

It does not matter how ornate, beautiful, costly, or expensive an idol is, or whether it is merely a plain piece of wood. The only reason something like that is looked upon and worshipped is the depravity of the heart and the rejection of God and His Word. Can you imagine bowing down before an idol, as people do? Can you imagine kissing an idol or offering to an idol which men made and had to put in its place because it could not walk there? It was worthless.

Now, go back to Hosea chapter 4, because here is another illustration of their insanity. He says in verse 12, “My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them.” They are consulting their walking sticks, the staff in their hands. They will not believe God speaking from heaven, but they will believe an evil spirit speaking from a staff. We know that our God is in the heavens. That is what He said in Psalm 115, verse 3.

“He's done whatsoever He is pleased.” But seeking counsel from a staff or a stump is insane. You do not even know who is holding the staff. I did not even know a staff could speak. If it did speak, what language would it speak, who would interpret it, and how would you know that the interpretation was correct?

This consulting of staffs, sticks, and arrows is called rhabdomancy, an odd way of divining from things like an arrow, a stick, or a staff. Sometimes it is used in combination with other methods. This is essentially what Nebuchadnezzar was doing in Ezekiel 21. God told Ezekiel to prophesy what Nebuchadnezzar was going to do: “The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, Also thou son of man, appoint thou two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come, both twain shall come forth out of one land, and choose thou a place, choose it as the head of the way to the city.” In other words, there was a divided way. “Appoint a way that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah and Jerusalem the defense.” He could go one of two ways. Now look what he says about Nebuchadnezzar.

“For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination.” How did he divine which way to go? “He made his arrows bright.” He was using the arrows to divine. “He consulted with images,” that is, his gods that he brought with him, “and he looked into the liver.” So he killed an animal and looked into the liver. It is an odd way, obviously, to make a divination, but that is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did. Of course, he went to Jerusalem, not because the arrow told him to, or the liver told him to, or his idols told him to, but because God corrected it against that city for correction and for judgment.

Any time you seek knowledge, any time you seek information over and above and beyond the Word of God, you have gone into idolatry; you have a spirit of whoredoms, and what you are doing is condemned by God.

God's Provision: The Prophet Like Moses

In Deuteronomy 18:9, God says, “When thou come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abomination of those nations.” God says you cannot mimic them. You cannot learn from them. “There shall not be found among you anyone that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire,” that is, giving your child as an offering to Molech, either as a sacrifice or as a dedication. Sometimes passing through the fire was just dedicating the child for the use of Molech and for idol worship.

"There shall not be found among you anyone that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire or that useth divination." Divination is any method of trying to ascertain truth, direction, instruction, or help other than from God. He says, "or an observer of times"—"Well, the stars are in their right courses right now and the planets are in their right places right now"—horoscopes, "or an enchanter, a murmurer or a witch." There is no such thing as a good witch. "Or a charmer, or consulter with familiar spirits," that is, spiritism, "or wizard or a necromancer." Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd, held séances in the White House, and some modern-day presidents have done so as well. You know what a necromancer is.

Necros is the Greek word for dead. A necromancer is someone who talks to the dead. These séance witches try to contact the dead and ask them to show themselves and speak. God says, no, that is not to be done. "For all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord."

Remember, an abomination is a stench in God's nostrils. "For all that do these things are an abomination of the Lord. And because of these abominations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee." That is one reason God casts out all those nations before them. Then He says, "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God." You are not to engage in any of this by any stretch of the imagination. "For these nations which thou shalt possess, hearken unto observers of times, and unto diviners. But as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee to do so." Do you realize the sovereign protection of God?

I told you this before, and my father told me this, and it stuck with me as a child. I have never been to a fortune teller, nor would I ever go to one. When my father and mother had just been married, they went to a county fair, holding hands, and walked by the fortune teller's tent. The fortune teller said, "Come on in, and I'll tell you when you're going to get married."

My father looked at her and said, "If you knew anything at all, you'd know we already were." They kept right on walking. I read an interview in which a newspaper reporter was supposed to interview a fortune teller and spiritual instructor. The journalist wondered

whether it was really real, but the fortune teller had to call and cancel because of unforeseen circumstances. They do not know anything at all either. God says, no, you are not to do anything like that.

Now look in verse 15. Here is what I want you to see: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee of thy brethren like unto me. Unto him shall you hearken.” Moses said, “I’m a prophet.” He is, and he was. Now he says that God will raise up a prophet like him from among their brethren.

Verse 16 says, “According to all that thou desirest of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.”

Moses was saying, “God is going to raise up a prophet like me because, in that day, you asked for a prophet, a mediator, a go-between. That is what I am, and God is going to raise up a prophet like me from among your brethren.”

Now look at verse 18. God answered Moses: “I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”

What did God just say? You do not need a diviner, an enchanter, a wizard, a witch, a necromancer, or a spiritist. God has raised up a prophet, given him His words, and he will declare all that God commands—everything you need to know. If you will not listen to him, God will require it of you.

I hope that you already know that the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed that prophet. Jesus Christ is not only prophet, He is priest and He is king. In Acts chapter 3, beginning with verse 18, we read: "But these things are those things which God before hath showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of

the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." We are talking about Jesus Christ. "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me. Him shall you hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among his people." So Jesus Christ is that prophet.

Acts chapter 7, beginning with verse 37, says concerning Moses: "This is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me. Him shall you hear. This is He that was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel which spake to him in Mount Sinai, and the Lord Jesus Christ was there, and with our fathers, who received the lively oracles to give unto them, to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt." So they refused Moses, but the reason they refused Moses was that they refused the One who gave the law to Moses, who would have been the prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Deuteronomy 18 and verse 19, God said, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee. I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken to my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

In Acts 3 he said, “He that will not hear shall be destroyed.” You remember what our Lord said in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17 concerning His disciples? He said, “I have given them the words which thou hast given me, and they have believed that I have come from thee.” God gave us Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. Jesus Christ is the living Word, according to John 1:1–3. The Bible is the written Word, according to 2 Timothy 3:16–17. God is saying, “I’ve given you everything that you need. And I’ve given it to you through the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Do you understand that God holds us accountable, responsible, and answerable to hear all the words of this book? He holds us

accountable and responsible to obey all the words of this book. That is why in Hebrews 12:25 we read, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh, for if they escape not him that spake upon earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.” Jesus Christ has spoken once on earth. They turned their back, and they were destroyed. Now He is speaking from heaven. He is the exalted Son of God. “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.” So, we have the Word of God.

How did this message start? The spirit of whoredoms. How is it that we are willing to hear anything and everything but the Word of God? How is it that people will follow false prophets so easily and so quickly, and never read the Word of God for themselves? Do not err from the Lord Jesus Christ. To err from Him is the spirit of whoredoms. It is biblical harlotry; it is scriptural and spiritual adultery.

Applications: The Spirit of Whoredoms Today

Now, let me make some applications. Has it ever really dawned upon you, or have you ever really considered the fact that when you refuse to follow or submit to the Word of God, and do your own thing—what you think best, what you want, and what you desire, regardless of what God has said—you are playing the harlot? You have the spirit of whoredoms. That is what He said: “They’ve gone a-whoring from their God.” They have run out from under His authoritative instruction and His commands. They refuse to obey. Moreover, when you hear, know, read, or see the Word of God and refuse to obey it, in one sense, you are in competition with God.

What did he say in Isaiah 42 and verse 8? “My glory will I not share. And I’m not going to give my praise to another.” When you say, “No, God, I’m not going to do this. Here’s what I think best. Here’s what I want to do. Here’s what I’m going to do,” you are dethroning God and enthroning yourself. You are an idolater. That’s exactly what he is saying.

In other words, it is a denial of Proverbs chapter 3, verses 5 through 7: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy path. Be not wise in thine own eyes, fear the Lord,

and depart from evil." When we are wise in our own eyes and lean to our own understanding, it is the spirit of whoredoms. We are not depending upon the Lord.

In one sense, the spirit of whoredoms is a spirit of independence: "I don't need God. I don't need his word. I don't need his law. I don't need his direction. I don't need his instruction. I know what is best for me." This is what God said in Hosea chapter 4: it is the spirit of whoredoms which has caused them to err. It causes us to go astray. Anytime and every time we do not submit to the Word of God, we err. Anytime and every time we do not obey, we go a-whoring from under our God. As His people, we run out from under His authority and jurisdiction, claiming our own authority and jurisdiction and saying, in essence, that we are God and can do what we want to do.

Many churches have the slogan, "Where everyone is someone and Jesus Christ is Lord." I know a number of churches that have that slogan, with the motto printed on or over their doors. However, when churches refuse to preach and teach the whole counsel of God, they are going astray from their God. When they refuse to obey and submit to that Word, they go awry from their God. When they refuse to walk in His ways, how is He their Lord? You remember Luke 6:47, where our Lord said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not those things which I say unto you?"

The truth of the matter is that, in Christianity today, most of us have erred. We have gone to whoring because of the spirit of whoredoms in our lives.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God said, "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 forgive their sins and heal their land." So here is my question: If in reality we wanted our land healed, wanted to be revived, and wanted Jesus Christ honored and glorified, why would we not do something so absolutely simple? Why would we not humble ourselves before God?

Why would we not acknowledge that everything we are and everything we have is because of Him and His grace? Why would we not acknowledge that He is the Creator and we are the creature; He

is the Lord and we are the servant; He is God and we are man? Why would we not do that? Why would we not pray? Why would we not seek His face? Why would we not want more holiness, more righteousness, and more obedience?

Why would we not be willing to turn from our sins? It is really, really very simple. You would think Christians all over this country would say, "Hey, I'm so sick of the perversions. I'm so sick of the spirit of error. I'm so sick of the spirit of whoredoms. I want holiness. I want righteousness in our land. I want what we were when we were founded." Why will we not do that? Well, here is the answer.

Conclusion: The Need for Repentance

Hosea 5:4 says, "They will not frame their doings to turn to the Lord. For the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord." God said they will not frame their doings to turn to the Lord. Why? Because the spirit of whoredoms is in their midst. In other words, even professing Christians will not frame their actions, attitudes, and conduct to turn to the Lord because of a spirit of whoredoms. That spirit has to be dealt with before we can ever consider 2 Chronicles 7:14. Unless it is, we will never turn. Unless it is, we will never pray as David prayed in Psalm 143:10: "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God. Thy spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness."

Have you ever prayed, "Lord, teach me to do thy will"? Have you ever prayed, "Lord, make me holy as thou art holy, Lord, make me righteous, make me godly"? Have you ever prayed, "Lord, give me a greater obedience, give me a greater humility, give me a greater prayer life, give me, Lord, a greater turning from sin unto thee, Lord, work in my life"?

Immorality is rampant because idolatry is rampant. Spiritual idolatry always precedes physical adultery, fornication, and immorality. Once we turn theologically from God, then we turn culturally, practically, and morally into declension on every hand. If a man is unafraid to sin against God, he certainly will not be afraid to sin against his fellow man. God said, "My people ask counsel of their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them." People are willing to

listen to the news, their neighbors, television, movie theaters, newspapers, and horoscopes, but they are not willing to listen to the Word of God. That is the spirit of whoredoms. Until it is repented of, there will never be a 2 Chronicles 7:14 in our lives.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee this day. We thank you for your word and your truth. Lord, enable us to deal with our own lives, and help us with the lives of our family and our neighbors. May we turn unto Thee with our whole heart and seek Thee in Thy will, Thy Word, and Thy way in every area of our lives. Give us Your grace, we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Implication of forsaking God's Laws

May 7, 2023

Implications of Forsaking God's Law

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 30:8-18 (KJV)

> Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever. But this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to the seers, See not.
>
> And to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore, thus saith the Holy One of Israel, because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of a potter's vessel that is broken in pieces.

> He shall not spare, so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit. For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, in returning and rest shall you be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be your strength, and you would not. But you said, No, for we will flee upon horses. Therefore shall you flee, and we will ride upon the swift. Therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one, and at the rebuke of five shall ye flee, till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill. And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you. For the Lord is a God of judgment, blessed are all they that wait for Him.

Introduction: The Alternative to God's Law

> I've preached many times in times past and made this particular statement, which I want to make again today, that the alternative to God's law is man's law. Man, in rejecting God's law, becomes autonomous, and thus he becomes a law to himself. Thus, a denial of and a forsaking of God's law, then, leaves you the only alternative, and that is to be ruled by man.

Autonomy may seem to be merely a competition to the law of God, because it is an alternate law system. In one sense, it is in competition with the law of God. But most of us have never really realized the implications of forsaking the law of God. When one rebels against God, refuses His word, disobeys Him, and conducts his life apart from God, he is not only destroying himself, but also his family and society as well.

Trusting in Man vs. Trusting in God

Jeremiah 11 sets the stage for Isaiah 30. The Word of God says, “And say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant.” Cursed be the man.

“Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey

my voice, and do them according to all which I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, that I may perform the oath which I swore unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day."

Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Lord. Then the Lord said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them. For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice.

"Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one 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." Note that he said, "Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their heart. Therefore..." It has been said over and over: anytime you see a "therefore," you had better make sure that you see what it is there for.

This is certainly a conclusion based upon their refusal to obey. He says, "I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, and they did them not." Thus, he is talking about all the curses mentioned in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. There were also blessings if they obeyed, but there were curses if they disobeyed. So he said, I will bring all these words of the covenant upon them. That is, all of the curses.

Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." If you put these two passages together and think about their implications, when one does not trust in the Lord, the only alternative is to trust in man and in the arm of the flesh. Moreover, according to Jeremiah chapter 11, when one does not trust in the Lord, the only thing left for him to trust in is his own thoughts and imaginations. You have to understand that man is not omniscient. Only God is omniscient. Therefore, his thoughts are insufficient; he cannot think things through clearly.

Moreover, Jeremiah 17:5 says, "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm," whose heart departs from the Lord. Anytime anyone puts confidence in man, in the arm of the flesh, or in anything man can do, it is indeed a departure from the Lord. The truth of the matter is this: one either trusts in the Lord God and His law and His word, or one trusts in man and his law and his word. You are either trusting in the arm of the Lord or the arm of the flesh.

In Isaiah chapter 30, Israel was trusting in Egypt, and in doing so they departed from the Lord. Look at the first three verses, which set us up for what comes in verses 8 through 18: “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me, and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin, that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt? Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion.”

Israel's Trust in Egypt as an Example

It is interesting that in verse 1 the Lord says, “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me.” They were willing to listen to anyone and everyone except God. “That cover with a covering, but not of my Spirit.” In other words, they were going to trust in Egypt to protect them. They would trust in man and the arm of the flesh, but they would not ask God to protect them. Thus, they were adding sin to sin. When they went down to Egypt, they had not asked counsel at His mouth; all they wanted was to strengthen themselves in the arm of Pharaoh.

Isaiah 31:1 says, “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are very strong. But they look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord.” Our Lord is telling us that safety and protection are not in the multitude of men or in the might of the flesh. None of these things are worthy of our trust. Our trust should be solely in the Lord Himself.

The Lord may use means, but we do not trust in the means; we trust in the Lord who makes those means effectual. There is always failure when you trust in the arm of the flesh. Going back to Isaiah 30, look at verse 7 and what it says about the Egyptians: “For the Egyptians shall help in vain.”

Implications of Forsaking God's Law

That is, it will be useless, worthless, and to no purpose. “Therefore have I cried concerning this, their strength is to sit still.” In other words, they are not going to do one thing to help or protect Israel—not one thing.

Over and over in the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, there are a multitude of verses that tell us not to trust in the arm of the flesh or in man. In fact, the middle verse in the Bible, Psalm 118:8, says, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” The very next verse says, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.” In other words, you do not trust in man, and you do not trust in government. You trust in God Himself. The flesh will always lead to disappointment, discouragement, and destruction.

Your flesh is at war with God, and your autonomy—your alien law system—is also at war with God. That is why He said, “...the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and they are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

Look in verse 8. This is what God wanted written down. He says to Isaiah, “Now go, write it before them in a table and note it in a book that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever.” God wanted them to see, have, and know that it is fruitless, useless, and worthless to trust in the arm of the flesh or in man. This would be true not only for the time being, but forever and ever. Therefore, He said, write it down and make sure that they understand it.

Implication 1: Attitude and Actions Reveal Relationship

There are implications in forsaking the law of God that should be understood and never forgotten. The first is this: our attitude and our actions reveal our relationship to God. Professions are absolutely worthless without obedience. Rebellion and disobedience prove that we are not in a relationship with Him.

Israel professed to be His people. They were His covenant people. Yet Isaiah 30:1 says, “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me, and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.” Israel certainly professed to be the people of God, but in reality they were not. They refused to listen and to hear God. They did not desire His covering or His protection.

He emphasizes this in verse 9: they are a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord. They were not only rebellious; they were lying children as well. You remember how God likened Israel in Isaiah chapter 1: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but my people 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.”

Now note what God said: they are dumber than a rock, dumber than what we would call a brute beast. He said, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib.” I can tell you, if you do not believe that, just come visit me and get on the golf cart with me as I ride in front of the pasture with all these cows. They will see me, start lowing and moving, and come to me. Anytime I ride in that pasture on the golf cart, Alice can tell you, we are surrounded. They come to us; they know who feeds them and where the feed comes from. But God said, “My people does not know.” In other words, they do not even know which side their bread is buttered on.

But here is the interesting thing. Look back in verse 9. He said that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord. All rebellious people are liars. That is what

God said. They are actually lying against God. When God says they are rebellious and liars, the Bible declares God to be the chief good. But what does a rebellious person do? He lies against God. He says God is not the chief good. What is really good for me is the lust of my flesh, the lust of my eyes, and the pride of life.

He says, “I have got to have sin. I have got to have that which God condemns in order to satisfy myself.” So he is lying against God, saying that God is not the chief good. Moreover, he is lying against God by denying that God is the only true lawgiver, judge, and king, because now he wants to make his own law. He is lying against God and denying His sovereignty and authority, lying against God in every way possible. That is why God calls them liars. Rebellion and lying are intertwined. You cannot have one without the other.

Now listen to this. I want to quote one verse, but I want you to turn to another one. Holding Isaiah 30, turn to Isaiah 59. As you turn there, here is Isaiah 3:8: “For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory.” Their tongue and their doings are against the Lord. Why? How is their tongue against Him?

They are speaking against Him, but they are lying against Him as well. Isaiah 59:13 says, "...in transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood." Notice that transgressing is rebellion, and rebellion is lying against the Lord. Anytime you transgress, anytime you rebel, you are lying against the Lord, and you are departing from our God. The end result is that you will speak oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. That is, you will be lying.

James 3:13-14 says, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth." It is possible to lie against the truth. How do you lie against the truth? Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us that the sovereign God is truth. He is truth; His way is perfect. The Son of God is truth. In John 14:6, our Lord said, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The Spirit of God is called the Spirit of Truth

in John 14 and John 16. Moreover, the Scriptures are referred to as the Scriptures of Truth. In John 17:17, our Lord said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

The Bible tells us in James 1:18 that He has begotten us again with the word of truth. Therefore, to lie against the truth means that you are lying against the Sovereign God, the Son of God, the Spirit of God, and the Scriptures of God. When Jesus Christ was standing before Pilate, Pilate asked Him, "What is truth?" The truth was standing right in front of him, and he did not even recognize it.

God is saying that those who rebel against Him are liars because they are lying against the Sovereign God, the Son of God, the Spirit of God, and the Scriptures of God. Lying and rebellion are intimately intertwined. You cannot have one without the other. Whoever rebels lies against the truth.

Go back to Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 9. Here is a wonderful explanation: “This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” They will not hear. It is not that they cannot hear, that they do not have ears, or that they are deaf. They will not hear because they refuse truth, reject truth, repudiate truth, spurn truth, and simply do not want truth.

Their inability is therefore a moral inability, not a physical one. In Jeremiah 29:19, God says, “Because they have not hearkened unto my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, but you would not hear, saith the Lord.” God said, “I sent my word, but you wouldn't hear.” You would not have it; you would not listen.

The very first principle we have to learn, and the very first implication of forsaking God's law, is that our attitudes and actions reveal exactly what our relationship to God is. A man's profession does not determine it. It does not matter where he goes to church, whether he has been baptized, or whether he serves in some capacity in the church. It is his attitude and his actions that determine whether or not he has an intimate relationship with God. Those who have a relationship obey. They are not rebellious, and they are not lying against Him.

Implication 2: Refusing God's Word is Refusing God

Here is the second implication: a refusal to hear the Word of God is a refusal to hear God. God speaks in His Word and through His Word. If you are waiting for thunder to clap, lightning to flash, the hair to stand up on the back of your neck, and a booming voice from heaven to speak, you will be waiting in vain. That is simply not going to happen. God speaks in His Word, and God speaks through His Word.

Look at verses 10 and 11: “Which say to the seers, See not, and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.”

A Refusal to Hear God's Word Is a Refusal to Hear God Himself

As I was looking at this passage, it dawned on me how many times I have emphasized this truth in different messages. It is not that I am repeating the same message; this truth appears over and over in the Scriptures. Yet, most of the time, even though it is repeated over and over, we simply do not grasp its significance.

Here is the second implication: a refusal to hear the Word of God is a refusal to hear God Himself. He said in verse 10, “which say to the seers, See not.”

A seer was nothing more than a prophet. The prophets were called seers before they were called prophets. A seer was someone who saw. They saw a vision of God, or they saw what was going to happen, and they proclaimed it. You will find that in 1 Samuel 9, because there the Bible says, “Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.” So a seer and a prophet are synonymous.

But note what they say to the seers: “See not.” Then, in verse 10, “and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.” Those who refuse to hear God

do not desire or wish to hear His Word. They say, “Prophesy not unto us right things, but smooth things. Prophesy deceits.”

The word “right” implies that which is upright, straight, and righteous. We use it when we say, “I’m going to give it to you straight.” That means, “I’m going to tell you all of it; I’m not holding anything back, whether it’s good or bad.” That is basically what this word means: “Prophesy not unto us right things”—do not prophesy unto us straight things. Do not tell us how the cow eats the cabbage. Do not tell us what God wants. Do not tell us what is righteous or holy. No.

You remember that passage in 2 Timothy 4, verses 3 and 4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." It is the people who have the itching ears. It is the people who do not want straight things or right things. They do not want to hear the truth.

Do you understand that sinners have not changed? We are still the same. I never will forget a fellow who used to attend our church. He was lost as a hound dog, but he was one of those likeable individuals. You could not help but like him, and he would give you the shirt off his back. His wife was a Christian, and his children attended the church, but he would come only once every three or four months.

One day I asked him, "Why don't you come to church more often? Your wife wants you to come. Your children want you to come. I want you to come. The rest of the people want you to come. Why don't you come more often than you do?" He looked at me and said, "Preacher, you want me to lie to you or tell you the truth?" I said, "Well, I want you to tell me the truth." He said, "Well, the truth is the reason I don't come is I know you're right and I know I'm wrong."

When you speak, he said, it convicts me. I don't want to be convicted. I just love my sins too much. That was truthful. He did not want to hear the Word of God because he did not want to be convicted, and he loved his sins; therefore, he stayed away from the

house of God. It is just that simple. They did not hear the truth. These people did not. They did not want the truth.

Look back at verse 10. They said, "Prophesy" or "speak unto us smooth things."

The word "smooth" refers to that which is slippery, flattering, and palatable. In other words, tickle our ears and scratch them for us. Give us that which we can swallow and digest, even if it is not true. Puff us up. Comment on how wonderful we are and how blessed God is to have us as his people, even though we are in open rebellion and warfare against him.

That is what we want to hear. Verse 10 says, “Prophesy not unto us right things,” or straight things, or righteous things. “Speak unto us smooth things,” flattering, palatable things. Then he says, “Prophesy deceits.” A deceit is not just something deceitful; it is that. It is not just something untrue; it is that. But it is also an illusion. It is not true now, neither will it ever be true in the future. It is a deceit.

There are prophets in the Old Testament, as well as some in the New Testament, who prophesied to accommodate the wicked desires of the people. There are preachers and teachers exactly like that today, and they do so for popularity and gain. In Jeremiah 14:14, Jeremiah said, "Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name, and I sent them not. Neither commanded I them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision, and a divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart."

In other words, it is totally an illusion. It is not true, never has been true, and never will be true. We have the same warning in the New Testament. In Colossians 2:8, God said, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

These people wanted smooth things and deceits. They wanted to be encouraged in their wickedness and fleshliness, and they wanted unscriptural prophets and preachers. In one sense, when you look at the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea, all these men of God were literally hated and despised. Jeremiah and Isaiah particularly were arrested and thrown into dungeons. At the same time, all the false prophets were held in high honor. Even during the time of Ahab and

Jezebel, God's prophets were hiding in a cave, eating bread and water, while the four hundred prophets of Baal were at Ahab's table having roast beef and steak every day.

These people would rather hear someone prophesy or preach something smooth, something easy to swallow, even though it is not true. They would rather hear something deceitful, to their own detriment and damnation, than hear the truth to their own preservation and salvation. It is just like that today. One does not need to express these sentiments with his mouth. He does not have to say, "I do not want to hear the Word of God." People who do not want to hear God's Word do not bother seeking it out, nor do they seek someone who will truly preach and teach it. If one truly wanted the Word of God, he would find it.

He would seek it out. It would not matter how far he had to drive—two hours or three hours. It would not matter the cost of gas or the inconvenience. If he wanted truth, he could really, really find the truth. That is for sure. But most people today would rather be in a very comfortable Christ-denying, Bible-denying, air-conditioned church that will hold a service for fifteen or twenty minutes and send them out with their conscience salved than hear an exposition from the Word of God.

That is where we were in Isaiah's time, and that is exactly where we are today. They did not ask that there be no preaching; they simply wanted to control what was preached. They were willing to listen as long as it was lies, deceits, and smooth things, but they were not willing to listen to the truth. Look around at the churches today that have full services regularly, but where there is really no truth and the Word of God is not truly expounded. Go back to verse 10: "Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." Now look what they say to Isaiah: "Get you out of the way. Turn aside out of the path."

In other words, Isaiah, if you want us to listen to you, preach what we want to hear. Get out of this straight path, this straight and narrow way. Quit giving us the demands of God. Stop telling us about all these moral imperatives that God demands in our lives. We are not interested in hearing that. You get out of the way, and we will

listen to you. As verse 11 says, “Get you out of the way. Turn aside out of the path.” Why? “Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” We do not want Him. We do not want His will, His Word, or His way. We want to do our own thing. Keep us away from God.

As wicked, vile, and rebellious as these people were, they still understood one biblical truth: If you have His Word, you have Him; if you do not have His Word, you do not have Him. It is impossible to separate God from His Word. They did not want the Word of God because they did not want God.

They had no desire for holiness, righteousness, justice, or obedience. Their desire was to cause the Holy One to cease from them. They knew that God demanded obedience, righteousness, and holiness, but they did not want to obey, be righteous, or be holy. They would rather have another gospel, another law system, and another God.

John Calvin said, “Here he again points out the cause of so great wickedness, which doubles their guilt, namely, that God does not spare or flatter their vices but acts the part of a good and skillful physician. Men desire to be flattered and cannot patiently endure that God should threaten them. Hence it comes that men hate and reject the word. Hence proceeds the furious attack on the prophets whose reproofs and threatenings they cannot endure. For there is no reason why men should revolt from the government of God, but because they take delight in what is wrong and crooked and abhor the right way.”

“Appropriately, therefore, does the prophet join these two things, dislike of heavenly doctrine and hatred of uprightness.” If you do not like God’s Word, you do not like God. It is just that simple. Our attitudes and actions tell us exactly what our relationship to God is. If we refuse the Word of God, we basically refuse God Himself. The refusal of God is a rejection of God, which brings judgment and destruction.

Implication 3: Rejection of God Brings Judgment

Isaiah 30:12 says, “Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and

perverseness, and stay thereon: Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant." God charges them with despising His Word. To despise means to refuse, reject, abhor, and treat as loathsome. Do you remember that passage in 2 Samuel chapter 12?

David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah the Hittite, her husband, slain with the sword of the children of Ammon. God sent Nathan to David in 2 Samuel chapter 12. He said, "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 out of thine house, because thou hast despised me," saith the Lord. God charged him first with despising the commandment, and then with despising Him.

It is impossible to hold one attitude toward God and a different attitude toward His Word. Someone says, "Well, I love God, but I don't like the Bible." That is impossible. "Well, I love the Bible, but I don't love God." That is impossible. You cannot separate God from His Word. To despise His Word is to despise Him; to love His Word is to love Him. God said, "You've despised Me."

He also said, "Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon." In other words, once you despise God and His Word, you live for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, pride of life, and the imagination of your heart.

Then God says in verse 13, "Therefore, this iniquity shall be to you as a breach, ready to fall," "swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly, at an instant." God's judgment is going to fall on a wicked people. It is likened to a bulging, broken wall ready to fall. Picture a huge dam holding back a body of water. When it begins bulging in the middle, the pressure is pushing against the concrete so that it will burst forth. Or picture a high-rise building whose whole side is bulging out; you know it is getting ready to fall. "Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall,

swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant," just like when that dam broke.

The Johnstown flood in the early 1900s drowned thousands of people when the dam burst and swept away an entire town—suddenly, in an instant. That is exactly what he is talking about here: judgment. In other words, his judgment is going to be fast, furious, and fatal.

Look at verse 14: "he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces. He shall not spare so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit." It is like taking a good bowl or pitcher out to the concrete and slamming it down. How many thousands of pieces will it burst into? God said that when he judges you, he will judge you so thoroughly that it will be like throwing pottery against concrete. You will not even be able to pick up a shard that could dip live coals out of a fire, transfer them somewhere else, and start another fire. You will not have enough to dip in water just to take a swig.

God's Mercy Amidst Judgment

It will be fast, furious, and fatal. There will not be very much left.

Their light attitude toward God, their contempt and despisement, and their outright hatred of God are manifested in many ways. Yet this is absolutely astounding: in light of all their hatred, wickedness, rebellion, and the prophesied judgment against them, God is still merciful. He holds forth an olive branch to these people. Look in verse 15: "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel."

"In returning"—that is, coming back to him—"and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. And you would not." God said, I have told you to repent. I have told you to come back. If you do not want this destruction, return unto me, saith the Lord. And then he said, "and you would not." They wanted their own will, their own way, and their own law, and they refused God.

"But you said"—when he offered them peace and rest and quietness—"No, we don't want that. We don't want you. We don't

want your word. No. For we will flee upon horses, therefore shall you flee. And we will ride upon the swift, therefore shall they pursue you. They that pursue you shall be swift." So the people wanted to go down to Egypt.

They wanted to get rid of and get away from Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. God had told them not to go down into Egypt, but they said, "No, we're going down to Egypt. We're going to trust in Pharaoh to protect us, serve us, and help us. We're going to ride upon swift horses." God said, "Go ahead. Those that pursue you will be swifter." God had given Egypt into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. They were running straight into the judgment of God.

Instead of obedience, there was disobedience. Instead of trust and confidence in God, there was distrust in Him and trust in the arm of the flesh. Instead of relying upon His protection, they relied upon Pharaoh and Egypt. Fast horses cannot outrun the judgment of God. Thus He said, "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one. At the rebuke of five shall you flee, till you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain and as an ensign on a hill."

To understand this verse, we must understand that the promise of Leviticus 26:8 is reversed, and the threat of Deuteronomy 32:30 is realized. In the blessings of obedience, God said, "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 they obeyed Him, five would chase a hundred, and a hundred would put ten thousand to flight; their enemies would fall before their sword. But now the curse is reversed, and they are the ones being chased by one man or by five men. Deuteronomy 32:30 says, "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?"

When God sells them into the hands of their enemy, it does not take a very great enemy to defeat or destroy them. John Gill said that a troop of horse, consisting of a thousand men, would flee at the attack of a single person. They would be so dispirited and possessed by fear of the enemy that what had been promised concerning their enemies would be turned against them. At the rebuke of five they would flee, being attacked by a very small number. The whole army would run away. This shows with what ease they would be routed

and put to flight. It was not speaking of what would happen at that present time, but of what would come to pass when the Chaldean army came against them, not only in the land, but also in Egypt, where they wanted to go.

Refusal of God's law always brings reliance upon the flesh, and reliance upon the flesh always brings disaster and destruction. You cannot outrun the Word of God, and you cannot outrun the judgment of God.

In light of their rebellion and refusal to hear, there is another verse that is absolutely mind-boggling to me. In judgment, God remembered mercy. If you have ever had any doubt concerning God's love, grace, mercy, and goodness, this next verse should clear up any and all doubt. Look at verse 18: "And therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you. And therefore will he be exalted that he may have mercy upon you. For the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him." Yes, God will judge, and yes, God will chasten. Those who receive the benefits and blessings of that judgment and chastening will turn to him in repentance and faith.

And what does he do? He waits to be gracious. The Bible says in Lamentations 3:33, "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." God is not some old meanie in heaven just waiting to strike us down, ready to destroy us. No. The Bible says he waits that he might be gracious. These people deserved judgment.

Look how they hated him. Look how they despised the Word. But God said, "I'm going to wait." Think about this: to show you the absolute mercy, grace, and patience of God, how many of you repented the very first time that you sinned? In fact, you do not even remember the first time that you sinned. You sinned as a baby.

You say, "How do babies sin?" Well, they lie. Here is that baby crying, and mama goes to pick him up. He must be hungry. No, he is not hungry. She picks him up, and he stops crying. She puts him back down, and he starts crying. He must need a diaper change. She checks, but no diaper needs changing. She puts him back down, and he starts crying again. All he wants is to be held. He is crying and lying because he is trying to make mama think something is wrong

when it is not. All he wants is to be picked up, held, and loved. That is just babies. The Bible says in Isaiah 58 that they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. May I remind you of all the sins you committed—not just as a child, but how about as a teenager?

How about as an adult? What if God was so absolutely, perfectly just with you that the very first time you sinned, He cut you off and cut you down? But He did not. He waited that He might be gracious. When I think of my life and my sins, I have often wondered why God had to kill me a million times. All I am trying to say is this: "Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you." God did not exercise His judgment all of a sudden against these people. He waited.

When the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, God put a sword in their hand and told them to utterly destroy the Canaanites, to wipe them out. Did they deserve wiping out? Yes. They were horrible, wicked sinners before God. But here is the amazing thing: when you read Genesis chapter 15, you know what God said to Abram? "Know for a certainty 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." God waited another 400 years before He put a sword in their hand and said, "Kill them all." As wicked as these people were, God was still willing to be gracious to them. As wicked as you and I were, God was still gracious to us and waited for us.

We must learn that a refusal of God's law is not only reliance upon the flesh; it is a rejection of God, a departing from God, because His Word is law. He is Judge, He is Lawgiver, and He is King. To refuse His law system is to reject Him in all three offices.

Application to America and Call to Repentance

What I just preached from Isaiah chapter 30 certainly applies individually. But He is talking to a nation. Look at where we are in America, and at what is happening in our country. The reason it is happening is because we rejected God. We rejected His law system, departed from Him, despised Him, and refused to listen to Him. We do not want His Word or His authority; we want to do our own thing and trust in the arm of the flesh.

Unless there is individual repentance and national repentance, you had better watch out. That huge, high, bulging wall holding back the judgment and wrath of God will soon burst. Our trust and confidence must be in God alone, in His Word alone. What does the Scripture say? “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.”

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy path. Be not wise in thine own eyes, depart from evil."

The implications of forsaking God's law should be evident to every true child of God. There is a need in our lives not only for repentance, but also for worship, thankfulness, and joy in the fact that God has spared us and waited that He might be gracious unto us.

I remember, as a young boy raised in church—Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and any night there was a special meeting—I was riding down the road on my little scooter when the thought hit me: If you died right now, would you go to heaven? I do not know where that thought came from. It came from the Lord evidently, but, as far as I know, the church I was raised in never really preached the Bible or the Gospel. There were probably some attempts at it, but not very much.

My answer in my mind was, "Well, I'll make it in somehow. I've always made it in everything else." That was absolute, utter blasphemy. You are not going to make it into heaven somehow. You are either going to make it in God's how, through the Lord Jesus Christ, or you are not going. It is just that simple. But He waited to be gracious, and I am thankful.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We ask You, Father, to teach us, to build us up in the most holy faith, and help us not to forsake Thee, not to forsake Thy Word, not to forsake Thy Law. Call us back to Thyself, not only as individuals and families and churches, but call us back to Thee as a nation. Give us, Lord, Your grace and Your mercy. Please wait and be gracious to us. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Gods Sovereignty, Man's Instrumentality and the Weather

October 20, 2024

Introduction and Text

I want you to listen carefully to the title of the message. I would really prefer that you listen very closely today. I am going to be quoting a lot of Scriptures, so please jot them down. You will not be able to turn to all of them, but I think the message is very applicable.

I was asked a question this past week which led to this message, and I am going to try to answer it. Jeremiah 14:22 says, “Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? For now thou he, O LORD our God, therefore we wait upon thee, for thou hast made all these things.”

When you think of the title, it is a very strange title. Obviously, God is sovereign. But what in the world does man have to do with God's sovereignty? And what in the world does man's instrumentality have to do with the weather? Our text in Jeremiah

14:22 makes it exceedingly clear that only God can give rain. Then he talks about the vanities: Can any of the vanities of the Gentiles cause rain?

The word vanities is used to refer to false idols. In Deuteronomy 32:21, God says concerning Israel, “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God. They have provoked me to anger with their vanities.” He is talking about their idols at that particular point.

So the vanities in Jeremiah 14:22 happen to be the false idols to which Judah and Jerusalem had turned, leaving and forsaking God. These false idols then were helpless and hopeless.

Rain as Blessing and Curse

Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? Think for a moment about rain. Once you read through Scripture, you find that rain, especially in its due season and in its due time, is always accounted as the blessing of God.

Leviticus 26:4 says, "Then I will give you rain in the due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit." Deuteronomy 11:11 says, "But the land, whither you go to possess it, is the land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven." Then, in verse 14, He says, "That I will give you the rain of your land in its due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, thy wine, and thine oil."

In Deuteronomy 28, where we have the blessings and curses of God, verse 12 says, "The LORD shall open to thee his good treasure, the heaven, to give the rain unto the land in his season and to bless all of the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow." Obviously, this is a blessing of God.

The opposite is also true, because the withholding of rain is considered the curse and judgment of God. Deuteronomy 28:24, speaking of the curses for disobedience, says, "...the LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed." Imagine rain being powder and dust; that is what he is saying. It is going to be an extreme drought.

In Amos 4:7–8, the withholding of rain is counted as God's judgment: "And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water, but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD." Here is the curse of God, the judgment of God, in withholding rain.

The Drought in Jeremiah 14

When we look at Jeremiah 14:22, the question is whether any of the Gentiles, or the vanities of the Gentiles, can produce rain. The question arose because, in Jeremiah 14, the people were suffering an extreme drought. Jeremiah 14:1 says, “The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought.”

“Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. Because the ground is chapped, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads.”

“Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass. And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail, because there was no grass.” This is an extreme drought.

Now, clearly, when he asks, “Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain?” no false idol can cause rain. They are not real; they are simply false gods. But there is another interesting question in verse 22: “Or can the heavens give showers?” The answer is no. Rain may fall from the heavens, but the heavens are not the source of rain. The heavens cannot, in and of themselves, give rain. Why? Because rain comes by the decree of God.

Job 28:26 says, “When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: then did he see it, and declare it; he

prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Note especially the words, "when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder." John Gill, the Baptist expositor, said that in his own wisdom God made and executed his decrees concerning rain, lightning, and thunder; he saw it in himself as it appeared in the works of his hands.

And then he talks about how God brings all these things to pass in his divine providence. Now, God is absolutely, totally sovereign. So let me say this again. There is nothing above God. There is nothing beyond God. And there is nothing outside of God's control. If there was something outside of God's control, then God would not be God. And God certainly would not be sovereign. And so we have to understand this principle. Everything that comes to pass in time was ordained from eternity. That is why in Acts chapter 15 and verse 18, the Bible says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning." So God knows the end from the beginning because God ordained everything which comes to pass.

God's Absolute Sovereignty

Now, before I get into the message today, I want to give you two passages to look at. One of them we're certainly going to come back to. But the first one is Romans 11. So, if you'll find that passage. And then the second one is Psalm 76. So, if you'll look at Romans chapter 11 first. And let's begin reading there with verse 33. Romans 11, verse 33. And then we're going to go to Psalm 76. So Romans 11, verse 33, listen to this.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Now, watch if you would. He says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" So it's impossible then for anyone to fathom the wisdom or the ways of God. God is absolutely sovereign and God is absolutely unique. And then he said this in

verse 33 as well, "how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." So now we're talking about God's judgments in time and in history. So they are unsearchable in one sense of the word. Now, here's the one thing that you and I can be absolutely sure of in Romans chapter 11, when he said, "for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." So here it is. Of him, that is originally; and through him, that is providentially; and to him, ultimately, are all things. So God then has ordained everything originally.

He will work it out in his providence. It will be through him, and ultimately it will redound to his honor and his glory.

Look at Psalm 76 and verse 10: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” When he says, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee,” that refers to the fact that all rage, all wickedness, all anger, and all rebellious actions ultimately are going to redound to God’s honor and God’s glory. That which will not redound to God’s honor and God’s glory, God will restrain. Literally, it says, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” So think about this.

Since man has fallen, man is sinful, wicked, and depraved. Consequently, fallen man fights against God, against God’s kingdom, against God’s law, against God’s rule, and against God’s people. But what God tells us in Romans 11 and also in Psalm 76 is that ultimately all of the rage, wrath, anger, and wickedness of man will do nothing but accomplish that which God has ordained before the foundation of the world.

God and Evil

There are three principles you need to understand. I am not going to take time to show you all the verses. The first is this: God is not the instigator of evil. What does the book of James say? “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” God is not the instigator of evil. The second principle is that God is not the infuser of evil. God does not infuse wickedness into anyone. He does not have to, because man is already wicked in and of himself. So the first principle is that God is not the instigator of evil, and the second is

that God is not the infuser of evil. The third principle is this: God is the controller of evil.

Nothing is outside of God's sovereign control. When you read through the book of Job, especially the first several chapters, remember that every time God gave Satan permission to attack Job, Satan had to have God's permission. Every time, God imposed a limitation: “Hitherto you can go, but no farther.” God is absolutely sovereign, and He controls everything.

In light of God's sovereignty, here is the question that came to me: How could a good and loving God allow evil? How could a good and loving God allow what you and I saw in Hurricanes Helene, Milton, and all of those others in times past? The answer is this: God, in His infinite wisdom, honor, and glory, is somehow ultimately going to receive more honor and more glory from everything that you and I would call evil.

Are you thankful for the salvation you have in Jesus Christ? Are you thankful for His sacrificial atonement? You will say yes. The sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ, the salvation for which you and I are thankful and grateful, was accomplished through the hands of the wicked. God ordained it, but it was accomplished by the hands of the wicked. Acts chapter 2, verse 22, says: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

So God ordained it. But it was wicked men who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. God did not make the Jews wicked, nor did He make the Romans wicked. They already were wicked. All He did was control their wickedness to work out, in time and history, that which He had ordained back in eternity. Thus, wicked men were the instruments of God to accomplish His purpose in the giving of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for our salvation and redemption.

Immediate vs. Mediate Work of God

This brings me to two words that we need to understand theologically: immediate and mediate. When we talk about the immediate work of God, we mean that God does something in His sovereignty without and apart from the use of any means whatsoever. The creation of the universe was an immediate act of God. How can we say that? The Bible tells us that He spake the worlds into existence. He spoke, and it was done. Read Psalm 33. That was an immediate work of God. Many of the miracles were also the immediate work of God.

However, when we speak of the mediate work of God, we mean that God works through means. Usually, most of the miracles were done through means, although they were indeed the work of God. For instance, with the one blind man, our Lord spit on the ground, made clay, and anointed his eyes. Naaman was healed of his leprosy, but he had to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. That was the use of means. Elijah was fed by the ravens and drank from the brook; the ravens brought him meat and bread morning and evening. That was also the use of means.

Therefore, when we use the word immediate theologically, we are talking about the instantaneous sovereign works of God without the use of means. When we use the word mediate, we are talking about how God uses means, and that is usually how God works. Everyone has to work, basically, for the food and money that they receive. God does not simply drop one-hundred-dollar bills out of heaven. He blesses the work of our hands, enables us to survive, and enables us to make money. We have to understand instrumentality.

Man's Instrumentality in Weather

What has all this got to do with the weather? We are talking about God's sovereignty and man's instrumentality. Think, if you would please, of the recent hurricanes and ponder this question, because it is asked of me: Is it possible for the weather to be controlled or manipulated by man? The answer is yes. It is possible to the extent of God's sovereign allowance.

Man is not going to go any farther than God will allow him, just as Satan could go no further in attacking Job. Man would be able instrumentally to do what God will allow. When I talk about this, do not say, “That is some kind of a harebrained thought.” No, it was a legitimate question that was asked me. Nor should you say, “That is a conspiracy theory.” Do you know what the word conspiracy actually means?

There are plenty of conspiracies. Con is a preposition meaning with, and spire means to breathe. A conspiracy is simply people breathing together for a specific purpose or act. It is just that simple. The word conspiracy is used nine times in the Bible, and usually the conspiracy is either against God, against God's rule, or against God's people.

Consider Jeremiah 11:9: “And the LORD said unto me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” They were conspiring against God, turning to idols, conspiring to thwart God if it were possible—which it is not—or to turn their back from His worship to worship their vanities. In Ezekiel 22:25, God says, “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof.” There is a conspiracy among prophets, conspiring together against God and against the people of God. Yes, there are plenty of conspiracies, usually against God, His rule, or His people. Conspiracies employ instrumentality.

So we have to understand this. There is a good instrumentality, and there is a wicked instrumentality. You remember how God sent Moses to Pharaoh with this message: "Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me." God gave Moses several signs: he could throw the rod down, and it would become a serpent; he could put his hand in his bosom and bring it out leprous; he could put it back in, and it would be totally healed. Every sign that Moses gave to Pharaoh, Pharaoh's magicians accomplished.

They did the same thing, with the exception of bringing forth lice. They could not bring forth lice, but every other thing they copied. So you had a holy or righteous instrumentality coming from God, and a

wicked and ungodly instrumentality coming from man. God does allow instrumentality.

Since we are talking about God's sovereignty, man's instrumentality, and the weather, someone is going to tell me, "Well, you know, you cannot manipulate the weather." Well, that's not true, because the Bible shows us two passages where the weather was manipulated by man. In Joshua chapter 10, beginning with verse 12, the Bible says: "Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

"Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel." So the sun was stayed and the moon was stayed, the Bible said, almost for a whole day, at the request of Joshua.

That was manipulation in reference to Joshua's prayer or request. If you look in your Bibles to James chapter 5, verses 17 and 18, you find weather being manipulated again by man, but by prayer: “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” Elijah prayed for a drought, and God shut the heavens for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, and God opened the heavens and gave forth rain.

Here are the questions that we have to ask and then answer. First of all, is it possible to control or manipulate the weather? Secondly, is it possible for wicked men to control and manipulate the weather? The answer to both questions is yes, to the extent that the sovereignty of God allows it.

Evidence of Weather Manipulation

Psalm 115, verse 16, says, “The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.” The Hebrew word for given is nathan, meaning to bestow, to grant, to give, to permit, and to entrust. The earth, then, has been granted, given, or entrusted to man. This means that man can either use it or abuse it; a man could either save it or destroy it in one sense of the word. Therefore, when we speak of the manipulation or control of weather, we must always keep in mind that it is only to the extent that the sovereignty of God allows it to be done.

He allowed it in the time of Joshua and in the time of Elijah. I am going to give you some quotes. The first is from Dane Wigington. This man is a PhD, and he has a website, geoengineeringwatch.org. I would encourage you to go to the website. He has so much information, it is absolutely astounding. Here is a quote from Dane Wigington.

The report refers to “covert global climate engineering programs.” Covert means hidden or secret; overt means open and outward. It says, “Covert global climate engineering programs are the single most environmentally destructive assault the human race has ever unleashed against nature and the entire web of life. The list of catastrophic environmental and human health consequences directly connected to the ongoing climate engineering insanity makes these programs mathematically the greatest and the most immediate threat we collectively face short of a nuclear cataclysm.” Wow.

Think of all the chemtrails. You may wonder where all the barium, aluminum, and other chemicals are coming from. I am simply pointing out that you need to go to geoengineeringwatch.org and listen to or examine some of the information there. Here is another quotation, from Eric Hecker. Listen to his interview on redactednews.com. Hecker is a whistleblower who used to work for Raytheon and was also at the station in the South Pole. He made this simple statement: “We can and do redirect hurricanes easily.” We can indeed. Go to Redacted News and listen to the interview.

If you say this is crazy, harebrained, or a conspiracy theory, explain why, in 2009, the History Channel aired a documentary titled “Weather Warfare” that discussed controlling the weather, HAARP, and steering hurricanes. Years ago, probably in the 1980s or 1990s, I read a book titled “Angels Don’t Play This HAARP.” HAARP stands for High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program. It is in Alaska, where they are bombarding the atmosphere with all kind of things.

Here is a HAARP whistleblower: “HAARP insider admits Hurricane Milton is part of a weather warfare plot to collapse society. Multiple HAARP whistleblowers have sounded the alarm, warning that a wave of man-made extreme weather events is on the horizon. These events are expected to grow in both frequency and intensity, with the goal of causing widespread destruction, triggering economic collapse, and reducing the population in targeted areas designated as kill zones, all within a short period of time. According to the globalists, the most convenient part of this carefully orchestrated plan is their built-in plausible deniability. Anyone who dares to point a finger will be branded a conspiracy theorist, labeled dangerous, and potentially sent to internment camps. But there’s one problem for the elites.”

“We have all the evidence we need—from governmental documents to undeniable proof—that they’re manipulating the weather, especially Hurricane Helene and Milton. The blood is on their hands.” Jerry Smith has written a book on HAARP. Here is one sentence from it: “At best, HAARP is science out of control. At worst, HAARP could be the most dangerous device ever created, a futuristic technology that is everything from super beam weapon to world wide mind control device.” Wow.

I have on my computer a copy of a patent application issued to Andrew Waksmanski of Chipley, Florida. I can give you the publication number. It was issued May 8, 2003, and the contact address was the Lippman Law Offices in Arlington, Virginia. The patent title is “hurricane and tornado control device.” Here is a simple paragraph describing it:

“A method is disclosed for affecting the formation and or direction of a low atmospheric weather system. Audio generators are

positioned to project sound waves toward a peripheral area of a weather system. The sound waves are generated at a frequency to affect the formation of the weather system in a manner to disrupt, enhance, or direct the formation. The sound waves can be projected in a manner to cause the system to produce rain."

I do not know whether the patent was granted; it may not have been. But the point is that it shows us how easily, in one sense of the word, weather could be manipulated.

Another thing that you should check out, all over the internet, is to type in Operation Popeye. You know what Operation Popeye was? This took place from 1967 to 1972, when we were fighting in Vietnam. Those countries have what is known as the monsoon season. They were using all the technology they had to increase, enlarge, enhance, and extend the monsoon season in order to destroy more property and more people. It is interesting when you start reading some of this research. I have two pages of websites where all of this is explained, and you can research one right after the other.

This stuff started back in the 1940s, when they took dry ice and dropped it in clouds and produced snow. You can read about that, but here is Operation Popeye.

You can dismiss all of this as absolutely insane, stupid, and crazy if you will, but it is hard to dismiss this article written in 1996, "Weather as a Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025." This was written for the Air Force by Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels, and Majors. I have their names here. The paper was presented in 1996. It is difficult to dismiss an article prepared for that purpose.

Listen to a few paragraphs. Here is the first one: "In 2025, the aerospace forces can own the weather by capitalizing on emerging technologies and focusing developments on those technologies to warfighting applications. Such a capability offers the warfighter tools to shape the battlespace in ways never before possible. It provides opportunities to impact operations across the full spectrum of conflict and is pertinent to all possible futures."

The purpose of this paper is to outline a strategy for the use of future weather modification systems to achieve military objectives, rather than to provide a detailed technical roadmap.

The paper discusses nanotechnology and the possibility of creating simulated weather: "A cloud, or several clouds, of microscopic computer particles, all communicating with each other, and with a larger control system, could provide tremendous capability. Interconnected, atmospherically buoyant, and having navigation capability in three dimensions, such clouds could be designed to have a wide range of properties. They might exclusively block optical sensors, or could adjust to become impermeable to other surveillance methods. They could also provide an atmospheric electrical potential difference, which otherwise might not exist, to achieve precisely aimed and timed lightning strikes. Even if power levels achieved were insufficient to be an effective strike weapon, the potential for psychological operations in many situations could be fantastic. One advantage of using simulated weather to achieve a desired effect is that, unlike other approaches, it makes what are otherwise the results of deliberate actions appear to be the consequences of natural weather phenomena."

In addition, it is potentially relatively inexpensive to do so. According to J. Storrs Hall, a scientist at Rutgers University conducting research on nanotechnology, production costs of these nanoparticles could be about the same price as a pound of potatoes. This, of course, discounts research and development costs, which will be primarily borne by the private sector. Why? And be considered a sunk cost by 2025 or probably earlier.

The paper continues: "Weather modification according to the United States Air Force document AF 2025 final report offers the warfighter a wide range of possible options to defeat or coerce an adversary. Capabilities, it says, extend to the triggering of floods, hurricanes, droughts, and earthquakes."

God's Use of Wicked Instruments

Would God allow wicked men to destroy a people? Would God allow wicked men to destroy his own people who sinned against him, rebelled against him and violated his covenant and refused to

worship him? The answer is yes. The Bible asks in Amos chapter 3 and verse 6, "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?" Nothing happens by accident in a world that is ruled by God. Someone says, but what about all these innocent people? There is no such thing.

When you stop and think about this, everybody is a sinner. Everybody deserves justice and judgment. Thankfully, not all receive judgment and justice; some receive grace and mercy. But when you think about this on a huge scale, like a hurricane, think about it on the same singular scale. Here is a man who gets shot in the head by a murderer. Here is someone who gets beaten to death by a Venezuelan gang.

You say he was innocent. I know what you mean by that. He did not deserve to be beaten like that, but yet, in one sense of the word, he did, because he was a sinner, and that is part of the wages of sin. Everybody has to die somehow. I am pointing out the fact that, when our sins, which are many, our backslidings, which are multiple, and our violations of His law, which are numerous, are considered, it is amazing that any of us are alive.

God used the wicked in time past to chastise and judge His people. What happened to Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.? God sent the Babylonians and wiped them off the face of the map. What happened in 722 B.C. to Israel when the Assyrians came? Isaiah 10:5-6 says, "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."

"Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." God was saying, "I am sending these Assyrians to accomplish My purpose." The Assyrians did not attack Israel thinking, We are just doing God's will. The only reason they came against Israel was that they wanted to loot, kill, murder, rape, and spoil. It was not in their heart to obey God; it was in their heart to destroy. But God said, "I sent them." Do you realize that God used the Romans to destroy Jerusalem in A.D.

70? Read Josephus; there were probably a million people killed during the siege of Jerusalem.

Would wicked men, would wicked rulers, destroy their own people? How about Joseph Stalin? A research paper written by a Gregorian historian, Roy Medvedev, and published in a weekly tabloid estimated that, in February 1989, two years before the fall of the Soviet Union, the death toll directly attributable to Stalin's rule amounted to some 20 million lives. Added to the 20 million Soviet troops and civilians who perished in the Second World War, that made a total of 40 million. Stalin also starved 20 million Ukrainians to death, purposely and deliberately.

How about Mao Zedong? It is probably fair to say that Mao was responsible for about 1.5 million deaths during the Cultural Revolution, another million during the other campaigns, and between 35 million and 45 million during the Great Leap Famine. Taking the middle number for the famine, 40 million, that amounts to 42.5 million deaths under Mao Zedong.

Do not leave out Pol Pot. Lasting four years, between 1975 and 1979, the Cambodian genocide was an explosion of mass violence in which between 1.5 and 3 million people were killed by the Khmer Rouge, a communist political group that had taken power following the Cambodian Civil War. During its brutal four-year rule, the Khmer Rouge was responsible for the deaths of nearly a quarter of the Cambodians, one-fourth of the population.

Think about what are known as the DEWs, direct energy weapons, which were used in Hawaii. That is why, it is said, only houses with blue roofs were spared. The same weapons were used in California and have been used here to start all these atrocious fires. Why would rulers or political leaders destroy their own people? Why would they destroy their own land?

Purposes of Weather and Applications

The answer is for greater control and greater profit. The area of North Carolina hit so desperately and wickedly by the hurricane reportedly has the greatest deposits of lithium and quartz. Whether those reports are true or not, I do not know; I have read and heard

them. The reports claim that the federal government has gone in, bulldozed houses, buildings, and cities, covered up corpses, failed to identify them, and claimed the land—which would be theft. They are stealing private property, if that is true. If lithium and quartz are there to the extent claimed, I can understand that.

Weather is nature, and nature can be a weapon. What did God use to drive the Amorites out of the land of Canaan? Hornets. That is nature. God used hornets to chase them out of the land. There is a little childish song I have always enjoyed: “God did not make them go. Oh no, God did not make them go. He just made them willing to go.” And you are certainly willing to go if a whole bunch of hornets are after you.

Understand this: weather is nature, and nature can be a weapon, especially in the hands of wicked men. If you do not believe that, think of all the COVID vaccinations and the people who have died from them. I read about a five-year-old child who was normal as the day is long, but allegedly developed autism after receiving eighteen vaccines in one day. Who in his right mind could be so absolutely stupid as to give a child eighteen vaccines in one day? Do you realize that governments do indeed murder their own people? In fact, if you study history, government happens to be the greatest murderer of people in history.

Now consider Job 37, beginning with verse 9: “Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud: And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy.”

Why does God cause, either immediately or mediately, foul weather? First of all, for correction. It is his rod, his chastisement, and his judgment upon a disobedient people. The second reason is for his land. That land does not simply refer to what we would call Israel or Palestine. His land is the world: “The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” So

sometimes he causes it to come for the good of the world, or the good of his land.

Read how he will send showers and rain into the desert and into the wilderness. He says also that it could come for mercy. Rain in due season is a mercy. Wind in due season is a mercy. Heat in due season is a mercy, and coolness in due season is a mercy as well. So God can do anything in Job chapter 37 that he speaks about, either immediately or mediately. God may do it sovereignly and straightforwardly, or he may allow man through technology to do it as well.

God has always used wicked men to judge countries and nations. God may use wicked men to judge America or any nation, and he may allow us to destroy ourselves with technology. That is up to him.

Let me make some applications. You remember when David had sinned against God and numbered the people? Gad the prophet came to him and said, "Thus saith the LORD, I want you to choose one of these three things that I may do unto you." He could have a certain time of famine, be chased by his enemies three months, or have a pestilence for a brief period of time. David replied, "I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man."

God, even in his judgments, is merciful. Man is not. The Bible tells you in Proverbs chapter 12 and verse 10, "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Even the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Fallen man is cruel even when he is merciful. He is not concerned about God, God's creation, God's creatures, or Christians. He is only concerned about himself.

Whether or not Hurricanes Helene or Milton were manipulated and controlled, we should understand this pivotal truth: government does not care about us. Consider the dear people in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee who lost everything—their homes, possessions, and automobiles. They lost everything, and our government was so stupid as to insult them by offering them 750 bucks.

The Bible says in Psalm 118, the middle verse of the Bible, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.” This should teach us to trust in the Lord and become self-sufficient, for we do not need them. I saw a video in which two sheriffs were interviewed, and this is what they said, quoting FEMA: “Stay out of our counties. We don’t need you. We’ll take care of ourselves. Thank you.”

I am simply pointing out the fact that we should learn something from this. God may have sent it in His sovereignty, or God may have used wicked men mediately. It is strange to me; it really just hit the Southland, especially those who were conservative and Christian. Isn’t that amazing?

Here is the second thing. Hosea 13:9 says, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself.” What does God often do? He lets us do what we want to do, and we end up destroying ourselves. God can allow us to destroy our own land and nation, or our lives with technology, because we are doing this contrary to Him and in violation of His law. The next thing we had better learn to do is pray the imprecatory prayers found in the Bible: pray against the wicked and pray that God will bring them down.

The Bible says, “Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish thou the just.” I want the wickedness of the wicked to come to an end. I want the just to be established. You have to remember this, folks: man can only go as far as the sovereignty of God will allow him to go. How far that will be, I do not know. But I do know this: the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain. God is going to allow man to do that which he will do, which will ultimately work out God’s eternal decree and bring Him greater glory and greater praise, and it is always going to be for our good, whether we understand it or not. God is sovereign. God does use instrumentality, and we are responsible for our actions and for our conduct.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. We ask, Lord, that You would indeed speak to us and teach us. And, Lord, help us to be independent and self-sufficient. Help us, Lord, not to look to man or

to government. But, Lord, help us to depend upon Thee. And then, depending upon Thee, help each other to do that which is right. Give us, Lord, Your grace and Your mercy, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Bible says, "Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish thou the just." I want the wickedness of the wicked to come to an end. I want the just to be established. You have to remember this, folks: man can only go as far as the sovereignty of God will allow him to go. How far that will be, I do not know. But I do know this: the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain. God is going to allow man to do that which he will do, which will ultimately work out God's eternal decree and bring Him greater glory and greater praise, and it is always going to be for our good, whether we understand it or not. God is sovereign. God does use instrumentality, and we are responsible for our actions and for our conduct.

We thank You for Your Word and truth. We ask, Lord, that You would indeed speak to us and teach us. Help us, Lord, to be independent and self-sufficient; help us not to look to man or government, but to depend upon Thee. Then, depending upon Thee, help each other to do that which is right. Give us, Lord, Your grace and Your mercy, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

A Curse Made Plain and Simple

February 15, 2026

Introduction to Biblical Curses

Isaiah 1:7 says, “Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your land strangers devoured it in your presence, and it is desolate as overthrown by strangers.” Everyone has heard curses as well as cursing.

Usually that which we hear is unbiblical, ungodly, depraved, and humanistic. As Christians, however, we shudder when we hear such language. We do not desire to be around it, and certainly we do not wish to repeat it. But we often fail to grasp the fact that there are biblical curses. In fact, God himself placed curses upon sin, disobedience, and rebellion.

Even the Apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, placed a curse upon those who denied Jesus Christ and who refused to preach his gospel. In Galatians chapter 1, verses 8 and 9, the Apostle says, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any

other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

He repeats it: "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." So twice now, the apostle has said that anyone who preaches anything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is accursed. This is the repeated warning of the inspired Word of God, not merely a human judgment.

The interesting thing is that the word "accursed" in both verses is the Greek word anathema, which means to be set apart for certain and sure destruction. It means that one is beyond the hope of redemption, beyond the veil of redemption. In other words, once you are anathema, you are just simply set aside for certain and sure destruction as well.

Examples of Curses in Deuteronomy 27

There are many curses in the Bible. You will find many of them in Deuteronomy chapters 26, 27, 28, and 29. You will also find them in Leviticus 26, and throughout the Bible. Look, if you would, at Deuteronomy chapter 27. Notice, as I read this, that once the curses were pronounced, all the people said, "Amen." The word "Amen" literally means "verily, verily, truly, truly, so be it, so be it." Beginning in verse 15, here are the curses, or at least some of them:

"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. Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the

people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen."

God does not mince words. He does not play around or beat around the bush. He tells you plainly and simply that if you wish to be cursed, all you have to do is be disobedient and rebellious, and he will see that you are most certainly and definitely cursed. In reality, you curse yourself. The curse is already there. You simply place yourself under that curse by your disobedient and rebellious actions. So here is the truth: If you do not wish to be cursed, do not be rebellious. Do not be disobedient.

The Curse Fulfilled in Isaiah 1:7

If you want to be blessed, all you have to do is submit and obey according to the Word of God. Interestingly, there are not only curses in the Bible that are stated plainly. Other words are used for curses. If you read Isaiah chapter 5 and Matthew chapter 23, you will find the woes. The woes are curses as well. When our Lord said, "Woe be to you Pharisees, scribes, hypocrites," every time there was a woe, it was indeed a curse. Thus, curses are found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Isaiah chapter one contains a very interesting verse. As I was reading through Isaiah this past week, verse 7 simply jumped out at me: here is the curse being fulfilled. He said, "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."

This curse was literally fulfilled upon Jerusalem and Judea, or Judah. But there are applications for today because God is immutable; that is, He is unchangeable. Since God is immutable, His Word is immutable. His curses never change, His blessings never change, His promises never change, and His punishments never change. The Word of God, including its curses and blessings, is as immutable as God Himself. In Psalm 138, we read that the Lord has

established His word even above His name. Psalm 119:89 says, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." Therefore, we know that the Word of God is true.

Looking again at verse 7: "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." Keil and Delitzsch say in their commentary: "This is described more particularly in verse seven, which commences with the most general view and returns to it again at the close. Now, listen: 'Your land, a desert. Your cities burn with fire, your field, foreigners consuming it before your eyes, and a desert-like overthrown by strangers.'"

Scriptural Roots of the Curse Language

From the time of Isaiah onward, the nation of Israel was a perfect realization of the curses of the law. The strangers he mentions refer to foreigners, to barbarians.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 5:15-17 (KJV)

> When you compare verse 7 with the rest of Scripture, you find that practically every word in it, especially every major word, is directly from one of the curses pronounced in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, Micah chapter 6, or Jeremiah chapter 5. God makes it exceedingly clear that this judgment fell upon the nation because of their rebellion.
>
> “Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. It is a mighty nation. It is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword.
>
> “Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you. And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and

> served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours. Declare this in the house of Jacob.
>
> "Publish it in Judah, saying, Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart."

They are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you." Everything that Jeremiah just said in chapter 5 is what has happened in Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 7.

Isaiah is speaking about a nation, not merely individuals. Verse 1 says, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." So the question is asked of the nation. In verse 5, he asks the people, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." In other words, punishment does no good. Chastisement does no good. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

Then verse 7 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." God is using a picture of someone who has been beaten to a bloody pulp. There is nothing about the body that has not been lacerated, bruised, broken, and left bleeding, from the top of the head to the sole of the foot.

Albert Barnes, in his commentary, said, "Your country is desolate. This is a literal statement of what he had just affirmed by a figure. In this there was much art. The figure, Isaiah 1:6, was striking. The

resemblance between a man severely beaten and entirely livid and sore and a land perfectly desolate was so impressive as to attest and to arrest their attention." Thus, Isaiah drew a picture in verses 5 and 6 of a man and then said that this was what the entire nation would be like.

The Hebrew word for "desolate" in verse 7 is shemamah. It literally refers to desolation, devastation, and being wasted. In our language, we would say that something has been destroyed and devastated.

So it is not just broken down; it is broken down, but more than that, there is nothing standing. It is simply a complete devastation.

Now, hold Isaiah 1, but look back in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Leviticus, chapter 26. I want you to see how this curse actually is fulfilled upon Judah and Jerusalem. Look in Leviticus chapter 26, and let us begin reading there with verse 31. We will read through verse 33. Here it is, Leviticus 26, verse 31:

"And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. 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."

Here we have the same language that we read in Isaiah 1:7. This is part of the curse for disobedience. In Jeremiah 44:22, we see the same exact language: "So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day."

Obviously, clearly, God is making it very plain that once again this devastation, this desolation, and this destruction are because of the sins and rebellion of the people. They were idolaters; they pursued God, they pursued his word, they pursued his law, they pursued his preachers, and God brings his curse upon them.

Here is what was happening in Jeremiah 38. Jeremiah had been trying to get King Zedekiah and his household to go out and surrender to the princes of Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah refused to do

so, but Jeremiah told him: "Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand."

Of course, Zedekiah refused to go. He said he was afraid of the Jews that were already in Babylon and that they might abuse him. So he was captured. His family was captured. The last thing he saw was his sons murdered. Then Nebuchadnezzar had his eyes put out, and he was put in chains and led to Babylon, where he died. The city was burned with fire.

These are judgments from the curse that was placed upon this nation because of its sin and rebellion against God. In Isaiah 1:7, the part that really, really grabbed me is this: "Your country is desolate." To me, this is the worst part. We got that.

The Horror of 'Strangers Devour It in Your Presence'

"Your cities are burned with fire." We have that. If you did a little thinking and remembering, you could remember Minnesota and a number of other cities, like Portland, Oregon, and places in Washington State, all being burned with fire in these protests and riots. But here is the scary part to me. Look at this: "Your country's desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your land, strangers devour it in your presence." Wow.

Take this phrase a word at a time. First of all, note the word "strangers." He says, "Strangers devour it in your presence." The Hebrew word for stranger is zur. We would spell it z-u-r. It refers to strangers, foreigners, barbarians, and those of a loathsome breath.

This word is also translated in the Bible as "a strange woman," a prostitute, and a harlot. A prostitute or a harlot would be someone of a strange breath, not your wife. This is what the word literally means: someone who is strange, someone who is foreign, someone who has a loathsome breath.

Secondly, consider what these strangers do. He says, "Strangers devour it in your presence." These strangers do something particularly: they devour.

The Hebrew word is akal, and it literally means to be eaten up, to be devoured, to be consumed, to be wasted and destroyed. I do not know if I can explain this any more plainly than the illustration I am going to use. Suppose Steve and I get into a knock-down, drag-out argument. Steve is so upset with me that he tells me he is going to beat me to a bloody pulp. He is going to do this and that to me; he is just going to tear me up.

I listen to him, and when he finishes, I look at him and say, "Man, let me tell you something. I will eat you alive." Have you ever heard that expression? Sure you have. You know what that means: I am not going to spare you. I am going to tear you from limb to limb. I will eat you up. There will be nothing left. This is exactly what he is talking about here.

He said, “Your land, strangers devour it.” They are eating it up, destroying it; nothing is going to be left. Look at verse seven again: “Strangers devoured in your presence.” The devouring and being eaten up by strangers are done in your presence, before your eyes. And here is the worst part: you are not simply observing it. There is absolutely nothing you can do about it. You cannot stop it, prevent it, or hinder it. There is not one thing you can do. The destruction is there.

I want you to make it personal. He said, “Your land, strangers devour it in your presence.” It is not someone else’s land; it is your land. It is not someone else’s house; it is your house. It is not someone else’s family; it is your family. Consider for a moment the absolute grief and heartbrokenness of not being able to save your own wife, your own child, your own family, or your own property from someone who is simply destroying just to be destroying.

If you remember, I recently preached messages on the dangers of old age. One danger I pointed out was the loss of control. I have seen young fathers and mothers with little children say, “They obey me precisely.” I say, “I am so thankful.” But wait until they are sixteen or seventeen. Wait until they are grown. Wait until they are married.

They still sometimes do things that are absolutely stupid and wicked, and you cannot stop them. You can tell them, counsel them, and give them advice, but you cannot stop them. You know what is going to happen, but you cannot stop it. You are absolutely helpless.

Now turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 13 and look at verse 16. Think about this: this is all part and parcel of the curse. Everything is being devoured and destroyed. Here is part of the curse.

Historical and Modern Parallels of Helplessness

"Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished." What in the world can you do if someone has your child by the heels, dashing him up against a rock, and you cannot do one thing? Someone is holding you; someone has tied you. You are absolutely helpless. But notice, it is not your children only. Your house is going to be spoiled. Someone is walking in and taking whatever they want. And then he says, "and your wives ravished." In other words, I have read about men who went into a house, beat up the husband, tied him up, and then raped his wife in front of him, forcing him to watch. I have not known them personally, but I have read about them. What can you do except cry?

Lamentations 5:11 says, "They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah." This actually happened. When the Babylonians came in, nothing was safe; no one was safe. What can you do? This was not merely a threat or an imagined possibility; it happened to the women and maids in the cities of Judah.

Zechariah 14:2 says, "For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city." Note the words: "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle. The city will be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished." The city is taken, the houses are rifled, the women are ravished, and half the city goes into captivity.

Now let me ask you a question. Do you realize that this is actually happening not only in Europe, especially in England, Germany, and Sweden, but also here in America? We have been invaded by

Muslims. Please listen to me: I know how they came, and I am not necessarily preaching against Muslims, but I am telling you what they teach. Here is a quote from an Islamic scholar, Tarek Fatah, who is a woman: "Allah allows Muslim men to rape non-Muslim women so as to humiliate them." Here is an article titled "ISIS Rapes Women Toward Allah." It is a short article. It says, "Other victims have also said they were told their rapes were a form of worship encouraged by the Koran."

Indeed, in an extensive investigation, the New York Times described a theology of rape in which militants often pray before molesting their victims. One victim, a 12-year-old girl, told the Times, "He said that by raping me, he was drawing closer to God." I can think of men that I know personally who, if that happened to someone in their family, would really help him draw much closer to his God, because he would simply not be around too much longer.

There can be nothing more grievous, nothing more heartbreaking, than to see such wickedness and such travesty of justice happening, and there be absolutely nothing you can do about it—not one thing.

Now, if you go back to Isaiah chapter one, look at verse seven. I hope you are seeing why this jumped out at me. He says, "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your land strangers devoured in your presence." Now watch again. He says, "and it is desolate." It is the same word used in the first part, "your country's desolate." Now he says, "It is desolate as overthrown by strangers." Once again, the word desolate, shemamah, means devastation, desolation, and wastefulness, but it is overthrown by strangers. Look at the word "overthrown." "It is desolate as overthrown by strangers." The word "overthrown" is very interesting. It is the Hebrew word mahpekah.

The Overthrow Like Sodom and Gomorrah

It does not mean just a simple overthrow. It means absolute total destruction. When we think of the word "overthrow," we think of the word "upset." We think of two football teams that are going to play, and one is supposed to be the superior team and is expected to win the championship, but the little dinky team that is far behind comes up and overthrows the champion, so to speak, and there is a huge

upset. That is how we think of the word "overthrow": something not necessarily really dangerous, but just something that happens, something normal. No, this is not normal.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy 29. Also find Jeremiah 49; we will come back to Jeremiah. We will go to Deuteronomy first, so mark Jeremiah 49 if you would please. Then turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 29, and we are going to begin reading with verse 23. I think you will probably come up with what I am referring to. Watch this. Deuteronomy 29, beginning with verse 23. Look at it.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 29:23-28 (KJV)

> "And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow"—the same word—"like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath: Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt."
>
> "For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: 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 their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day."

The overthrow of Judah and Jerusalem was like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. What was left of Sodom and Gomorrah? Nothing. What was left of Admah and Zeboim? Nothing.

Isaiah 49:18 says, "As in the overthrow"—the same exact Hebrew word—"as in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the LORD, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it." The Lord was going to absolutely annihilate them. Thus the word "overthrow" in Isaiah 1:7

is exactly the same Hebrew word found in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Thus the curse fell upon Judah and Jerusalem. Why? They served other gods. They forsook God, his word, and his law. There is no time out, no neutral ground, and no king's ex. You are either under the curse of God or under the blessing of God. You are either obedient or disobedient, either righteous or unrighteous. Someone said, "Honesty is like being pregnant. Either you are or you're not, there's no in-between." There is no in-between or neutral realm here. You are either cursed or blessed. It is just that simple.

Calvin makes an important point about the word "overthrown": "That word might no doubt be applied to enemies, but it is better to take it as literally denoting foreigners. The calamity is more grievous when it's brought on by men who are unknown, who have come from a distant country, who lay waste with a far greater recklessness and cruelty than neighboring tribes. Such men destroy cities, burn houses, buildings, and villages, and spread desolation all around. In short, they rush forward with barbarous ferocity, bent on murders and conflagrations, and are more eager to inflict damage than to make gain. But neighbors, when they have subdued a country, can retain possession of it by having a garrison or as soon as a revolt is attempted or an insurrection takes place, can send additional troops. And therefore they are not so cruel, nor do they lay waste a country from which they hope to derive some advantage. It is therefore no ordinary calamity, but the most shocking of all calamities that is here described."

In other words, the people who came could care less about conquering. They wanted to rape, destroy, and murder, and that is exactly what they did.

Application: Muslims as a Rod of Judgment

Now, I want you to think momentarily about all of the foreigners, all those strangers, and all of those with loathsome breath whom our politicians have brought into this country. You remember that Trump got himself into some hot water because he referred to the Somali Muslims as garbage. Why did he refer to them as garbage? Because, he said, all of them are on welfare—not only their own

welfare, but they are extorting and stealing from every American, and it is billions. Not just in Minnesota, but now in New York, Michigan, and Texas; they are finding it absolutely everywhere.

When you stop and think about this, obviously a Muslim is not a Christian. Moreover, they are not really Americans either. In fact, you will find that anybody with dual allegiance cannot possibly be a good American. Muslims refer to Christians as infidels, and they refer to America as the great Satan.

I read an article a few weeks ago whose author said that some people took great offense at it. I read it and thought, How could anyone take offense at it? I mean, it is truth. So I am going to read you the article, and I want you to think about this. Here is the article. He asks, "Can a devout Muslim be an American patriot and or a loyal citizen? Is Muslim American really an oxymoron?" Then he says, "Consider this.

"Theologically, the answer is no, because his allegiance is to Allah, the moon god of Arabia. Religiously, the answer is no, because no other religion is accepted by Allah except Islam. Scripturally, no, because his allegiance is to the five pillars of Islam and to the Quran. Geographically, the answer is no, because his allegiance is to Mecca, to which he has to turn and pray five times a day. Socially, the answer is no, because his allegiance to Islam forbids him to make friends with Christians and Jews.

"Politically, the answer is no, because he must submit to the Mullah, that is, the spiritual leaders, who teach annihilation of Israel and the destruction of America, the great Satan. Domestically, no, he cannot be a good American patriot because he is instructed to marry four women and beat and scourge his wives when they disobey him. Intellectually, the answer is no, because he cannot accept the American Constitution since it is based upon biblical principles and he believes the Bible to be corrupt. Philosophically, the answer is no, because Islam, Mohammed, and the Koran do not allow freedom of religion and expression." And then he says this: "Democracy in Islam cannot coexist."

I would change that last sentence. I would say Islam and a constitutional republic cannot coexist. But you get the point, because

every Muslim government is either dictatorial or autocratic. Then he says, "Spiritually, the answer is no, because when we declare one nation under God, the Christian's God is loving and kind, while Allah is never referred to as a heavenly father, nor is he ever called love in the Quran's 99 excellent names of Allah."

He concludes, "Therefore, after much study and deliberation, perhaps you should be very suspicious of all Muslims in this country. They obviously cannot be both good Muslims and good Americans. Call it what you wish, it is still truth."

That was the end of the article, but there is another truth called Taqiyyah, spelled T-A-Q-I-Y-Y-A-H. Taqiyyah is the practice of lying and deceiving to further Islam. Every Islamic sect agrees to it and practices it. In other words, Taqiyyah is actually mainstream Islam. If there are some who vary from it, they would be the exception and not the rule. Taqiyyah is very prevalent in Islamic politics, especially in this day and age.

Here is a quote from Mohammed bin Jarir al-Tabari, author of a standard and authoritative Qur'an commentary, explaining 3:28: "If you Muslims are under their non-Muslims' authority, fearing for yourselves, behave loyally to them with your tongue while harboring inner animosity for them."

"Know that God, that is Allah, has forbidden believers from being friendly or on intimate terms with the infidels rather than other believers. Except when infidels are above them in authority. Should that be the case, let them act friendly toward them while preserving their religion."

In other words, be the hypocrite: lie, deceive, and pretend that you are my friend when in reality you are not. When I read this article and thought about the lying and deception, I thought about an old saying prevalent when I was a boy. You would tell someone something, and they would say, "Oh no." Then we would say simply, "Like it or love it. It's the truth. Like it or love it." And that is exactly what this is. It is actually the truth. When you realize that most of the stolen money and the billions have been sent back to the Somalians, to the terrorist organizations there, where they can help destroy America and fight against the great Satan, wow.

The Curse Is for Disobedience, Not Just About Muslims

It is not just the learning centers that they are now discovering, but also some type of hospice and care centers. All of this is nothing but a big, big scam. The point I am trying to help you see is this: when you look at Isaiah 1:7, it is nothing more than the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 being applied to Judah and Jerusalem, which, of course, we now see applied here in this country.

Let me make some applications. This message is not about Muslims. This message is about the curse of God upon a disobedient and rebellious people. Can God save a Muslim? Yes! Plenty of Muslims have been genuinely converted and saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. In fact, I know some. With a little research, you will regularly find writings exposing Islam and showing how Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, can save. But the point is this.

Abraham was an idolater in Ur of the Chaldees. God found him and saved him. What did Abraham become? A friend of God.

So why am I talking about the Muslims in this country? Because God said that He was going to send strangers to devour the land. If the Muslims have their way, they are nothing more than the rod of God to be used in the chastisement and destruction of our country. Before you become upset, remember that God sent the Babylonians to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. If you read Jeremiah 27 through 29, you will find God repeatedly saying, “Nebuchadnezzar, my servant.” God sent the Babylonians against Judah and Jerusalem.

When you read Isaiah 10, you understand that God sent the Assyrians against the northern kingdom of Israel. He said, “The rod in their hand is the staff of my indignation. I gave them a charge to take a spoil. I gave them the charge to tread under.” God said, “I sent them.” Why? Israel had apostatized; they were idolaters and denied God, His word, and His law. Judah and Jerusalem were sent the Babylonians for the same reason. God may use whomever He pleases, whomever He chooses, to chastise His people.

In fact, I thought of a verse in the book of Psalms. Look, if you would, in Psalm 17. He is talking about the wicked. Beginning with

verse 9, he says: “From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.”

Then he says: “Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.”

But note that in verse 13 he says the wicked are God's sword. In verse 14, he says, “from men which are thy hand.” In other words, they are God's hand. God places a sword in their hands and says, “You judge this people.” That is exactly what we have in this country.

Call to Repentance and Remnant Faithfulness

It is not just the Muslims; it would be anyone and everyone who is against Christ, against Christianity, against the Word of God, and who is trying to draw people into further idolatry. By the way, let me just point out again: you do not have to bow down to an idol to be an idolater. You can be an idolater in your mind. In fact, any thought that you have about God that is contrary to Scripture is part and parcel of idolatry. The word “image” comes from the word “imagination.” If you imagine something in your mind about God that is not true, it is idolatry, because you are viewing God as what he is not.

Here is the second truth: Unless we repent and turn back, we will witness not only the destruction of Europe, but the destruction of America as well. The Imams in Islam have repeatedly said—you can find it all over the internet, and you can find it all over the paper—“We did not come to assimilate, we came to dominate.” Islam is a political religion. Period. They want to dominate. It is just that simple.

I have one last passage I want you to see. Turn, if you would please, to the book of Hosea, chapter 13. Hosea follows Daniel and precedes Joel and Amos. I said this at the beginning. You probably never picked up on it, but I am going to say it again: you place yourself under the curse of God by your disobedience. Look at what God said to Israel in Hosea, chapter 13, and look, if you would please, at verse 9. God says, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.”

We can destroy ourselves, but we cannot help ourselves. We can destroy ourselves by disobedience, rebellion, refusal to hear the word of God, and refusal to obey. Or we can recognize that our only help is in God himself. No man is going to save us in this country: no president, no Congress. If we are saved, it will only be by the grace and mercy of God himself.

The Scripture tells us that he must turn us, incline our heart, and move upon us. So as though Israel, "thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." There is no help and no hope apart from God. Just as Isaiah 1:7 showed the curse of God from Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, and Jeremiah 5, that same curse is applicable today—not just to individuals, families, and churches, but to nations. Judah was a nation and a kingdom; Israel was a nation and a kingdom.

When God set the Babylonians against Judah and Jerusalem, a remnant was left. When God sent the Assyrians against Israel, a remnant was left. I want to be in the remnant. I do not want to be in the part that is destroyed. If we are going to be a remnant, we must be faithful and true to him, worship him alone, honor him, submit to him, and walk humbly with him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before thee. We thank you for your word and your truth. Lord, we are in a very desperate, precarious position in this country. Help us to see that the curse still exists, as well as the blessing; the promise, as well as the punishment. Turn our hearts unto thee, grant us repentance, faith, and obedience. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Promises and Limitations

March 1, 2026

Isaiah 55:6–13 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. 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 in 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 sent it. For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands, and instead of the thorn shall come up

the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Each one of us understands promises in one sense of the word, because promises literally abound in the Word of God. Oftentimes we try to claim one of those promises, and it seems like there is no fruition of the promise in our life. We think then either there is something wrong with the promise, or there must be something wrong with our interpretation of the promise. So we fail to understand concerning promises in the Bible.

Introduction: Two Types of Promises

In the Bible there are two types of promises. Number one, there is an unconditional promise. An unconditional promise simply means what it says. There are absolutely no conditions attached to it. It is the work of God. It is a declaration of God. It is the decree of God or the counsel of God.

But then there are also what we know as conditional promises. Conditional promises certainly are based upon conditions, and we cannot expect the fulfillment of that promise unless those particular conditions are met.

Examples of Unconditional Promises

Now let me give you some examples of unconditional promises.

First, in Genesis chapter 9, verse 11, God promised that he would never again destroy the world by flood. Clearly, this is an act of God and an unconditional promise: regardless of how man lives or acts, God has promised unequivocally that he will never destroy the world again with a flood. He may destroy it some other way, but not with a flood, because his word is true.

Then, in Genesis chapters 12 through 15, God promised Abraham a seed, to preserve his posterity, and that through him and in him all nations shall be blessed. That is an unconditional promise.

God said, "I will. I will. I will." Nothing is based upon Abraham's acts; it is all based upon God.

Thirdly, the unconditional covenant, the promise of the new covenant, is spoken of in Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 through 34. God has promised to write his laws upon our hearts and in our minds. You'll find that promise also in Hebrews chapter 8 and chapter 10. Again God says, "I will. I will." This is something God is going to do. You may say he is only going to do it for those who have faith and repent. That is true. But remember that God also gives you the faith to believe and repentance to enable you to turn from your sin. So it is still all an act of God. That is for sure. In 2 Samuel chapter 12, God promised David a posterity and, beyond that, an everlasting dynasty, which is unconditional.

How can this work with Abraham and David? The answer is Matthew 1:1: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Jesus Christ is the true Son of David and the true Son of Abraham. That everlasting covenant and unconditional dynasty are found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is another unconditional promise in Hebrews 13:5: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” That promise is based upon God's sovereign decree. God is never going to leave us. You say, “But He is going to leave us when we die.” No, He is not. David said in Psalm 23, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me.” He is never going to leave us or forsake us. Unconditional promises are grounded upon God's character and fulfilled through His sovereign action, even when human instruments fail.

It does not matter, because God has given these promises unconditionally. That is why the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” All these promises are unconditional. Secondly, there are conditional promises.

Examples of Conditional Promises

We have to grasp these conditions. In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, we find curses and blessings. The blessings are based upon obedience: if we obey His word and His commandments. The curses are based upon disobedience. There are conditions. If you want to be cursed, simply disobey; if you want to be blessed, you must obey.

For example, I could say to Brother Steve, since he is mechanically inclined, “If you can fix my old truck and take care of the parts, I will give you a thousand Federal Reserve notes.” I promise to give him that if he fixes my truck. If he does not fix it, I do not owe him the thousand Federal Reserve notes. That is a conditional promise: I promised to give it if he fulfilled the conditions, but if he does not fulfill them, he does not get it.

Let me give you an illustration straight from Scripture that everybody can understand. Most of you can quote 2 Chronicles 7:14: God said, "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," He said, "will I hear their prayer, forgive their sin, and heal their land." Hearing our prayer, forgiving our sins, and healing our land are based upon and conditioned upon humility, seeking Him, praying to Him, and turning from our wicked ways. You can pray all you want for a real, genuine revival in this land, but until we humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, there will not be any real healing in our land.

That is a conditional promise. Our Lord said it like this in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things shall be added unto you."

When you go back and read the context, He is talking about supplying our daily needs. Here is a condition: if you want your daily needs supplied, seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we put God first, He promises that all these other things will be added unto us. But if we put Him second, third, fourth, fifth, 100th, or 1000th, we are not going to find those promises fulfilled in our lives, because there are conditions.

Clearly, conditional promises reflect what I would call a covenantal relationship, where God's grace interacts with human faith, obedience, and repentance. These conditions are not burdensome; they are designed to deepen our relationship with God and foster spiritual growth. Believers are actively encouraged to meet these conditions—faith, obedience, repentance, and prayer—to experience the fullness of God's blessings. Let me make this clear: these conditions are not earned, nor are they earning the fulfillment of God's promises.

The only way that we can come to Him is that He first comes to us. It is like the passage in 1 John 4:19: "We love Him. Why? Because He first loved us." When He stirs our hearts, encourages us, and gives us faith, repentance, obedience, and all that we need to fulfill those conditions, we are not earning them. It is still His grace and mercy working in our lives that enables us to meet those conditions.

Now, I want you to keep these truths in mind as you look at Isaiah 55 with me. First of all, look at verse 6: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near.”

The Urgency of Seeking the Lord (Isaiah 55:6)

In one sense, we might think this is a very strange command. The two verbs in verse 6 are imperatives; that means they are commands. There is the command to seek the Lord while He may be found, and the command to call upon Him while He is near. So here is the question: Is God not always near? Can God not always be found?

When you stop and think about this, most of us immediately think about the omnipresence of God. We think that God is truly everywhere in each place with the totality of His being. When people try to explain the omnipresence of God by saying that one part of God is in Russia, another part is in Egypt, another part is in Israel, another part is in Canada and England, and another part is in America, no. You do not put all these parts together and have one God. No, that is heresy to the nth degree. The omnipresence of God tells us that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His being.

So let me show you. If you will turn in your Bibles, hold Isaiah 55, but turn to Psalm 139. In this Psalm, David is talking about the omnipresence of God, that it is impossible to escape His presence. Let us begin reading with verse 7. David asked, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not

from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

So David is saying there is no way to escape the omnipresence of God. I remember when I was a boy, and my male friends and I wanted to do something bad, something we knew our parents did not like, we would go out by the barn. Why would we go by the barn? Because nobody could see us. But you cannot go by the barn with God, because God is omnipresent. God is everywhere at once in the totality of His being.

Now look back to Isaiah 55:6: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." How do we understand this verse in light of the omnipresence of God? First, God is telling us that we must seek Him sincerely. We must seek Him seriously. And listen to this: we must seek Him seasonably—that is, in season—because this verse clearly indicates there is a time when God cannot be found and a time when God is not near. What does it mean when He is not near? He is not near in His special, selective presence.

You will remember that the children of Israel had the tabernacle. God ordered it, gave the pattern, and Moses built it. The tabernacle was carried throughout the wilderness wanderings by the children of Israel. It was just a tabernacle until the Shekinah glory descended upon it. When God came down upon it, that was a special presence of God. There was an outer court, an inner court, the holy place, and the most holy place. The most holy place was where God revealed Himself in a special presence.

This is what we are talking about in this sense of the word. He is saying in verse six that there is a time when it may be impossible to call upon God. There may be a time when God is not near and is not going to answer. Albert Barnes said, "In an important sense, God is equally near to us at all times." That would be His omnipresence. But this figurative language is taken from the mode of speaking among people, and it denotes that there are influences more favorable for seeking Him at some periods than others.

Thus, God comes near to us in the preaching of His Word when it is borne with power to the conscience. He comes to us in His

providences when He strikes down a friend and comes into the very circle where we move or the very dwelling where we abide. When He lays His hand upon us in sickness, He is near us by day and by night in a revival of religion or when a pious friend pleads with us. God is near to us then and is calling us to His favor. These are favorable times for salvation, times which, if they are suffered to pass by unimproved, return no more. Periods will soon be gone, and when they are gone, the sinner is irrevocably lost or dies.

We will either be saved in God's time and God's way or not at all. We will either be blessed in God's time and in God's way or not at all. Salvation and blessing are not in our hands; they are in God's hands. God is not at our disposal. We are to be at His disposal. He is God, and not us.

Isaiah 55:6 is speaking about seeking the Lord while He may be found. Consider Psalm 32, particularly verse 6, in light of verse 5. David said, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” So now we are talking about confession and acknowledgement. Then verse 6 says, “For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found. Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto thee.” There is a time when God may be found, and there are times, described as floods of great waters, when they come near and He cannot be found. Those are times when God is not near.

Scriptural Warnings About Missing God's Time

The floods of great waters can be anything catastrophic that will take away your attention and take away your desires. You heard me speak of Stonewall Jackson when he was wounded on the battlefield. A litter was called, and his left arm had been mutilated by many bullets and broken. As he was being carried from the field, Lieutenant Smith’s foot became tangled in a vine, and he tripped. Stonewall fell from the litter onto that arm.

He let out a pitiful groan. Lieutenant Smith asked, “Are you hurt?” and he answered, “I’m fine.” They carried him to the hospital, where his arm was amputated. He died shortly thereafter, within a week or so, from pneumonia, not from the amputation. But he told Chaplain

Beverly Tucker Lacy, “I learned a very valuable lesson.” He said, “When I fell from that litter, had I not already been a child of God, my pain was so great, I could have never controlled my mind to call upon him and ask for mercy and grace.”

This is what Psalm 32 is talking about. There is a time when God cannot be found and when God is not near. Let us look at another truth in Proverbs chapter 1, beginning with verse 23 and reading through verse 31. Our Lord, who is wisdom incarnate, says, “Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you. I will make known my words unto you.”

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof.” You would not listen. What would be the outcome? “I will also 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. Why? For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.” What does he think? “I have called, and you refused. I was near, and you paid me no attention.” Now you are going to call, and I am not going to answer.

Isaiah 65:12 says, “Therefore, will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear.” “But did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I did not.” God said, “I called, and you would not answer. I spoke, and you would not hear.” Now he would number them to the slaughter.

Hosea 5:6 says, “They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them.” There are times when God withdraws his special, favorable presence. He cannot withdraw his

omnipresence, but he can withdraw that special saving or blessing presence for sure.

In Luke 19, our Lord bewails the fact that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. You remember how He said that as a hen gathers her chicks under His wings, so would He have gathered them, but they would not come. Then He said in Luke 19:44, "And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Jesus Christ lived and walked among them. They did not receive Him. They hated Him. They despised Him. They crucified Him. He said, "You did not know the time of your visitation." They did not know the time of the special presence and manifestation of God.

It is important for us to understand that we are not to waste opportunities to seek the Lord, to call upon Him, to worship Him, and to be taught of Him. He is not always near in His gracious presence, although He is always present because of His omnipresence. There are times that God also comes in a chastening presence or in a punishing presence, especially for those who disobey and rebel and those who refuse to hear and listen.

Scripture teaches that there is an accepted time of salvation and an accepted time of blessing. Go back to Isaiah, chapter 49; hold Isaiah 55, for we are coming back there, but look at Isaiah 49:8: "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, in a day of salvation have I helped thee, and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people to establish the earth, and a cause to inherit the desolate heritage."

This is a promise that God gave to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Look in verse 7: "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to a servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, He shall choose thee." Then He talks about the acceptable time: "I have heard thee, and a day of salvation have I helped thee," and how He is going to preserve Him. If you turn to 2 Corinthians 6:2, you will see that this truth is also applied particularly to His people.

It is stated very plainly in 2 Corinthians 6:2: “For he said, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.” Go back to verse 1: “We then as workers together with him beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

Do you realize that it is possible to receive the grace of God in vain? It must be, because Paul says that you should not receive it in vain. There is a common grace, yes, and there is a special grace as well. Notice that he says, “We then as workers together with him beseech you.” He has heard them “in a time accepted” and in “the day of salvation.” What time is it when they are beseeching, preaching, teaching, and witnessing? It is a special time. God must be near because His salvation is being proclaimed and offered. Paul says, “Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.” The apostle is beseeching them not to receive the grace of God in vain, because this is the time when salvation is being offered. It is not merely a time of preaching; it is a special time in which God is near.

Here is one more illustration in Hebrews 4:1: “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” Why should we fear? How does one come short of the promise? Verse 2 explains it: “For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them. But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” He says, “Let us therefore fear,” lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. That is the warning: the promise is left, but one may still come short of it.

He is speaking about those Israelites who fell in the wilderness. They did not believe; they did not hear. But he says, “For we who have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest, although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.”

In other words, God says, “I’m speaking in a special time, in a special way. You better hear me. You better come when I call.” It is just that simple.

Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near." You remember that Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn writer, wrote, "Pass me not, O gentle Savior. Pass me not, O gentle Savior. Do not pass me by. While others are calling, do not pass me by."

In other words, there is a special time. This is what Isaiah is talking about: there is a time to call. Notice how this leads into verse 7: "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 to the Lord and he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

You must note that the promise of mercy and pardon in verse 7 is conditioned upon repentance of our ways and repentance of our thoughts.

The Condition of Repentance (Isaiah 55:7)

If there is no changing and repenting of the mind, there is not going to be any repenting or changing in the conduct. Without repentance and without faith, it is useless to call upon the Lord. Pilate may wash his hands all day long. The Pharisees may clean the outside of the platter all day long, and the hypocrite can try to deceive everybody, but he cannot deceive God. None of them will ever be blessed by the Lord or saved by the Lord. Why? Because they are not meeting the conditions of repentance and faith.

It is impossible to be converted without repentance. In Jeremiah 18:11, God says, "Now, therefore, go to speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you and devise a device against you. Return you now everyone from his evil way and make your ways and your doings good." God says, I am planning something destructive against you, and the wise thing for you to do is to listen and repent. Turn you everyone from his evil way and make your ways and your doings good. Your way is your lifestyle; it is your conduct. It is how you live. It is just that simple.

Jeremiah 25:5 says, "Turn you again now, everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the

Lord hath given unto you and your fathers forever and ever." You are not going to dwell in the land unless you repent, unless you turn, and unless you obey.

Now, let me tell you how appropriate this is. In Luke chapter 13, they came to our Lord and said, basically, “Did you hear about those Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices?” They were trying to upset our Lord because He was from Galilee; Nazareth was in Galilee, so these were His people. Pilate had murdered some of them while they were sacrificing unto God. Our Lord said, “Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Then He added, “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” In other words, God demands repentance.

The Necessity of Changing Our Thinking

The way of the wicked is his walk; it is his conduct, and God demands that he turn from his conduct and from his walk. How does he do that? He must turn from his evil thoughts as well. You have to understand that it is your mind that controls your body and your actions. If you do not think biblically, you are not going to act biblically. If you think wrongly, you will act wrongly.

Years ago, I was preaching in a little Baptist church outside Thomasville, Georgia. In the congregation was the pastor’s brother. The pastor had witnessed to him for years, but his brother was lost. That night, God mercifully and graciously saved him. After the service, the pastor was so happy that he invited us to a restaurant for refreshment and fellowship. His brother and family went as well. We had already prayed and were sitting around talking. His brother was a huge bird hunter; he hunted quail.

All of a sudden, he burst out laughing—almost uncontrollably. I asked, “What is wrong?” or, “What is so funny?” He said, “Well, it just hit me. I’m going to have to retrain my bird dogs all over. They won’t understand a word I’m saying now.” You get the picture. Since

he had been saved, he had to think differently, and he had to speak differently as well.

This illustration leads me to verses 6 and 7: "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."

It is not just the way, the conduct, that has to be changed; the way of thinking must be changed as well. Our thought life is the foundation of our walk, conduct, action, and ways. The way you think is the way you act. If you think unbiblically, you are going to act unbiblically. If you think according to Scripture, you are going to act according to Scripture. It is the sinful, wicked, and wrong way of thinking that leads us into wicked and wrong ways of acting and conducting ourselves.

We have to change our way of thinking into a biblical pattern. Normally, we think carnally, naturally, and fleshly. Suppose Ron and I get at each other's throats, and Ron becomes so aggravated at me that he starts cussing me in front of everybody. He is not going to do that, I know, but what would be my normal reaction? What would be the fleshly reaction? I might cuss back: "You're not going to talk to me like that. I'll talk to you even worse."

But what does Scripture say? Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." If I let him upset me because he is already upset, and then fire back at him, he becomes more upset. The next thing we know, we are in a fistfight. You can think carnally or fleshly, or you can think biblically. It is that simple. We have to change our way of thinking if we are going to change our way of acting and conducting ourselves.

This is the place where most Christians fail. They change a few things in their lives: "Well, I quit drinking; I quit smoking." I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't chew, and I don't go with the girls that do. That is fine. But we never change our way of thinking. We still think wickedly and carnally, and therefore we never really change.

If you do not change your thinking, if you have a habit that is wicked, wrong, or unscriptural, and you say, "I'm going to quit that

habit," you will quit it temporarily, but then you will go back to it. Although you change your conduct for a short period, you never change your thinking, and you go right back to it.

Here is a quote from Albert Barnes on Isaiah 55 and verse 7: "The Hebrew word denotes all that is the object of thought, and the idea is that the man must abandon his plans and purposes of life. The thoughts in the sight of a holy God are not less important than the external deportment, and no man can obtain his favor who is not ready to abandon his erroneous opinions, his pride and vanity, his plans of evil, and his purposes of life that are opposed to God." You have to change your way of thinking.

Consider Proverbs 4 and verse 23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The heart in the Bible is the mind. Occasionally it refers to the affections, but most of the time it refers to your mind. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Everything comes from your mind. You cannot move without thinking. I cannot even pick up my glasses without thinking. The Bible says in Proverbs 23 verse 7, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

In other words, your thoughts determine how you live. It is just that simple. Our Lord says in Matthew chapter 15, beginning with verse 16: "Watch this."

Our Lord said to His disciples, "Are you also yet without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man." Look at what comes out of the heart. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts." Your heart, your mind. And what are those thoughts about? "Murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." Everything comes out of the heart, and the very first thing is evil thoughts.

The same truth is stated in Mark 7: "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth him." "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts,

covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man."

Unless we change our way of thinking, we are not going to change our lives. Consider Romans 12:1–2: "I beseech you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service," not unreasonable. "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed"—listen—"by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God."

You will never prove that good and perfect and acceptable will of God until you have a renewed mind. Your mind must be renewed. Do not be conformed to this world; do not be pressed into its mold, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Ephesians 4:23 says, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Colossians 3:10 says, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." How did we get renewed in knowledge? Because we submitted our minds to the Word of God. We learned what God said, what God demands, and what God desires.

Philippians 2:5 says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” God then demands that we have the mind of Christ. What is the mind of Christ? How do you know whether or not you have the mind of Christ? The mind of Christ is a mind of submission, obedience, walking in faith, and pleasing the Father. That is the mind of Christ. John 8:29 shows us what the mind of Christ is: “And he that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things which please him.”

Do you remember how Jesus Christ said, “I came not to do my will, but the will of him that sent me”? Jesus Christ delighted in doing the Father’s will. He was submissive to his Father. He was obedient to his Father. He honored his Father. He prayed to his Father. “I do always those things which please him.”

It is important that you and I understand our way when Scripture says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” Our way is our walk. It is our life. It is how we live. But

that walk, that life, and how we live are controlled by our minds, so that we cannot do anything without thinking. If we think in a biblical framework, we will act biblically. But if we do not think in that framework, we will act unbiblically.

Let me put this together. Look how beautifully this is woven together in Isaiah 55: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” in a special way. “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.”

God's Thoughts and Ways Are Higher (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Why should we do all of this? Why does God have conditions? Here is why: “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.” Isn't that amazing? We do not think like our Heavenly Father by nature.

It is only in regeneration and conversion that we even begin to see how He thinks and how He moves. We understand that in His Word, in His truth, and we understand that His thoughts are far above ours. His ways are far above ours. But we must learn to think His thoughts.

In Ephesians 4, the apostle is talking about the unsaved. He says, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk,” or the unsaved walk, or the nations walk, “in the vanity of their minds.” That is the uselessness of their minds. Why is their mind vanity? “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.” They don't know God. They don't know His Word. They don't know His truth.

“Because of the blindness of their heart,” they are blind to it. Consequently, “Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

You and I must learn Jesus Christ. "If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, that ye

put off concerning the former conversation"—or conduct or lifestyle—"the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." You learn Jesus Christ by learning His Word, His precepts, and His principles. You learn to change your thinking, and therefore you learn to change your conduct, because your conduct is a product of your thinking.

We must change our thinking in order to conform our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Word. We have to learn to think biblically. God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways." We have to learn to think the way God thinks in order that we may stay in the way that He has ordained.

God says, "For my ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts, and my ways higher than your ways." God is not going to condescend to think our thoughts. Our thoughts are carnal and fleshly and human. God is not going to condescend to approve our ways. God demands that we conform to His Word, His will, and His way. We have to learn to think His thoughts. You are only going to find peace and mercy and pardon in submission and obedience.

The promise in Isaiah 55 is conditioned upon repentance and faith. It is conditioned upon biblical change. Biblical change is not just changing your life; it is changing your thinking. When you do that, it is a permanent change. It is not what we would call a temporary fix or an emergency fix. I have seen parents whose child was dying, husbands whose wives were leaving them, wives whose husbands were leaving them, and adulterous individuals. In every emergency situation, people cry, "Lord, Lord, help me. Lord, help me. Lord, if you do this for me, I'll do this. I'll do that."

They continue for about three or four weeks and then quit once they get what they want. That is trying to bargain with God and deceive Him, though He is not deceived. He already knows, and that only adds to your condemnation. If you and I are going to change our lives, we have to change our way of thinking, period. We have to learn to think biblically and scripturally.

There will never be an increase in holiness, obedience, and sanctification unless we learn to think biblically. Go back to Isaiah 55. There are conditional promises. This is a conditional promise. He said in verse 7, “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.” The pardon and mercy of God are conditioned upon forsaking wicked ways and wicked thoughts and turning to the Lord.

The Blessings of Meeting God's Conditions (Isaiah 55:10-13)

The blessings come from the same thing. It is not only salvation; it would be any blessing. Beginning with verse 10: “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,” which is a blessing. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth,” that is, His promises, anything; “it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” If you come to Him in the way He demands in verse 7, look at verse 12: “For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing. And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. And instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” In other words, God’s Word is true. His blessings are true.

Applications: Dependence on God's Enabling Grace

When you and I try to claim a promise, if it is conditional, we must understand and meet the conditions God demands. The only way we can meet those conditions is to beseech Him to enable us, giving us His grace and mercy. If God demands faith, faith is His gift. If God demands repentance, repentance is his gift. If God demands submission, submission is his gift.

We cannot do anything without Him. Our Lord said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Therefore, when we come to the promises of

God, we must understand that conditional promises have limitations. Those limitations are the conditions God requires, and we must beseech Him to enable us to meet them, because without Him we can do nothing.

Let us pray. Father, we ask You in the name of Jesus Christ for Your grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Help us to change our thinking, enable us to read Your Scripture, and give us understanding and enlightenment. May we understand Your principles and precepts and apply them in our lives. Teach us to think as thou dost think, so that we may act biblically and scripturally. We ask Your blessings upon each one, Lord, especially those on the prayer list. We commit them into Your hands and ask this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

Stripped Naked

October 5, 2017

Introduction: The Shame of Nakedness

“For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he made Judah naked and transgressed sore against the LORD.”

There is absolutely no one who wishes to be publicly shamed or humiliated. Most of us would be extremely embarrassed if we lost our pants or a skirt in public. Others might laugh and think it was funny, but for the one to whom it happened, it would not be humorous.

The interesting thing is that when God created man, He created them male and female, and they were naked and not ashamed. In Genesis chapter 2, verses 23–25, the Bible says, “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

The Hebrew word for “naked” there literally means to be naked, to be bare. The Hebrew word for “unashamed” means that they were not shameful, neither were they embarrassed. They were created naked; in other words, nakedness was the state of their creation. They were also created pure and innocent, and therefore there was no reason to be ashamed or humiliated. Should babies be ashamed of the fact that they were born without clothes? Obviously, there would be no reason for Adam and Eve to be ashamed if we are not ashamed of babies being born naked as well.

Nakedness and Sin

But shame and embarrassment came through sin and because of sin. We are shamed and humiliated now because we have lost our purity and our innocence. Genesis chapter 3, verses 9–11, says, “And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” Sin has caused us to lose not only our purity but our innocence, and it has caused shame and embarrassment.

There have been over the years numerous "back to Eden" movements in which people publicly advocate public nudity. They say that no one should be ashamed of his or her body. That is one point that could be enunciated. Yet those who advocate such movements and public nudity have no way to deal with the shame, humiliation, sin, and rebellion against God. Only Jesus Christ can remove the stigma of sin and rebellion.

The truth of the matter is this: man will never go back to Eden because of our sin and rebellion. Moreover, those who are in Jesus Christ now have something far better than Eden. Whatever we lost in the first Adam, we gained far more in the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you think about nakedness, what about Jesus Christ? The Bible says that they stripped the Son of God. Matthew 27:27 says, "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall,

and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe."

Jesus Christ Was Stripped

"And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him."

In verse 28, the Bible says, “they stripped him.” The Greek word there is ekdyo, which literally means to strip, to take off, to unclothe, and to strip one of his garments. So the question must be asked: Did they strip Him naked? In verse 35, we know that He was crucified, and the Bible says, “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.” Did they strip Jesus Christ naked? We know that they gambled for His garments. John 19:23 says, “Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.”

The Greek word for “garments” here is himation, which refers to garments, a cloak, clothes, a robe, and apparel. The Bible says they stripped Him. Whether they stripped Him absolutely naked, or whether they left what we would call underclothes on Him, it was still a humiliating and embarrassing situation. They purposely and deliberately wanted to mock and humiliate the Son of God.

Hebrews 12, beginning with verse 1, says, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Verse 2 says, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Verse 3 continues, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

The Bible says that He endured the cross, despising the shame. Regardless of whether or not He was absolutely stripped naked—and the Bible also says concerning the women that they stood afar off, which may indicate that in reality He was—it is our sin that makes us naked, bare, and polluted, and only Jesus Christ can deal with that sin.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 16:4-13 (KJV)

Biblical Theme of Nakedness

God is describing how He found Israel, and in that sense of the word He also describes what we were in and of ourselves before He saved us. Ezekiel 16:4 says:

"And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born."

So here is a picture now of a newborn child that no one wanted, no one cleaned, no one swaddled, and no one washed; they just threw the child out in the field to die. Verse 5 continues: "None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."

"I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with

> broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk."
>
> Here is a picture of sinners, of what they are in and of themselves. God says once again that we were naked, and we were bare, and we were in our blood, in pollution, and cast out to the loathing of ourselves.

The theme of nakedness in the Bible is an interesting thought. Have you ever thought about it? According to Scripture, individuals, families, churches, and even nations can be made naked through sin and rebellion.

As far as individuals are concerned, there are a number of passages. Let me show you two of them. In 2 Corinthians 5, beginning with verse 1, the Apostle Paul is talking about our bodies: "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." He is talking about Christians. If this tabernacle, this body, were dissolved, we have a new body, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Then, in verse 2, he says, "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." There is an indication here that those who are without this new body or without this new house will be found to be naked.

Then he says in verse 4, "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." Those who are in Christ will certainly be clothed. Those who are without Christ will not have that new house, or that new body, and thus will be exposed.

Another verse that relates to individuals is Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Keeping your garments here, I believe, would refer to being obedient, to be holy, to be godly. Lest he walk naked and they see his shame. The Bible indicates that individuals can be made naked, but there are also verses indicating that churches can be made naked. For instance, in Revelation 3:14, our Lord speaks to the church of

Laodicea: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." The church of Laodicea said: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Entire churches may be found to be naked. I am afraid that many Christians, as well as churches, shall be ashamed in the day of our Lord because of their nakedness. We may not be ashamed now, but we will be ashamed then. The Greek word for "naked" in the New Testament is gymnos. It is translated as "naked" or "bare" and indicates someone who is unclad or unclothed. One who is made publicly bare, stripped of his clothing, will be embarrassed and ashamed. I got tickled at one of our ladies years ago, just to show you how easily embarrassed we are.

You do not have to do something great to be embarrassed. A woman was coming down the steps of the post office—four or five marble steps—and she tripped, fell down the steps, and landed on the pavement. She told me, “Pastor, do you know the first thing that I did?” I immediately said, “Well, you hollered for help.”

“No,” she said, “I looked around to see if anybody else was looking.” It embarrassed her simply because she tripped and fell in public. Obviously, we could be embarrassed even more if something like losing your clothes happened.

Aaron Made Israel Naked

In Exodus chapter 32, you must remember that it was Aaron who made the people naked to their shame. Notice how he did this. “And

when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Moses was up in the mountain receiving the law of God, and they said, "We don't know what's become of him."

"And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

When the Bible says they rose up to play, it does not mean that they rose up to play basketball, baseball, or Monopoly. It means that they rose up to commit fornication. If you skip down to verse 25, notice: "And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:)"

Moses saw that the people were naked. So individuals can be stripped naked, and churches can be stripped naked. But in our text, 2 Chronicles 28:19, it is a nation that is stripped naked. There is a correlation between Exodus 32 and 2 Chronicles 28:19. If you have been listening to or reading the news, you will have noticed numerous individuals recently who stripped naked and did things that were absolutely insane.

Ahaz Made Judah Naked

I read this week about a woman—apparently in a minor wreck—who jumped out of her vehicle, took off all her clothes, grabbed a knife, and ran straight toward a deputy. Thankfully, he did not shoot her.

Here in Jacksonville, Florida, the police had to deal with several people who were naked, absolutely insane, and high on drugs.

The point is this: when we think about someone who is naked, we are thinking about someone without provision and without protection, because clothing helps protect you. You are without power as well. If you do not believe that you are without power when you are without clothes, try existing in zero-degree temperatures for twenty-four hours while completely naked. You will find that you have no power to do anything except freeze to death. And, of course, if you are stripped naked, you certainly have no peace.

Now look in your Bibles at 2 Chronicles 28:19. Let me read this again, because we are going back to examine the context and see what is happening: "For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel: for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD."

Several truths have to be observed. First, it was the Lord who brought Judah low. The Bible says, "For the LORD brought Judah low." God is a God of judgment. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."

God is not removed from the world which He created. He does not sit idly by, twiddle His thumbs, and express no interest in what transpires in the world. The deists say that God created the world like a clock, wound it up, and then withdrew, waiting for the clock to run down; when it finally stops, God will step in. No. The truth is that He judges and executes His righteous intervention, either in judgment or deliverance. He does so in time and in history. He is active in bringing His purpose to pass in His providence.

The Bible tells us that God brought Judah low, and He is also the one who will bring all the nations low that rebel against Him. Secondly, He says in verse 19, "For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel." God judges nations in light of their wicked rulers.

Ahaz was actually king of Judah. Is the Bible wrong in calling him the king of Israel? No. There is a purpose in that. Verses 1 and 2 say, "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."

It was not merely that he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he did that. Keil and Delitzsch say concerning Ahaz, "Ahaz is called the king of Israel, not simply because he walked in the ways of the kings of the kingdom of the ten tribes, but ironically, because his government was the bitterest satire upon the name of the king of Israel and the people of God." In other words, Ahaz personified all the sin, rebellion, and wickedness of the kings of Israel.

He was a wicked, vile individual. The Bible tells us that God brought Judah low because of Ahaz, king of Israel: "For he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD." What did Ahaz do? He transgressed sore against the LORD, and in his transgressions he made Judah naked. His transgressions were against the LORD, and they were the reason he made Judah naked.

How Ahaz Stripped Judah

How did he do this? First, like Aaron in Exodus 32, he stripped the people of their faith and led them into idolatry. Second Chronicles 28, verses 2 and 3, says: "For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt 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." Here is a man who is exceedingly vile. He sacrifices his own children to a false god and serves Baalim.

Verse 22 says, "And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz." The Bible continues: "For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help 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."

By his decrees and example, he stripped Judah of their faith, their service, and worship of the true God. He caused licentiousness and nakedness to abound in Judah. He allowed Judah to break loose from all restraints of true religion and turn to any idolatry they preferred. In other words, this apostasy resembles what Scripture refers to as an unfaithful wife.

In verse 22, the Bible says, "this is that king Ahaz." When you look at 2 Kings 17:21, the Bible says that Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and he made them sin a great sin. Jeroboam was the first king of the ten northern tribes, and he drove Israel. It is like someone taking a whip and beating them and driving them away. There are numerous ways that he drove them.

When you get to 2 Kings 21:9, you read about King Manasseh. The Bible said, "And Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel." On the one hand, you have Jeroboam driving, and on the other hand, you have Manasseh seducing. Here are two ways that people can get into idolatry: either by being driven or by being seduced. If you study your Bible, you will find that all of the idolatries began with the kings, and they began with government.

It was Solomon that introduced idolatry into Israel. It was Jeroboam that introduced idolatry into Israel. It was Manasseh. It was also Ahaz. On the one hand, you have Jeroboam driving; you have Manasseh seducing; and now you have Ahaz, a man who abused the house of God. He cut the pieces of the furniture of the temple into—he shut the doors.

When he stole the equipment and the vessels, the priest could not do the service, and the people could not enter the temple to worship. Basically, Ahaz was worse than all of the kings before him. He even denied God, because the Scripture said that he put altars in every corner of Jerusalem. In other words, he made his altars equal to or above the true altar of God. You could not get to the true altar of God because he shut the doors of the temple. He was saying, "This is

where you are going to worship." He made high places, these idolatrous places, all over Judah and Jerusalem.

Wherever and whenever men are not men of conviction and principle, it is possible for civil rulers to drive, seduce, and lead a people into idolatry and apostasy. Wherever and whenever you do not have men of principle and conviction, it is easy for a tyrant to drive, seduce, or lead them into apostasy and idolatry. He made them naked, the Bible says, because he drove them from the true God and from the true faith. We have not understood the implications of wicked rulers. Neither have we really understood the implications of politically correct speech.

The actions going on today are similarly referred to as cultural cleansing. We are being stripped naked in this nation, and we do not even realize what is happening. Consider the removal of Confederate monuments and statues. It is called cultural cleansing. The Marxists, leftists, and liberals are doing this. Someone says, "They are after our culture." My response is that they are not after our culture; they are after our faith. Culture is religion externalized. The culture of Africa, India, China, and America demonstrates that culture is the outworking of faith. Monuments and statues to godly and heroic men are symbols of our Southern Christian heritage and faith.

I do not care whom you read, Northern or Southern; most authors acknowledge that General Lee, Robert E. Lee, was one of the godliest men who ever lived. The same is true of Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart, and Richard Stoddard Ewell. The point is not merely that they are removing monuments; they are after our faith. Once they have removed the Confederate monuments and statues of these godly, heroic men, watch out. They will go after the founding fathers and men of principle and conviction.

Because they represent biblical Christianity, they are already after Sam Houston in Texas. Sam Houston was originally from Tennessee, the man who defeated Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, helped make Texas a republic, and brought it into being. Now they are after Sam Houston as well. What Ahaz did, the way he made Judah naked, was strip them of their faith and consequently of their culture, because their culture was an expression of their faith.

Secondly, Ahaz made them naked by exposing them to their enemies. His leadership, wickedness, and actions brought the wrath of God not only upon Ahaz, but upon Judah. In 2 Chronicles 28:5 we read: "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."

The Syrians defeated Judah. The latter part of verse 5 says: "And he [that is, Ahaz] was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter." Then: "For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men." Why? "Because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. And Zichri, 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."

Here not only had the Syrians destroyed and defeated them, but Israel had done so as well, killing 120,000 in one day and taking 200,000 prisoners. Can you imagine?

Ahaz sought help from Assyria, saying, “I need some help. I don't need help from God. I just need help from a stronger king.” But the Edomites again came and smote Judah, carrying away captives. The Philistines invaded the cities of the low country and the south of Judah, taking Beth-shemesh, Ajalon, Gederoth, Shocho with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages, where they dwelt. “For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD.” Then Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came unto him and distressed him, “but strengthened him not.” When a ruler and a people forsake God, God forsakes them and judges them.

Look back at verse 6. “For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers.” This is reiterated in verse 9 by the prophet Oded: “Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand; and ye have slain them in a rage

that reacheth up unto heaven." It cannot be overemphasized that our protection is in the Lord, not in man or political alliances. Psalm 127:1 says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Proverbs 21:31 likewise says, "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD."

Ahaz made them naked by driving them from their faith and their culture, and by exposing them to their enemies. Thirdly, he made the people naked and destroyed the nation by stealing from God and the people and by personally following the grossest forms of idolatry. He did so under the pretense of seeking to protect the nation. Second Chronicles 28:21 says, "For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not."

Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD—in other words, he stole from the temple—and out of the house of the king. That may have been his own, but it may not have been; it may have belonged to the nation. He also stole from the princes: he taxed them and took from them. Then he turned around and gave it to the king of Assyria. But the king of Assyria helped him not.

"And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz." He sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him, saying, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.

He had forsaken God. He reasoned, "These dumb idols help their people. I'll sacrifice to them." He was seeking to protect the nation, but he was doing so by destroying the nation. Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, cut them in pieces, shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and made altars in every corner of Jerusalem. In every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, provoking the LORD God of his fathers to anger. He was stealing from God and stealing from the people.

Modern Applications

No amount of money, taxes, or theft can prevent, hinder, or thwart the judgment of God. If you have never read The Law by Frédéric Bastiat, I trust you will do so. Bastiat distinguishes between illegal plunder and legal plunder. If I put a pistol to Steve's head and say, "Give me all your money or I'll kill you," that is illegal plunder. But if I want what he has and do not want the consequences of going to jail or the chance of being shot by him, I act as a politician: I pass a law and make him give it to me, or else he goes to prison. That is legal plunder.

Even Thomas Jefferson said it is immoral to make a man pay for and support that which he does not believe in. One of the things that drives me up a wall is property taxes. When you stop and think that about 80% of that, or 70%, goes to the government schools, I've never had a child in a government school a day in my life or a day in their lives. All my children went to a Christian school all their lives.

I sacrificed, I paid for their education. Why should I pay for the education of Steve's children? That's his responsibility. That's not mine. Moreover, when you think about a property tax, "the earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." When man comes along and says, "I'm going to tax you on this property," man is assuming ownership of God's world. Many people do not realize that the colonists, when they were fighting George III, tried to get Canada to join with us. One argument was, "We're not careful; the next thing you know they'll even be trying to tax our property." So the point I'm trying to make is here this man was doing everything he could.

He thought to protect the nation, and what he was doing was destroying the nation. He made them naked. Ahaz made Judah naked, as his sin debased them, so it exposed them. It made them naked to their shame, for it exposed them to contempt, as if a man is unclothed. It made them naked to danger, for it exposed them to assaults as a man unarmed. We fail to remember that sin strips men. It does so individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally.

The Bible says in Proverbs chapter 14, verse 34, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." We're being

stripped naked in this country, and we do not even realize it. First of all, we are being slowly but surely stripped naked. It is our faith, our culture, our history, our heritage, consistently and constantly attacked and destroyed. Corrupt rulers and politicians and unbelievers may knowingly or unknowingly strip us naked, but that is beside the point. We are still being stripped naked. Those that will not humble themselves under the hand of God shall be made low. God brought Judah low because of their pride and arrogance and rebellion and idolatry. I'd much rather submit to God in a humble manner and be blessed by God than be ruined by Him.

Look in Psalm 106, verses 40 through 43. Here the people had rebelled against God and sinned against Him: “Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand.” God judged the people and gave them into the hand of the heathen, and they that hated them ruled over them.

Is that not where we are? Go to Deuteronomy 28. Everybody knows this passage. You say, “Why in the world would God deliver us into the hands of the heathen?” These are the blessings and the curses, and this is the section concerning the curses. Beginning in verse 43, God says, “The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low.” It does not take much today to look around and see how the illegal immigrants get far more out of our government than does a citizen. In fact, they have more rights than a citizen today. “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.”

Now watch: “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.” Here is why God judges with the heathen: “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 don't want to serve me joyfully and gladly and willingly?"

"You think my service is hard? I tell you what I'll do. I'll put you in the hands of your enemies and we'll see whose service is hard. We'll see whether you'd rather serve me or serve them." Obviously, we're made naked when we forsake the Lord and His Word.

The second application is this: we must understand that God is omniscient. That is, He is all-knowing. God knows our hearts, our desires, our thoughts, our actions, and our motives. It is a joy to a righteous man that God knows our hearts, thoughts, desires, and motives. Many times we try to do something right and mess up. We can always come to the Lord and say, "But Lord, you know my heart. You know the motive. You know why I really want to do that which is right."

It just didn't work out. It is a terror to the wicked to know that God does indeed know every desire, thought, and motive. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:13: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

So the truth of the matter is this: if we wish to maintain our history and heritage, our families, churches, and country, we can do so only by being submissive and obedient to Him and His law. If we sin against Him, we shall be found naked. Just as Adam was found naked, and as Aaron and Ahaz made them naked, we shall be stripped of everything God in His mercy has given us. It is possible for civil rulers to strip a nation naked.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. Lord, help us to be obedient, to be holy, to be godly, to be submissive. If no one else stands, may we stand. If no one else is true, may we be true. If no one else loves Thee, may we love Thee, and do that which is holy and

right and pleasing in Thy sight. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, amen.

CHAPTER 10

Turning Back In The Day Of Battle

November 20, 2018

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 78:1-11 (KJV)

Introduction and Reading of Psalm 78:1-11

Psalm 78, verse 1: “Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious

> generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law; and forgot His works, and His wonders that He had showed them."
>
> I could begin by asking two very simple questions. Number one, have you noticed a change in our culture? And number two, have you noticed changes in the men in our culture? Generally speaking, the men in our day and age have become soft, effeminate, and cowardly.

The Decline of Masculine Courage in Modern Preachers

I know that there are exceptions to that statement, and I am certainly thankful for those exceptions. But if you want to see the real change that has taken place in America, and the real change that has taken place in the men in America, then you need to compare and study the preachers in the 1700s with the preachers that we have today. You need to look closely, because those men in the 1700s who fought for liberty and freedom, who stood for truth and righteousness, were bold, fearless, courageous, and determined.

Today, you look around at most pastors and most preachers, and you will find that they are soft, prissy, and politically correct. They never want to offend anyone or hurt anyone's feelings in any way whatsoever. They go around as though they are walking on eggshells. I am certainly not advocating being ugly, unkind, or uncivil in any way whatsoever. But when you begin to look at the preachers who were around in the 1700s and 1800s and compare them with the preachers today, you are going to see a very obvious difference.

Remember, the British dubbed the preachers in early America the Black Robed Regiment because they wore those long, flowing black robes. They accused the preachers of being the leaders in the Revolution, which they in reality were. These men stood for truth, righteousness, liberty, and freedom. They were bold, courageous, and certainly valiant for the truth.

Look around today at our modern-day preachers, and you are going to find that they are unwilling to take a stand on anything, especially if it might affect their position, their pension, their income, or their members. The sad fact is that most preachers place truth and righteousness very low on their list of priorities.

For example, there was a pastor by the name of Gad Hitchcock who preached an election sermon in 1774. Gad Hitchcock was chosen to preach this election sermon. In those days, no man could assume political office without first going through what was known as an election sermon. The pastor then stood and preached to the official, and to all those around him, the duties he had toward God and toward the people.

Historical Example: Gad Hitchcock's Election Sermon

He would detail the role of government, the role of government to the people, and the people's role to the government, all based upon the Bible. Gad Hitchcock was invited and chosen to preach this election sermon to the newly appointed governor, appointed by King George III. He took as his text Proverbs 29:2: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn."

When Gad Hitchcock arrived to preach, he discovered that the newly appointed governor was none other than General Thomas Gage himself. General Gage had his men behind him, having been sent by George III to quell the uprising, quieten the colonists, subdue them, and make sure they did not revolt against George III. Seeing General Gage and the soldiers standing behind him did not slow Hitchcock down. He preached:

"If I am mistaken in supposing plans are formed and executing subversive to our natural and charter rights and privileges and incompatible with every idea of liberty, all America is mistaken with me. Our continued complaints, our repeated humble but fruitless, unregarded petitions and remonstrances, and if I may be allowed the sacred allusion, our groanings which cannot be uttered are at once indications of our sufferings and the feelings since we have of them."

"Let the governor and his chair of state hear it. We not only mourn, but with groanings that cannot be uttered, and all because the wicked bear rule. The castle cannot shelter him from the scorching thunderbolt. Families are divided. Brothers are right against brother. Friend against friend. Society is cut from its moorings. And hate and consternation reign on every side. And all because of the wicked bear rule. King George may say that the evils that produce this state of things are imaginary. But I tell you, and I will tell the tyrant to his face, it is because of the wicked bear rule."

That was Gad Hitchcock preaching to General Gage and calling George III a tyrant. He said, "I will tell him to his face." If you really want to be impressed, pick up a book like "Chaplains and Clergy of the Revolution," written by J.T. Headley, and read about these men. You will see the vast difference between the preachers in the 1700s and the preachers of today.

The Church Militant and Biblical Warfare

In fact, the truth of the matter is, we have fallen so far that most pastors do not even want the song "Onward Christian Soldiers" sung in their churches anymore. It is too militant. However, the Bible does tell us about the church militant. May I remind you that in Exodus chapter 15 and verse 3 the Bible says, "The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name." When you get to Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 24, it is by means of war that God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt. Then, when you get to the book of Numbers chapter 21 and verse 14, you find that the wars of the Lord were so numerous that the Bible talks about "the book of the wars of the Lord."

If you take a Webster's 1828 dictionary and look up the word "militant," here is what you will read. Number one, "fighting, combating, fighting as a soldier." Number two, "the church militant, the Christian Church on earth, which is supposed to be engaged in constant warfare against its enemies, thus distinguished from the Church triumphant which is in Heaven." So when Webster wrote his 1828 Dictionary, when he came to the word "militant," he could not think of a better illustration than the Church on earth, because the Church is to be engaged in constant warfare against its enemies.

The Problem of Ephraim's Cowardice

You look in Psalm 78 and verse 9, which I will be talking about today: "The children of Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle." The sad fact is that most preachers and most Christians today are very much like the Ephraimites in Psalm 78. We have retreated from reality. We have not only retreated from reality, but from Biblical principles and Biblical truth. There are only a few today who will enter into the fight and enter into the fray, and unhappily, many of those men who are in the fight and in the fray soon grow weary and lose heart. Then they turn back themselves because they sense that they are all alone and realize they cannot, quote unquote, fight the battle just by themselves. Usually, men quit when they are most needed. You would think that being armed with truth and being armed with righteousness would be sufficient for anyone, but unhappily there are many today who will cast those weapons aside and simply give in and give up.

The Bible says, “The children of Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle.” One of the greatest warriors in the Bible was an Ephraimite, Joshua the son of Nun. Ephraim was the largest tribe. In fact, it was so prominent that Ephraim often represented the entire Northern Kingdom, for it was indeed a leading tribe.

According to 1 Chronicles chapter 5, the privileges of the firstborn were given to Joseph. Before Jacob died, he assigned those privileges to Ephraim in Genesis chapter 48 and verse 1. The supremacy of Ephraim was shown in the order of marching to Canaan, because they marched directly behind the ark. When the ark was settled, it was settled in Shiloh, which was in the land of Ephraim. Ephraim was also given a very large, expansive, and extremely fertile piece of land.

Ephraim had many blessings and privileges, yet Ephraim turned away from God. Ephraim should have been leading the tribes in courage and valor; however, Psalm 78:9 shows it leading them in cowardice. What would make a well-armed people turn back in the day of battle? Ephraim was armed—in fact, well armed—but when they faced the enemy, they turned back.

Before answering that question, consider a principle that generally affects all of us: we develop attitudes, dispositions, habits, and even actions from our fathers. Our fathers will always be our fathers, yet they are not always right. Generally speaking, wisdom and judgment come with age. I did things as a young man that I would never think of doing now. Looking back, I think, Lord, You had to preserve me, because I was so stupid in doing some of those senseless things.

We think wisdom comes with age, but not always. Hold Psalm 78 and turn back to Job chapter 32. Job had three friends who tried to counsel him, but none of the counsel they gave applied to Job.

The Influence of Fathers and the Danger of Following Bad Examples

There is a fourth friend by the name of Elihu. Elihu was a younger man, and he held his peace until last. Here is what he said in Job 32: "And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."

Then look at this: "Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment." Just because someone has gotten old does not mean that he is wise, and just because someone is aged does not mean that he understands judgment.

Our fathers are always going to be our fathers, and that is certainly true. But we must not follow them in sin and disobedience. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." In other words, we should follow no man any further than he follows the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the problems is that Ephraim followed their fathers as well. Psalm 78:8 says, "And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." Their fathers were stubborn, revolters, and rebellious; they did not set their heart aright and were not steadfast with God. They were double-minded,

disobedient, and daring rebels against God—stiff-necked, ungovernable, and inclined to revolt. Nothing was more remarkable in the history of Israel than this truth.

They provoked Him so many times, constantly betrayed Him, and fell into idolatry. They were treacherous and treasonous. Fathers stubborn in their own ways and rebellious against God are sorry examples for their children. They bring the curse of God upon themselves and upon their children.

God said in Ezekiel 20:18–19: “But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them.” God said to their children, “Don't walk in the statutes, or in the laws or the rules, of your fathers. Don't observe their judgments. Don't defile yourself with their idols. Do what I tell you,” because what they were telling them was contrary to the truth.

Trust in God, Not Weaponry

It is wonderful to have fathers to emulate, but those whom we cannot emulate require us to mark their bad habits and sins as things we should not follow or do. I can think of two men and two families. Both men, as boys, were raised in bars and saloons. One recently died at a very early age from drunkenness, smoking, and everything else that went with it. That was the way he was raised in a bar.

The other individual was raised in a bar as well, but he marked what was happening, and God had mercy upon him. He is a wonderful young man, already a preacher, very talented and enlightened concerning the truth. Here were two men, both raised in bars: one followed his father's bad example, and the other said, “Hey, I'm not going to act like that. I'm not going to live like that.”

When you can emulate your fathers in goodness, kindness, and righteousness, do so. But if they set a bad example, then don't do it.

“And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being

armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." In the day of battle they turned back.

Weapons do not make a valiant man. Weapons do not make a man courageous. Weapons will not and cannot make you courageous. They may make you foolish, but they cannot make you valiant. The Ephraimites were armed, probably with the best of weapons, and yet the Bible says they turned back.

The problem is that many people place their confidence in their weaponry. I have heard people say, "Well, let him come to my house. Man, I'm loaded for bear. I'm ready for him." Really? If that weapon does not work, it is useless. If you cannot get to it in time, it is useless. If you cannot use it correctly, it is useless. Weaponry will not make a man valiant or courageous.

The Bible says in Psalm 20 and verse 7, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." I believe I would rather trust in the Lord than trust in weaponry or armor. One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 21 and verse 31: "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord." David said in Psalm 140, "Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." And remember Psalm 127, verse 1: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

Having the latest, greatest, best, and most expensive weaponry that money can buy cannot and will not make us courageous and valiant. Courage is not found in weaponry.

David faced Goliath with a sling. When you stop and think about this, David was probably a teenager, while Goliath was a seasoned warrior from his youth. Consider not only the difference in age, but also the difference in size. Goliath was a huge, strong man, and David was just a young boy. Then consider the difference in their weaponry. Goliath was covered with armor, had a heavy spear, and had a shield, while David had only a sling.

When you stop and think about the age difference, the size difference, and the difference in weaponry, that would have been enough to cause fear and consternation in the average individual

right there: “Don’t tell me I’ve got to fight this man.” Yet David, with a sling, went and took care of Goliath.

Remember that Saul offered David his armor, and David said, “I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them.” David then said to Saul, “Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” Saul answered, “Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.”

David replied: “Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.”

David said, “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.” Saul’s attitude was essentially, “The Lord be with you, son, because I’m not going out there.”

David did not say, “I’m an expert with a sword,” or, “I’m an expert with a sling.” He may have been. But he said, “God who delivered me out of the paw of the bear and out of the paw of the lion, He’s going to deliver me from this Philistine.” His trust was not in his weaponry. His trust was in the Lord God.

A principle appears not only in 1 Samuel 17 but also in Psalm 78:9: a biblical martial spirit only comes to light in obedience to God and His Word. A biblical fighting spirit only comes to light in obedience to God and His Word. If God is not with us, in us, and for us, our martial spirit, our fighting spirit, is gone. Sin dispirits man; it takes away man’s heart. One cannot and will not fight courageously and bravely apart from God and His truth.

The Source of a Biblical Martial Spirit

Historically, Christian men have always been the greatest fighters. The reason is that, number one, they always fought on biblical principle; number two, they were willing to die for those biblical principles; and number three, they were not afraid to die. Oliver Cromwell was known as the Ironsides of England. He gathered Christian men to fight against King Charles, and they went into battle singing psalms and hymns. Their watchword was “the Lord of hosts.” In the Bible, when you see God is the God of hosts or the Lord of hosts, the word “host” means armies. God is the God of the armies. They entered battle with the words “the Lord of hosts,” determined to win or die. Cromwell said, “Truly I think he that prays and preaches best will fight best.” That is true.

Hedley Vickers himself was an excellent Christian soldier, and he wrote this: “I have often heard it said the worse the man the better the soldier. Facts contradict this untruth. Were I ever, as the leader of a forlorn hope, allowed to select my men, it would most certainly be from among the soldiers of Christ. For who should fight so fearlessly and bravely as those to whom death presents no after terrors?”

Once you die, there is no terror to you. You have died in the faith and in the Lord. So, when you look at Psalm 78:9 and read, “The children of Ephraim being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle,” you have to ask several questions. Why did the children of Israel turn back in the day of battle? Why were they unwilling to fight? What made them cowards? What made them lose their martial spirit?

Reasons for Ephraim's Cowardice: Covenantal Unfaithfulness

Once you have lost your fighting spirit, the best of reasons will not induce you to fight. If I took the time to go through the Bible, I could show you numerous reasons to fight and numerous encouragements given to the people. One is found in Nehemiah 4:14. The people were building the walls while their enemies were planning a surprise attack. Nehemiah said, “And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye

afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." Here is his encouragement: Remember the Lord. The Lord is great and terrible.

He is a man of war. Then remember your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses. Remember your life, your Lord, your family, and your property. Here are excellent reasons to fight. But once a man has lost his martial spirit, none of these reasons will prevail upon him. He cannot be goaded, prodded, or made to fight. He will simply give in, give up, give out, turn over, and die.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 76:5: "The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands." Isn't that amazing? The stouthearted are spoiled. What were they spoiled of? The answer is their stout heart. They have slept their sleep.

That is, they are dead now. They could not fight, and none of the men of might had found their hands. Herman Venema, commenting on Psalm 76:5, writes: "There is indicated in these words that consternation of mind which deprives of judgment and power, the valiant or spoiled of their heart. That is, they who at other times were wise and courageous have now lost their heart and have been reduced to foolishness and stupidity."

Joseph Caryl, who preached forty years from the book of Job, says: "The stouthearted, the strong are spoiled. The strong man may be spoiled by a stronger, that is a good sense, but it is more elegantly rendered they are spoiled of their stout heart. That is the Lord takes their heart out of their bosom. Daring men who fear nothing are turned into Magor-missabib, that is men who fear everything round about. Their stout hearts are taken from them. And they are so far from being a terror to other men that they run from the shadow of a man. Their courage is down. They cannot give a child a confident look, much less look dangers or enemies in the face."

As we say of a man who goes lamely or lazily, he cannot find his feet, so of a man who acts lamely or lazily, or of a soldier who fights faintly and cowardly, he cannot find his hands. Psalm 76:5 speaks of people who have turned into pure cowards, unwilling and afraid to

fight. Psalm 48:6 says, "Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail." Fear took hold upon them.

I am sure you have heard, and probably used, the expression "frozen with fear." There are interesting videos of people standing still in the face of danger, as though frozen in place. That is what happens when you lose heart.

When Psalm 78:9 says, "The children of Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle," we must understand that there are reasons why they turned back. If you understand this, you will understand what has happened in America, to the men in America, and to the preachers and churches in America.

"They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law." The very first reason the children of Israel turned back in the day of battle—the reason for their faint heart, cowardly attitude, and actions—is what we would call covenantal unfaithfulness. They were not faithful to the covenant. They violated God's covenant; they were disobedient, rebellious, and stubborn. They refused to abide by and walk in obedience to His covenant, and their disobedience was accompanied by obstinacy. That is, they held God's law in absolute contempt. When you hold God's law in absolute contempt, you also hold God who gave that law in absolute contempt.

When you read the Bible, you find that these people gave way to fornication, idolatry, and all the violations of God's law over and over. They lived in rebellion against God, against His rule, and against His power. These people had pledged to obey God's covenant at Mount Sinai, and now they violated it over and over.

Blessings and Curses of the Covenant

Again and again in the Bible, God warned and reminded them not to forget His covenant. In Deuteronomy 4:23-24, He says: "Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee." Note the warning: "Take heed unto yourselves lest ye forget the

covenant of your God." Do not forget. He tells you why in verse 24: "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God."

God says you had better pay attention to this covenant. Do not forget it. Deuteronomy 8:11 gives another warning: "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day." Again, God says to beware that you do not forget His commandments, judgments, and statutes. All those were bound up in the covenant. He is reminding you: Do not forget this covenant.

Now remember this: the children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. Why? Covenantal unfaithfulness. There is a truth here from the covenant.

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 deal with the blessings and the curses—that is, the sanctions God gives concerning His covenant. God says, “If you obey Me, if you're faithful, I'm going to bless you. If you disobey Me and you're unfaithful, I'm going to curse you.”

First, look at the blessing promised upon covenantal faithfulness in Leviticus 26:6–8: “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.”

God says that if you are faithful to this covenant, He will give you peace in the land. You will lie down, and none will make you afraid. He will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through it. If your enemies come against you, five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; your enemies shall fall by the sword.

In Deuteronomy 28:7, the same blessing is expressed: “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 are covenantally faithful, when your enemies attack in one great horde, thinking they will overrun you,

you will defeat them so thoroughly that they will scatter and retreat seven different ways.

These are the blessings. Now return to Leviticus 26 and read verse 23, where they are covenantally unfaithful and the curse is declared: “And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me,” that is, you will not keep My covenant, “then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.” Then verse 25 says, “And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant.”

"And when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy." God said, on the one hand, "I've promised you peace if you obey Me." On the other hand, if you disobey Him, He will bring a sword against you, send pestilence, and deliver you into the hand of your enemies.

Leviticus 26:36 says, "And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up." God says that if you are covenantally unfaithful, you will fall into the hands of your enemies.

Deuteronomy 28:25 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 into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away." The blessing was that if your enemy came against you one way, you would defeat him and he would flee seven ways. But if you walk contrary to God, you will lose. You cannot face your enemies or stand before them.

Second Reason: Covenantal Ungratefulness

With that in mind, look at Psalm 78:9-10: "The children of Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle." Why? Here is the first reason: they were covenantally unfaithful. "They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law." When we deny the covenant of God and cast His law behind our backs, we throw away His blessings and bring His curses upon us. Remember what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:31? "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

If God be for us, who can be against us? If God is for us, it does not matter if the entire universe is against us, because God is quite capable of whipping anyone and anything in the entire universe. But the opposite is also true. If God be against us, nobody will help us. David understood this, for he said in Psalm 60:11, “Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.” Man cannot help us, especially if God is against us.

Sin may make you bold and forward to commit more sin, but in the time of danger and testing, it will make you a coward. How can we plead to God for help if we know that we are in rebellion and disobedience against Him? David said in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Merely regarding it causes God not to hear. How much more will He not hear if we are involved in it?

Oftentimes, when we turn against God, He leaves us to ourselves and lets us see how weak, helpless, foolish, and stupid we really are as we reap what we have sown. One reason given in Scripture that the children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle was covenantal unfaithfulness.

Look at what is happening in America. In the beginning, we were faithful to God and to His Word. Today, no one thinks about faithfulness; no one even thinks about God. All we think about is political correctness and tolerance. We do not want to upset or offend anyone. It is all right to offend God, but it is not all right to offend a wicked sinner. Covenantally unfaithful, these men were brought down—pure cowards.

Here is a second reason given in verse 11. Let us read verses 9, 10, and 11. Verse 9: “The children of Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle.”

"They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law"—that is covenantal unfaithfulness—"and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them"—that is covenantal ungratefulness. They forgot His works and His wonders. Had they remembered them, they would have been filled with gratitude and thankfulness. They would have had His works and wonders in their hearts and minds, deeply moved because of the grace and mercy shown to them.

I told the folks this morning that Alice and I are still cleaning up. I still have several large trees down that I have to cut up and carry off, along with many limbs and much debris. But every time I cut a tree or begin carrying it away, I thank God that He spared all our buildings; not one fell on any of them. If you can remember God's wonders and works, you can have a grateful and thankful heart.

John Trapp, the old Puritan, said, "Forgetfulness is a grave. All is lost that is conferred on an ungrateful person." Each one in this room has undoubtedly helped someone financially at one time or another, only for that person to turn around, stab him in the back, work against him, or do something to hurt him. Forgetfulness is a grave, and all that is conferred upon an ungrateful person is forgotten. I know particularly of one friend who helped another so-called Christian greatly financially, and then that man turned around and stabbed him in the back. Anything conferred upon an ungrateful person is forgotten.

Look what God has done for us. Look what God did for Israel and for Ephraim. Yet we have forgotten His works and wonders and become an ungrateful and unthankful people. They may not have forgotten His works historically. How could they forget the history of the Red Sea, or the destruction of Pharaoh and his army? But they forgot His wonders and works practically and spiritually, so that they were unthankful and ungrateful for anything and everything He had done.

Applications and Conclusion

They refused to love Him, serve Him, honor Him, and walk in His law. For all practical purposes, whatever God had done for them, they simply forgot. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 106, verses 12 and 13, to see how hypocritical these people really were.

When they read verse 12, "Then believed they his words; they sang his praise," they might think, At last, here are people who believe Him and sing His praise. Yet there is such a thing as a temporary believer, one who is not genuinely saved. Remember the New Testament parable of the sower: these believed for a while. That is what the Scripture says. Notice again verse 12: "Then believed they his words; they sang his praise."

But look what happens next: "They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert." Here are people singing His praise one moment and forgetting Him, refusing to wait for Him, provoking Him, and sinning against Him the next moment. This is what happened to Ephraim. This is what happened to Israel. This is what happened in America. It is what happens in our churches. It is what happens in our lives.

The first thing they did was neglect God. Anytime you neglect the reading of the Word, neglect prayer, or neglect listening to the preaching and exposition of the Word of God, when you neglect God, inevitably you are going to begin rejecting His law. You are going to be saying something like this: "Well, it might be wrong for everybody else, but it's all right for me." Or, "I can do this little bit and I can get by." Once you begin rejecting His law and His standards, that leads to forgetfulness. Then pretty soon you are simply hog-wild in rebellion against God. They neglected, they rejected, they forgot. That is what we do. We neglect God, we reject His law, and then we forget everything that He has done for us.

When we forget God and His covenant, it is impossible to trust Him. How can you trust someone you forget? How can you trust someone you reject? How can you trust someone you neglect? Hence, in times of danger, we become outright cowards because we have nothing in ourselves, we have no power in ourselves, and all we

can see is our weakness. Our forgetfulness of God and His works is at the bottom of our disobedience to His laws. We are facing dangerous times, I can assure you of that. We better be remembering Him, and we better be remembering His covenant.

The second application is this: hypocrisy is the high road to apostasy. Those who do not set their hearts steadfast with God will be double-minded at the best and apostate at the worst. These men, being armed with bows, turned back in the day of battle.

The last application is this: carnal confidence is worthless. Carnal confidence is worthless. When you start trusting in yourself and your power, your weaponry, what you have, or what you do not have, when you trust in any of those things, it is absolutely worthless.

It is not going to give you a martial spirit, courage, or valor. It is going to destroy you. William Gurnall wrote a book I would encourage you to get, titled The Christian in Complete Armour. Listen to what Gurnall said: “Let the armour be what it will, yea, if soldiers were in a castle whose foundations were rock and walls of brass, and yet, if their heart be not right to their prince, an easy storm will drive them from the walls, and a little scare will open their gate, which hath not this bolt of sincerity on it to hold it fast.”

If you are not a genuine believer, it will not take much to drive you away from standing for truth and righteousness. Sin and disobedience will make cowards out of all of us.

What happened to Ephraim has happened to America. We have become covenantally unfaithful and covenantally ungrateful. We are a nation of wimps, softies, and cowards. We have lost the fighting spirit, even in standing for truth and righteousness. Today, people would rather be politically correct than biblically correct. When we stand for truth, we will certainly be assailed. It will take covenantal faithfulness and thankfulness to stand in the time of testing.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Lord, help us not be like those who turned back in the day of battle. Give us a holy determination to be faithful unto Thee, grateful unto Thee, thankful unto Thee, submissive to Thee, obedient to Thee, to honor Thee, and to worship Thee alone. For Thou alone art God, and beside Thee

there is none other. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 11

Things That Go Together

September 30, 2019

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 16:1-10 (KJV)

Introduction: Things That Naturally Go Together

In the sixth and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the Lord, and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, that dwelt in Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father. Behold, I have sent thee silver and gold. Go, break thy league with Baasha, king of Israel, that he may depart from me. And Ben-Hadad hearkened to King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel.

And they smote Ijon and Dan and Abel-maim and all the store cities of Naphtali. And it came to pass when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah and let his work cease. Then Asa the king took all Judah and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof wherewith Baasha was building;

> and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah. So it must have been a mighty big project. And at that time, Hanani the seer came to Asa, king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied upon the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.
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> Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge host, and with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly. Therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.
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> Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house. For he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time. We're talking about things that go together. And I pointed out earlier today that there are some things that go together naturally. We tend to think of the old song and also the old saying that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. And certainly love would not be anything unless there was a way to express it. And likewise, a carriage would be absolutely useless without a horse or at least without a motor as well. But there are things that do indeed go together. Someone has pointed out that peanut butter and jelly always go together.

Chocolate and peanut butter have always been staple foods for most children and many adults. Some think they are the apex of everything. One of Alice's favorite candies, years ago and perhaps still, was a Reese's cup: peanut butter and chocolate together. Friends who came from Hawaii once brought her a shirt that smelled like chocolate. Give me the chocolate and nobody gets hurt.

There are things that go together. We have always noticed this especially with clothing—shirts, ties, trousers, shoes, and that kind of thing. When our girls were small, I would hear Alice say, "You're not going to wear that outfit; that does not match." When some of the grandchildren grew older, they would look at Alice and say, "Granny, you're not going to wear that, are you? That doesn't

match." The children became more meticulous, while the older we got, the less we cared whether things matched.

One of my favorite stories concerns a trip out west. My sunglasses broke, and Tripp and Lacey, our two youngest grandchildren, were with us. I stopped at a dollar store, bought a pair of sunglasses, paid for them, and got back into the car. Lacey asked, "Papa, you're not going to wear those glasses, are you?"

I said, "Well, yes, I am. I bought them. They're mine. I'm going to wear them." She replied, "But Papa, you can't wear those outside of the car." When I asked why, she said, "Those are ladies' sunglasses." I answered, "No, they're not. They were on the men's turnstile of sunglasses. I picked them off the men's rack. Those are men's sunglasses." She said, "Papa, look at the arms. There's little tiny diamond sequins all up and down them."

I wore them to the next store where I could stop and get another pair. Obviously, even my grandchildren knew that a man was not supposed to wear that which belonged to a woman. When we look at 2 Chronicles 16:1–10, we see things that go together.

The problem is that we often do not think about these things because we are not biblically conscious, or we are simply unperceptive when reading Scripture. Yet the things I will share with you go together like hand in glove. They fit together, and one inevitably leads to the other.

Asa's Early Godliness and Blessing

This involves King Asa. Asa basically was what you and I would call a good man, a godly man, and also a very gracious man. In fact, the Bible has a lot of good things to say about Asa. In 2 Chronicles chapter 14, notice what God said concerning him:

"And Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years. And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. For he took away the altars of the strange gods and the high places, and broke down the images, and cut down the groves, and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. And he took

away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images, and the kingdom was quiet before him. And he built cities in Judah, for the land had rest. For he had no war in those years, because the Lord had given him rest."

Obviously, Asa initially was a very good and godly king. He not only destroyed idolatry out of the land; he sought to bring the people back not only to biblical law, but also to biblical worship. God honored Asa, because the Scripture says, "And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord." Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Lord God had given him rest and kept him from wars.

What did Asa do during that time of rest? "Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities and make about them walls and towers and gates and bars, while the land is yet before us. Because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought him and he's given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered." During this time of rest, he built cities and fortified them, making towers, gates, and bars. He was using his time wisely. Moreover, Asa also had what you and I would call a very large army.

In verse eight, "And Asa had an army of men that bear targets and spears out of Judah, three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin that bear shields and drew bows two hundred and fourscore thousand; and all these were mighty men of valor." Thus, Asa had five hundred and eighty thousand soldiers, a very large army. Obviously, he needed them, because in verse 9, Zerah the Ethiopian came against him with over a million men: "And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with a host of a thousand thousand, that's a million, and three hundred chariots, and came into Mareshah."

The chariots in those days were the heavy weaponry, a modern-day tank-like weapon. Many chariot wheels had knives and sharp things coming out the side and edge, enabling them to drive through soldiers and cut them down. Moreover, the chariots had archers who could shoot very well. Here was an enemy who came against Asa with a million men and three hundred chariots. Asa was outnumbered two to one and outgunned by this weaponry.

If Asa was a good and godly man faced with such great odds, what would he do? In verse 10, we read: “Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array at the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. And Asa cried unto the Lord his God and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee. So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar, and the Ethiopians were overthrown, they could not recover themselves.”

"For they were destroyed before the Lord and before his host, and they carried away very much spoil. And they smote all the cities round about Gerar, for the fear of the Lord came upon them, and they spoiled all the cities, for there was exceeding much spoil in them. They smote also the tents of cattle, and carried away sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem."

God granted Asa a tremendous victory and a great deliverance, and they came away with all of this abundance of spoil. Undoubtedly, at this particular time Asa and Judah would be what you and I would call a very happy and blessed people.

Let us see how much Asa did in trying to restore God's honor and worship. In 2 Chronicles 15, beginning with verse 7, the prophet of God comes to Asa and says: "And be strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded." When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin and out of the cities which he had taken from Mount Ephraim, that is, in the northern kingdom, and renewed the altar of the Lord, that was before the porch of the Lord.

Asa’s Covenant and Zeal for Purity

He gathered all Judah and Benjamin and the strangers with him out of Ephraim and Manasseh and out of Simeon. For they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him. He tried to establish again the true worship of God. Even these people in the northern kingdom saw, knew, and understood

that God was with Asa, and they left the northern kingdom and came down to Asa in order that they might worship the Lord and do that which was right and holy.

Asa wanted thoroughly and completely to restore biblical worship. "And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. And they swear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire. And he was found of them, and the Lord gave them rest round about."

Concerning Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove. Asa cut down her idol, stamped it, and burned it in the brook Kidron.

Notice what this means: here was a man who had entered into a covenant with himself and with his people that they would worship the Lord, and that anyone who did not worship the Lord was to be put to death. It did not matter whether that person was man or woman, great or small. To show how absolutely serious he was, he removed his own mother from being queen because she had made an idol. He cut up that idol, stamped it, and totally destroyed it. Asa was not playing favorites at that time; he was serious.

When we remember Asa, we remember him as good, godly, and gracious. But the truth is this: Asa, like everyone else, was a sinner.

Asa was a man. You have to remember the middle verse of the Bible. In fact, I will give you the verse before as well. Psalm 118:8 says, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.” The next verse says, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.” So God says, you cannot trust in man. You cannot trust in government. You cannot trust in rulers. It is wiser simply to trust in God.

Asa's Sin: Trusting in Man Instead of God

The best of men are sinners. The best of men fail. The best of men will let you down. The best of men are weak and vacillating. So what do I mean? Let me show you. Look in 2 Chronicles 16, which we just read. I want to review it and then get to a certain passage and point it out.

Notice in chapter 16, verse 1, that Baasha, the king of Israel, had come out against Judah and against Asa. What did Asa do? He took silver and gold out of the temple and out of his own treasuries. Then he went to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, and said, "There is a league between us, just like there was a league between my father and your father. Now that I have given you all this money, break your league with Baasha, go and attack Israel, and get him off my back." That is exactly what Ben-Hadad did.

Consider this: Asa had taken all the money, silver, and gold out of Judah and Jerusalem, and now Ben-Hadad was going to attack Israel and steal and take whatever he could at that particular point. He came in verse 4 and smote Israel to the extent that Baasha left off building. Then Asa took all of that material and evidently built two cities, Geba and Mizpah.

Now here is what I want you to see. Look in verse 7: "At that time Hanani the seer, that is, the prophet, the preacher, came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand." God had delivered the Ethiopians into Asa's hand. The prophet was saying, Had you done that which was right, I would have delivered the Syrians into your hand as well. You could have had the spoil of the Syrians, just like you have the spoil of the

"Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge host with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." Then Hanani said to the king, "Herein thou hast done foolishly. Therefore, from henceforth thou shalt have wars."

Here is what Hanani said to King Asa: "You're a fool. You did something very, very stupid, very, very foolish. You have trusted in the arm of the flesh." Here is Asa's first sin in this passage: he is relying upon the arm of the flesh. He is no longer relying upon God for his sovereign protection. He is relying upon Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, to break his league with Baasha and attack Baasha because Asa paid him to do that.

You know what the Bible says in Jeremiah, chapter 17, verses five and six? "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." He goes on to say, "He shall be like the heath in the desert." He will be like a tree that never gets watered. He will suffer. Cursed be the man that trusteth in the flesh and maketh flesh his arm.

That is exactly what Asa was doing. He was no longer relying upon the Lord as he did when the Ethiopians attacked him; now he was relying upon Ben-Hadad. Here is a second sin. If you go back to verse two in 2 Chronicles 16, notice this: "Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the Lord, and out of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, that dwelt in Damascus."

The Prophet's Rebuke and Asa's Tyrannical Response

To whom did the treasures in the house of the Lord belong? To the Lord, not to Asa. If Asa wanted to spend his own money, that would be one thing. But Asa went into the house of the Lord, stole that which belonged to God, added what he had, and sent it to Ben-Hadad. In other words, he took God's money to bribe a heathen so that the heathen might violate his agreement with Baasha and enter into a new agreement with him. Asa was doing something absolutely, totally contrary to what we have read so far concerning him.

Thirdly, Asa is rebuked for his sins by Hanani, the preacher and prophet. Hanani reminds him, "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge host with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand." Then he tells him, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them

whose heart is perfect toward him." In other words, God would have done much more for Asa if he had remained true. "Herein thou hast done foolishly. Therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars."

Now watch: "Then Asa was wroth with the seer; he was angry, he was in a rage. And Asa was wroth with the seer and put him in a prison house, for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time." In light of all the other sins I have mentioned concerning Asa, this was, I believe, his greatest sin. He refused to listen to God. He refused to listen to the preacher who was proclaiming the word of God.

Consider Zedekiah in 2 Chronicles 36: "Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God." Now watch: "and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord." Zedekiah's attitude was, "I don't care what God says. I don't care what you say. I'll do what I want to do." Perhaps Zedekiah learned from Asa, or Asa from Zedekiah. Zedekiah was certainly after Asa, but both refused to humble themselves before the prophet speaking from the word of the Lord.

Hanani the seer—seer being another word for prophet, a preacher—confronted and rebuked Asa. Asa refused to humble himself, acknowledge his sins, confess his sins, or repent. Instead, he took Hanani and threw him into prison.

The Bible says he also oppressed some of the people at the same time. Here is what happened: the deceitfulness of the human heart deceived Asa, and his sin hardened his heart. The Bible says that he put the prophet in a prison house. If you look up the word prison, it is actually the word stocks. He put him in the stockhouse, which undoubtedly was a prison.

Sometimes it was a dungeon, but the word here implies torture. A stockhouse, or a stock, was a twisting instrument, an instrument of torture, by which the body was contorted and forced into an unnatural and twisted position. Sometimes the hands were even tied down to the ankle, so that a person could not stand up, sit down, or do anything. Sometimes they would twist the body around as well.

They not only put Hanani in the prison house; they placed him in the stocks. They were torturing him.

Notice verse 10 again: “And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.” The Hebrew word for oppressed actually means to crush, and to crush with violence. It could be that some individuals were taking up for Hanani or protesting what the king was doing. It could also refer to unjust exactions and taxation. Whatever he did, he oppressed the people, crushed them, and crushed them with violence.

The Principle: Rebellion Always Leads to Tyranny

The conduct of Asa at this point is seemingly completely contradictory to his previous conduct and the previous testimony given to him. What happened? Why did this happen? I am pointing out things that go together. Here is one thing that always goes together: rebellion and tyranny. Rebellion is always the foundation of tyranny. Rejection of God, rejection of God's Word, and rejection of the preaching and teaching of God's Word always lead to tyranny.

Our Lord, in Luke chapter 18, was talking about prayer, and He said in verse 2, “There was a judge in a certain city who feared not God, neither regarded man.” Anytime a ruler does not fear God, he will have no regard for man. Here is Asa, now in a rebellious stage.

At that stage, he no longer fears God. He throws the prophet of God in the stockhouse and begins to oppress the people at the same time. It is impossible to have liberty and freedom apart from God and His law. May I remind you of 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 17? The Bible says, “Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” But the opposite is also true: where the Spirit of the Lord is not, there is tyranny. You can only have liberty and freedom when you have God, His law, and His Word.

Now, let me show you something. We are still dealing with Asa. Go back to 2 Chronicles, chapter 15. You have to ask yourself this question: What would be the results of rulers turning away from God? Let me ask it another way: What are the results when you do not have the true God? What are the results when you do not have the Word of God? What are the results when you do not have anyone

who will teach, preach, and explain the Word of God? Here is our answer. Let us begin reading in 2 Chronicles, chapter 15, verse 1: "And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while ye be with him. And if ye seek him, he will be found of you."

But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. Now look what he's about to tell you. He's going to tell you what it was like in the land without God. You have to remember, there were kings who turned away from God. Here's what he says: "Now, for a long season, Israel hath been without the true God." Whoa, whoa, stop. I thought Israel was the nation that had the true God, not the Philistines, not the Egyptians, not the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Hivites. No, no, it was Israel. But now he says, "For a long season, Israel has been without the true God." How can they be without the true God? And the answer is because they were without a teaching priest and without law. They did not know God's law. They did not have anyone to teach and explain and apply it. And when you are without a teaching preacher, when you are without God's Word, you are basically without God.

What are the results? Now watch. "But when they in their trouble did turn to the Lord God of Israel and sought of him, he was found of them." Wonderful. But in those times—what times? Go back to verse 3, the times when they were without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without the law—in those times "there was no peace to him that went out nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city, for God did vex them with all adversity." Note, if you would, what he said in those times. Without the true God, without a teaching priest, without the law, there was nothing but vexation. There was no peace. And there were wars, nation against nation and city against city. Notice if you would in verse 6, "And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city, for God did vex them with all adversity." In other words, the reality is divine vexation. The wars, the exploitations, the exactions, the theft, the loss of liberty, the loss of freedom, all stem from a rejection of God and a refusal to hear His Word and the preaching and teaching of His Word. So mark this down. Whenever you have a city, whenever

you have a nation, whenever you have a country that is without the word of God and without the preaching and teaching of the word of God, they are without the one true and the living God.

Asa's tyranny stemmed from the fact that he rejected the word of God. He rejected the prophet of God. Rebellion always leads to tyranny; it is hand in glove. You cannot have one without the other. Asa was all right until he rebelled, and when he rebelled, he began to tyrannize his people.

This is a principle enunciated over and over in Scripture. In 2 Chronicles 22, we are not going to take time to read it, but I will tell you about it. There was a grandmother named Athaliah. Her son Ahaziah was king, and he died. Athaliah then did a very un-grandmotherly thing. The Bible says she arose and destroyed all the seed of the house royal except one, Joash. She murdered all of her grandchildren so that she could be queen and reign in the land. If it had not been for Joash's aunt, who happened to be the wife of Jehoiada the priest, she would have gotten Joash as well. She stole Joash and rescued him. She took him out and hid him in the temple. Evidently, because there were so many grandchildren, Athaliah did not know that she had missed one.

Jehoiada the priest was now the man raising and teaching Joash. He was the man who had essentially saved his life. In 2 Chronicles 24, we read, “Joash was seven years old when he began to reign.” Jehoiada had trained and taught him. They took Joash from the temple and crowned him. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. “And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. And Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he begat sons and daughters. And it came to pass after this that Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord.”

This is very significant: “And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.” As long as Jehoiada was alive, Joash did that which was right. The Bible says that Jehoiada took him two wives. Later, Joash ordered the temple to be cleansed and rebuilt. It was through Joash that the order was given for all the trash and idols to be taken out. Joash was basically what you and I would call a man who wanted to do that which was right.

What happened after Jehoiada died? The Bible says that Joash did that which was right all the days of Jehoiada the priest. Let us look in 2 Chronicles, chapter 24, beginning at verse 17. Jehoiada has died.

"Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them." They came and did obeisance to the king. It is not merely that they bowed down to him; they talked with him, counseled him, and advised him. He took their advice and followed them. "And they," that is, the king and the princes, "left the house of the Lord God of their fathers and served groves and idols, and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. And yet he sent prophets to them," that is, God sent prophets to them, "to bring them again to the Lord, and they testified against them, but none would give ear."

Here is Joash. He was raised right, raised in the temple, and taught right. He cleans the house of God and does that which is seemingly good and right. But when Jehoiada the priest dies, the princes come and talk him into idolatry. God sent preachers, but he would not hear. The princes would not hear.

Now look at verse 20: "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 you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you." Zechariah is saying, "You're in trouble. You have forsaken God; now God has forsaken you. You are going to reap exactly that which you have sown. You will find great vexations upon you."

Then verse 21 says, "And they conspired against him," that is, the king and the princes, "and they conspired against him and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord." The king who was raised by Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, gave commandment for Zechariah to be murdered in the court of the house of the Lord. Zechariah and Joash had been raised like brothers together.

Could that happen? May I remind you that they rebelled against God. They refused to hear his word. God sent prophets, but they would not listen. It was not just that Joash had Zechariah murdered; he murdered all of Jehoiada's sons. Verse 25 records the death of Joash: "For when they were departed from him, for they left him in great diseases, his own servants conspired against him, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died. And they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings." They conspired and slew him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada. He murdered the priests, the sons of the men who had actually raised him. How could such happen?

Go back to verse 18: "And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, served groves and idols, and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he," that is, God, "sent prophets to them to bring them again to the Lord, and they testified against them, but they would not hear."

You want to know what goes together? Rebellion and tyranny. Refusing to bow to God's word and tyranny. You cannot have liberty or freedom apart from God and his law. It is impossible. When we talk about rebellion and tyranny, one precedes the other and always leads to the other. Whenever rulers and governments refuse to bow to God and humble themselves before him at his word, inevitably there will be tyranny.

Applications: Liberty Through Obedience to God

Let me make some applications and tie this together. There are certain things that go together, and rebellion and tyranny are the peanut butter and jelly of governments. Just as in a real peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a little goes a long way. In rebellion, a little goes a long way, and it will always end in tyranny. Now I want to read you a quote. In fact, I am going to give you two quotes. Both of these quotes are by James Madison, who is known

James Madison is called the father of the Constitution of the United States because he was secretary at the Constitutional Convention. Listen to what he said concerning the alarm we should take at rulers who are rebellious: "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be

the first duty of citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle."

The American colonists did not wait until George III had a stranglehold on them. They were alarmed at the very first instance of unjust taxation—taxation without representation—and they denied the consequences by dealing with the principle. Do you realize that one of the problems in this country is that we do not know the principles of the Word of God? We do not know the principles of the Constitution. The Constitution is not going to save us.

If our government did follow the Constitution, we would not have near the problems we have today. Unhappily, many today believe that the peanut butter and jelly of government is found in socialism. They are willing to denigrate, deny, and denounce liberty and freedom so they can have what they call their free lunch and free meal. They are willing to destroy everyone else's liberty and freedom just so they can get what they want. Government is not God, and government is not going to save us. The Constitution is not going to save us.

James Madison again said, "We have staked the whole future of American civilization not upon the power of government. Far from it. We have staked the future upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God." Government is not going to save us. If you think government is going to save you, you are mistaken. We have staked the future of this country on our ability to submit to God, be ruled by God, and obey God.

That is the source of true liberty and freedom. Do you realize that even the most godly men are men—sinners? The most godly men will fail, and the most godly men will let you down. The most godly man in the world today is nothing more than a weak sinner without God. When we trust in men and think that if we can just get certain men elected, that will take care of our problems, we are mistaken. It will not.

I want to emphasize that rebellion and tyranny go together. One always leads to the other. But there is something else that goes together: obedience and freedom. You are not going to have freedom without obedience. In Galatians 5:1, the apostle Paul said, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Real liberty, real freedom, is found in Jesus Christ. That is why John 8:36 says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." There is no freedom apart from Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and obedience. It is only disobedience and rebellion that always bring tyranny.

You can put two and two together. Do you want to know why we are in such a mess in this country? Because we have rebelled against God. We refuse to hear His Word and His preachers. We refuse to confess our sins, and we refuse to repent. You remember the passage in 2 Chronicles 15: "And God did vex them." Whenever there is rebellion and sin unconfessed and unrepented of, there are always divine vexations. God's judgment always follows rebellion, disobedience, and tyranny. If we want liberty and freedom, we must learn to submit and obey, because true liberty is found in Jesus Christ.

Father, we bow to Thee this day. We thank Thee for Thy Word and Thy truth, and that Thou hast indeed sent men to proclaim Thy Word and declare that which Thou demandest of each of us. Help us, Father, to be obedient; to acknowledge our sins, confess them, repent of them, turn from them, and embrace Thee, Thy truth, and Thy Word. Give us grace, we pray, Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we ask these things. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Consider Your Ways

April 12, 2020

SCRIPTURE READING - Haggai 1:1-12 (KJV)

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.

> Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.
>
> Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.

Introduction: The Insanity of Unchanged Ways

Someone wise once said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Whether or not it is insanity, idiocy, or just plain stupidity, the truth is that this is usually the way most professing Christians function. We have our ways, and we do not intend to change. I've heard people say, "Well, that's just the way we are," and, "This is the way we've always done it."

In one sense, professing Christians are almost as bad as the Pharisees when it comes to their ways and traditions. We unthinkingly follow what we've been taught, heard, and observed, and we never consider what the Word of God has to say about those things. Traditions are very difficult to violate and break. Habit is very hard to break as well. We develop our ways usually without consideration. Our ways include the way we think, talk, act, work, and believe.

The Two Ways: Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing

One individual said it like this: "Evil is wrought from want of thought, especially in evil times." Twice we are told the same truth in the book of Proverbs concerning man's ways. Proverbs 14 and verse 12 says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Then Proverbs 16 and verse 25 says,

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Just because something seems right does not make it right. In modern-day parlance, just because something feels right does not make it right. The Bible tells us plainly that there is a way of life and a way of death, a way of blessing and a way of cursing. We are either going to live and be blessed, or we are going to die and be cursed.

Psalm 1 and verse 6 says, "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish." There is a way of the righteous and a way of the wicked, the way of the righteous on the one hand and the way of the ungodly on the other.

God is giving us the way of life or the way of death, the way of blessing or the way of cursing. In Deuteronomy chapter 11, beginning with verse 26, He says:

“Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; 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.”

So I said, look, here it is. It’s so simple. You can either be blessed or you can be cursed. You can either have life or you can die.

In Deuteronomy chapter 30, beginning with verse 19, look what he 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: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

But note: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I’ve set before you life and death, blessing and cursing.” And in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 21 and verse 8, God says the same thing to these people who refuse to listen to Him: “And unto this

people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death." Now, it is true that the righteous do not walk in the way of death.

However, it is quite possible for the righteous to lose his sense of bearing and walk in a way displeasing to the Lord and bring upon himself certain judgments or certain curses. When we are talking about judgments and curses, we have to remember that there are agricultural curses, economic curses, physical curses, as well as spiritual curses. In Haggai chapter 1, we see all of these curses and how they flow together. In the context of the book of Haggai, the children of Israel had been returned from their captivity, and they were to build the house of the Lord. The foundation had been laid, but the house had not been finished. This book is a reproof against the children of Israel for their slackness, their slothfulness, and being dilatory in trying to restore the temple. Their slackness and slothfulness had provoked God to the extent that He had judged them with famine and scarcity.

Context of Haggai: Selfishness and Neglect of God's House

In this book there is an exhortation for them to rise and finish the temple. Why were they so slothful? Why were they so indolent in building the house of God? One of the most important lessons we are to learn from this book is very simple: the people in the days of Haggai were more concerned with their own welfare, their own comfort, and their own financial security than they were concerned with God and His worship. Therefore, God had to reprove these people for their selfishness.

Look in your Bibles to Haggai 1 and verse 4. He asks this question: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" God was saying, "Here is what you are doing: you are taking care of your house, and yet you are totally ignoring My house." Is it fit that they should be building elegant houses for themselves while, at the same time, totally ignoring His house and His worship, and ignoring the praise and honor that should be going to Him? That is the question God is asking.

The rationality behind their selfishness and sinfulness appears in verse 2: “Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.” Their reasoning was that the time had not come for the Lord’s house to be built, although they had found time to care for their own houses, welfare, comfort, and financial security.

They were not denying that the temple was important, nor that it needed restoration and completion. They were saying, “Yes, it is important, and yes, it needs to be restored, but it is not time to do it.” Since it was not time to build it, they were not really concerned about it. Their concern was themselves: getting things done in their own houses, being comfortable, and spending their time and money on what they believed should be done immediately. The temple could wait. It was not time to build it, and therefore it was not really important right then. What mattered was taking care of themselves and their houses.

I do not believe it is a sin to desire a decent house, or even a beautiful house. I do not believe it is a sin to desire a very expensive house, with this exception: unless you place that desire above God and before Him. Then, of course, it becomes idolatry. These people were taking all their time and all their money, investing them in themselves and certainly not in God.

The Tithe as Acknowledgment of God's Ownership

Let me tell you something about money, first of all, because this chapter deals with money. In this day and time, many people make excellent money. Let me rephrase that: many Christians make excellent money, and yet they refuse to tithe. That does not mean they give nothing; they certainly give something. But they do not really tithe at all.

A tithe is nothing more than God’s tax for the use of His earth. Even the wicked, even the unsaved, are obligated to tithe. Why? Because they use God’s earth, breathe His air, and use the fruit of His ground. Everything they have comes from Him. Whether they recognize it or do it is beside the point. They are still responsible and accountable to do so, because a tithe is simply the tax for the use of God’s earth.

If Steve had an apartment that he rented to you and you refused to pay the rent, what would he do? He would kick you out. That is exactly what God can do when people refuse to pay His rent, because it is simply rent for the use of His earth.

Now, let me show you something about the tithe. I'm going to show you two things, but first of all, look in your Bibles to the book of Leviticus, chapter 27, the third book in the Old Testament. The point I'm trying to make right now is, first of all, the tithe is the Lord's. It does not belong to the preacher or the church. It belongs to the Lord.

Notice in Leviticus chapter 27, verse 30: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord." Verse 32 adds: "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." So, first of all, the tithe belongs to Him, and secondly, it is holy unto Him.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (KJV)

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 26. I am going to read the entire chapter, but I only want to comment on two verses. I want you to see it in context and see how important it is. Whenever somebody talks about tithing, everybody says, "Well, they're just interested in money." No, no, no. There is more to the tithe than simply money. Look in Deuteronomy chapter 26, beginning with verse 1.

"And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father.

> "And he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: and when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God." Note that: set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God. "And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you."

"When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing," and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled.

In reality, in the Old Testament, there were three tithes. There was the Levitical tithe, which was 10%. There was the poor tithe, which was 10%, but it was only taken every third year. So that meant you would be actually tithing 13 and a third percent. Then there was the tithe of rejoicing, which was 10 percent. That tithe of rejoicing was spent on yourself and your family on a religious vacation. You had to go to those seven annual feasts, so you had to have money there. You were actually tithing 23 and a third percent per year, but 10% of that was spent on yourself.

"When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase," then "thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them: I have not eaten thereof in my

mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me. Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey."

"This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken."

Look at verse 17. Here is the main implication in the act of tithing: "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice."

They would go before the priest, bring the tithes, and confess that God had saved them, given them the land, and given them everything. Then he says, "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God." The word "avouched" is the word "amar" in the Hebrew. It means to say in one's heart, to think, to vow, to affirm, to avouch. So the act of tithing is an act of confessing and acknowledging that the Lord your God is your God. You are affirming that he is your God in a most solemn manner. You are setting your seal to the fact that God is your God, acknowledging that everything you are and everything you have has come from him.

By tithing, we are acknowledging, avouching, and confessing that God is our God. But look in verse 18: "And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments." It is one thing for

me to avow and avouch that God is my God. But God also avouches that I am His child, that I belong to Him.

None of us are perfect. Each one of us has sinned in a multitude of ways. It is easy for me to say God is my God, but when He looks down and says, “That’s my child,” that is an amazing, marvelous, wondrous act of grace. It is easy for you to claim a child as your own when that child is loving and obedient. I used to do this with our grandkids. When they were sweet and kind, I would say, “That’s my grandchild.” But when they acted up and were ugly, I would say, “That’s Alice’s grandchild.” God does not do that. Whether we are perfectly obedient or not, as long as we are acknowledging Him, especially in the solemnity of giving our tithes and recognizing Him, He acknowledges us to be His children. That is why the Bible says in Hebrews 11:16, “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.”

So if God is not ashamed to be called our God, it means that He's not ashamed of us. He identifies with us. He avouches that we are His people.

In the book of Haggai, look at verses 5 and 7, because the title of the message is "Consider Your Ways." God says twice, in verse 5, "Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways." Then, in verse 7, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways."

Now God points out the insanity, the idiocy, the stupidity of these people who are doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. What He's saying is, look, you're living for yourself. You're idolaters in that sense of the word. You're extremely selfish. You're not concerned about My house, My worship, My honor, or My praise. You better stop and consider your ways.

The Curses for Neglecting God's House

Now, here's what He's saying. Look in verse 6. This is why verse 6 comes between verses 5 and 7. He says in verse 6, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat. But ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."

If you put your money in a bag with holes, what's that mean? You're going to lose it. It's gone. You can sow and not reap. You can eat and not be full. You can drink and not be satisfied. You can have clothes, but not be warm.

Their disregard for God in His worship brought all of these judgments. There was an agricultural judgment: their gardens and crops failed. There was a personal judgment: they could not be satisfied, no matter what they ate or drank. Moreover, there was a financial judgment because they could not get ahead. Whatever they made was like putting their money in a bag with holes in it.

Do you realize that most people are in the same fix today? I read again this past week that the average American, if he is in an emergency situation, could not come up with a thousand bucks. The average American is so deep in debt and has absolutely no savings that, in an extreme emergency, he couldn't even raise a thousand dollars. Unhappily, most Christians are in the same situation.

I want you to see how this is amplified. Skip down to verse 9, Haggai chapter 1. He is telling them that they had better consider their ways: “Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.” What little they got, He made even smaller. Why? “Saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.”

“Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.”

One thing made exceedingly clear in this passage is that God sent those judgments. God said, “I did it. I blew upon it. I kept the dew from falling. I kept the rain from falling.” He spoiled the labour of their hands.

So let me put it to you very bluntly. Have you ever been in a predicament like this? Has it ever been where everything you touched seemed like it was cursed, everything you tried failed, and no matter how much you tried to make financially, you could never,

ever get ahead? Have you ever considered why you could not get ahead financially?

There are biblical principles of economics in the Bible. I have taught them, and I know them. I could give them to you right now, but giving you the principles of economic freedom from the Bible would not help you one little bit if you are not willing to honor God and place Him first. Nobody is going to follow a biblical principle if he is going to dishonor God.

Seek First the Kingdom: The New Testament Parallel

So let me show you what this is all about. Turn in your Bibles, first of all, to Matthew 6. Hold Haggai and go to Matthew chapter 6. As you do, listen to Colossians 3:1–2: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” We have been commanded to set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth. Now look in Matthew 6, and let us begin reading at verse 24. Watch carefully.

Our Lord says, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

Then he gives these illustrations: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." So what is going to be added? A realm of sufficiency if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

That's exactly the message of Haggai. God is saying, You put me first. You obey me. You worship me, you honor me, and all these things are going to be added unto you. We will never ever be successful as Christians until we learn to put God first. You have to remember the very first commandment is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the biggest god that we have is ourselves. We want to please our flesh. We want to have the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. Now, twice in the book of Haggai, twice God tells these people to consider your ways.

What does it mean to consider your ways? How do you consider your ways? I believe the answer can be found by examining the context in which that command was originally given. It was given to people who were very selfish, looking out for number one instead of looking out for God, His honor, and His glory. So what is meant by “Consider Your Ways”?

How to Consider Your Ways: Three Steps

First, the command to consider your ways includes recognizing and realizing your failures, faults, and sins. Once these have been recognized and realized, they can be dealt with. Included in this is what you and I would call repentance: once we have identified our failings, faults, and sins, we have to turn from them. We have to turn to that which is right, holy, and godly.

When you look in Haggai chapter one, the sin of placing God and His worship second to themselves and their houses had to be dealt with, and they needed repentance. It does no good to recognize your sin, failure, and fault if you are not going to turn from it. There will never be any change unless there is real, genuine repentance. Unless you break off your sins and turn from them, recognizing and realizing them will not help you at all. You can confess them and acknowledge them all you want, but unless you repent and turn from them, nothing is going to change.

So the very first thing it means when He says, “Consider your ways,” is that you must recognize and realize your failures, faults, and sins, and deal with them through repentance. The second thing it means is closely connected to realization, recognition, and repentance: we have to examine the fruit of our ways.

In the context of Haggai chapter one, they were not reaping any blessings. They were sowing their fields, but they were losing money. I never will forget what my father told me years ago. I was raised on a farm, but after Alice and I got married and I started preaching, I was away from the farm for many years. I came home one day and began looking at the crops Dad had planted. I asked, “Where’s this crop? And where’s that crop? I don’t see it.”

My dad said, “I quit farming to be farming and started farming to make money.” What he meant was that those crops which did not make any money, he was not going to mess with anymore, although we had had them all of my life. That was a wise thing to do, because he was not making any money; he was losing money.

If you are sowing a garden, and it is costing you one hundred dollars in seeds while you get only twenty dollars’ worth of vegetables out of it, something is wrong. If it is costing you one thousand dollars to plant a field and you are getting only eight hundred out of it, something is wrong. You better consider it. You better examine the fruits.

The apostle Paul in Romans 6 and verse 21 said, “What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?” Every one of us can look back on what we used to be before God saved us, and there was fruit in our lives over which we are extremely ashamed—things we wish we had never done, thought about, or experienced. Therefore, we have to examine the fruit.

He said in 2 Corinthians 13 and verse 5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” How do I prove my own self? How do I examine myself? I examine myself to see what kind of fruit I am bringing forth. There is biblical fruit and there is unbiblical fruit. Our Lord kept saying, “By their fruit ye shall know them.” He said, “A good tree cannot bring forth

evil fruit. Neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

I need to examine my life and see whether I have corrupt fruit, unbiblical fruit, or good fruit. We have to look at the fruit of our lives. I understand that we go through tests, trials, afflictions, and chastisements.

But the truth of the matter is this: if we are really children of God, most of our lives should be filled with blessings. In fact, everyone in this room has had more good days than bad days, more healthy days than unhealthy days, and more financial blessings than financial difficulties. Generally speaking, our lives are blessed.

We must realize that there are varying kinds of blessings. Financial blessings are not the only blessings; prosperity in and of itself could be a curse. Yet God does indeed allow us to enjoy the fruit of our labour.

Look again in Haggai 1:6: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm." "And he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."

Calvin comments, "We know that God punishes men in both ways, both by withdrawing his blessings so that the earth is parched, and that the heaven gives no rain, and also, even when there is a good supply of fruits of the earth, by preventing their satisfying, so that there is no real enjoyment of them. It often happens that men collect what would be quite a sufficient quantity for food, and for all that, they're still always hungry."

"This kind of curse is seen the more plainly when God deprives the bread and the wine of their true virtue so that eating and drinking fail to support the strength." Have you ever thought about even the worthlessness of the bread that we buy today? Compare a loaf of white bread from the grocery store with a loaf of homemade bread; there is a big difference, not only in taste, but in filling as well.

God can either deprive a man by cursing the ground and not letting it bring forth, or he could curse the man by letting the ground bring forth plentiful supply, but the man is never ever satisfied. The

Bible says, “The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.” So how do we consider our ways?

We have to realize and recognize our faults, failures, and sins and repent of them. We must also examine the fruit of our lives. Third, we must ask ourselves honestly whether or not we are violating a biblical principle.

Most Christians do not live by principles. They live by feelings, emotions, and circumstances. Anytime you live by your emotions, feelings, or circumstances, you are always going to be in trouble—discouraged, in despair, downtrodden, and downhearted. We are to live by principles. Principles never change. Feelings change all the time. Emotions change. Circumstances change. But principles never, ever change. Nothing is going to work for us as long as we are violating a principle of the Word of God.

Our Lord said in John 17:17, in His high priestly prayer, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Matthew Henry, speaking about considering our ways, said, “Be sensible of the hand of God going out against you. Inquire into the reason. Think what you have done that has provoked God thus to break in upon your comforts; and think what you will do to testify your repentance, that God may return to you in mercy.”

The way you consider your ways is to realize what you have done wrong. Then, when you repent, you must realize what it will take to return to God. Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3:40, “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.” In Malachi 3:7, God said, “Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord.”

We read in verse 12 where Zerubbabel, Joshua the high priest, and the people obeyed. Now look in Haggai chapter 2, beginning at verse 15. You will see a comparison from what was to what is, or what is coming: “And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord: since those days, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty.” In other words, you were doing without.

The Promise of Blessing Upon Obedience

He said, "I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." You did not do that. But now He says, "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you." You repented. You put Me first. From this day, I will bless you.

Now, let me make a couple of applications. First, we have to acknowledge that financial success does not equal spirituality or the blessing of God. Psalm 73 makes that exceedingly clear. There are many ungodly men who are extremely wealthy. The old Puritans always said God often curses His enemies with riches. It is a curse because they end up trusting in their riches and wealth instead of the Lord God. You can look around and name a number of extremely wealthy, wicked, ungodly reprobates. So you cannot say that financial blessings equal spirituality or the blessing of God. No.

Applications: Wealth, Selfishness, and Eternal Perspective

I would rather have a godly life than a goodly bank account, and I would much rather have a godly seed than a great house. I am not averse to great riches, but everything we have will be left when we die. The folly is laying up treasures on earth, where thieves break in and things rot and rust, instead of laying up treasures in heaven, as the Word of God commands, where thieves do not break in and there is no rotting or rusting.

Today we are like the people in the days of Haggai. We have become extremely selfish, with every man running to his own house. He said in verse nine, “Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.” In other words, all you are doing is looking out for number one, thinking only of yourself. You are absolutely and totally selfish.

Conclusion: Ponder Your Path and Prove Your Work

Someone will say, “But we must live.” I understand that, but it is equally true that we must die. I would much rather live a life pleasing to the Lord and have little than live a life displeasing to the Lord and have great wealth. Why? There is always the judgment. I want my life to be pleasing unto Him.

He said twice, “Consider your ways.” David said in Psalm 119:59, “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” We consider our ways by thinking upon them, as Solomon said in Proverbs 4:26, “Ponder the path of thy feet.” Then we do what Paul said in Galatians 6:4: “But let every man prove his own work.” We look at our lives and see where we are failing, sinful, wicked, or rebellious; then, by the grace of God, we repent and change. When circumstances are against us, situations never work out, and we can never get ahead financially, it is time to consider our ways—to stop and say, “What am I doing? What am I doing?”

This past week, four men were arrested for burglary, robbery, and murder. Two of them were teenagers. They stole a bunch of guns—seven or eight—a bunch of ammunition, and their lives are ruined. Probably they'll get the electric chair. The way the law reads, if I'm with Steve and Gary and we're robbing someone, and Gary shoots and kills the man, Steve and I are charged with murder just like Gary is, because we're part of it.

If we would listen to the Word of God and do what God says, consider our ways, evaluate everything in light of the Word of God, turn to Him, and do that which is right, then we're not going to have the problems that we're in.

He said, "From this day forward, I will bless you." We need not seek the praise, recognition, and honor of man, but that which comes from God alone. Consider your ways. How do you do it? By recognizing your sins, faults, and failures; turning from them; examining the fruit of your life; making sure that your life does not violate a principle of the Word of God; and bringing your life into conformity to His Word. Consider your ways.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and truth. We ask, Lord, that You would help us

diligently to consider our ways, compare our lives and the fruit in our lives, and turn unto Thee. We ask for repentance, faith, grace, and mercy, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 13

A Time Of Need

August 24, 2020

I want you to listen closely today because I think the message might be very applicable to our time and to our lives. Hebrews chapter four, beginning with verse 14, says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that has passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."

Has there ever been a time of need in your life? I am asking that question positionally, because if you are mortal, there have been times of need, and there still will be times of need.

Introduction: The Reality of Needs

We face all kinds of needs: financial, medical, emotional, familial, ecclesiastical, educational, spiritual, and a whole lot more. Truthfully, one of our problems is that we oftentimes confuse our wants and desires with our needs. I may want a new automobile, but

as long as mine is in good running mechanical condition, I really do not need one. I may want a million dollars, but as long as I am able to pay my bills and live, I really do not need a million dollars.

One man was asked, "What would you do if someone gave you a million dollars?" His response was, "Well, I'd put it on my bills as far as it would go; the rest of them would just have to wait." That is the way some really are, I can assure you. But the truth is, there are times when we have real, genuine needs.

Let me define a need for you. A need is something that may be defined as that which is absolutely necessary. It may also be defined as that without which we are helpless and hopeless, because a need is something usually in which someone must help.

As mere mortals, there certainly are numerous needs in our lives. Oftentimes we need what is known as divine help. Twice in the Bible, first in Psalm 60:11 and again in Psalm 108:12, we find this same prayer to God: “Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man.” In other words, the help of man is useless and worthless. It is a prayer and an appeal for divine help.

The Lord Jesus Christ knows all of our needs. The Bible tells us that in Matthew 6:11 He taught us to pray, “Give us day by day our daily bread,” or simply, “Give us our daily bread.” Moreover, in Matthew 6:31–33 He said, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For all of these things do the Gentiles seek after.” Then He says, “For your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all of these things.” Therefore, seek ye first the righteousness of God and all these other things shall be added unto you.

It is obvious that our Lord knows we need food, drink, clothes, and things like that. Yet, in one sense, going hungry for a few days has never truly hurt most people. We need food to survive, and we do not like to do without it, but there are many other things in which we could say there are real, genuine needs.

For instance, when you lose a loved one, you need your emotional, mental, and spiritual needs met. What about when a close family member or a child is in the hospital in dire physical condition? When you have a child in the hospital, especially, your heart is stirred, your

emotions are on a roller coaster, and your physical frame often grows weak and weary.

There is absolutely nothing more tiring than sitting in a hospital, especially while waiting on a loved one and having to be there nearly twenty-four hours a day. There are indeed real, genuine needs. Sometimes, when we give ourselves in those areas, crying and praying while it seems that nothing avails, the burden upon us is even worse.

Before I begin expounding the message from Hebrews chapter four, I want to set the stage by showing you a few things, especially in light of our situation. Quoting Hebrews chapter 4, I want you to turn back, if you would please, to 1 Timothy chapter 2, and I need to ask you some questions in light of this passage. Notice, beginning there with verse 1.

The Need for Freedom from Wicked Rulers

You know, we seldom think of our real, genuine needs until it is almost too late. I could ask you this question: Do we not need to be free from the wrath, control, and stupidity of the wicked? Well, if you look in 1 Timothy 2, the apostle says this in verse 1: "I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men."

"And for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For that is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." So let me ask a couple of questions in light of this passage. First of all, why does the Apostle Paul ask prayers for kings and all that are in authority? Second, according to verse 3, what is that which is good and acceptable in the sight of God? Well, let us go back to verse 1. He says, "I exhort therefore, that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority."

So why should we pray for civil rulers? Let me be very blunt. It is not for their sake. It is for our sake, he says. We pray for them that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. In other words, spelling it out very plainly, we pray for them that

they will leave us alone so that we can do that which God has commanded us. So, to answer the second question, what is it which is good and acceptable in the sight of God? Verse 3 gives the answer: that we lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and all honesty. This is why he is saying that we need to pray for the civil rulers, not for their benefit. So many people have said, “The reason we need to pray for them is so that they might be saved.” But the truth is, if you read Deuteronomy 17 and a number of other passages, they have no right being a ruler if they are not already saved.

If you go back and study American history, you'll find that, in the beginning of this nation, no individual could hold public office unless he confessed faith in Jesus Christ, believed both the Old and the New Testaments, and took an oath to that. So the answer is, we need to pray for them, not for their sakes, but for our sakes, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. You remember the Bible says in Proverbs 28, verse 28, "When the wicked rise, men hide themselves." And when they perish, the righteous increase. Then, in Proverbs 29, verse 2, the Bible says, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn."

If you would stop and consider all of the imprecatory prayers in the Bible, these prayers are against the wicked, asking God to overthrow them. Let me show you where we are in our time in history, based upon the word of God. There is absolutely no other chapter, I think, in the Bible that will demonstrate the trouble that we're in in this nation simply because we have forsaken God and his law. This is one of the curses for a failure to obey God's law. Deuteronomy 28, verse 43, 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 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 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." Now watch verses 47 and 48: "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, which the Lord shall send against thee in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in the want of all things, and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee."

One reason the wicked are ruling and reigning over us is simply that we have forsaken God and His law. He said, “Look, you’re going to find out the difference between My service and the service of man.” Clearly, Deuteronomy 28 demonstrates that we have been and still are under the judgment of God Almighty.

Have you ever sighed and cried out like David did in Psalm 7:9? David says, “O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” “Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end”—in other words, “Lord, stop it, please. Put them down, remove them, do whatever You want to, but let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.” The positive is, “But establish the just”: establish those who are willing to obey God and do that which is right and holy.

There is a real, genuine need in our lives, not only for life, but also for liberty and freedom. The Apostle Paul understood this because, in 2 Thessalonians 3:2, he made this prayer request: “And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.” Pray that we will be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men have not the faith.

Do we realize our wants or our needs? Do we have simple desires, or do we understand that there is a real need to be freed from the control of the wicked? Would there be a real, genuine need for what we would call a revival? Look around and see how the saints of God are drooping, dropping, despairing, and living discouraged lives. Look at the work of God and at churches that have simply closed down and refused to worship God as He has commanded. Look at the preachers, pastors, and ministers who have no understanding that the civil government does not have authority over the Church of God.

The Need for Revival

It does not, it cannot, it never has, and it never will, because civil authority and spiritual authority are two separate jurisdictions. The state, or civil government, has no right or authority to tell me what I can preach, when I can preach, or whenever I can preach. It does not.

Moreover, Scripture tells us plainly and clearly that the church does not necessarily have authority to look at civil government and say, “Hey, you cannot execute that criminal,” because the Bible says they can execute a man. God gave them the sword. Obviously, there are two jurisdictions.

So ask yourself: Do we need revival? The answer is absolutely yes. But only God can revive. I am sometimes tickled—not in the ha-ha sense—when I drive by church buildings and see this announced on the bulletin: “Revival next week.” I wish that were so, but they should advertise, “Meeting next week in hopes and prayers for a revival.” It is just a meeting, because only God can send revival.

David said in Psalm 85, verse 6, “Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?” Then, in Psalm 138, verse 7, he said, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me.” David prayed, “Revive us,” and then he prayed, “Revive me.”

When you get to Isaiah 57, verse 15, the Bible says, “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.” David prayed, “Revive us” and “Revive me,” and then God said, “I'm the one that revives the heart of the contrite and the humble.”

In Habakkuk chapter 3, verse 2, Habakkuk prayed, “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.” David prayed, “Revive us, revive me.” God said, “I'm going to revive the hearts of the humble and contrite ones.” Habakkuk said, “Revive thy work.”

It is not just the saints that need reviving. You and I as individuals need reviving, and the work of God needs reviving. These are real, legitimate needs, yet oftentimes we fail to acknowledge them. We concentrate on what we want and on our desires instead of on our needs.

Now go back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 4, because here is the message today: the time of need. In verse 14, first of all, we have the reality. The Bible says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." We have a high priest; further, we have a great high priest. The high priest in the Old Testament was the only one who went into the holiest of all. He alone could enter, and he went in only once a year, and then not without blood.

The Reality: Our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14)

Of course, the high priest had bells on the bottom of his garments. If those bells stopped ringing, they knew he had done something wrong. Usually, a little rope was tied to his ankle so they could drag him out, because nobody was going to go in there. He could enter only once a year.

But here is the reality: we have a great High Priest. What does a priest do? First, a priest intercedes. He advocates, blesses, reconciles, and atones. The Bible teaches us that our great High Priest is totally different from all the high priests who have ever lived. He is not after the Levitical priesthood, but after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:23 says, "And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death." Aaron is dead, all his sons are dead, and every one of the high priests died. There were truly many because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. But verse 24 says, "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." Therefore, Jesus Christ "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." He never dies, and he never will die. His priesthood does not change, and he forever lives to make intercession for us.

"For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."

The Bible teaches us that Christ has a priesthood totally different from the Levitical priesthood. Hebrews 9:11 emphasizes His work: "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building." Our Lord's tabernacle is not earthly, like that which Moses built, but heavenly. Scripture tells us that the earthly tabernacle and temple were only shadows and emblems; they were not the real thing. Our Lord is in the real thing.

Verse 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. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:" How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living and true God? Jesus Christ is a totally different high priest from those of the Levitical priesthood.

Secondly, He is our divine advocate. An advocate is, basically, a lawyer—the one who advocates for us. The Bible says in 1 John 2:1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This is a poor illustration, but I will show it momentarily from the Scripture.

I understand that there would probably be a conflict of interest if a son who is a lawyer argued a case before his father, who is a judge. But let me ask you a question. Do you not think that the son, who is a lawyer, could simply open the door and walk into his father's office? Of course he could. He would not necessarily be going in as a lawyer; he could be going in as a son. There is an intimate relationship there, just father and son.

Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, and He is our divine advocate. He is now seated at the right hand of God. There is no conflict of interest. He is our divine attorney.

If you look in your Bibles at Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, see what the Bible says concerning the Son: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Since He is the Son, He has intimate access and relation to the Father.

He is also our advocate. He is our near kinsman. He is our representative. He is our intercessor. He is the one who blesses. He is the one who reconciles. He is the one who atones.

Now go back to Hebrews chapter 4, and look at verse 14 again. We are looking at the reality: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." What is our obligation? What is our duty? What is our privilege based upon this reality? Here it is: "Let us hold fast our profession."

The word "profession" is the same as the word "confession." In fact, it is homologia in the Greek, which literally means that we are saying basically one and the same thing. But this confession should be considered subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, when we are holding fast our profession or confession, we are simply saying that Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, and we do not need or desire any other. Objectively, when we confess that Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, we are saying, admitting, and confessing that God the Father anointed and appointed His only begotten Son to be that great High Priest and intercessor.

That is why the Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." John Gill, the great Baptist expositor, commenting on verse 14, "Let us hold fast our profession," said that we must hold fast our profession of faith, the grace and doctrine of faith, Christ, salvation by Him, and the hope of eternal life and happiness. This profession, made publicly and sincerely in words and deeds, should be held fast because it is valuable, because there is danger of dropping it, and because holding it requires strength, courage, greatness of mind, and

the use of every proper means. It should be held without wavering, for it is good and profitable, recommends the gospel, and has been made publicly before witnesses. Not to hold it fast is displeasing to God and resented by Him.

Unhappily, most Christians have dropped this great reality that Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. If we have not dropped it intellectually, we have certainly dropped it practically. Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, and our obligation in light of that is to hold fast our confession of Him.

The Reason: A Sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:15)

Now note the reason in verse 15: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Jesus Christ is not a cold, uncompassionate, uncaring, unprincipled High Priest, isolated from us and without understanding. The Bible tells us that He was touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He hungered, thirsted, and did without. In Luke 9:58, our Lord said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Jesus Christ lost friends and disciples, faced hatred, and faced hypocritical tyrants who desired neither truth nor deliverance from their sins. He agonized and groaned, and the Bible teaches that He sweat great drops of sweat as blood. He was tempted by pride, shortcuts, and self-dependence in Matthew 4. He endured temptation; He did not yield.

It is not a sin to be tempted. Our Lord was tempted. It is a sin to yield to temptation.

Our Lord was assaulted, ridiculed, mocked, hated, and despised. When you read Isaiah 53, He is designated as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was subjected to all kinds of trials, the same as we can be, and is therefore able to sympathize with us and to aid us.

He was tempted in the literal sense of the word. He was persecuted. He was poor. He was despised. He endured the cross,

the Bible says, despising the shame. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

As sinful as we are, we can be shamed. I can be shamed, and you can be shamed. But have you ever stopped to think how sinless the Son of God was, and yet He endured not only the pain and agony, but also the shame heaped upon Him? Many times we should be ashamed, and we are not, but He endured the shame. One author said, "He though sinless can sympathize with sinners."

His understanding more acutely perceived the forms of temptation than we who are weak can. He repelled them as instantaneously as the fire does the drop of water cast into it. He therefore experimentally knew what powers were needed to overcome temptations. He is capable of sympathizing, for he was at the same time tempted without sin and yet truly tempted.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” In all of his tests, trials, and temptations, he was without sin.

There is an outstanding difference between you and me and between our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that he did not yield to sin. But there is something even more true: There was no latent sin in Jesus. There was no sin nature in him that the temptation could stir up and cause him to yield. Moreover, there were no sinful habits in him.

He was not only perfect man, but perfect God. He was the sinless Son of God. He suffered as we suffer in the flesh, in that he was weak. He hungered, thirsted, and grew weary. The Bible says in John 4 that Jesus grew weary and sat on the well. Clearly, the reason he sat on the well was that he was looking for water—and, of course, someone to witness to as well, which he did.

Satan used his strongest weapons against our Lord in Matthew chapter four during that temptation. Yet throughout it all, our Lord

remained undefiled. Jesus Christ looked at all of His enemies in John 8:46 and said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Who can prove that I am a sinner? Who can prove one thing that I have done wicked and wrong? The answer is no one.

John Gill said, "Yet without sin, there was no sin in his nature, though he was encompassed with infirmities, yet not with sinful infirmities, only sinless ones. Nor was there any sin in his temptations, though he was solicited to sin by Satan, yet he could find none in him to work upon, nor could he draw him into the commission of any sin." Jesus Christ endured all the temptation, but He was sinless. When the Bible says that He was apart from sin, He was indeed holy, harmless, undefiled, and apart from sinners. Jesus Christ did not sin.

The Resolution: Come Boldly to the Throne of Grace (Hebrews 4:16)

Hebrews 4:15 gives the reason for what follows: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Verse 14 gives us the reality: we have this great High Priest. Verse 16 gives us the resolution. Each of us has trials, temptations, and needs: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Herein lies the answer to all our needs and the resolution to all our problems.

The problem and the truth are that we fail to follow what is given here in order to resolve our needs. How can we come boldly to the throne of grace? Our boldness lies in our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is unlike Aaron and unlike all the other high priests.

The old Levitical priesthood is gone. Aaron could enter into the Holiest of All only once a year. Has it ever dawned upon you that in Jesus Christ we may enter into the holiest of all as often as we please? Hebrews chapter 10 shows us this. Let us begin reading with verse 16.

God says, “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; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. That is why we do not come with the blood of bulls and goats and calves, because Jesus Christ has given us the absolute perfect offering.

Because of His offering, look in verse 19: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)"

He says, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." It does not say that you may enter brazenly, but it does say that you may enter with boldness, and the reason we are to enter with boldness is because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have divine forgiveness in Him, reconciliation in Him, the atonement in Him; we have everything in Him.

The Bible is not only teaching us that we have open access unto our Father. In Hebrews chapter 4, verse 16, it says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace." Interestingly, in the Greek, it is a present middle subjunctive: let us keep on coming boldly. It is not just one time; we keep on coming boldly over and over again. It is the person and work of Jesus Christ that gives us this boldness. He satisfied and placated the wrath and holiness of God, fulfilled the law of God, and God was absolutely, totally pleased with His sacrifice, because God raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand. Had He not been acceptable, God would never have raised Him from the dead. Clearly, He was acceptable with God the Father.

"Let us therefore keep coming boldly unto the throne of grace." It is indeed a throne of grace. It is not a throne of judgment or condemnation; it is a throne of grace. Why are we to keep on coming boldly to the throne of grace? The answer is, "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Do you want divine help during your tests, trials, afflictions, and temptations? Do you want the merciful and gracious God of heaven and earth to supply your need and give you divine help? If so, the apostle says, we need to keep on coming boldly to the throne of grace. Keeping on coming boldly, however, is not doing that which our Lord condemned in Matthew 6:7. He said, "When you pray, be not as the heathen who use vain repetitions, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." We are not just saying the same thing over and over and repeating it.

It is an opportunity, and even more so. Hold Hebrews 4, but look in your Bibles to Luke 11. The disciples had come to Jesus Christ and asked Him to teach them to pray, and He gave them the disciples' prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven." Immediately after He taught us how to pray, He said something significant. In verse 5 He said, "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee."

Now watch verse 8: "I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

Here is the man who comes at midnight and says, "Look, a traveler has come in his journey to my house. He is hungry. I have nothing to set before him. I need to borrow three loaves." The man responds, "Do not trouble me. It is midnight. I am in bed. My children are in bed with me. The door is now shut. I cannot and will not arise and give to you."

"But you do not understand. I have a friend. I need three loaves." Finally, the man says, "Look, I know you are my friend. I am going to give you three loaves just to get you out of my hair, so I can go back to bed and go back to sleep." That is importunity.

Now watch this. Is God like that? No. He said, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth;

and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? Now watch, if ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" In another passage, He says He will "give good things to them that ask him."

The man says, "I do not want to get up. My children are in bed with me." But sooner or later, he does it just to get rid of the man begging him for it. God is not like that. He said, "If you ask, you are going to receive. If you knock, it is going to be opened. If you seek, you are going to find. You have children. If one of them asks you for a piece of bread, are you going to give him a stone? If he asks an egg, will you give him a scorpion?" No. If you have enough sense, morality, and character to give good things to your children, how much more will He give to those who ask Him? It is not just importunity; it is the fact that He is our Father and we are His child.

We come to Him in our time of need. We are to keep coming boldly. That is true, but it is not just importunity. He has exhorted us; He has commanded us to keep coming boldly. And He gives us the reason: "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The time of need is the Greek word eukairos.

Eu is a preposition meaning good or well. We are familiar with the English word euthanasia, made up of two Greek words: eu, good or well, and thanatos, death. Euthanasia simply means a good death. Here, eukairos means eu, good or well, and kairos, time. We come to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in good time. That is, we come in a convenient time, a seasonable time, an opportune time. There is never an out-of-season time to come to God.

The problem is that most of us never really seek God until we are in an extreme emergency. It is like going to the hospital to see someone who is very sick. I ask the family, "Well, how is so-and-so?" They answer, "The doctor says, it's in the Lord's hands now." What? It has always been in the Lord's hands.

"All we can do is pray." Well, that's all you could do beforehand. Why did you not come in a more convenient season? Why are you waiting until someone's on their deathbed to start praying? There's never an out-of-season time to come to God. It is always a good time, a seasonable time, an opportune time. God will give us well-timed help. He is never too early or too late; He is always on time. Usually we say, "Wow, the answer to my prayer just in the nick of time." No, it wasn't in the nick of time; it was the right time, the proper time.

Applications and Exhortation

We are to keep coming boldly to the throne of grace, that we may find mercy and grace to help in the time of need. If we desire divine help, we must come boldly through the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting only in His person and work. Do not come to God saying, "Well, Lord, if you'll do this for me, I'll do that for you." Do not say, "Well, Lord, I've been a good boy." No, you haven't. Do not say, "Well, Lord, I've been in the Christian ministry," because that does not matter. The only standing you have is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no standing outside of Jesus Christ. If you want divine help, you have to come through Him.

Here is the second thing, and this ought to hit us like a lead balloon: How small is our confidence and trust in the priesthood of Jesus Christ if we do not continually and constantly come boldly unto the Father through Him? Most of us have dropped the doctrine of the priesthood of Christ, or at least its implications, even though we say that we believe the doctrine. The implication is very plain, because we do not keep coming boldly to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, in Ephesians 2, verse 18, "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." So we go to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

Consider the great advantage that we have over the Old Testament saints. It is true that they could come to the tabernacle and to the temple, but they could not enter the Holy Place. Only the high priest could do that, and then only once a year. Now God tells us, exhorts us, admonishes us, and encourages us to come boldly into His presence through the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever stopped to think how wicked, even blasphemous, and how

displeasing to God it must be when His own saints will not continually come boldly to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ? He has promised.

If we ask, He will answer; if we seek, we will find; and if we knock, it will be opened. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit, or even good things, to those that ask? We need to learn once again the importance and value of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, so that we may come boldly to the throne of grace, have mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need. You ought boldly to come to God through the person of Jesus Christ, knowing that His atonement is complete and sufficient.

Through Him, we have a new and living way through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.

Father, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and for the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You that He is our Divine Intercessor and indeed our Advocate. We pray that You would help us understand and comprehend the greatness of His intercessory work, and give us holy boldness to enter into Your divine presence through the Lord Jesus Christ. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

Stop Your Fretting

January 22, 2021

Introduction and Reading of Psalm 37:1-7

Psalm 37 is the text, and the title of the message is “Stop Your Fretting.” I told Alice this morning that I was conflicted because I had two different messages I wanted to preach, but I could preach only one of them. We will begin by reading through verse 7 and will look at the entire Psalm shortly.

“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in him. He shall bring it to pass and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”

Fretting Defined as a Sin

An astounding statement that many probably have never thought of is simply this: fretting is a sin. It is also a sin that most everyone engages in. We fret over things that we have said and done. We fret over situations and circumstances in which we presently find ourselves. We fret also over things that may or may not happen. Fretting is a sin into which we usually fall concerning the past, the present, and the future as well.

The command not to fret is found three times in this psalm: first in verse 1, secondly in verse 7, and thirdly in verse 8. What is fretting? The Hebrew word is kharah. It literally means to heat oneself into vexation, to burn, to be angry, to be incensed, to be furious, and to have your anger kindled.

I took the time to look up the word fret, although I knew the definition, and I was surprised at the definitions. Most of them still go along with the Hebrew word, but there are some synonyms that we need to consider as well. Here are a few definitions found in a modern-day dictionary. Number one, to be vexed or troubled, to worry and brood. Number two, to be worn or eaten away, to become corroded. Number three, to move agitatedly. Number four, to gnaw with the teeth after the manner of a rodent. Number five, to cause to be uneasy, and to gnaw and wear away.

When you consider these definitions, I think you can see that in reality they are in line with the definition of the Hebrew word. You and I have not really grasped the significance of the sin of fretting in the sense that fretting is a sin that affects us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Fretting is a sin that is not just simply a sin against God. It is also a sin against our bodies.

Years ago, I read a book by Dr. S.I. McMillen titled None of These Diseases. He was a Christian doctor, and he took all of the unholy emotions that you and I frequently engage in—anger, jealousy, envy, and all of these—and demonstrated how they actually destroy the organs in our bodies and how they harm our bodies as well. This is why I am saying that we have really not grasped the destructiveness of the sin of fretting.

Biblical Arguments Against Fretting

We fret over many, many things. Usually, some of the common things most people fret over would be food, clothing, health, prosperity, popularity, or what people think about us.

There are individuals in the Bible who had the problem of fretting, because there are times in which those people were just as guilty as we are today. The words of our Lord in Matthew chapter 6 are, in reality, words against the sin of fretting. Normally, we can use the words worry, brooding, and anxiety as synonyms. Notice verse 25: “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body, what you shall put on.” Then He asks this question: “Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?”

"Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are you not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take you thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The entirety of this passage is an argument from the lesser to the greater. Consider the sparrows, the little birds: they do not sow, reap, or store in barns, yet your heavenly Father takes care of them. Is not your life much more valuable than theirs? Look at the lilies and the grass in the field. Solomon, in all of his glory, was not arrayed like these. Do not be concerned about what you eat or what you wear, because God knows that you have need of these things. If

God takes care of the birds, and if God takes care of the grass and the flowers, how much more is he going to take care of his own children?

Romans 8 gives the reverse argument. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” Here it is: “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?” In Matthew 6, there was an argument from the lesser to the greater. In Romans 8, there is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has already given us His greatest gift, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall He not give us that which is much less?

The answer is yes. It is like a multimillionaire buying his twenty-one-year-old son a million-dollar automobile. If he bought him a million-dollar automobile, do you think he is going to hesitate to pay for the changing of an oil? Of course not. God has already given us His Son. That is the greatest gift. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” the Bible says. If God has given us Jesus Christ, how much more shall He give us all things through Jesus Christ? If we understood these things, it would certainly keep us from fretting.

Back in Psalm 37, verse 1, we need not merely comprehend this passage, but apply it as well: “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.” This passage not only forbids fretting, anxiety, brooding, worrying, and sinful agitation; it also forbids envying the wicked, because it says, “be not thou envious against the workers of iniquity.”

Why Christians Envy the Wicked

The word for envious here is kanah in the Hebrew, and it literally means to be jealous or to be envious. This command is given to us several times in Scripture. Proverbs 3:31 says, “Envy thou not the oppressor and choose none of his ways.” Proverbs 23:17 says, “Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.” Proverbs 24:19 says, “Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked.”

Why in the world would anyone be envious of the wicked? More specifically, why would any Christian be envious of the wicked?

Unhappily, there are Christians who are very guilty of this sin. When we find ourselves in adverse situations—testing, trials, and adversity—we tend to think that we are being harshly dealt with. We may think that if God really loved us and cared for us, these things would not be happening to us. Then we look around and see the wicked sailing through life without difficulties, prospering in everything they do and untouched by our problems. We begin to envy and feel jealous of them because we are suffering and they are not.

This point is very important: Asaph had this identical problem. Hold Psalm 37, but turn over to Psalm 73. Psalm 73 was written by Asaph, who wrote a number of these psalms, probably through at least Psalm 83. Not all the psalms were written by David. Moses wrote Psalm 90, and Asaph wrote some of these psalms. In Psalm 73, beginning with verse 1, notice what he said: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." Then he confesses, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone. My steps had well nigh slipped." Why did he almost fall? "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

He makes these observations: "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." In other words, they are not going through what he is going through. "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." They have plenty of money and get whatever they want. Then he says, "They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily."

They set their mouths against the heaven; they don't mind cursing God. And their tongue walketh through the earth; they don't mind cursing man. Therefore his people return hither, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the most high? Then he makes this observation: "Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world. They increase in riches." Now, Asaph was suffering.

So look what he says in verse 13: "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long I

have been plagued and chastened every morning." I'm suffering. They're not. I'm godly. They're not. I'm holy. They're not. I want to be pure. They don't. So he says, "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency, for all the day long I have been plagued and chastened every morning."

"If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children." Now look in verse 16: "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me." He said, I just can't comprehend how here we are, and here I am wanting to do what's right, yet I'm struggling, and I'm in adversity and testing, while these people are so wicked and vile they'll curse God, and their eyes stand out with fatness.

They've got everything they want. I don't understand this. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places. Thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment? They are utterly consumed with terrors, as a dream when one awaketh. So, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image."

"Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee." Asaph says, I was ignorant of them until I really understood their end. It was his sin and wickedness.

Oftentimes you will find Christians like Asaph fretting over the prosperity of the wicked. But it is not simply the prosperity of the wicked that causes Christians to fret; it is also the pleasures of the wicked. Wicked people indulge in just about every fleshly appetite and pleasure they want, while Christians are seeking the mortification of the flesh.

The Temporary Nature of Wicked Prosperity, Pleasures, and Power

The Bible says in Proverbs 24:1, "Be not thou envious against evil men, and neither desire to be with them." Who would desire to be with them except someone who wanted to indulge the flesh? If we are honest, we have to admit that there are pleasures in sin. The

Bible even admits that. In Hebrews 11:25, speaking of Moses, it tells us that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Our Lord, teaching the parable of the sower in Luke 8:14, said, "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." He speaks of the pleasures of this life. In 2 Timothy 3:4, he describes men who are "traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

Then Titus 3:3 says, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." Every true Christian has to confess that before conversion he lived for the pleasures of the flesh and the pleasures of this life. But note this: when the Bible speaks of the pleasures of sin or of this life, those pleasures are always temporary. They are only for a season; they are not permanent.

It is like the leaves on an oak tree. They are there all spring and all summer, but when fall and winter become, they die and fall off. When you begin to think that, when the pleasure is gone, the sin remains, and the only thing that you have to look forward to is the judgment of God, you understand that oftentimes it is probably not so much the sin or the pleasure of sin that causes the Christian to fret. It is the fact that the wicked seem to sail through this world without a care and without a thought.

Here we are seriously and studiously endeavoring to be holy, godly, and obedient, and we have obstacle after obstacle. Yet the wicked somehow simply glide by and slide over everything. Nothing ever seems to happen to them. Think about some of those who are very prominent in the world today. If we lived only by sight, we would tend to think that they are escaping the just punishment of their sins and wickedness. Thankfully, we do not walk by sight; we walk by faith. I can assure you of one thing: they shall not escape the punishment of their sins.

This is what Asaph had to realize in Psalm 73. He said, “When I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Thou settest them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction. And when thou awakest, Lord, thou shalt despise their image.” You know what the Bible says in Nahum, chapter 1, verses 2 and 3? “God is jealous. 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.” No wicked man is going to get by with his sins.

Mark it down: the wicked may have their prosperity and their pleasures, but they certainly shall be punished. It is not just the prosperity or pleasures of the wicked concerning which Christians fret and are envious. How about the power of the wicked? You have noticed that in our state capitals and national capitals there are very few individuals whom we would classify as godly. Most of them we would probably call downright wicked.

In fact, I read an article this week written by an insider who said—and I am quoting—that the average American would be absolutely shocked out of his senses to discover how many politicians were pedophiles and satanic worshipers. You and I sometimes do not even think in that realm, yet he says we would be totally shocked at the number of men and women in power who are indeed pedophiles and worship Satan.

What we do not understand is this: the wicked are in power because the righteous have forsaken God and His law. Hold Psalm 37, but turn back in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 28. There you will find one of the curses God has placed upon those who forsake Him and His law. Beginning with verse 45, look what he 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. And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder and upon thy seed forever.”

Then he says: “Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with 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.”

Notice that because they did not serve the Lord their God with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things He had given them, they would serve their enemies. In other words, we are going to know the difference between the service of God and service to wicked, wicked men. Obviously, when we talk about the wicked being in power, they are there because we have forsaken God and His law.

When you think about wicked rulers, you must also consider the devastating effect they have upon the righteous. Proverbs 28:28 says, “When the wicked rise, men hide themselves. And when the wicked perish, the righteous rejoices.” When wicked men rise, the righteous hide themselves; and when the wicked perish, the righteous increase. Proverbs 29:2 says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn.”

Why is it that when the wicked bear rule, men hide themselves and people mourn? One answer appears in Psalm 94:20–21: “Shall the throne of iniquity have a fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by law?”

We have spoken of this verse before. The throne refers to government, but it is also called the throne of iniquity, meaning a wicked civil government. So here is the question: Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God when it frames mischief by law—that is, when it makes sin legal? What is the result when a wicked civil government legalizes sin and rebellion against God? Verse 21 tells us: “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood.”

That is what they do. In other words, when the wicked are bearing rule, injustice reigns, not justice.

A thought came to my mind about Gideon. Gideon was threshing wheat behind the winepress. Why would you thresh wheat behind the winepress? You do not. They would thresh wheat on a hill or mountain, because they would have the wheat on a large sheet with all the chaff in it. They would throw it into the air; the air would catch the chaff and blow it away, while the wheat fell back down. They would continue until most of the chaff was gone.

But Gideon was doing it behind the winepress. Why? The Midianites had invaded the land. When the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, he said, “Hail, thou mighty man of valour.” If he was a mighty man of valour, why was he hiding behind a winepress? The answer is that he had good sense. If he did this out in the open, the wicked would take it away from him. They would steal it.

Obviously, when the wicked bear rule, men hide themselves, because what they have would otherwise be taken from them, either legally or illegally. Here is the power of the ungodly: to take and to steal. When wicked men are in positions of power and authority, injustice always prevails.

For instance, think about the reign of King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. They had murdered so many of God’s prophets. The rest who escaped murder were hidden in a cave and fed on bread and water, while the prophets of Baal sat at the king’s table, indulging themselves in every kind of food imaginable. Clearly, Ahab and Jezebel were not kind to the prophets of God. The book of Judges is replete with examples of the wicked abuse of power.

Many times we fret and sometimes are envious, not only at the prosperity, pleasures, and power of the wicked, but also because of their plans. Let me assure you of one thing: whenever the wicked have their plans, they are not for our benefit or blessing. The wicked could care less for the righteous. All we are are sheep to be sheared and cannon fodder for their numerous wars. Their plans call for an increase to their prosperity, pleasures, and power. It is not for our behalf.

When you stop and think about the United Nations, the New World Order, the deep state, the power elite, and the club of

billionaires, all of these people are not our friends, and they do not seek our health or our welfare.

The Plans of the Wicked Will Fail

Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, who is tied to Bill Gates and George Soros, has laid out plans for America by 2030. The Great Reset that we are hearing about now is supposed to be fully implemented by 2030. The United States, he says, becomes submissive to the United Nations. And here is one of the things Klaus Schwab said: "You'll own nothing and you'll be happy about it."

If you own nothing, somebody owns everything. Is that not right? It is like back during the stock market crash, when somebody told me, "Everybody's selling." I said, "If everybody's selling, somebody is buying. You cannot sell without a buyer." If you own nothing, somebody else owns everything that you had.

Number two is that the United States will not be the world's leading superpower. Number three, you will not die waiting for an organ donor; organs will be made by 3D printers. I do not know about that. Number four, you will eat much less meat. Meat will be an occasional treat, not a staple, for the good of the environment and our health. They are going to tell you what you can eat and what you cannot eat, and they are going to control your health.

Then he says this: a billion people will be displaced by climate change. Translated, a billion people will be killed. Number six, polluters will have to pay to emit carbon dioxide. There will be a global price on carbon, helping make fossil fuels history. When you inhale oxygen, what do you exhale? Carbon dioxide. Does that mean they are now going to tax you for breathing, because you will be a polluter?

Number seven: You could be preparing to go to Mars. Scientists will have worked out how to keep you healthy in space. Really? And here is the last one: Western values will have been tested to the breaking point. Checks and balances are forgotten. Why not say Christian values? Western values are based upon Christianity. If you destroy Western values, you destroy Christianity. If there are no

checks and balances, all you have is tyranny. So the point I am trying to make is this.

When you think about the plans being enunciated, announced, and proclaimed today, none of them sound as though they are for our benefit or blessing at all. I am thankful for the Word of God and that I do not need to fret. I do not care about the prosperity, pleasures, power, or plans of the wicked. Why? Because they are going to fail. They are not going to succeed. No matter how painstakingly they plan or how systematically they try to implement those plans, they will fail.

Job 5:12 says, "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise." He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. In Job 21:27, God says, "Behold, I know your thoughts and the devices that ye wrongfully imagine against me." Psalm 33:10 is one of my favorite passages: "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought. He maketh the devices of the people of none effect." The Lord brings the counsel of the heathen to nought, to nothing; He makes the devices of the people of none effect.

Proverbs 19:21 says, "There are many devices in the heart of a man. Nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." In Isaiah 46:10, God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

I do not fret over the wicked. Why? The answer is very simple: God is sovereign. He has everything under control. Do you realize that fretting is a sin because it is a denial of God's sovereignty, providence, and control? When we fret over something, we are saying, in essence, "Lord, You do not have the power or wisdom to handle this situation. If I do not fret over it, it will probably never be worked out."

Moreover, fretting is a denial of God's justice. We think somehow the wicked are going to escape, but they are not going to escape. It is also a denial of God's love, because we are saying, in essence, "Lord, if You really loved me the way You should, I would not have to fret over this." Fretting is a sin, and it is a grievous sin. If you think for an

instant that the plans of the wicked are going to prevail, you probably need to have a little conversation with Pharaoh.

You might also want to question Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar. I am sure that Haman could help your understanding, as well as Ahab and Jeroboam. No, they are not going to prevail.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 7, beginning with verse 14. He is talking about the wicked man: "Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." Then, "I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High." God says that they are going to fall into the very pit which they have dug. All their violent dealings are going to come down upon their own pate, and ultimately God is going to get the glory from it.

When you think about the wickedness going on in this world, I can tell you exactly how much wickedness is going to happen: God is going to allow just enough wickedness to get glory out of it. That which will not glorify Him, He will restrain. Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain." If something will not ultimately redound to God's honor and glory, He will restrain it.

Someone asked me twice this week, "Why did God allow sin?" Have you ever stopped to think about this? If it had not been sin, we would never know one thing about the justice of God. We would not know anything about the mercy, love, or grace of God. Will God ultimately get glory from what has happened?

Exposition of Psalm 37: God's Preservation of the Righteous

If it did not glorify God, it would not come to pass. Turn back now to Psalm 37. If you are a fretter, or prone to fret, I recommend that you read this psalm every day for a couple of months. This psalm is

designed to demonstrate how God preserves and provides for the righteous in times of adversity and testing.

In verse 1, he begins, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.” Why should we not fret, and why should we not be envious? Verse 2 gives the answer: “For they shall soon be cut down like grass and wither as the green herb.” How many of you think of mowing your grass? You may think it needs to be mowed, but you think nothing more than cutting that grass down because it is grass. God says that is what the wicked are: grass. They are soon to be cut down, and they are going to wither as the dry herb. Sometimes people fret because the righteous are in distress and the wicked are not.

Look at verses 5 and 6: “Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.” Just as surely as day follows night, when our crosses, adversities, testings, and trials are upon us, comfort and deliverance will follow, just like night follows day. So do not worry about it.

Many fret over the plans of the wicked, but look at verses 12 through 15: “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth his day is coming.”

"The wicked have drawn out the sword, and they bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of an upright conversation." Look what happens: "The sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken." God says all their plots will come to nothing. They will fall upon their own sword and into their own pit. We fret because we are poor and think we do not have sufficient means to fight the wicked and their crowds. I get requests for money just about every day from every politician under the sun, and many others. We need money; we need to stand and fight. Well, look at what the Bible says.

Psalm 37, verses 16 and 17: "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholdeth the righteous."

It is true that we may not have much, but may I remind you that the Lord took one loaf of bread and two small fish and fed 5,000 men, not counting the women and the children? The little that the righteous man has is far greater than the wealth of many wicked. Again, some fret because we are despised and destitute. Look down to verses 18 and 19: "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied." One of my favorite verses is where David said, "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."

We tend to think that the prosperity and success of the wicked cannot be understood, because they seem to get money, wealth, and things so easily. But look at Psalm 37, verse 20: "But the wicked shall perish. And the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs. They shall consume into smoke. They shall consume away." When you think about the prosperity of the wicked and how easy their lives are, God is just fattening them up for the slaughter. That is all there is to it.

You say that oftentimes the righteous are cast down and fall, while the wicked do not. Look at verses 23 and 24: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in His way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth them with His hand."

Our falls are neither permanent nor fatal. Proverbs 24:16 says, "For a just man falleth seven times and riseth up again, but the wicked fall into mischief." God has promised that when we fall, ours will not be fatal or permanent.

Someone may say, "But the wicked prosper and never fall, while many righteous have rough days all their lives." Look at Psalm 37:28: "For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints. They are preserved forever, but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off." Then, in verse 37, he says, "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright for the end of that man is peace." God will not forsake us. We are preserved, and our end is peace.

Now look at verses 35 and 36: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." In other words, the wicked will perish.

The last two verses in this psalm should quench all fretting. This psalm teaches that God works everything out for our good and His glory. Verse 39 says, "But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them. He shall deliver them from the wicked and save them because they trust in him."

Applications and Conclusion

Psalm 37 presents a strong contrast between the wicked and the righteous. We must discern between the temporary prosperity of the wicked and the permanent prosperity of the righteous. The righteous need not be vexed by the prosperity of the wicked, for their prosperity is transient, and their end is very undesirable. Psalm 37, as well as the rest of Scripture, teaches that we as Christians are victorious. We are the victors; we are the overcomers. God will destroy the wicked in His time.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 58:3-11 (KJV)

Until then, we do what the psalmist said. We trust in the Lord. We delight ourselves in the Lord. We commit our ways unto the Lord. We rest in the Lord. We do that which he commands. The reason we should rest in the Lord and trust in him is because he will indeed take care of the wicked.

Psalm 58, beginning with verse 3: "The wicked are estranged from the womb and they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent. They're like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." They won't listen.

"Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth. Break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord. Let them melt away as waters which run continually. When he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces. As a snail which melteth, let

> every one of them pass away like the untimely birth of a woman that they may not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind both living and in his wrath. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, so that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous. Verily, he is a God that judges in the earth."

Asaph was right when he said, “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castest them down into destruction. In a moment, as a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.” Yes, there is a God that judges in the earth.

It is not the end of the world just because someone thinks that the wicked are in control. The wicked are not in control. When you look at the world by sight, you think, “Well, the wicked are in control, and everything is going wrong.” But everything is going wrong just right. Nothing happens by accident in a world ruled by God. God has everything under control.

He is using His enemies to work out His infinitely wise counsel, purpose, and will. Nothing is going to come to pass except that which God has decreed and ordained, and it will ultimately redound for our good and His glory. One of the old Puritans said, “With God, there are no contingencies.” God does not need a backup plan. With God there are no contingencies.

“The mighty charioteer of providence has gathered up all the reins of all the horses and he guides them according to his infallible wisdom. There is a predestination which concerns all things, from the motion of a grain of dust on the threshing floor, to that of a flaming comet which blazes through the sky; nothing can happen but what God ordains, and therefore we should not fear.” I would change one word, or add it: Nothing can happen but what God ordains; therefore, we should not fret. “Fret not,” he says. Fretting comes from fear. You cannot fret unless you fear, and perfect love casteth out fear, the Bible says. So often, we are upset over the things that are happening.

I am not saying, “Do not plan.” I am not saying, “Do not prepare.” The Bible says, “A prudent man perceiveth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” What I am saying is that we must do what God commands us to do without fretting and without fear. We trust in Him, commit our way to Him, lean upon Him, and rest in Him.

And he will protect his own.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your truth. And Lord, we confess that we have sinned against thee by fretting. We've sinned against thee by fear. We've sinned against thee by failing to prepare. We've sinned against thee. But Lord, help us never, ever to question your sovereign control, your all-wise providence, and your infinite counsel and purpose. Help us, Lord, to bow before Thee, to honor Thee in all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

The Desire Of The Righteous

January 17, 2022

Introduction: The Question of Desire

Nehemiah is praying: “O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and to the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name. And prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man, for I was the king’s cupbearer.”

If you could have only one desire granted you by the grace and mercy of God, what would that desire be? The truth of the matter is, everyone has desires. There is nothing wrong with desiring things that are biblical, godly, and holy. However, the truth of the matter is that, since we are depraved sinners by nature, we normally desire things that are wicked, wrong, unbiblical, and ungodly.

The Word of God declares that there are many wicked people who desire wicked things. They usually end up boasting in those wicked desires and also blessing those who are like themselves. For instance, Psalm 10:3 says, “For the wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.” The

wicked man boasts of his evil desires and blesses those who are likewise evil like him—those whom the Lord hates.

We are also informed in Psalm 112:10, “The wicked shall see it and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth and melt away.” Listen: “The desire of the wicked shall perish.” So really and truly, all of his desires are going to go away anyhow.

Desires Can Be Righteous or Wicked

I do not know whether you have ever paid attention to James 4:2, but the Scripture teaches us that murders, fightings, and wars all stem from lusts and wicked desires. For instance, the Bible says, “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.” So, interestingly, our Lord pens all of the fightings, all the wars, and all the murders on wicked lusts and wicked desires.

The interesting thing is this. When you get to James chapter 4 and verse 2, the Greek word there for lust and desire is epithumeo. That word means to desire, to covet, to long after, to long for, and to lust after. It is used in Scripture both in a good and in a bad sense. Usually, when we think of lusts and desires, we think of that which is evil, sinful, and wicked, but it is not necessarily like that.

The word is epithumeo. We take that word from epithumia, and epi is a preposition meaning upon. It is from the Greek word thumos, which means a passion. Your lust is basically whatever you set your passion upon. In other words, it is the desire of your heart. The word describes what you long for, what you covet, and what you set your affection upon; therefore, its moral character depends on the object of that desire.

To show the good sense of the word lust or desire, consider Luke chapter 22 and verse 15. Our Lord says to His disciples, "And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Actually, it is the same word as lust: "Have I lusted to eat this Passover with you before I suffer?" He is setting His desire upon a last supper with them, in fellowship with them. He is longing to share that meal with His disciples before He suffers. So it is a good and holy usage of the word.

One more passage shows the same point. First Peter chapter 2 and verse 2 says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Set your affection and your passion on the milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. This is not a wicked desire, but a proper longing for spiritual nourishment and growth.

These two Scriptures point out and make the truth known that desires are not necessarily wicked and wrong in and of themselves. There are indeed evil desires and wicked desires. But just because there are wicked and evil desires does not mean that every desire is like that. There are holy desires. There are righteous desires.

Nehemiah's Prayer for Fellow Servants

If you look back in Nehemiah chapter 1, verse 11, there are two clear and plain implications. First, Nehemiah says, “O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and to the prayer of thy servants.” Nehemiah is not praying only for himself; he is also praying for the prayers of other servants.

It is right and honorable to pray for the Lord’s servants. I hate to have to say this, but it is the absolute truth: unhappily, most pastors do not even believe it. We are not in competition; we are on the same team. It does not matter to me if the Lord uses another pastor in his church and starts a great awakening and a great revival. I am more than happy. I am not in competition with him.

There are many pastors who think that if something does not affect or bless their own church, they must be against it. No, we are not in competition. Nehemiah is praying not only for his own prayer, but for the servants of the Lord as well.

Here is the second implication. Nehemiah says, “O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and to the prayer of thy servants.” The qualifying phrase is, “who desire to fear thy name.” He is not simply praying for fellow servants; he is praying for those fellow servants who desire to fear the name of the Lord.

Negatively speaking, then, the prayer would not be for servants who do not desire to fear the name of the Lord. Why would he not

pray for those who do not desire to fear the Lord's name? The answer is simple: those who truly do not desire to fear the Lord are merely playing. They are not serious about the work of the Lord and are not truly interested in obeying God.

Nehemiah's concern is evident in chapter 1, beginning with verse 3. He had asked about the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and this was the answer: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." This is a pitiful picture of Jerusalem's inhabitants. They are in deep affliction; the wall is broken down, and the gates are burned with fire. They have no protection.

Now look in verse 4. He said, "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." Nehemiah was really concerned about the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was concerned about the wall, the people, the city, and the town. Therefore, he sat down, cried, mourned, fasted, and prayed.

This is why, in verse 11, he prayed for the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name. We may pray for all of God's servants, but I believe the majority of our prayers, the intensity of our prayers, the fervency of our prayers, and the constancy of our prayers should be for those who desire to fear the name of the Lord.

It is much like that passage in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 10, where the apostle Paul says, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, but especially they that be of the household of faith." In other words, we have a duty and obligation to do good to everyone, but there is a special duty and a special obligation toward those who are of the household of faith. When you stop and think about the household of faith, there are some who are not very serious, and there are others who are very serious. Nehemiah understood this. Therefore, in Nehemiah chapter 1 and verse 11, he prayed not just for the servants of the Lord, but for those who desired to fear His name. They were going to take the work very seriously.

God Knows and Judges Our Desires

It is imperative that we understand something at the outset of this message: our desires and our motives are before the Lord. He knows us in detail, and He knows us intimately. We cannot fool Him or deceive Him. Many times we do things without thinking. We upset some brother in Christ—or, to use the modern-day word, we offend him. Then we look at him and say, "Well, I didn't mean it that way. I didn't mean to do that." He may say, "Okay, that's all right. We'll work it out. We'll forgive each other. We'll go on." But the truth of the matter is this: I may say to Steve, "I didn't mean that," but the Lord knows whether I mean it or not. He knows every one of our desires.

David said in Psalm 38 and verse 9, "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee." Every one of our desires, whether right, wrong, good, bad, holy, or unholy, is before the Lord. God will judge wicked, unbiblical, and ungodly desires.

Our desires and motives are more important than our outward conduct, because our outward conduct stems from our desires and motives. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Our Lord said to those Pharisees in Matthew 23, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" He said, "for ye garnish the outside of the sepulcher, and then ye make it white." But on the inside, they were full of dead men's bones. The outside really does not matter if the inside is all messed up. We have desires that are right and desires that are wrong, and God is going to judge those that are wrong.

Let me give you a good illustration. In Numbers chapter 11, the children of Israel were in the wilderness. God had been feeding them with manna, angel's food, the corn of heaven, but they became sick and tired of it. They said, "We don't have any meat. We'd love to have meat. We had meat in Egypt. Why can't we have meat now?" God heard their whining and complaining and said, "And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt." They remembered having meat in Egypt, though they had been slaves. That is what made slavery comfortable to them: they had meat.

The Lord continued, “Therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; but even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?” Isn’t that interesting?

Notice that God said, “I’m going to give you flesh. I’ll give it to you till it comes out your nostrils, till it becomes loathsome.” I can give you a good, clear illustration of that. When I was 12 years old, my father and mother allowed me to go to Savannah, Georgia, and spend a week with my aunt and uncle. I was so happy to go because my aunt and uncle owned and operated a bakery, and I had a whole week with them.

I ate doughnuts—regular doughnuts, glazed doughnuts, cake doughnuts, cream-filled doughnuts, and sprinkled doughnuts. I ate doughnuts until I was so sick. My wife can tell you, I probably didn’t eat another doughnut for 30 or 40 years after that, and I still don’t care anything about them. I just got sick of doughnuts, and they became very, very loathsome to me.

Psalm 78 recounts how Israel complained because they did not have meat, although they had manna. God commanded the clouds from above, opened the doors of heaven, rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them the corn of heaven. “Man did eat angels’ food: he sent them meat to the full.” He caused an east wind to blow in heaven, and by His power brought in the south wind. He rained flesh upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like the sand of the sea. He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations.

Now pay attention to verse 29: “So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust. But while the meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.” Did you hear what he said? He gave them their own desire. Do you realize that one of the most severe judgments of God is when God gives us what we want, when we want that which is contrary to Him? It is indeed a judgment of God. If God ever leaves us to ourselves, if God ever leaves us to our

fleshly desires, it is a judgment. Hence, we need to do what Nehemiah prayed about. We need to learn to fear His name.

What It Means to Fear the Name of the Lord

Here is the pressing question in this message so far: What does it mean to fear the name of the Lord? In the Bible, the name of the Lord is always synonymous with and equated with the person of the Lord. To fear His name is to fear Him; not to fear His name is not to fear Him. Hold Nehemiah, but turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 28. Mark this passage, because we will come back to it.

Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 58, states: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.” Note the condition: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God.” The warning is tied directly to observing all the words of the law, that we may fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord our God.

There are three very clear implications in this passage. First of all, fearing the name of the Lord is equal to and synonymous with fearing the Lord Himself. Secondly, fearing the name of the Lord is vitally and intimately connected with obedience. Thirdly, a failure to fear the name of the Lord is a failure to fear God Himself, and thus brings judgment upon the individual or upon the nation.

First of all, fearing the name of the Lord is the same as fearing God Himself. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 7 says, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Taking God's name in vain is the same as cursing God. His name is representative of Himself in all that He is.

Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 13 says, “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.” Thus,

thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt swear by his name. You see it again in Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 20: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name."

The Connection Between Fear and Obedience

The Scriptures take God and the name of God and use them interchangeably. Psalm 20 and verse 1 says, "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble." That is His person. "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee"—that is still His person. Verse 5 says, "We will rejoice in thy salvation." That is the person. "And in the name of our God we will set up our banners." That is still His person because His name represents Him. "The Lord fulfill all thy petitions." Verse 7 says, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."

The very first implication is this: the name of God represents Himself. To fear His name is the same as fearing God. Secondly, fearing God is vitally and intimately connected with obedience. It is so connected with obedience that it is impossible to fear Him and not obey. I will show you that before I close.

Go back in your Bibles to Leviticus chapter 19. Notice verse 14: "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord." Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind. Why? Thou shalt fear thy God. In other words, if you fear God, you are not going to curse the deaf or put a stumblingblock before the blind.

Look at Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 32. He says it again: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord." If you really fear God, you are going to rise up before the hoary head. That is, you are going to respect old age and honor the face of the old man.

Look in verse 17 of Leviticus—Leviticus 25 and verse 17. Here He says it again: "Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the Lord your God." So what is to stop me from oppressing you or anyone else? I fear God. And if I fear

God, I am going to be obedient. Turn right on over to Deuteronomy chapter 10 and verse 12.

Here it is very plainly stated: “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?” Deuteronomy 13:4 says, “Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.” So it is impossible to fear God and remain disobedient. Samuel said, “Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.” If you fear him, you fear his name. If you fear his name, you will obey him, love him, serve him, and honor him.

Obedience is basically the same as fearing the name of God. Deuteronomy 6:24 says, “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.” Fearing the Lord is for our good and our protection as well.

This brings me to the third implication: a failure to fear the name of the Lord is a failure to fear God and always brings judgment. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are the two passages of the Bible where you have the blessings and the curses. In Leviticus 26, beginning with verse 14, here are the curses, or at least part of them, for disobeying:

Judgment for Not Fearing God

“But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; 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.” Verse 17 says, “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.” This is judgment if we do not fear Him.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 28:58-67 (KJV)

"If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed. And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. 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; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. Among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."

So, what he is saying is if we do not fear his name, judgment is going to fall upon us.

May I point out the fact that the sins of our forefathers, the sins of our ancestors, are exactly the same sins that we have today. We have failed to fear the name of the Lord. If you would like to know what is wrong with Washington, D.C., there's no fear of God there. If you'd like to know what's wrong with Tallahassee, Florida, there's no fear of God there. If you want to know what's wrong with Atlanta, Georgia, there's no fear of God there.

Two Types of Fear and the Wicked's Impudence

When we speak of fear, we must understand that the Bible mentions basically two types. First, fear refers to reverence and respect: “Honor the hoary head,” says God; “Honor thy father and thy mother.” The second type is fear of wrath or anger, fear of punishment.

I told you before that, when I was a boy, I feared my father. By that, I meant that I honored and respected him. He was my father; he ruled the roost. When he said, “Jump,” I would ask, “How high?” Until I got older and decided, “I’m almost grown. I think I can do what I want to.” Then Dad decided, “You can’t do what you want to. You’re going to do what I tell you. And if you don’t do what I tell you, here’s a nice peach-tree limb that will teach you.”

You are still to obey. I usually tell people we had a peach tree, a big peach tree up at our house. The thing never did blossom until after I left home because my father used all the limbs for switches. But I feared him. I feared him both ways, because he was a big man and a strong man. And so here is the fear of God.

If you do not fear God, you are going to be not only wicked and vile, but exceedingly impudent toward Him as well. Psalm 36:1–4 says, “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit. He hath left off to be wise, and to do good. He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.”

Why does the wicked man not abhor evil? Why does he set himself in a way that is not good? Why does he devise mischief upon his bed? Why are the words of his mouth iniquity and deceit? Why has he left off to be wise and to do good? Why does he flatter himself in his own eyes until his iniquity is found to be hateful? The answer is in verse 1: there is no fear of God before his eyes.

The Apostle Paul said the same thing in Romans 3:12–18: “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of

asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes."

When one despises the name of God, he is despising God. When he despises God, he will not only sin against Him wickedly and blasphemously; he will do so with the utmost impudence, spitting in the face of God, daring God, and challenging God to do His worst. You know, God asked this question.

Nehemiah's Negative Illustration

In Malachi 1:6, the Lord asks, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name." If you despise the name of God, you will not honor Him or fear Him; you will sin against Him.

The book of Nehemiah gives us two illustrations. The first is negative, showing what people do when they do not fear God. The second is positive, showing what people do when they do indeed fear God. In Nehemiah 5, beginning with verse 1, we find the negative illustration—what happens when people do not fear God.

Negative Illustration: Oppression in Nehemiah 5

"And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews." The Judahites were crying out against the Judahites. Remember, this was a remnant that had escaped from Babylon and returned to the land.

"For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live. Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. Yet now 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, and 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 watch Nehemiah's anger: "And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us?"

"Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest."

"Then I called the priests, 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 labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise."

Is it not unlawful, according to the Bible, to charge a brother usury? Of course it is. Is it not unlawful to confiscate, steal, and defraud? Of course it is. Why, then, were these Judahites charging their brethren usury? When they could not pay, they confiscated their lands; and when there was no land left to confiscate, they took their children as servants and slaves. Why were they doing this?

Nehemiah tells you why: "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of the Lord?" They did not fear God. God had forbidden all of it, but that did not matter to them. Nehemiah gives a second reason: "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" First, they ought to walk in the fear of God

simply because God commanded them to do so. Second, they had to remember that they were living among the heathen, among their enemies. And what were those enemies saying? There is no difference between us and them. They are doing exactly what we are doing.

Do you realize that this is the charge given to most Christians today? “I cannot tell any difference between me and most Christians except they go to church and I do not.” Everybody does the same thing; everybody acts as though there is no difference. You do not fear God. If you feared God, you would obey Him.

They would not charge usury, do that to their brother, confiscate their lands, or enslave their children. They did not fear God, so they sinned against Him.

Now consider the positive. In Nehemiah, you will encounter the word Tirshatha. Nehemiah is called the Tirshatha in chapter 8, verse 9, and in chapter 5, verse 14, which we are about to read, he is called the governor. The Tirshatha was the governor. Nehemiah was governor in Judah and Jerusalem for twelve years.

“Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.”

Positive Illustration: Nehemiah's Integrity

Although he was governor, he did not take everything the governor could take: “But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work.”

“Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the

bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people." Now the question has to be asked.

Why did he not charge like all the other governors? If he was going to eat an ox every day, six sheep, and all the fowl, with 150 people eating at his table three times a day, it would have been an expensive undertaking. But he said, "For all of this, I didn't charge any money. I didn't demand." Why did he not demand? Why did he not do like the other governors?

He said, "Because I feared God." The only thing that will stop the abuse of office, deter theft and fraud, and prevent taking advantage of others is the fear of God. Why did Nehemiah not act like our modern-day politicians who defraud, deceive, steal, confiscate, and do whatever they want to do? Why did Nehemiah not do like them and become exceedingly rich in twelve years? Because he feared God.

He said, "I'm not going to do those things. That's wicked. That's wrong. That's ungodly." This is why, in Nehemiah 1:11, he was praying for the prayers of those servants who desire to fear thy name. He said, "I know that those who really desire to fear the name of God, you can trust them. They're going to work. They're going to be honest. They're going to do that which needs to be done." You do not have to constrain them to do their duty and fulfill their obligations. Nehemiah said, "I didn't take the bread of the governor. I didn't do all those things that I could have done because I fear God."

Applications: Desiring to Fear the Lord

Now, let me make some applications because I want to tie all this together. I began this message by asking you a question: If you could have one desire fulfilled, and God guaranteed that he would give you the desire of your heart, what would that one desire be? To be absolutely honest, if you said, "My one desire should be to fear the name of the Lord," that would include so many things. It would include God's providence, God's protection, God's provisions, and God's blessings. But do we really and truly desire to fear the name of the Lord?

The Bible says in Proverbs chapter 18 and verse 1, “Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.” In other words, if we really desire something, we are going to set ourselves apart, focus upon it, work on it, and seek it until we accomplish it. So the question has to be asked: Do we really and truly desire to fear the name of the Lord?

Our Lord, of course, is wisdom incarnate and truth incarnate. There are special promises to those who seek Him and desire to fear His name. Let me show you some. Psalm 10, verse 17, the word of God says this: “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” Did you get that? “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble.”

It is not necessarily that we were able to give voice to our desires. He knows our desires and he hears our desires. He says, “Lord, thou wilt hear the desire of the humble, thou wilt prepare their heart,” that is, to get that desire fulfilled. “Thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” Look in Psalm 21 and verse 2. The scripture says, “Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips.” So if God gave you your heart's desire, what would it be? And then in Psalm 73 in verse 25, I can quote that verse where David asked, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” How badly do we really desire the Lord? What did David say? “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”

Now, if we really and truly and genuinely desire to fear the name of the Lord, we need to set ourselves apart and seek that we may truly, genuinely do so. Here's the second application: As the curse is upon those who disobey, so His special blessings are upon those that do obey. Psalm 33:18 says, “Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.” The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him. Well, if we fear Him and if we desire to fear Him, His eye is going to be upon us. Psalm 34:7 says, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

I don't know about you, but I don't mind having a band of angels camped around me. I don't mind having angels interfere in my life

and save me from destruction, delivering me from all kinds of things. That's a special blessing for those that fear the Lord. Psalm 34:9 says, "O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him." If you want your provision, if you never want to be in want, then the answer is that we must fear him.

Isaiah 59:19 says, "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Note this: so shall they fear the name of the Lord. When you fear the name of the Lord, even the Spirit of God is going to come in to defend you and raise up the standard of righteousness.

Now turn to 2 Kings 17. I want to show you basically where we are today. In this passage, the king of Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom and taken the Israelites to Assyria. He conquered other nations as well, took those nations, and placed them in the northern kingdom, especially in Samaria.

You have to remember that in the New Testament the Samaritans were hated and despised by the Judahites in the southern kingdom. Why? Because all these heathen had been brought into the northern kingdom. Some of the poorest Israelites remained in the land, and they intermarried with these people. Thus, the Jews in the southern kingdom referred to the Samaritans as dogs and wanted nothing to do with them. This created a mixture in the land, and these people brought all their idols.

Jeroboam made the two golden calves, placing one in Dan and one in Bethel. All the northern kings followed Jeroboam in worshiping the calves. With that in mind, look in 2 Kings 17:25. The Assyrian king had placed various peoples in the land: “And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land.”

This was heathenistic thinking. God was regarded as a local god, not the omnipotent, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent God of the

universe. They said, “we don't know the manner of the God of the land. Therefore he hath sent lions among us, and, behold, they slay us, because we know not the manner of the God of the land.” The king of Assyria commanded, “Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land.” It could not be the one true and living God, because they were worshiping the calves.

Verse 28 says, “Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.” But consider what happened: “Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt.” The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth; the men of Cuth made Nergal; the men of Hamath made Ashima; the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. “So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places.” They feared the Lord and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.

Do you know, that is pretty much descriptive of what we have in Christendom today? Everybody says we fear God, but they do whatever they want to do: live the way they want to live, act the way they want to act, and serve when they want to serve. Interestingly, verse 32 says they feared the Lord and made to themselves the lowest of them priests. Verse 33 says they feared the Lord and served their own gods. Here is the conclusion, verse 34: “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.” In other words, they do not fear God. They said they did, but they did not fear God because they did not obey God.

Conclusion: Duty and Blessing

If you fear the name of the Lord, you fear God. If you fear Him, you obey Him. Here is our duty and our obligation. Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 13 says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” If you fear God, you will keep His commandments; if you fear Him, you will obey Him. This is the whole duty of man.

Now here is the grace and the blessing. Malachi chapter 4 and verse 2 says, “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” What does that mean? You are getting fat. You are being blessed. A stalled calf is the calf that gets the feed and grows because he is not out doing a lot of different exercises, running and jumping and kicking. He is being fattened and blessed. If you obey God, the Sun of righteousness is going to rise with healing in His wings, and you shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall.

Is it any wonder that when Nehemiah prayed in verse 11, he prayed for the Lord’s servants who desire to fear His name? I wonder how many professing Christians, how many church members, would actually say, “I desire to fear the name of the Lord, and I will separate myself.”

I will seek His face. I will seek obedience in every area of my life because I want to fear His name. All right, well, let's pray. Father, thank you again for your love, your grace, your mercy. May we see, Father, the absolute necessity of fearing thy name and bringing our lives into greater conformity to your word. Give us, Lord, your word, your truth, your will for our lives. Help us, Father, to desire to fear thy name. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask. Amen.

So.

You know what that means? That means you're getting fat. You're being blessed. A stalled calf is the calf that gets the feed. And he grows Because he's not out doing a lot of different exercises and exercising by running and jumping and kicking. No, no, no. He is being fattened and blessed. So God says, here it is. If you obey me, the son of righteousness is going to rise with healing its wings and

you shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall. Is it any wonder? That when Nehemiah prayed. In verse 11, He prayed for the Lord's servants who desire to fear thy name. I wonder how many professing Christians, how many church members would actually say, I desire to fear the name of the Lord and I will separate myself.

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CHAPTER 16

When Disobedience Becomes Obedience

July 5, 2022

SCRIPTURE READING - Daniel 3:13-23 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

In Daniel chapter 3, notice, if you would, verse 13:

"Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these three men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

"Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made well. But if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour in the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

> "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Therefore he spake and commanded they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The Blessings and Curses of Obedience

> "And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

> We have been taught the concept of obedience all of our lives. We have also been taught the concept, or the destructive power, of disobedience. In fact, as you read through the Bible, there are many blessings pronounced upon our obedience, and there are also curses pronounced upon our disobedience. Practically everyone can quote a passage in which these blessings and curses are mentioned. One such passage is Ephesians chapter 6, verses 1 through 3.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with the promise, that it may be well with thee and that thou mayest live long on the earth." Here is a positive command and a blessing. If we honor our father and mother—that is, if we are obedient—God's

blessing is that we live long upon the earth and that it will be well with us.

By clear implication, there is also the curse of disobedience. If we fail to honor our parents and fail to obey, we are not going to live long upon this earth, and it is not going to be well with us. Thus, in this one simple passage, we have both the positive and the negative, the blessings and the curses.

In light of this passage, there is a pressing question that I must ask—not because I do not think you know the answer, but because I believe you do know it. I am asking it to set up what is going to follow: Is it ever right, or can it ever be right, for a child to disobey his parent? We could ask it another way: Is it right not to obey a parent? These questions set up a biblical principle. Parental authority is delegated. In fact, all authority is delegated.

Delegated Authority and Its Limits

There is only one sovereign, only one supreme, and that is God Himself. Any authority anyone has on earth—parental, pastoral, governmental, or whatever it may be—is delegated. Delegated authority is always limited, defined, and confined. It is like the ocean. When God said to the waves in Job 38, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

Suppose I had a teenage son. I do not, but suppose I did. If I told him, "I am low on money this month and do not have enough to pay all my bills. Son, take this pistol, rob the bank, and bring me the funds so I can pay my bills," and the child looked at me and said, "No, daddy, I am not going to do that," would he be right to refuse?

Suppose I commanded a child to rob a bank. I would tell him, "You do not understand. I am commanding you to rob that bank. The Bible says, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right,' so I am commanding you to do that." Is the child disobedient to me? Yes, he would be disobedient to me. But would he be disobedient to God? No, because God is the sovereign supreme authority, and God has said, "Thou shalt not steal." His disobedience to me would become obedience unto God at that particular point.

No parent has any right or authority to ask a child, no matter how young or how old, to do anything contrary to the Word of God. If I ask my child to do something contrary to God's Word, I am the one in rebellion, not the child. It would be right in that instance for the child to disobey me if I am violating the law of God, because his disobedience would then become obedience to God.

God's Objective Standard vs. Subjective Standards

Years ago, Dr. R. J. Rushdoony wrote a book titled By What Standard? Jared Longshore has also written a book by the same title. Both men point out that this is God's world, that God has set the rules, established the standard, and that His Word is law.

Everyone must have a standard; in fact, everyone does have one. The problem is that not everyone has the same standard. There are subjective standards, and there is God's objective standard. These subjective standards are humanistic and could be based upon pride, popularity, fleshly desires, our goals, our desire for prosperity—anything that promotes us and helps us. Our subjective standard is always selfish and humanistic. All of our subjective standards arise and originate from within; that is, they are based upon our desires and our determination.

God's objective standard is His law-word. It is the only objective standard, a standard He has laid down for individuals, families, churches, societies, governments, and everything that exists. By what standard should we live? We are to live by God's objective standard, His law-word. Christians, especially Baptists, and Presbyterians as well to a good extent, have always confessed that the only standard for faith and practice is the Word of God. The Bible teaches us what we are to believe, and it also teaches us how to apply the truth that God has revealed in His Scripture.

Dominion and Bringing Thoughts Captive

We have erred and sinned greatly because we have forsaken God's standard. The goal of every Christian, the goal of every believer, should be to bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God, to be as obedient and as holy as we could possibly be by the grace of God. The goal of every biblical church is to preach and teach the pure

Word of God, and to show people not only the truth of God's Word, but how to apply that truth as well.

All of this is simply called exercising dominion. Dominion is nothing less than bringing everything into captivity and subjection to Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” Paul is not denigrating what you and I would call physical or carnal weapons. The only thing he is saying is that those kinds of weapons will not work in the warfare that we are fighting. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Now, what is your stronghold? It is your place of defense. It is where you hide, and it is where you run when you are in danger. He says it is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. What, then, is the stronghold of man? Here it is: “Casting down imaginations and every high thing,” or literally every high thought, “that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Notice that our stronghold is our thinking; it is our mind. We are to cast down that stronghold. How? By casting down every imagination and every thought that is contrary to God, and bringing every thought into captivity and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we brought every thought into captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ, that means we would be thinking biblically in our individual lives, thinking biblically when it comes to our families, and thinking biblically when it comes to our churches.

Historical Examples of Biblical Standards in America

We would be thinking biblically when it comes to economics and government. When this country was founded, it was basically founded upon the Word of God. I have copies of practically every colony that was begun in this country—the constitutions, charters, and agreements of the colonies between themselves and the king. Interestingly enough, each one proclaims the Word of God as the standard, the objective standard.

The first charter of Virginia, found in 1606, concerned the settlement of Jamestown. Here is what the charter says: "We, greatly commending and graciously accepting of their desires for the furtherance of so noble a work, which may, by the providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the glory of his divine majesty, in propagating the Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God, and may in time bring the infidels and savages living in those parts to human civility and to a settled and quiet government."

In New Hampshire in 1639, they defined the purpose of government: "Considering with ourselves the holy will of God and our own necessity that we should not live without wholesome laws and civil government among us, of which we are altogether destitute, do in the name of Christ and in the sight of God combine ourselves together to erect and set up among us as such governments as shall be, to our best discerning, agreeable to the will of God."

They wanted their government to be agreeable to the will of God. How would they know what was agreeable to His will? The answer is that it is revealed in His Word.

The New Haven colony, in 1644, adopted rules for its judicial system. In one simple sentence, it declared: "The judicial laws of God, as they were delivered by Moses, are to be a rule to all our courts in this jurisdiction." The courts, then, were to rule based upon biblical law.

I could go on for hours because these charters and constitutions are very plain, but three are sufficient to establish one general concept: we have turned from the Word of God as our standard and followed humanistic standards for years. Consequently, we find ourselves in an extremely deplorable situation, in which most people will probably become absolutely destitute. We have quietly submitted to the tyranny of man.

I am sure you have heard the motto, “Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God.” You may not know its sources, but I will give them to you. First, the phrase was William Tyndale’s. He was the Bible translator—and, if you want to call him an agitator, at least one

who provoked the government of England to righteousness. He lived from 1494 to 1536, and that is why he was

Resistance to Tyranny as Obedience to God

"Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." Benjamin Franklin, in August 1776, proposed that the motto for the seal of the United States should be, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Isn't that interesting? Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, who lived from 1743 to 1826, adopted as his personal motto, "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God."

If you have never seen a picture of the state flag of Virginia, I would encourage you to get on the Internet and get a picture of that flag. It features a woman who is personifying virtue. She is dressed as an Amazon, wearing a helmet. She holds a spear and a sword above. There is the Latin motto, "Sic Semper Tyrannis," which means "thus always to tyrants." At her feet she stands on the crumpled figure of a fallen king. His crown lies by his side, carrying out the theme of popular victory over tyrannical government. The whip and the chain which the king had used are now lying helplessly by his side. Of course, it is "Sic Semper Tyrannis"—thus always to tyrants.

I told you a lot of those things to give you something to really think about. Many of you have heard the name Omar Bradley. Omar Bradley was a five-star general who died in 1981. Here is what Bradley said. Listen: "America today is running on the momentum of a godly ancestry. And when that momentum runs down, God help America." When you stop and think about that one statement, it is true. We have been running and living on what we were and what our founding fathers and those who followed them gave us, which we have forsaken and turned from, and now that momentum is about to expire. When we think of our history as a nation, we can only exclaim with David in 2 Samuel 1:19, "How are the mighty fallen."

Modern Authoritarianism and Blind Submission

The truth of the matter is that we have given up our liberties. We have given up our freedom. We have given up self-defense. We have given up personal responsibility. We have given up accountability.

We have given all these things up to be ruled by a handful of petty, unsaved, unelected, egocentric bureaucrats who are sociopaths, think that they have the ability to rule the world, and desire to rule the world. We have basically descended from a Bible-believing people and from our constitutional republic to authoritarian rule.

If you don't believe that, all you've got to do is look around and try to analyze what has happened in the last two years, especially in relationship to the pandemic. Think with me because I'm going to mention some things that you're totally familiar with. You've heard the phrase, “Follow the science.” That was the admonition. I saw a cartoon of Mr. Bean saying, “I keep trying to follow the science, but it always brings me back to the money.” That was the admonishment, but no one asked which or what science it was.

The unelected and unaccountable CDC in our age who fortune friends who were calling all the shots. Hardly anyone questioned their pronouncements. The people simply obeyed. Most did not question. Most did not research. Most did not ask. Most did not investigate. Most did not think for themselves. Most did not contemplate. They simply obeyed. This is what is called the tyranny of the experts. I've heard two good definitions of expert in my life.

The first one is simple: an expert is anyone 50 miles from home with a briefcase. The second one I even like better: an X is a has-been, and a spurt is a drip under pressure. But no one has asked what the qualifications of these experts were. No one has asked about collusion, credentials, verification, conflict of interest, or the contents of the vaccines.

Most simply rolled up their arms and took the shots. Why? The answer is because of the appearance of authority. So let me spell it out for you. We're no longer ruled by the Word of God as our standard. We're no longer ruled by the Constitution, which is supposed to be the supreme law of the land. We're not only not ruled by the Word of God and not ruled by the Constitution; we're not even ruled by law. We're being ruled by what is known as authoritarianism.

I'm going to show you this in the Bible in just a few minutes. You're going to ask me, what is authoritarianism? I want to give you

the definition. We're going to see this from the Bible, but listen very carefully and think about what has been going on in the last number of years in this country. Here's the definition of authoritarianism: authoritarianism is the principle of blind submission to authority, as opposed to individual freedom of thought and action.

In government, authoritarianism denotes any political system that concentrates power in the hands of a leader or a small elite that is not constitutionally responsible to the body of the people. Authoritarian leaders exercise power arbitrarily, without regard to existing bodies of law, and usually cannot be replaced by citizens choosing freely among competitors in elections. The freedom to create opposition political parties or alternative political groupings is either limited or nonexistent. Authoritarianism means that you are not ruled by law or any objective standard; you are ruled by the whim of one man or several small groups.

To break it down simply, suppose I came into this room and said, "I am the authority. You do what I tell you, and when I tell you to jump, you ask how high. Don't talk back to me. Don't disobey me. You must do what I tell you because I am the authority, and you must remember that I have force on my side. If you disobey me, there will be consequences." That is authoritarianism.

It does not matter whether it is one man or several men. It is not rule by law, by constitution, or by the Word of God. It is rule by the whim of man. Thomas Jefferson said, "Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day, but a series of oppressions pursued unalterably through every change of ministers or administrations too plainly provides a deliberate systematic plan of reducing us to slavery."

So let me ask you something. If you think back over the last couple of Democratic administrations and Republican administrations, what has changed? The answer is nothing. Everything continues down the line.

I am absolutely astounded today to see people who are still wearing masks. I see people riding down the road alone in a car wearing a mask, and people riding a bicycle in the sunshine with a mask. Brother Chrisman told me that he stopped at an Arby's for a

sandwich and saw a black girl working as the cashier. The rubber strap on her mask had broken, so she was trying to hold the mask in place and work the cash register with one hand. In front of him was a white lady who saw her struggling, took off her own mask, and offered it to the black girl.

He said it was as dirty as it could possibly be. I asked, "Well, did the black girl graciously accept it?" He said, "No." I replied, "She has more sense than the white woman who offered it." If you are going to wear a mask, you are not going to want to inhale what everybody else has exhaled. It is simply difficult for me to conceive.

Yet you have to understand that most of these people do nothing but watch television, and they hear it pounded into their heads. The Bible gives us prime examples of authoritarianism. Look back in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 3. The first illustration is Nebuchadnezzar, who was basically a law unto himself.

Biblical Examples of Resisting Authoritarianism

He had set up an image in the plain of Dura and expected everyone to worship it. In all probability, this image was an image of himself. He gave the command, and everyone was to worship. You did not have a choice—although you did have a choice. If you did not do what he said, you would be executed.

John Trapp, the old Puritan commentator, explains why he believed this image was Nebuchadnezzar's. "Having taken Tyre, which was that great service spoken of in Ezekiel 29, verses 18 and 19, God gave him Egypt as his pay for his pains at Tyre and the overthrow of Nineveh, as Nahum had foretold. He was so puffed up with this great success that he set up this monstrous statue of himself to be adored by all on pain of death, that it was his own image which he here erected for such a purpose, as did afterward Gaius Caligula, the Roman emperor. It is gathered, number one, because he did not worship it himself, and number two, because of Daniel 3:12, it is distinguished from his gods, and number three, because this was long since foretold of him in Isaiah 14 and verse 14." At Isaiah 14:4, we find that he is indeed speaking of the king of Babylon.

Looking back at Daniel 3:12, we read of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who had not regarded the king. They served not his gods, nor worshipped the golden image which he had set up. In verse 14, Nebuchadnezzar again said, “Do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up.” The gods and the golden image were separate. Obviously, this was indeed an image of the king of Babylon.

Authoritarians not only like to think they are God; they like to play God. You have to remember that God is sovereign. God has all power; He is omnipotent. If I am going to play God, that means you must obey me or else. I can give commands left and right, and if you do not obey me, then I cannot ascertain that I am really a god. Therefore, I have to force you to obey me upon pain of death.

When this image was set up and the music played, only three refused to bow. They not only refused to bow; they were determined and willing to face the consequences. They were delivered from those consequences because of their obedience, and their obedience and deliverance helped change Nebuchadnezzar’s mind.

Here is why these three Hebrew children did not bow down: they had a totally different standard. Their standard was the law of God, which says, “I shall have no other gods before me.” When the king said, “You must bow down and worship this image that I have made,” they said, “No, we do not, and we will not.”

Those who follow God’s inspired, inerrant, infallible standard will always act differently from those who have a subjective humanistic standard. Those who follow God’s objective standard are always willing to suffer the consequences for their obedience unto God. Their obedience to God is demonstrated by their disobedience to man. In Daniel 3, it was Nebuchadnezzar—one man—saying, “You will do this or else.” That is authoritarianism. His authority was self-assessed. God did not give him that authority; it was usurped.

SCRIPTURE READING - Daniel 6:6-11 (KJV)

> Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king and said thus unto him, King Darius, live forever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors and the princes, the counselors and the captains, have consulted together to

> establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, that it may not be changed according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore, King Darius, sign the writing and the decree.
>
> Now, when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house with his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem. He kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

In Daniel 3, authoritarianism was displayed in one man; in Daniel 6, authoritarianism is displayed in a number of men. Daniel 6 begins: "It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom. And over these three presidents, of whom Daniel was first, that the princes might give an account unto them, and that the king should receive no damage, or have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel, they were envious, but they could find none occasion or fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault in him. Then these men said, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

These men came together, deceived the king, and lied to him to obtain his approval and signature upon an insane law that no one could ask a request of any man or God, save the king, for 30 days. That would mean I could not ask you to come look at my lawnmower, loan me 10 bucks, or do anything. I would have to ask the king, because he was going to sit there and pretend to be a God. It was essentially insane.

They lied when they said, "All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors and the princes, the counselors, the captains have consulted together." Daniel was not included. What did Daniel do

when he found that this law had been passed? “Now, when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime.”

Why did Daniel open his windows? Was he flouting his resistance, being brazen, challenging, or daring these men to throw him into the den of lions? No. He was being biblical. Hold Daniel 6, but look in your Bibles to 1 Kings 8, where Solomon is dedicating the temple.

In 1 Kings 8, beginning with verse 41, Solomon says, “Moreover concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of far country for thy name’s sake. For they shall hear thy great name, and thy strong hand, and thy stretched out arm, when he shall come and pray toward this house. Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all the people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel, that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name.”

Daniel knew the Scriptures. He knew which direction Jerusalem and the temple were, and he prayed toward that temple, based upon Solomon’s prayer. Did Daniel suffer the consequences for his resistance to an ungodly law? Yes. Did God deliver him from those consequences? Yes. Why, then, did Daniel keep doing what he was doing?

The way to pray effectively when you are in trouble is to be accustomed to praying before you get into trouble. When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he prayed three times, as he did aforetime. Why? Because his standard was the Word of God. His standard was not the rule of man, nor was it based upon authoritarianism. His standard was the Word of God.

You have to grasp the absolute superiority of God’s law to man’s law. All authority is delegated; that means all authority is limited. God is the one who gives authority, and He defines, confines, and limits that authority. No parent has authority above and beyond the Word of God. No pastor has authority above and beyond the Word of God. No church has authority over and above the Word of God. No

government has authority over and above the Word of God. It is impossible. If someone claims that authority, then he is usurping and stealing that which God has not given to him.

Look in Acts 5:29: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." What were Peter and the other apostles saying? God is sovereign. God is supreme. God alone is to be obeyed, first, foremost, and always. When men and authority go against God and His standard, God is to be obeyed rather than man, and God enforces this principle.

Look in Acts 5, beginning with verse 17: "Then the high priest rose up and all they that were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and were filled with indignation." What were the apostles doing? They were preaching. "And they laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them forth and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life."

You may not understand the significance of that at this point, so go back to Acts 5:27. Here is what had happened: "When they had brought them," that is, the apostles, "they set them before the council, and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

The apostles were preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus Christ and preaching the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees and the religious rulers caught them and threw them into prison for doing what they had forbidden them to do. Acts 5:18 says, "And laid their hands on the apostles," that is, the Sadducees and the rulers, "and put them in the common prison."

"But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them forth and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." God sent an angel, delivered them out of prison, and told them to do exactly what the rulers had

told them not to do. They obeyed God and preached, and the rulers became upset.

"Did we not straightly command you not to preach anymore in this name?" "We ought to obey God rather than man." Here is a principle: God's word and God's law are supreme and sovereign. They are above the rule and will of man. Authoritarianism is contrary to God's sovereignty. When man's law conflicts with God's law, we must obey God.

Now turn in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 2. If you do not know who Amram and Jochebed were, you are going to find out. Their names are given later in the Bible. Amram and Jochebed were the father and mother of Moses. Look in Exodus chapter 2, beginning with verse 1: "There went a man out of the house of Levi, Amram, and took a wife a daughter of Levi, Jochebed. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink."

Why did she hide Moses for three months? After she could no longer hide him, why did she make the little ark of bulrushes? Go back to Exodus 1:22: "And Pharaoh charged all his people saying, Every son that is of a Hebrew that is born, you shall cast in the river and every daughter you shall save alive."

Watch carefully: "And Pharaoh charged all his people." It is true that the Egyptians were his people. But it is equally true that the Hebrews were his people because they were his slaves. Thus the Egyptians had Pharaoh's authority to murder any male child of the Hebrews, and the Hebrews were expected to murder their own male children. You say, how in the world can you say that?

Stephen is giving his defense in Acts chapter 7. He says, “Till another king arose which knew not Joseph.” Then verse 19 says, “The same dealt suddenly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they,” that is, the fathers, the Hebrews, “cast out their own children to the end that they might not live.”

How in the world could these Israelites cast out their own children? How could they murder them at their own hand? It is still outrageous when we hear of a mother murdering her own children or a father murdering his own child. I just read this week where one man murdered his eight-month-old pregnant, 22-year-old girlfriend, and not only murdered her, but cut her head off and threw it in the dumpster. How can you do things like that?

The answer is that they have a standard, but it is not God's standard. It is their own subjective standard, based upon their own desires, feelings, wants, and wishes. In other words, God's standard is different from fallen man's. God's standard is different from a single authoritarian ruler. God's standard is different from an elite group of rulers.

So here is a good question: Why did Amram and Jochebed not murder Moses? You might say, "Because he was a goodly child." There is more. Hebrews 11:23 says, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents." They were children of faith. They did not obey the king because they saw he was a proper child, but that was only one thing. The parents were not afraid of the king's commandment.

The word afraid is the Greek word phobeo, from which we get our English word phobia. It means to fear, to be afraid, and to reverence. Amram and Jochebed did not reverence the king's ungodly command. They had no fear of that ungodly reprobate when he ordered that all the male children be slain. Why did they not fear? Why did they not reverence?

Why did they not submit to him? The answer is because they had a totally different standard. Their standard was indeed the Word of God, and therefore they were not about to bow to a wicked, corrupt ruler. It is just that simple.

The point is this: Where we are today in this land, we have rejected God's law as our standard. Consequently, the rulers have rejected the Constitution as a standard, and the rule of law is no longer in existence.

Applications and Conclusion

What we're being ruled by is an elite group of authoritarians who believe they have the absolute right to take your life, your possessions, your occupation, or whatever they want, just so they can play God.

Let me make a couple of applications. The first is based on the question, What is your standard? We either must submit to God's standard, His law word, or submit to the standard of man. We must understand that man's authority is always limited.

I have a T-shirt given to me years ago. On the front it says, "Question authority." We should do that: By what authority do you direct me to do anything? Who gave you that authority? How did you derive that authority? You can find out whether that authority is legitimate or not. The United Nations has no authority over the American people.

I do not care what anybody says—neither Fauci, the WHO, the CDC, George Soros, nor Klaus Schwab. We have to understand that we are where we are because we have rejected God's standard and submitted to man's standard. This is one reason we are seeing so much wickedness, violence, murder, and genocide: we have left God's standard and are following man's standard.

When we refuse wickedness and disobey ungodly and wicked laws, it is not rebellion; it is resistance. There is a vast difference between rebellion and resistance. Rebellion can only be against lawful authority. Resistance is directed toward authority that is unlawful, usurped, or stolen. Therefore, we may resist unlawful authority.

Have you ever stopped to think about this? What in the world could the United Nations, George Soros, Klaus Schwab, Yuval Noah Harari, Biden, Pelosi, Harris, or Schumer do if everybody simply stopped obeying them? Their game would be up. We have to return to the objective standard, which is God's law. By His standard, you are illegitimate; you have no authority. You have stolen and usurped.

Even by our own Constitution, Article 6, paragraphs 2 and 3, the Constitution is supposed to be the supreme law of the land—not

what Congress wants, not what Congress says, and not what Biden said: "I'll use my power." He has no power. No ruler has any power above that which is written in the Constitution. Where we are now is because we have given in to authoritarianism rather than the Word of God.

Standards do matter. When we reject the law of God, we reject it at our own peril. When we leave His law, we head straight for destruction. It is impossible to have civil liberty without spiritual liberty. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 17, "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Where the Spirit of the Lord is not, there is no liberty.

If we want our liberty, our freedom, our country, our homes, our families, our churches, and our society, we must return to God's objective standard, obey it, and be willing to suffer whatever consequences come because His Word is right and true. When we disobey man in order to obey the Word of God, our disobedience becomes obedience.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth, and pray, Lord, that You would indeed help us see the absolute importance of Your law, Your written word, and Your commands. Help us bring our lives into conformity. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

The Faithful God

August 24, 2023

Introduction: The Faithful God

It is not necessarily my intent to expound this verse, but to consider the theme found in it. Deuteronomy 7:9 says, “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.” Note that God is specifically referred to as the faithful God. Over and over in the Bible, you will find the phrase that God is faithful, or another phrase referring simply to the faithfulness of God.

The truth of the matter is that I am not only constantly reminded, but also constantly amazed, at the faithfulness of God. It is a truth that should strike home to each of us and should also make us constantly and consistently praise Him for His faithfulness. His faithfulness, in one sense of the word, should be a rebuke to our unfaithfulness.

Doctrinal Deficiency and the Importance of Truth

As we are His children, we should be like Him. In fact, the Bible tells us that we are to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. I think one of the greatest faults, one of the greatest failings, and one of the greatest sins of modern Christendom is that we are doctrinally deficient. We are doctrinally challenged. I suppose that is simply a nice way of saying that we are ignorant concerning biblical truth.

That certainly is true, generally speaking. Consequently, we lose an awful lot of benefit by not understanding these biblical doctrines, especially in relationship to God. Our understanding of truth will keep us sane during what the world calls tragic incidents. We do not go crazy the way other people go crazy because we understand truth.

The Nature of God's Faithfulness

Arthur W. Pink speaks of the faithfulness of God: “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God.” This quality is essential to His being. Without it, He would not be God. For God to be unfaithful would be to act contrary to His nature, which is impossible. “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself.” Faithfulness is one of the glorious perfections of His being. He is clothed with it. “O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee, or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?” So too, when God became incarnate, it was said, “Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.”

What a word is Psalm 36:5: “Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens and thy faithfulness unto the clouds.” Far above all finite comprehension is the unchanging faithfulness of God. Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forfeits his word. To every declaration of promise or prophecy, the Lord has exactly adhered. Every engagement of covenant or threatening, he will make good. For “God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

Therefore does the believer exclaim, “His compassions they fail not, they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness.” Meditate

and concentrate on the faithfulness of God, and let this sink deeply into your heart and mind. Let it not only be a challenge to you, but also a challenge to our own unfaithfulness.

One of the passages that I quote practically every day is Lamentations 3:22–23. When I awaken every morning, I am thankful that the Lord has allowed me and Alice to live through the night. When I go to bed, I am thankful that the Lord has allowed us to live through the day. The Bible tells you very plainly that "it is of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed because His compassions, they fail not. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness."

Dependence on God's Faithfulness in Creation

What we have not really comprehended is that our lives, our breath, our blessings, and everything we take for granted are dependent upon the faithfulness of God. We usually do not consider what would happen to our lives and to this world if God ceased to be faithful. We take it for granted that the sun will come up every morning, that its warmth will produce our food and livelihood, that we will live through the night and the day, and that we will have strength and ability to perform our duties. We take it for granted that we will be given sleep and rest, and that this world will continue to meet our needs and give us

We enjoy these blessings simply because we take them for granted, and we do not realize how dependent everything is upon the faithfulness of God. The Bible says in Psalm 50:1, "The mighty God, even the Lord our God, hath spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the setting or the going down thereof." Psalm 74:16 says, "The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun."

When you stop and think about day and night, summer and winter, those seasons and times continue to exist simply because of the faithfulness of God. In Genesis 8:22, God says, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease." That is a fact. We have day and night, springtime and harvest, winter, cold, and heat only due to the faithfulness of God.

The reason we have productive gardens, rain in due season, and are able to harvest those gardens and enjoy their produce is simply because of the faithfulness of God. He said in Acts 14:17, “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

So God is the faithful God. Unfaithfulness is one of the sins and evils of our modern day. Have you ever considered

Human Unfaithfulness Contrasted

In how many ways have you been unfaithful to Jesus Christ? Have you ever thought about your unfaithfulness to God the Father? How many ways have you and I been unfaithful in our blessings, privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities? Stop and think about unfaithfulness for a moment. There is no way in the world that we could know how many homes have been devastated and how many families have been divided simply because of the unfaithfulness of a spouse.

We have never even considered the fact that many children are totally unfaithful. They are not merely unfaithful to their parents; they are unfaithful to their heritage and their upbringing. Think also about the preachers in the land who are unfaithful to the One who called them to preach His Word. Some are now actively denying certain parts of the Word of God. Those who are not actively denying certain parts of the Word of God have nevertheless been unfaithful through a refusal to study, a lack of study, and a failure to proclaim the totality of God's truth.

In times past, we understood that a man's word was his bond. His word was really a revelation of his character. In times gone by, men would keep their word even if it cost them. Let me show you what I am talking about. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 15. Psalm 15 is a wonderful psalm. The question is asked as to who will abide in God's holy hill and who will abide with the Lord in His tabernacle. Note the answer that is given. The Bible says in verse 1 of Psalm 15, "Lord, who shall abide in my tabernacle?" That is a good question. "Who shall dwell in my holy hill?"

Now God begins to answer those questions: "He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue nor doeth evil to his neighbor nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoreth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not." He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not—in other words, a man who keeps his word regardless of what it costs him. He is a faithful man. He is a true man. Years ago, when I was young and naive, someone told me something, and I believed him. When it did not come to pass, I asked him why he had not kept his word.

He laughed in my face, as though it were foolish of me to think he was ever going to keep his word. It was funny to him. After that day, I never had anything else to do with him. Why would I? Here was someone who did not have enough character to do what he said he was going to do.

I am simply pointing out that even today we are living in what you and I would call a dog-eat-dog society. Hardly anyone keeps his word. Hardly anyone is faithful anymore. In light of that truth, we must understand the Latin phrase caveat emptor. Caveat emptor is a common-law doctrine that places the burden on buyers to reasonably examine the property they are about to buy from the seller. The phrase simply means “let the buyer beware.” It means that the buyer buys at his own risk and that he had better be talking to the seller. He had better be asking specific questions if he does not want to get stung, so to speak.

The point I am trying to make is this: if people were honest and kept their word, caveat emptor would be a useless doctrine. But because of depravity, because of sin, we certainly had better beware. The sad truth is that many Christians do not understand the need or necessity for faithfulness. I have known professing Christians who, when asked, “How long have you been a Christian?” answered, “Twenty years, off and on.” When I hear that, I assume it was far more off than it ever was on. That is for sure. It should not surprise us, in this climate of unfaithfulness, to grasp the inability of professing Christians to be faithful in anything.

Stop and think about the ones who are unfaithful to church. They're unfaithful to worship. They're unfaithful in reading their Bibles. They're unfaithful in prayer. They're unfaithful in giving. They're unfaithful in tithing. They're unfaithful in anything related to the worship of God. How in the world can we emulate our Heavenly Father if we are so unlike Him?

I find this absolutely amazing, and yet at the same time it is so accurate and so true of you and me today. In Mark chapter 14, our Lord takes His inner circle, Peter, James, and John, and goes into the garden to pray. These three are usually always with our Lord. Mark 14:33 says, “And he taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy. And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death, tarry ye here and watch.”

He went forward a little, fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee. Take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.” And He came and found them sleeping, and said unto Simon Peter, “Simon, sleepest thou? Couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”

Can you imagine that? Our Lord comes to Peter and asks, “What? What’s wrong? Can’t you just stay awake for one hour? Can’t you do what I ask you to do for one hour? Can you not be faithful for one hour?” The point here is that the inner circle of the Lord Jesus Christ was with Him, and they failed to do what He asked them to do for just one hour. Peter, James, and John failed in that one hour, and certainly we fail in many ways and at many times.

Luke chapter 16 gives us a good lesson concerning our inconsistencies, our lack of character, and our lack of faithfulness. Beginning with verse 10, after our Lord has already been talking about the unprofitable servant, He makes this conclusion in verse 10.

Faithfulness in Small Things

He said, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. Therefore if ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”

Notice the contrast between unrighteous mammon, which is money, and the true riches. Then He says, “And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

There are several great truths here. First, we must understand that even the smallest things afford us an opportunity to be consistent and faithful. Our Lord said, “He that is faithful in that which is least.” We do not need something huge, great, or incredibly magnificent to prove our love, our grace, and our faithfulness to our God. There are little things that we can use to prove our faithfulness.

What did He say in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 31? “Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” A housewife can keep a house clean for the honor and glory of God. A husband can keep the yard clean for the honor and glory of God. It is the little things, the small things. We do not necessarily need something huge to prove that we are faithful; we can do that in the small things.

Here is a second truth: a man who acts faithfully in that which is small will prove to himself and others that he may also act faithfully in that which is far greater, that which is much larger.

Adam Clarke wrote: “He that is faithful in that which is least, who has the genuine principle of fidelity in him, will make a point of conscience of carefully attending to even the smallest thing, and it is by habituating himself to act uprightly in little things that he acquires the gracious habit of acting with propriety and fidelity and honor and conscience in matters of greater concern. On the contrary, he who does not act uprightly in small matters will seldom feel himself bound to pay much attention to the dictates of honor and conscience in cases of high importance. Can we reasonably expect

that a man who is continually falling by little things has the power to resist temptations to great evils?"

Certainly, that is true. Calvin said: "Christ, therefore, exhorts his disciples to act faithfully in small matters in order to prepare themselves for the exercise of fidelity in matters of the highest importance. He next applies this doctrine to the proper stewardship of spiritual graces, which the world indeed does not estimate according to their value, but which far surpass, beyond all question, the fading riches of the world. Those persons, he tells us, who act improperly and unfaithfully in things of small value, such as the transitory riches of this world, do not deserve that God should entrust to them the inestimable treasure of the gospel and of similar gifts. There is, therefore, in these words an implied threatening, that there is reason to fear lest on account of our abuse of our earthly stewardship we fail to obtain heavenly gifts. In this sense, what is true is contrasted with riches, and what is solid and lasting is contrasted with what is shadowy and fading."

Calvin really hits it on the head. Our Lord is teaching that if we cannot be faithful in the little tiny area of monetary faithfulness, God is never ever going to entrust us with great spiritual blessings. If we would be like our Heavenly Father, we have to learn to be faithful in small things. In Zechariah chapter 4 and verse 10, we are admonished not to despise the day of small things.

I have been thinking on the faithfulness of God, and I want to show you several passages that specifically relate to God's faithfulness. I hope it will be an encouragement to us, in order that we might be more faithful unto Him as well.

God Is Faithful in His Word

God's Faithfulness in His Word, Calling, and Sanctification

God is absolutely faithful in His word. He is faithful in His promises, faithful in His precepts, and even faithful in His punishments. In Deuteronomy 28, verses 1 and 2, Moses records: "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 to the voice of the Lord thy God."

God said, Look, all you have to do is obey. All you have to do is be faithful, and these blessings are going to fall upon you.

Now skip down to verse 15: "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." Then he lists the curses. In other words, God is saying, "I am faithful. I am either going to bless your obedience or curse your disobedience. I am faithful to my word."

That is why David said in Psalm 119:86, "All thy commandments are faithful." He went on to finish, "They persecute me wrongly; help thou me." In other words, "Lord, I am depending upon your word. I am being wronged. I am being sinned against, but here is your word. Here is your promise. Here is your precept. Lord, I am relying upon it."

Have you ever noticed that when Daniel prayed, when Ezra prayed, when Nehemiah prayed, and when Moses prayed, they all reminded God of His word, His promises, and His precepts? "Thou hast said. Thou hast spoken. Thou hast covenanted." How many times when we pray do we say, "Lord,"

You have said in your word. You must understand that God is faithful in his word. That is why David said in Psalm 119:138, "Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful." Everything that God has said is faithful, for he is the faithful God.

God is faithful in calling us to Himself. He said in 1 Corinthians 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." This calling is an effectual calling, and it is a calling that results in salvation. It is a calling that results in fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ. It is a calling whereby we are called to be saints. Note again what he said: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul, writing to the Roman Christians, says, "Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ." Saints in the Bible are often referred to as called ones. He continues, "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He says again, "Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ."

God did not choose you and then forget you. He did not begin and fail to finish. I do not know if you have ever thought about this, but God faithfully provided His so great salvation in Jesus Christ. He faithfully provided every area and every obedience of Jesus Christ for us. Once Jesus Christ accomplished that work, God called us to Himself. By His marvelous grace, out of darkness into light, He faithfully illuminated and enlightened our minds and granted us understanding.

He faithfully released our wills from the bondage of sin. He faithfully then enabled us to come savingly to Jesus Christ by giving us faith. Do you understand that God always finishes that which he started? God is faithful who called you unto his Son Jesus Christ.

God isn't only faithful to his word. He's faithful to call us savingly into himself. If you cannot quote Philippians 1:6, I would encourage you to memorize it: “Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” God did not bring us to Christ to drop us and leave us in the world. He did not bring us to Christ to drop us and leave us to ourselves. He did not bring us to Christ and drop us and leave us to the devil. No, he brought us out that he might bring us in. “Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” He's going to do exactly what he said he's going to do. He will finish the work.

The third truth is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24. The Apostle Paul is praying: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly,” that is, completely, totally. “And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now watch verse 24: “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” In other words, this

This passage puts together the previous two points. God is not only faithful to His Word; He is faithful in calling us savingly to Jesus Christ. But that is not all. He is faithful to sanctify us and to preserve us in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have been called savingly unto Jesus Christ, you are going to be sanctified. That is all there is to it. That is what He said: “Faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it.”

There is no such thing as a justified, unsanctified person. Those whom God justifies, He sanctifies. He may sanctify us through the use of affliction, or through tests, trials, and temptations. I do not know what He will use. But whatever God uses to sanctify us, He will sanctify us, because faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it. God, who is faithful to call us out of darkness and justify us in Jesus Christ, is also faithful to sanctify us and to preserve us in Jesus Christ as well.

Fourthly, God is faithful in His Word, faithful in calling us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and faithful in sanctifying and preserving us. God can sanctify us through tests, trials, afflictions, heartaches—whatever He chooses. If you have not memorized 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13, I would encourage you to do so. Consider what the Bible says: “There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.”

God's Faithfulness in Temptation and Suffering

What does that mean? It means that Clay has the same temptations, tests, or trials that I have; Gary has the same one that I have; Marshall has the same one that Gary has. The point is that none of us experience what you and I would call a supernatural temptation. People say, “Nobody’s ever going through what I’m going through.” That’s a bunch of hogwash. Everybody goes through common temptations, tests, and trials. “There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.”

"But God is faithful, who will not allow or suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." God knows exactly what it will take to sanctify you. He knows exactly what it will take to make you submissive. He knows exactly what it's going to take to give you a broken heart. "There is no temptation taken you but such as is

common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." What is the way of escape? The way of escape is usually through obedience, but note what he said: he's faithful. So let me put it to you like this: whatever test you are going through, whatever trial, whatever affliction, whatever temptation, God put it on you, you can take it. It's that simple, because he's promised he's never ever gonna put more on us than we can handle. "There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow or suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able." Now in

light of that, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 103. I want you to see this truth in light of 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 13. I love this passage, and I've quoted this to myself so many, many times. Before I read it, let me ask you a question. I know the answer. Have you ever been tired? Have you ever been just given out? Have you ever been to the point that you think, "I just can't go on"? Really? I want you to see this. Psalm 103, note if you would verse 13. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him, for he knoweth our frame.

He remembereth that we are but dust." You remember that passage? "There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." Think about this: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust."

There have been times in my life when I wanted and needed to do things in the ministry, but I would say, “Lord, I’m worn out. I can’t keep going unless I get some rest, unless I get a break.” Do you realize that even our Lord told His disciples, “Come ye apart into a desert place, and rest a while”? Lester Roloff used to say, “If you don’t come apart, you will come apart.” That is true.

But notice: “Like as a father pitieth his children.” I had children who were supposed to perform certain tasks, and sometimes they could not quite finish. What would I do? I would go over and help them. I would have pity upon them. That is exactly what God does

for us: “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” When we think that we cannot, He helps us.

You remember that the Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh. Three times he besought the Lord to remove it, and what did God say? “My grace is sufficient for thee.” God knows exactly what we can take and what we cannot take.

God is known in faith in His Word. He is faithful in calling us, faithful in sanctifying us, and certainly faithful in protecting us. But notice 1 Peter 4:19: “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” There is suffering according to the will of God. It could be by means of sanctification or glorification. There are many reasons why we suffer.

May I remind you of Philippians 1:29: “For unto you it is given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Just as faith is God’s gift, suffering is also a gift of God. Just as God does not give His gift of faith to everyone, He does not give His gift of suffering to everyone. But those who are called upon to suffer are to commit their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator. God is faithful. Do you realize that God knows exactly

How does God comfort us, console us, and calm our fears and anxieties? According to 2 Corinthians chapter 1, He is indeed the God of all comfort. He will protect us, preserve us, and provide for us. He is the faithful Creator, Savior, and Redeemer.

Scripture presents many passages concerning God's faithfulness. In light of that truth, God requires faithfulness in each of us. He requires faithfulness in that which is least, because that evidences whether or not we will be faithful in that which is greater. When we were looking in Luke chapter 16, I pointed out that the true riches are not monetary. The true riches are the blessings of God and the ability to honor and worship Him. God does require faithfulness.

I believe, based upon Scripture, that one reason God has not used us—and by us, I mean Christendom in general—for His greater good, for a revival, so to speak, or for an awakening to truth and righteousness, is because of our unfaithfulness. Scripture says,

"Every man will proclaim his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find?"

The Requirement of Faithfulness for Stewards

Stop and think about the unfaithfulness in the average Christian and in the average church. The Bible says, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 2, "Moreover, it is required of a steward to be found faithful." It is required of a steward to be found faithful. The word "required" is the Greek word "zeteo." Literally, it is demanded of a steward that a man be found faithful.

How many of you would keep an unfaithful housekeeper? How many of you would keep an unfaithful employee? If Marshall hired me to give him forty hours in five days, and the first week I showed up for four hours, the second week I showed up for six hours, and the third week I showed up for two hours, how long do you think I would have a job?

Dr. Bob Jones Sr. used to say it like this: "The greatest ability is dependability." That is true. God demands that we be faithful. "Moreover, it is required of a steward that a man be found faithful." Each of us is a steward. Think about this: God has entrusted each one of us with knowledge, abilities, money, families, opportunities, and responsibilities. We have a stewardship. Marshall and Megan have a stewardship with those three children. Anyone who has children has a stewardship. Anyone who has money, abilities, or knowledge has a stewardship. God requires us to be faithful.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 101:1-8 (KJV)

David said in verse 1:

> “I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me. I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they

> may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord."
>
> Now, think about this. This is a psalm of David, and David makes a statement in verse 6. It is very important. He said, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me." May I remind you that David is a type of Jesus Christ? In fact, Jesus Christ sits upon the throne of David. When you get to Matthew 1:1, Jesus Christ is called the son of David as well as the son of Abraham. But now in verse 6 he says this: "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me." Now the word "faithful" is the Hebrew word

"Emun" refers to those who are trustworthy, worthy of confidence, firm, steadfast, and faithful. In other words, not only his eyes, but God's eyes are upon them, looking for them, recognizing them, using them, and blessing them.

John Gill, commenting on Psalm 101:6, says that Christ's eyes are upon faithful persons and faithful ministers of the Word—those who preach the gospel faithfully, administer the ordinances truly, watch over the souls of men, and faithfully reprove and exhort them. Christ's eyes are upon them to keep and preserve them, to honor and reward them with a crown of life that fadeth not away. His eyes are also upon faithful members of churches: those who truly believe in Him, hold fast the faithful word, and keep close to His worship and ordinances. His eyes are upon them to show favor, bestow blessings, protect and defend them, and preserve them from perishing, that they may dwell with Him, sit with Him at His table, at the council board, or in judgment, and assist Him in the affairs of government. Those who are faithful shall dwell with Christ both here and hereafter. They dwell in Him and with Him by faith and have communion with Him; they dwell in His house below, and shall dwell with Him above forevermore.

Even John Gill takes this to refer to Jesus Christ, the greater David, whose eyes are upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Him.

Counted Faithful in Christ

Now, God does require us to be faithful. Think about this: He tells us in Matthew chapter 5, "Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." Have you ever stopped to consider the application of this truth? He says in 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 16, "Be ye holy; for I am holy, saith the Lord." If the holiness of God demands that we be holy, does not the faithfulness of God demand that we be faithful? We are to be like our Heavenly Father and emulate Him, and we cannot bring Him honor and glory unless we are faithful.

Now, if I were to ask you, "Have you ever been unfaithful to the Lord Jesus

Christ?" I believe I know what your answer would be, because you would have to answer yes. I am a sinner. I have not prayed the way I should. I have not studied the way I should. I have not witnessed the way I should. There are a lot of things I have not done as I should. I have not treated folks the way I should. I have not been the sweetest husband, wife, or child. Yes, we have failed. I want you to see the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Our Lord, of course, is destroying His enemies. The Bible says, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." We have already seen that we are called of the Lord. We know that we are chosen because the Bible tells us that He chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. We can understand called and chosen, but faithful?

Each of us understands that there have been times in our lives when we have been unfaithful, either through ignorance or through sheer rebellion and sin. We have been unfaithful, and yet the Bible says that those who are with Jesus Christ are called, chosen, and faithful.

Now look in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 12. Look what the Apostle Paul said: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." Here is a good question based upon 1 Timothy 1:12: Was Paul perfect? No. Paul was a sinner. Was Paul always faithful?

The answer is no. Only Jesus Christ is perfect, and only Jesus Christ is always faithful. But look at what Paul said in verse 12: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." The word "counted" in the Greek is hegeomai, which literally means to count, to think, or to esteem. So how did God esteem Paul faithful? How did He count him faithful? He counted and esteemed him faithful because he was in Jesus Christ, who is perfect, the faithful witness, and obedient par excellence. He was in Jesus Christ.

Here is the greatness of God: even in our unfaithfulness, which is sin and wickedness, God in His grace and mercy looks at us and sees us in Jesus Christ. Since Jesus Christ is the faithful One, He views us as faithful in Jesus Christ.

That ought to challenge us to endeavor to be more faithful in every area of life. The Bible says in Proverbs 28:20, "A faithful man shall abound with blessings." If we want the blessings of God, we need to learn to be faithful in the minutest and smallest areas, because he that is faithful in that which is least will habituate himself to be faithful in that which is greater. If God graciously counts us faithful in Jesus Christ, we should never let Him down. We should say, "Father, help me to live up to Your estimation of me in Jesus Christ. Help me to be the faithful servant."

What is the blessing our Lord promised? He will say to the faithful servant, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." We need faithfulness because our God is faithful, and we must be like Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. Lord, we confess that we have failed in so many areas and been unfaithful in so many ways. Yet, Lord, Thou art the faithful God, and Thou hast covered all our sins and iniquities in the sacrifice and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We give Thee praise. Help us, Lord, to be what we should be, what we ought to be, and what we can be by Thy grace. Make us holy and make us faithful, in the name of Jesus Christ. We ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

How The Mighty Have Fallen

January 2, 2024

Introduction and David's Lament

All right. I want you to open your Bibles, if you would, please, to 2 Samuel, chapter 1. I'm actually going to bring the message which I should have brought to you last week. I preached a different message this morning and you may or may not get it. But the title of the message this morning that I preached was "Ears, Thumbs and Toes." So you might be interested in it. And I'm sure it'll be on the net before long. But look in your Bibles, if you would, please, to 2 Samuel chapter 1. The title of this message is "How the Mighty Have Fallen." So if you look in 2 Samuel 1 in verse 27, I'm just going to read this text momentarily. David says, "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" This statement comes over David's lamentation.

Of the death of Saul and his son, Jonathan. So if you look in verse 17: "And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (Also he bade them teach the children of Israel the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.) The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty

fallen!" And then he goes on down and he talks about Saul and Jonathan. And this elegy, then, is a deep testimony to the depth of David's sincere grief over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. He also taught that this lamentation was to be made and taught to the children of Israel as well. Now, you have to remember that Saul treated David as an enemy.

He chased him many times, tried to kill him twice. He threw a javelin at him, tried to pin him to the wall. The interesting thing is, although Saul treated David as an enemy, David never retaliated in kind. And David maintained a biblical attitude towards Saul's wickedness the whole time. I want you to look at it, if you would, in 1 Samuel chapter 24. David had an excellent opportunity to kill Saul and he refused to do so. So in 1 Samuel chapter 24, beginning there with verse 4, look at what the Bible says. Saul now has come into the cave where David and his men are hiding, and he does not know that David and his men are there. "And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt."

David said unto his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.” David had a perfect opportunity to kill Saul, and he refused to do so. Even cutting off the skirt of Saul's garment convicted him.

Again, David had a perfect opportunity to kill Saul. Saul and his men had been chasing David, but now they were at rest at night, and God had caused a deep sleep to fall upon Saul and all those surrounding him. Abishai said to David, “God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day.”

“Now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.” David said to Abishai, “Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and 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 cruse of water, and let us go."

Here is the interesting thing. Although David's heart smote him in 1 Samuel chapter 24, in chapter 26 it was Abishai who urged him. Abishai was a warrior, and he begged David to let him kill Saul. In effect, he said, "He will feel a thing. I will not have to smite him a second time. I know how to kill him. Let me kill him." David refused. He told Abishai to take the spear and the cruse of water, and they left. David then called Saul, awakened him, and told him that he had had the opportunity to kill him but had not done so. David never retaliated against Saul.

Saul's Rejection by God

Saul was chosen by God to be king, anointed by God to be king, and actually became king. Yet because of Saul's disobedience, wickedness, and rebellion, he was rejected by God after he had already been anointed. In 1 Samuel 15, God sent Saul on a mission to kill the Amalekites. Saul partially obeyed: he killed all that was vile, but he saved Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive, as well as the best of the oxen and the best of the sheep. He simply would not kill everything. The word of God came to him and told him that he was rejected. Saul said to Samuel:

"Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou."

Saul had been chosen by God, anointed by God, and initially used by God. God did use him to defeat the Philistines and drive the Philistines away from the people of Israel. But Saul disobeyed God, and God rejected him. Saul not only lost his life; he also lost his kingdom because of his rebellion against God.

What is true of individuals, as we have just seen in the life of Saul, is also true of nations. God is free to choose whomever He will, and God is free to dispose whomever He will, whether they are individuals or nations. Jeremiah 18 shows that we are no longer speaking only about individuals, but about nations. We read this passage several weeks back, but we look at it again in light of this truth:

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold."

God's Sovereignty Over Nations

"He wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."

"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them."

"Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."

God said, just like the clay is in the potter's hand, so the nations are in His hand. Just like the potter can make the vessel into anything that he desires, God says, I can make nations and kingdoms into anything that I desire. I can either build them up or I could destroy them. I can pull them down.

Think about the title, "How the Mighty Have Fallen." Everyone will understand that things have changed greatly in America. Things have changed greatly since I was a boy and since I was a young man. I've often thought that it was my generation that tasted the real last little bit of freedom that we really had in this country.

America's Moral Decline

But things have gotten progressively worse. We have increased in wickedness. We've embraced socialism and communism. We've debauched our economy. We've destroyed manliness and femininity. We have supported laziness and indolence by an unbiblical and an ungodly welfare system. We've also destroyed an already unbiblical educational system that turns out dysfunctional illiterates by the thousands every year.

I could give illustration after illustration, but think about this: our churches are also impotent. I read a quote this week: “Christianity has changed.” Someone objected, “No, Christianity has not changed. Christians have changed. Christianity is really the truth and the same. It is just Christians who have changed.” We have perverted the gospel, destroyed God's law, and turned our backs upon the Lord. Our churches are impotent in one sense of the word. Christianity is hated and despised.

Secularism and humanism seemingly have triumphed. They are not just on the rise; they are in control. Governments, both state and federal, are run by misfits, intellectually challenged morons, enemies, traitors, and treasonous individuals. There may be one or two exceptions, but by and large, that is an accurate statement of governments. Whether you are talking about the federal government in Washington, D.C., or state governments in Atlanta, Georgia, and Tallahassee, Florida, it does not matter. Usually they are as corrupt as they could be.

So here is the question: How have we gotten into the mess that we are in? How did we get into the state in which we now exist? The short answer is that we have forsaken God and God's law. We have turned our backs upon Him. That is for sure. But most of us have never realized the depth from which we have fallen and the depth into which we have fallen.

Look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 28. You will see basically the same truth in Leviticus chapter 26. If you want to know about the curses and blessings of God, read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. In Deuteronomy chapter 28, the first fourteen verses deal with the blessings for obedience.

Biblical Curses for Disobedience

In 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 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.” Through verse 14, you will find all the blessings if we are obedient.

Then, in verse 15, God 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; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field.” All of the curses continue down to about verse 68.

In verse 43, this is part of God’s curses for disobedience: “The stranger that is within thee”—and remember, a stranger in the Bible is an alien, not merely someone from a different country, but someone who holds a different culture and a different faith. 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, 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." And then he said, "The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from afar." Notice what God is saying: the enemy that is within, the stranger that is within, is going to get up very high. You are going to get down very low. He is going to be the head; you are going to be the tail.

This is part of the curse for disobedience. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 32. Notice the imagery given to us of how this actually appears to God. In Jeremiah 32, beginning with verse 32, God says: "Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them."

"Yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction." If you were speaking to me as sincerely and genuinely as possible, and I simply turned my back on you, letting you speak to my back and not to my face, you would consider that an insult, and rightly so. I would be saying, "I'm not interested in what you have to say. I don't even want to listen to you."

This is what God is saying: "I sent men to teach you, but you turned to me the back. You would not listen." Now go back to Jeremiah chapter 18. This has already happened, but notice what God says to these same people in verse 17: "I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity."

God says, "You have turned your back on me. Now, when your calamity falls upon you and you are screaming and crying, I will turn my back on you. You would not listen to me. I will not listen to you." That is the lex talionis, the law of retribution.

Isaiah 63:10 says, "But they rebelled"—we're talking about Judah, Jerusalem, and Israel—"but they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit." I preached an entire message just on this one verse. "Therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." They

vexed God. They turned their backs upon Him. He turned His back upon them, turned to be their enemy, and fought against them.

You remember when Judah was being attacked by Babylon. Zedekiah sent word to Jeremiah and said, "Pray for us that maybe the Lord will turn this people away from us." God told Zedekiah through Jeremiah, "He's not turning them back. He's going to fight against you himself. And all these kings are going to assemble themselves in the gates of Jerusalem." That's exactly what happened.

Now, here's what I'd like to do for the next little while. I want to share with you some of the original charters and constitutions of the original colonies. You've heard me say this before, and I have copies of all of them. You're going to find that they were basically the same. If you were an early colonial and wanted to hold office in this country, you could not hold office unless you were a Christian, adhered to the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, and confessed faith in Jesus Christ.

America's Christian Foundations

So let me begin by showing you a few samples. I'm going to come back to one of them, but I want you to think about this: "How have the mighty fallen?" Think how far we have fallen and the depth into which we have fallen. Here is the Constitution of the state of North Carolina in 1776: "There shall be no establishment of any one religious church or denomination in this state in preference to any other."

Now listen to the next article, Article 32: "That no person who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion or the divine authority of the Old and New Testaments or shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of this state shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this state."

If you did not adhere to the inspiration authority of the word of God, and if you were not a Christian, you could not hold office. You did not have to be a Baptist, an Anglican, or a Presbyterian, but you had to be a Christian.

Here is the Constitution of the state of South Carolina, 1778, Article 38: "That all persons and religious societies who acknowledge that there is one God and a future state of rewards and punishments and that God is to be publicly worshipped shall be freely tolerated. That all denominations of Christians in this state demeaning themselves peacefully and faithfully shall enjoy equal religious and civil privileges." In other words, you had to be a Christian, and it did not matter whether you were a Presbyterian, Baptist, or Episcopalian. You had to be a Christian.

Normally, we think of the North as being apostate, and it did become apostate later on. But listen to the Constitution of Massachusetts in 1780: "The governor shall be chosen annually. And no person shall be eligible to this office unless at the time of his election, he shall declare himself to be of the Christian religion."

Chapter 6, Article 1 states: "All persons elected to state office or to the legislature must make and subscribe the following declaration: I, [blank], do declare that I believe the Christian religion and have a firm persuasion of its truth." Article 3 states: "And every denomination of Christians demeaning themselves peacefully and as good subjects of the Commonwealth shall be equally under the protection of the law and no subordination of any sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law."

Once again, they said you had to be a Christian, but there would be no state religion. Everyone would be tolerated as long as they adhered to the belief that the Bible is the word of God and the Christian religion is true. The Constitution of the state of New Hampshire, 1784, says: "And every denomination of Christians demeaning themselves quietly as good citizens of the state shall be equally under the protection of the laws and no subordination." It is the same thing. A lot of these states had exactly the same wording, but every one of them required Christians to be rulers.

The constitution of the state of Vermont, 1786, says: "And each member of the legislature, before he takes his seat, shall make and subscribe the following declaration: I do believe in one God, the creator and governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked. And I do acknowledge the scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration and

own and profess the Christian religion. And no further or other religious test shall ever hereafter be required of any civil officer or magistrate in this state."

You had to affirm that you believed the Bible and had a firm faith in the Christian religion. Not amazing.

This is the constitution of the state of Tennessee. It was the original constitution—1796. Listen to Article 8, Section 2: "No person who denies the being of God or a future state of rewards and punishment shall hold any office in the civil department of this state." If you deny the Scripture, if you deny the Lord Jesus Christ, you could not hold office.

John Jay, the very first Supreme Court justice, was appointed by George Washington. He was also a founding father, a member of the first and second Continental Congresses, and instrumental in causing the Constitution to be ratified. Along with Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, he wrote the Federalist Papers. On October 12, 1816, John Jay 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."

Here is the Constitution of the state of Mississippi, from 1817: "No person who denies the being of God or a future state of rewards and punishments shall hold any office in the civil department of this state." Note that every one of these constitutions read so far required a belief in the Word of God, faith in Christianity, and particularly a belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someone is going to say, "But the Constitution forbids a religious test. How could these states include this in their constitutions if the Constitution of the United States says there is to be no religious test?" Here is the wording of the United States Constitution, Article 6: "The senators and representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all 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 to any office or public trust under the United States."

In 1787, the term "religion" referred to the different religious groups or denominations of Christianity. When it said there was to be no religious test, it meant there was not to be any denominational test. In other words, the United States Constitution was saying, “We're not going to have the Baptist religion as our state religion. We're not going to have the Presbyterian. We're not going to have the Anglican. We're not going to be like England.” There was not to be a religious test. Article 6 did not mean the exclusion or denial of Christianity, nor did it require a secular government. It meant only that a person did not have to be of a certain denominational persuasion to hold office in the state.

You need to be a Christian. Now, in 1796, the Tennessee Constitution said this in Article 8, Section 2: "No person who denies the being of God or a future state of rewards and punishment shall hold any office in the civil department of this state." If you deny God or judgment, you cannot hold any office in Tennessee.

Here is Article 11, Section 4: "That no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under this state." In Article 8, they said no person who denies the being of God or judgment can hold office. In Article 11, they said there would be no religious test. This religious test had nothing to do with believing in Jesus Christ or having Christianity as a basic foundation. It meant there was no denominational test. A fixed state of religious beliefs for the office holder is prescribed in Article Chapter 8, while Chapter 11 says there will be no religious test, which would be a denominational test.

Prescribing a requirement professing, "I, [blank], do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God blessed forevermore. I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration"—this was the Constitution of Delaware in 1776—was not considered a religious test, because it was not a denominational test.

So understand this: God can either build nations or destroy nations. Those who turn their backs upon God, God turns His back upon them.

Tocqueville's Observations on American Christianity

Consider where we were and where we are. Let us look to the 1800s. Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America is a work many have heard of but perhaps never read. Tocqueville was a French social scientist who traveled to the United States in 1831 and wrote this two-part work in 1835 and 1840.

De Tocqueville wrote, “Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention. And the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things to which I was unaccustomed.

“In France, I’d almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America, I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country. The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive of the one without the other.”

He said the Americans conceived of Christianity and liberty so intimately in their minds that they could not possibly think of one without the other. Second Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 17 explains it: “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and 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 no liberty.

De Tocqueville continued, “And with them, this conviction does not spring from a barren, traditionary faith, which seems to vegetate in the soul rather than live.” In other words, he says this is a living thing. Then he goes on: “Religion in America”—and, by the way, back in those days, religion equaled Christianity—“Religion in America” or Christianity in America “must be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country. For if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of it.”

He called religion, or Christianity, in America the foremost political institution. Then he said, “This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or a party, but belongs to the whole nation.” Everybody in the 1800s understood this. Everybody in the 1700s

understood this. He went on: “The sects or the denominations that exist in the United States are innumerable.

They all differ in respect to the worship due to the Creator, but they all agree in respect to the duties due from man to man. Each denomination adores the Deity in its own peculiar manner, but all denominations preach the same moral law in the name of God. Moreover, all the sects or denominations of the United States are comprised within the great unity of Christianity, and Christian morality is everywhere the same. Whether you were in Massachusetts, Vermont, South Carolina, or Pennsylvania, there would be Christian morality.

He said it did not matter where you went or which denomination you listened to; all of them agreed on Christian morality. I wonder how that works out today, especially when you have churches now that are having gay parades and LGBTQ and whatever else was there. I'm just pointing out the fact we're in the world is Christian morality. We've got to understand from where we have fallen and the depth into which we have fallen.

De Tocqueville went on: "In the United States, the sovereign authority is religious"—or Christian. "The sovereign authority is Christian. There is no country in the whole world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence than in America. America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept the greatest real power over men's souls, and nothing better demonstrates how useful and natural it is to man since the country where it now has the widest sway is the most enlightened and the freest." Let that sink in.

You lose Christianity, you lose freedom. In August of 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville traveled through Chester County, New York, and had the opportunity to listen to a court case. He writes: "While I was in America, a witness who happened to be called to the court of the county of Chester declared that he did not believe in the existence of God or in the immortality of a soul. The judge refused to admit his evidence on the ground that the witness had destroyed beforehand all confidence of court in what he was about to say."

The newspaper related the fact without any further comment. The New York Spectator of August 23rd, 1831, wrote: “The Court of the Common Pleas of Chester County, New York, a few days since rejected a witness who declared his disbelief in the existence of God. The presiding judge remarked, that he had not before been aware that there was a man living who did not believe in the existence of God, and that this belief constituted the sanction of all testimony in a court of justice, and that he knew of no case in a Christian country where a witness has been permitted to testify without such belief.” That is shocking. In 1831, the judge said he could not believe there was a man who did not believe in God. You could not even be an atheist and be a witness; nobody would believe you.

In 1895, Josiah Hotchkiss Gilbert compiled many dictionary quotations. He quoted de Tocqueville: “Christianity is the companion of liberty in all of its conflicts, the cradle of its infancy and the divine source of its claims.” De Tocqueville understood that Christianity was basically the foundation of this country.

A contemporary of de Tocqueville traveled with him across America. He was a French historian named Gustave de Beaumont. De Beaumont gave his observations, and said: “In America, Christian religion is always at the service of freedom. It is a principle of the United States legislature that to be a good citizen, it is necessary to be religious or Christian, and it's no less well-established rule that to fulfill one's duty toward God, it's necessary to be a good citizen. In general, anyone who adheres to one of the religious sects or denominations, whose number is immense in the United States, enjoys all his social and political rights in peace.

“But the man who would claim to have neither a church nor religious beliefs would not only be excluded from all civil employment, and from all political offices, but would be an object of moral persecution of all kinds. No one would care to have any social relationships with him.” The man who was not a Christian, who claimed to be an atheist, would be excluded from all civil employment and political offices; no one would want anything to do with him. Then he said: “No one in the United States believes that a man without religion could be an honest man.”

How far have we fallen? It is one thing to say, “This country was founded on the Bible. This country was founded on Christianity,” until you realize the depth of that foundation. Then you look around and see where we are today, and all of a sudden, we should be very shocked.

Tocqueville's Prediction of Despotism

Tocqueville basically predicted how we as Americans would eventually lose our freedoms. This is based upon his observations. I am not saying this is prophetic, nor am I saying what he wrote is biblical. But what he said is basically accurate. He said, and I am quoting, “It would happen a little at a time.”

“I had noted in my stay in the United States that a democratic state of society similar to the American model could lay itself open to the establishment of despotism with unusual ease.” Listen: “It would debase men without tormenting them.”

If you have never read Rushdoony’s book, The American Indian, I would encourage you to do so. It is only a small book. Rushdoony was a missionary to the American Indians for eleven years. In that book, Rushdoony explains how the federal government destroyed the American Indian. The Indians originally were great hunters and great warriors. Now they are drunkards and dopeheads. It is all because of what the federal government did to the American Indian.

In the same book, Rushdoony shows how the federal government has destroyed the American blacks. When I was a boy, we would have as many as 200 blacks a day working on our farms. They would work. Not today. In that book, he also tells how the white race is being destroyed.

Look at the welfare system. You get paid for having babies out of wedlock. You get paid for not working. What happened to the mighty hunting powers of the American Indian? How he could read tracks, broken leaves, and broken limbs? Not anymore. “It would debase men without tormenting them. Men all alike and equal turned in upon themselves,” now listen, “...in a restless search for their petty, vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls.”

You remember the bread and circuses in Rome. This is what he is saying: “Above these men that are being debased, and allowed to fulfill all of their lusts, above these men stands an immense and protective power.” Listen: “It prefers its citizens to enjoy themselves provided that they have only enjoyment in mind. It restricts the activity of free will within a narrow range and gradually removes autonomy itself from each citizen. The ruling power, having taken each citizen one by one in its powerful grasp, spreads its arms over the whole society, covering the surface of social life with a network of petty, complicated, detailed, and uniform rules.” Wear your mask. Social distance. You cannot go out.

“It does not break men's wills, but it does soften and bend and control them. It constantly opposes what actions they perform. It inhibits, represses, drains, snuffs out, dulls so much effort that finally it reduces each nation to nothing more than a flock of timid and hard-working animals with the government as shepherd, a single protective and all-powerful government. Individual intervention is suppressed. It is in the details that we run the risk of enslaving men.”

Then he says this: “For my part, I would be tempted to believe that freedom in the big things of life is less important than in the slightest.” I want to stop there. There is not much more, but I want you to listen. He says, “For my part, I would be tempted to believe that freedom in the big things of life is less important than that in slightest.” Let me explain this to you, because every great thing, every big thing, is made up of small things.

I remember when I was in graduate school. We were in Berkhof's systematic theology, and we were discussing the sovereignty of God. I was an old man when I was there—or, when I say I was an old man, I was young, but I was still older than most of those students because I was a married man and had children. But I never will forget that we were discussing the sovereignty of God.

I usually refer to him as a kid. He was taller than I am, but he was a younger man. He raised his hand and said, “Dr. Neal, I believe that God is sovereign in all the big things, but not the little things.” Before I could catch myself, I said out loud, “Oh, what utter blasphemy.” Of

course, everybody looked at me. Dr. Neal looked at me, and I looked up at Dr. Neal. I said, “Dr. Neal, I'm sorry for that outburst.”

But I said, that is such a blasphemous statement. If you do not correct it, I am—because every big thing is made up of a series of small things. If there is anything over which God is not sovereign, then God is not God. He is not in control. Dr. Neal said, "Mr. Weaver's right."

And so this is what he is saying: "For my part, I'd be tempted to believe that freedom in the big things of life is less important than the slightest." In other words, when we begin to give in to the little things, all of a sudden the big thing is gone. Every big thing is made up of a series of little things. Then he goes on to say, "Subjection in the minor things of life is obvious every day."

Look up the word "license" in Black's Law Dictionary or Bouvier's Law Dictionary. Do you know what the word "license" means? It means permission from a competent authority to do that which otherwise would be unlawful to do. Marriage licenses are a recent invention. People got married for centuries before marriage licenses ever came along. People drove before driver's licenses ever came along. To my horror, years ago—probably thirty to forty years ago—I had a pastor friend's son in Fairfax, Virginia, who was arrested for cutting down a tree on his own property without a permit.

I could not believe it. He said, "Subjection in the minor things of life is obvious every day. It constantly irks them until they give up the exercise of their will and enfeebles their spirit. It will be useless to call upon those very citizens who become so dependent upon central government to choose from time to time the representative of this government." He concluded: "Increasing despotism in the administrative sphere. They reckon citizens are incompetent. It is difficult to imagine how men who have completely given up the habit of self-government could successfully choose those who should do it for them. The vices of those who govern and the ineptitude of those governed would soon bring it to ruin and revert it to its abasement to a single master."

Call to Repentance

He has hit the nail right on the head when we look through history and at where we are today. The truth of God's word demonstrates how far we have fallen and shows how God can turn His back on a nation when that nation turns its back upon God. We fight against Him, and He fights against us. Romans chapter 1, verse 28, tells us that those who did not like to retain God in their knowledge were given over by God to a reprobate mind. All God has to do to destroy a nation is let us do our own thing. All God has to do to destroy a man is let him go. He will destroy himself.

People cannot think clearly. We cannot think clearly biblically, constitutionally, ethically, or morally. Why? I do believe the confusion and lack of education in truth are purposeful.

Unless we repent as individuals, families, churches, and a nation, we will be right back under a George. It may not be George III. It might be a George Soros, a George Klaus Schwab, or anyone ruling us for our good and benefit.

We have lost the concept of freedom and liberty. Because we have lost those two things, we have lost the truth of God's word. In our Thursday-night Bible study, I have been teaching Romans 13 to people who had never heard it. Some of their most surprising statements were, "Why have we never heard this? Why have we never been taught this?" The truth of the matter is this, folks.

If you perceive how far we have fallen, it ought to scare you, make you cry out, and pray to God. The foundation of this country was the Christian religion, but Christianity has now been usurped by secularism, humanism, and every other ism under the sun. We need to turn our face to God, ask forgiveness, and begin obeying His Word. How have the mighty fallen—as individuals, families, churches, societies, and nations?

Europe is in worse condition than we are. If God is not merciful and we do not repent, we are in trouble up to our eyeballs.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, the warning, and the education. Help us see how desperately we need Thee, how far we have fallen,

and into what depths. We are at the danger point. Lord, turn us, and we shall be turned. Quicken us, and we shall fall upon Thy name. Give us Your grace and mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask, Amen.

CHAPTER 19

Sent to War

February 21, 2024

Introduction: The Concept of Being Sent to War

Second Chronicles chapter 6. We're going to read verses 34 and 35. Let me say this before I begin the message today. This is a message that I really wanted to preach yesterday and we ran out of time. So for those of you who were not able to come to the conference yesterday, I started off with a message that I actually taught here on responsibility and responding back in November. I actually planned that message just for the meeting yesterday. But once I saw it, I just thought it was so important that I went ahead and preached it here. But then after that, I dealt with a message on biblical mindset when it came to self-defense. And then, of course, I preached two messages on the biblical mandates for self-defense. And so I had this fifth message, which I never got to bring, which I just simply entitled Sent to War. So if you will notice in your Bibles, Second Chronicles, chapter 6, verses 34 and 35, Solomon is praying at the dedication of the temple and notice, if you would, what he said in verse 34: "If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and

they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen and the house which I've built for thy name, then hear thou from heaven their prayer and their supplication and maintain their cause." Now the phrase that caught my attention as I was reading through 2 Chronicles on this passage is verse 34, when he said, "If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them." Oftentimes we hear the phrase "going to war" or "sent to war." I've had numerous uncles as well as other relatives that were sent to war. And usually when you ask someone, "Well, where is so-and-so?" or "Where is Uncle so-and-so?" the response is, "They've gone to war" or "They have been sent to war." In other words, when you say "he's been sent to war," "he's gone to war," it could imply an eagerness and a readiness to go, but it also could imply a necessity to go as well. Usually when someone says "he was sent to war," that means he either enlisted or he was drafted and he was sent there by his government.

The truth of the matter is this: everyone has enemies, but that does not necessarily mean that you have to war against those enemies. Likewise, governmentally speaking, all governments have enemies. But unless a government or its people are endangered, it does not necessitate a war.

The Nature of War: Just vs. Unjust Wars

If you've never read the speech—now a little booklet—by General Smedley Butler entitled "War is a Racket," I would encourage you to read it. It's very short. I understand that the military-industrial complex and its desire to keep wars going is rooted in profit. For them, war is profit. The death, destruction, and devastation do not matter to them or concern them whatsoever. The bottom line is profit. It's the same way with the pharmaceutical industry, whose bottom line is profit. Both the military-industrial complex and the pharmaceutical industry are controlled by money. It's just that simple. They want the profit.

There is a vast difference between what you and I would simply call war and a just war. Practically all of our wars since the War of Northern Aggression have been unjust wars. An unjust war is usually one in which you are fighting for empire, profit, gas, or oil. A lot of

our last wars have been merely for the stabilization of the petrodollar, which would be the Federal Reserve note.

If I remember correctly, I've dealt with this issue a number of times. I think I have 15 messages on the biblical doctrine of war and two messages on the biblical doctrine of self-defense, plus numerous other messages like "Orde teaches to fight" and "How to fight like a Christian." There are many messages that I've preached on this subject before. What I find interesting is simply the attitudes and thoughts that Christians have concerning war. Very few Christians really and truly hold a biblical concept when it comes to war.

Some are even totally pacifistic; they do not believe in fighting at all. I met one of those individuals in Indiana years ago when I was preaching on Romans chapter 13. I mentioned war, fighting, and that sometimes it was necessary to do so. After the service, a young man came up to me with his wife and small children and told me that he disagreed with me. He did not believe in war, period, nor in fighting or resisting whatsoever. I said, "Well, let me ask you a question. If a man therefore breaks into your home—he is breaking into your home so that he might rape your wife and murder her and your children—what would you do?"

Here is what he said: “I would not do anything. The outcome is in God's hands.” I looked at him and said, “Sir, the only thing I can say is that I am so thankful I am not your wife and I am not your child.” Any man who would simply sit by and let his wife and children be murdered has something certainly wrong with him.

That means most people do not understand the sixth commandment. When God says, “Thou shalt not kill,” “Thou shalt not murder,” or “Thou shalt not take life except on God's terms,” that is the negative. The positive is, “Thou shalt preserve life.” Therefore, there is a duty and responsibility to preserve life.

Biblical Evidence that God is a Man of War

Another difficult concept to grasp is that God oftentimes uses war. War is not necessarily sinful in and of itself. There are unjust wars, and many wars are absolutely unnecessary. These unjust and unnecessary wars are indeed sinful, but there are just and righteous

wars that are not sinful. If war were sinful in and of itself, God Himself would not be engaged in it, because He is infinitely holy and righteous.

Exodus 15:3 teaches that God is a man of war. In fact, the Bible says, “The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name.” Consequently, God does indeed use war, oftentimes not only for the deliverance of His people, but also for the destruction of His enemies. Deuteronomy 4:34 speaks of how God delivered the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 34, the Word of God says this: "Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?"

Notice that God brought forth the children of Israel not only by temptations, signs, and wonders, but also by war. In doing so, God revealed His mighty hand and His stretched-out arm as well.

If you look back in your Bibles to the book of Exodus, chapter 17 and verse 16, here is another verse that we should understand in light of this. Amalek had made war against the children of Israel, and, in this instance, Moses happened to defeat them. But notice what the Bible says in verse 16. In fact, let us read verse 15: "And Moses built an altar and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi."

For he said, "Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Now there is a reason for that, and I am not going to get into that today. Amalek is indeed a type of the flesh. But notice that the Bible says, "the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

In 1 Chronicles, chapter 5, look at verse 22. Here is another astounding verse. The Bible says: "For there fell down many slain. Why? Because the war was of God."

SCRIPTURE READING - Revelation 19:11-16 (KJV)

“And they dwelt in their steads until the captivity.” Note that phrase: “and the war was of God.” In Numbers 21:14, the Bible

says: “Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, what he did in the Red Sea and in the brooks of Arnon.” Notice that he said, “wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord.”

Someone is going to say inevitably, “But Brother Weaver, all of those are Old Testament verses.” Yes, they were. We have one Bible, not two, and the Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament. When the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable,” he was referring primarily to the Old Testament, because the New Testament had not been completed at that particular time.

But if you want a New Testament verse, you do not have to look any further than Revelation 19. Does Jesus Christ engage in war? The Bible says, most definitely He does:

“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. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

The Bible does say concerning the Lord Jesus Christ that “in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” Therefore, it should be understandable that God does indeed at times send His people forth to war. You say, “Well, Brother Weaver, I don’t believe that God would ever do that. I don’t believe that God would ever send someone to war.” The truth of the matter that you must grasp is simply this: God does send people to war.

God Sends His People to War: Old Testament Examples

He has done so in time past. He sent the Israelites against the Canaanites. They had to fight in order to conquer the land, and God commanded them to do so. The truth is, in one instance, God punished them for not fighting.

God brought Israel into the land and sent out the spies. The people wanted the spies because they wanted to know which way to go up into the land. Joshua and Caleb brought forth a good report, but ten wicked men brought forth an evil report against the land and against the Lord, discouraging and disheartening the people. Therefore, the people said, “We are not going to fight. What we are going to do is make us a captain, and we are going to return to Egypt.”

Caleb stilled the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” But the men that went up with him said, “We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.” And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And 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.” “And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” God sent them to fight and commanded them to conquer the land, but they refused. They said, “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” Their punishment for refusing to fight is given in Numbers 14:28.

They said, “Would to God we had died in Egypt, or would to God we had died in this wilderness.” So in Numbers chapter 14 and verse 28, God says: “Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you.” Their carcases would fall in the wilderness; all who had been numbered, from twenty years old and upward, who had murmured against Him, would not come into the land which He had sworn to give them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Their little ones, whom they had said should be a prey, He would bring in, and they would know the land which they had despised. Their children would wander in the wilderness forty years and bear their whoredoms, until their carcases were wasted in the wilderness.

God was judging them for their refusal to fight. Here is a sad truth: when they heard God's punishment for refusing to fight, they rebelled even more, determining to fight although God had now told them not to. In verse 40: “And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised: for we have sinned.” Moses asked, “Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? but it shall not prosper.” He told them not to go up, because the Lord was not among them; the Amalekites and the Canaanites were there, and they would fall by the sword. Because they had turned away from the Lord, He would not be with them.

“But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.”

God punished them for refusing to fight; then they tried to fight without God's permission and direction, and He punished them again. We must learn this truth: it is just as much a sin to go to war unsent by God as it is to be sent by God and refuse to go. It is a sin either way. Now there is a very clear passage on this truth.

Context is hardly ever considered. So you're in the book of Numbers. I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Numbers chapter 31. Look at it. Numbers chapter 31, it is I believe in verse

23—no, that's not it. I have the wrong verse down. In the book of Numbers, chapter 31, there is a verse that practically every Christian can quote, or at least part of it, but the context in which it is found is almost never considered. The reference is not Numbers 31:23, as first supposed, but Numbers 32. Moses said, “But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.” We quote it all the time, or at least part of it: “Be sure your sin will find you out.” That is a truth. But what sin in the world is Moses talking about?

Look in the same chapter, beginning with verse 16. The “they” are the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. “And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones: But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward.”

Moses answered, “If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the Lord to war, and will go all of you armed over Jordan”—

Moses said that they must remain before the Lord until He had driven out His enemies and the land was subdued: “then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the Lord, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.”

Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River. All the other tribes had helped them conquer that land, which had previously belonged to Og and Sihon, kings on that side of the Jordan. They came to Moses and said, “Look, we've got cattle and this is a good land for cattle. We don't want to inherit on the west side. We want to be here on the east side.”

Moses replied, “Wait a minute. All of your brethren helped you conquer this land. You need to cross Jordan and help them conquer their land.” They agreed to build the sheepfolds and fenced cities for their wives and children, go over armed, and not return until the others conquered. Moses accepted this, but warned, “If you do not do so, be sure your sin will find you out.”

The sin, therefore, would have been refusing to fight and refusing to help the people inherit the land. They agreed to fight, and Moses said, “That is correct.”

God does send His people to war. In Numbers 31:1-3, the Lord says to Moses, “Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.” Moses then says to the people, “Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian.” God is indeed sending them to war. In Joshua 6:1-2, God tells Joshua about Jericho: “Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the

children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." Then God told him how to conquer Jericho. Yes, God sent them to war. That is a fact. If you would turn over in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 15 and look at the first two verses. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 15 and look at verses 1 and 2. The Bible says: "Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: 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."

The Certainty of War and the Curse of Refusing to Fight

God has sent him to war. He said, "I want you to take care of Amalek."

Now look at two more passages. Turn to Numbers chapter 10, and compare it with Deuteronomy chapter 21. Numbers chapter 10, verse 9, says: "And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies." Note what he said: "and if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you." In other words, here is someone trying to subdue and conquer the people of God. They are oppressing; they are wicked; they are wrong. Now look at Deuteronomy chapter 21 and verse 10: "When"—not if—"When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them

Notice that he says, “when thou goest to war.” It is no longer “if thou goest to war,” but “when thou goest to war.” In other words, he is saying that there are times when God sends people to war. Jeremiah 48:10 is a powerful verse on this point: God does indeed send His people to war. When God sends you to war, He says: “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.” If you do not fight when God commands you to fight, then you are under the curse of God.

God's People Have Enemies

Biblical principle: God sends His people to war when needed or necessary, either for their deliverance or the destruction of His enemies. He sends them when circumstances require it, when deliverance is needed, and when His enemies must be destroyed. This is not merely an incidental statement, but a biblical principle.

A second truth, often overlooked, is that God and His people do have enemies. The apostle Paul, speaking of individuals in Philippians 3:18, says: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” And 1 Corinthians 15:25 says of the Lord Jesus Christ: “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” God does have enemies, and we have enemies. Yet not all the enemies we have as saints are violent toward us; not all are violent in their opposition or attack.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 83:1-15 (KJV)

And if they're not violent to us, we certainly will not be violent to them in any way whatsoever. One can be an enemy simply by resisting the truth. One can be an enemy by mocking, ridiculing, and harassing the people of God. However, there are instances in the Bible, and I showed one of them very thoroughly yesterday from Nehemiah chapter 4, where the people of God were violently attacked by their enemies and had to defend themselves. You can find, if you read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, how the enemies oftentimes attacked. But it's not just in those books. If you'll look back in your Bibles to Psalm 83, it's throughout the entirety of the Word of God.

The psalmist says, and this is the psalm of Asaph:

"Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation;" in other words, let's kill them, let's murder them, "that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:

The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah. Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession. O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm."

“Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O Lord. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put

to shame, and perish: That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth." So we must grasp a principle. I mentioned this yesterday, and I am going to mention it again right now: according to the Word of God, we cannot and we must not use arms or weaponry to extend the kingdom of God. But arms and weaponry may be used to defend the kingdom of God.

This is why he is praying this imprecatory prayer against these enemies: they are attempting to violently take the lives of innocent individuals and confiscate all of their property. And so he prays this imprecatory prayer. We do have enemies. There are enemies not only of God, but enemies of His people as well. This is the reason for the prayer, not an attempt to advance God's kingdom by force.

God Providentially Directs His People in War

Here is the third concept that should be understood: when God sends His people to war, He providentially directs them. When God sends His people to war, He providentially directs them. David is a good example of this truth. The passage is in 2 Samuel, not 1 Samuel. I initially had the wrong chapter and verse written down, but it is where the Philistines had heard that David had been anointed. In 2 Samuel chapter 3, look at verse 17:

"And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you: Now then do it: for the Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies. And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin. So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him."

Notice what has happened. They are now going to make David absolute king over all Israel. When the Philistines hear that David has been made king over all Israel, they come to fight against him. In chapter 5, verse 18, we read: "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? 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. And David came to Baal-perazim, and David 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. And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them."

David fought the Philistines and defeated them. Evidently, in this battle, David made a frontal assault, and God gave him the victory. The Philistines then came again a second time. Verse 22 says: "And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David inquired of the Lord, he 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. And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer."

Note that David made a frontal assault one time, and God blessed it. The second time, God directed him not to make a frontal assault, but to come around behind them. God indeed gave him the victory.

God not only directed David; He also directed Joshua. God told Joshua exactly how to conquer Ai:

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land: And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it."

Joshua did indeed lay that ambush exactly as God directed. When God sends His people to war, He providentially leads them, opens doors, and directs them.

Another illustration appears in 2 Chronicles 14. "And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew

bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valour." Thus, Asa had 580,000 men. "And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand," that is, a million, "and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah. Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah."

"And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee. So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown,"

They could not recover themselves. Why? "For they were destroyed before the Lord, and before his host." In other words, Asa cried, and God delivered. God does indeed providentially direct and deliver His people in the time of war.

So here is the leading question: How do we discern whether or not God is sending His people to war? Someone may simply say, "Well, God is telling me to do something." Really? I know of one preacher who was single, a young man, and a young woman came up to him and said, "God told me to marry you." He said, "He did?" She said, "Yes." He said, "Well, let's wait until He tells me to marry you."

A lot of people will say, "God told me this," or, "God says now is the time." How do we know when God is saying, "This is a war that I have ordained, and I want you to go to it"? There are probably a number of answers given from the Bible. In fact, I have a message just on that question. But I will tell you quickly at least three ways that we can discern.

Discerning When God Sends His People to War

The first is this: We know that God will be sending His people to war when He unites their hearts by giving them a holy and righteous resolve. What does the Bible say in Judges chapter 20, verse 1? "Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was

gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the Lord in Mizpeh." They were coming to make war against the Benjamites. Notice that the whole congregation was gathered together as one man. Everyone knew that what had happened was wicked, wrong, and ungodly, and it was time to fight. You can read what happened in Judges chapter 19, but God united the hearts of His men, and everybody knew in his soul, "Now is the time."

The second answer is this: We know that God is sending us when we go in obedience to Him and His law and have the promise of victory from Him.

Look in your Bibles, first of all, to Joshua chapter 23 and verse 10: "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you." God said you will be so victorious, so valiant, and so brave that one man of you will chase a thousand.

Then turn back to Leviticus chapter 26. In this passage, the law is given—the blessings and the curses, just as it is in Deuteronomy 28. Beginning in verse 6, this is still the blessing of God for obedience: "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." In other words, you are not going to be attacked if you are obedient.

Then He says in verse 7: "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." In other words, if you are not going to go in obedience, and if you are not going to be holy and godly in the battle, then you are not going to have the promise of victory. God has to not only ordain it, but it does indeed have to be a holy armor.

Do you realize that even Oliver Cromwell, in his battles against King Charles, carried flags that said "The Lord of Hosts," and his army went into battle singing psalms? Cromwell and his ragtag army of common, everyday men defeated one of the greatest armies in the

world at that particular time because they trusted in the Lord and had the promises of God.

A third point is this: we know that God has sent us when He gives us the victory. If God sends you to war, there is not going to be a defeat.

If you look in your Bibles to Psalm 20, notice beginning there with verse 6. Now David said: "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed;" wait a minute. "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, Lord: let the king hear us when we call."

Now you are in the Psalms. Look back at Psalm 18, beginning at verse 39. Here it is: "For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me." So notice we have victory here. Note, if you would, verse 40: "Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the Lord, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets. Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me." Actually this has reference not just to David but to the Lord Jesus. And He said, "As soon as they hear

"The strangers shall submit themselves unto me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places. The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people under me. He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name."

So we can know that God is sending us when, first, God unites our hearts into a holy resolve. We can know that God is sending us when we are not violating any of His principles or Scriptures, when we

have the promise of God, and when we are living a holy, righteous life.

In Deuteronomy 23, God demanded that the camp have a paddle. When they had to ease themselves, they had to dig a hole and cover it. Why? “Because the Lord thy God is holy and he walketh among you.” In other words, God is going to require not only cleanliness but godliness as well. God is not going to bless an ungodly, rebellious people, a people that will not listen to His will and His word.

We can know that God is sending us when He gives us a holy resolve, when He gives us an obedient life, when we have His promises, when His providence opens doors and directs us, and when He does give us total victory.

That is why, when Solomon is praying and dedicating the temple, he said, “when thou dost send them,” or, “by the way which thou dost send them.” We have to understand that there is a time when God does send His people to war. It is Ecclesiastes 3 says: there is a time to fight, and a time not to fight; a time of peace, and a time of war. To everything, there is a season.

Conclusion: A Time for War

Unhappily, so many Christians turn out to be, if not pacifists, unbelievers, saying, in one sense of the word, “It’ll never happen here. We will never have to fight. We will never, ever have to go to war. We will never have to defend ourselves.” The truth of the matter is, we’re no better than those in the Old Testament. We’re no better than those in the New Testament. Read Hebrews chapter 11, and you will find how the righteous suffered so many times, how they did fight, and how God, the Bible says, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. You will read about Jephthah and Samuel and the rest of the prophets who did indeed fight, and they had to fight because God sent them to war. God does send His people when it is needed, when it is necessary, and it will always be just and righteous and holy. He will only do it to deliver His people or to destroy His enemies, but He does send His people to war.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. Lord, help

us to understand that there is indeed a biblical doctrine of self-defense and a biblical doctrine of war. Help us also to understand, Lord, that Thou art a man of war, and that You do indeed use war for many and various reasons. Help us always, Lord, to be tender to Thy Word and Thy will, and help us always to make sure that we follow You, walk in Your steps, and do that which is right and holy. Give us an understanding, and give us Your grace and mercy, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

Destruction and Deliverance

April 27, 2024

Introduction to Counsel and Its Importance

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Counsel is often required, and at times it is demanded and necessary. We need counsel usually in a multitude of areas. When you stop and think about counsel, it usually revolves around a situation or circumstance where you find yourself and you really just simply do not know what to do. I have often said that a problem is

not a problem if you know what to do; you just have problems when you are totally ignorant or foolish, and you do not know what to do.

People get themselves in so many situations, and so much trouble so often. Sometimes we get involved in things, and our emotions get so ratcheted up that we just need help sorting things out. Consequently, we have to have counsel. A lot of people will go to a hired counselor. Sometimes they will go to their pastor; sometimes they will go to a family member; sometimes they will go to a friend.

But the truth of the matter is this: most of the time, we do not understand a distinction in counseling. In reality, our entire lives are based upon counsel—the counsel that we learned as we were maturing and the counsel that we acquired while we were being educated. Sometimes, of course, we receive counsel from our friends, and they have been educated the same way we have been educated. Consequently, most people have never really understood that most counseling is absolutely humanistic to the core. In other words, there is a vast difference, which we are going to see today, between biblical counseling and humanistic counseling. Proverbs 11:14 makes this statement: “Where no counsel is, the people fall.”

Biblical Foundation for Counsel

"But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." So where no counsel is, the people fall. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." Apart from counsel, purposes are disappointed. Proverbs 24:6 says, "For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety."

What is not apparent to many people when it comes to counseling and counselors is that there is a vast difference between biblical counsel and what we would call humanistic or worldly counsel. That difference is between destruction and deliverance. I can give you a good illustration of humanistic counseling.

Many years ago, I spoke with a man whom I knew who had come to our church several times. His wife was having problems, so he sent her to a psychologist. He told me he had to pay the man something like fifty dollars an hour. This was almost forty or fifty

years ago, when that was a large sum of money. The counselor told his wife that her problem was that she was sexually frustrated, and that she needed to go out and have three or four different affairs; that would work everything out. When the man told me what the counselor had said, I looked at him and said, "I have one question for you." He asked, "What is that?" I said, "Were you stupid enough to pay the man?" I do not think I would ever have given him a dime for counsel like that.

I say that to point this out: Have you ever noticed that some people are wise concerning that which is evil, wicked, and wrong? They are crafty, subtle, and cunning. They know how to work every angle and come out on top. They know how to take every evil situation and prosper, how to deceive and defraud others, oftentimes without even getting caught. There are people who are wise in sin and wickedness.

Jeremiah chapter 4 and verse 22 says, “For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.” They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. First Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 19 says, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.”

There is a worldly wisdom and a worldly counsel, and it is completely, totally contrary to God. Before expounding on Proverbs 1 and 2, consider two illustrations of individuals who were wise in evil. The first is found in 2 Samuel chapter 13, concerning Jonadab.

Illustrations of Worldly Wisdom

Jonadab was a very subtle man. He gave Amnon, who would have been a cousin, the plan to rape his half-sister Tamar. Second Samuel chapter 13, verse 1, says, “And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her. But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man. And he said unto him,

Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister. And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick."

"And when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand. So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand. Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat."

You know the outcome. He did indeed rape his sister, his half-sister. She begged him not to, saying, "If you really want to marry me, ask the king; he will not withhold me from thee." But she said, "Do not do this evil. Do not do this foolishness." He would not listen. Notice that the Bible refers to Jonadab as a very subtle man. The Hebrew word for subtle here literally means to be wise, skillful, shrewd, cunning, crafty, wily, and learned. Certainly this man was learned in evil and wickedness. He planned this thing for Amnon, and it resulted two years later in Amnon's death.

The second illustration is found in 2 Samuel chapter 16, in reference to Ahithophel. Ahithophel was David's counselor. When Absalom rebelled against his father David, Ahithophel joined the rebellion. There is an interesting verse about Ahithophel. In 2 Samuel 16:23 we read, "And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom." That is quite a compliment and an astounding statement: Ahithophel's counsel was as if one listened to the oracles of God. He always gave wise and sagacious counsel. However, that wise and sagacious counsel, at least once, led to that which was evil, wicked, and wrong. Look back in 2 Samuel 16, beginning with verse 20, because Absalom had now come into Jerusalem.

David has been driven from the throne and driven from the town. Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, "Give counsel among you what we shall do." And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, "Go in unto thy

father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong." So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

This was an amazing statement and an amazing act. He went into his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. Everyone knew exactly what he was doing. Ahithophel gave this counsel, and it was obviously wicked, wrong, and vile. But it was designed to accomplish one particular end. He said, "Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house." In other words, you are going to defile your father's concubines. "And all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father."

Then look what he says: "Then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong." In other words, Absalom, you go into your father's concubines. Why? Because the father forgave the son, but he is not going to forgive those who were with the son. Everybody would hesitate and say, "We are not going to fight because Absalom could go back and get reconciled with his father; then where are we going to be?"

But when Absalom did what he did, he was saying publicly, "I'm not asking forgiveness. I'm not going back. This is the way it's going to be. I'm either going to kill my father or my father's going to kill me. That's it." So the hands of all of them would be strong. They would fight for him because he was not going to back up or back down. While the counsel Ahithophel gave was wicked and vile, it was designed to accomplish one end: to unify those men who were going to fight with Absalom.

So many individuals are wise when it comes to this world. They are wise in sin; they are wise in wickedness.

James 3, beginning with verse 13, gives us a passage that distinguishes between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom, or godly counsel and worldly counsel.

Contrast Between Worldly and Godly Wisdom

The Scripture asks, “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” That is good conduct.

From wherever you receive your counsel, it will be made known, because you will act out your counsel. This is what he is saying in verse 13: “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?” If you are wise, if you are endued with knowledge, inevitably you will show, out of a good conversation—that is, good conduct—your works with meekness of wisdom.

But look at verse 14. Here is the contrast: “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.”

Here is another distinction: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then 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.”

Now, Gary, I do not have my Greek text in front of me, but verse 17 is the very first word—is it “alla”? A-L-L-A.

Usually you will find the word "alla." There is the "de." "Alla" is a strong word of contrast, but "de" is also a word of contrast; "alla" is just a little stronger. There is a distinction between those two things.

As you turn back to Proverbs 1, we fail to grasp another very significant truth. It is a small truth, yet very significant: one sin always leads to another sin. Sin may begin small and seemingly insignificant, but it builds and builds until it comes to a crescendo, and all of a sudden it is something that completely destroys you. Every sin leads to another sin, building into something extremely huge and large. We tend to forget that every big thing or every large thing is made up of a series of small things.

The Progression of Sin and the Call of Wisdom

Solomon gives wisdom beginning in verse 10: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit. We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: my son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof."

In 1 Corinthians, the Word of God says, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." When you associate with wicked, vile people, you are going to be corrupted.

In Proverbs 1, this truth is shown from Psalm 1:1: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” Let us take that verse apart. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.” What is counsel? It is advice. They are telling you how to live. Do not walk in the advice, or counsel, of the ungodly.

What happens if you start listening to the advice of the ungodly? The next step is, “nor standeth in the way of sinners.” That is association. Once you start listening to their advice, you begin associating with them. What is the third step? “Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” That is agreement. Once you listen to the voice, you begin associating; once you begin associating, you end up agreeing with them.

So, when you look back in Proverbs 1:10, it says, “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” In other words, ignore them. Do not listen to them. Turn away from them. Do not associate with them whatsoever; turn from them.

Consider what they are talking about: robbery and theft, which inevitably involve murder. You start out with something small, but it builds up into something absolutely abominable and great in

wickedness. I was reading this past week of an eleven-year-old boy who pulled a pistol on a woman to steal from her and even to try to hijack her car—eleven years old.

The psalmist is saying, No, no, no. Do not listen to them. Do not go in their way. Do not listen to all their pleadings. They say, "Cast in thy lot with us. We're going to have one purse. We're going to get rich, we're going to divide everything." Then they begin talking about murder as well.

The truth is that each small step always leads up to something great, something big, something huge. All the promises in verses 10 through 19 are based upon humanistic or worldly counsel, reasoning, and advice. That is all it is. Each one is absolutely contrary to the law of God and to the counsel of God.

Once he gives you an illustration of what not to listen to in verses 10 through 19, look at verses 20 through 23. Here is biblical wisdom crying out; here is biblical counsel crying out: "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: 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."

Grasp with me the significance of this order. First, men will either listen to biblical counsel and wisdom, or they will listen to humanistic counsel and wisdom. You have those two contrasted right here. Second, men will always act upon either biblical counsel and wisdom or humanistic counsel and wisdom. You are either going to listen to one or the other, and you are going to act upon one or the other.

Third, there is no alternative. "What I think best" is your humanistic desires and thinking. You are either following biblical counsel or humanistic counsel; either biblical wisdom or ungodly humanistic wisdom. It is just that simple. Desolation and destruction always await those who will not follow biblical wisdom. Only those who follow biblical wisdom have deliverance. That is why I named this "Destruction or Deliverance."

Many times people do not recognize how deeply they have erred until it is too late. And when it is too late, it is just too late. In verses 10 through 19, he is talking about humanistic and worldly counsel and wisdom. Then, in verses 20 through 23, he is saying that you had better listen to that which is biblical, right, and godly. Now watch destruction here.

Consequences of Rejecting God's Counsel

In Proverbs 1:24, the Lord says, “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. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” Turning away from God's truth, counsel, and wisdom always leads to destruction.

Deliverance Through Obedience

When we talk about deliverance, remember that deliverance is the opposite of destruction, just as life is the opposite of death and blessings are the opposite of cursings. Proverbs 1:33 concludes, “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.” Here is deliverance, but deliverance is only for those who hearken, those who listen.

The phrase “but whoso hearkeneth” comes from the Hebrew word “shema,” which emphasizes hearing, listening, obeying, hearing with attention and understanding, and consenting as well as being obedient. To hearken unto God is not merely audible hearing; it is spiritual hearing that results in obedience. The obedient shall dwell safely and shall be quiet from the fear of evil.

Isaiah 55:3 says, “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” God says, “Incline your ear, and come unto me.” Then, “Hear, and your soul shall live.” He will make an everlasting covenant and give the sure mercies of David.

This is a wonderful truth and a wonderful promise. However, there is a problem. The problem is not with God or with God's promise; the problem is with us. Because we are sinful and depraved, we desire and prefer our own ways, and anything that will satisfy our flesh and wicked desires. It is just that simple.

Consider this: read through your Bibles and underline every time people will not hear or will not listen. Especially in the Old Testament, mark how many times Israel would not hear. Israel was God's professing people, supposedly in covenant with Him. Yet 2 Kings 17:13 says, “Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.” Then verse 14 says, “Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.”

Over and over in the Bible, Israel refused to hear the Word of God. In the book of Jeremiah, the people in Judah and Jerusalem wanted to murder Jeremiah simply because they did not like what he was preaching and teaching. It is astounding when you think about biblical counsel and wisdom, about that which is given us in the Word of God. Unhappily, most Christians very seldom read the Word of God. Most are inconsistent in listening to the Word of God expounded, explained, and applied. The truth of the matter is that most absolutely refuse to guide their lives by the truth of God's Word.

Now consider the consequence. You and I would never leave something extremely valuable out in the open or on a table for everyone to see. If some of you ladies had a necklace worth ten or fifteen thousand Federal Reserve notes, would you simply leave it on your table? Would you leave it on top of the dresser?

Would you put it up because you understood its value, and would you guard it and protect it? The truth of the matter is this: God's Word, God's wisdom, and God's counsel are valuable as well. Consequently, He is not going to leave them for people who despise, reject, and refuse them. You remember that passage in Mark chapter 4, where He said, "And unto you that hear shall more be given." And he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

You remember in 1 Samuel chapter 3 and verse 1, the Bible says the word of God was precious in those days; there was no open vision. In other words, there was no open and public preaching. The word of God was precious. It was valuable. It was scarce. When you look around today, you find biblical counsel and biblical wisdom being scarce as well, because people do not want it.

I want to show you what is going to happen—what has happened in time past, and what will happen even in the present and the future. In Leviticus chapter 26, beginning with verse 14, God says, "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; 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.” Did you notice what he said? “If ye shall despise my statutes, if ye abhor my judgments.”

Look at Isaiah chapter 30, beginning with verse 8. God says, “Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever.” Write it in a book. Here is what God says: “That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and

perverseness, and stay thereon: therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant."

Lord, this wall is going to fall on you. "And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit."

So God says, because you despise my word, I am going to destroy you. You will be so destroyed that it will be like taking a potter's vessel and slamming it on the floor. It is made of clay, and you cannot even find a piece to get a drop of water in it, or a piece that will pick up a coal out of a fire. It will be totally, absolutely destroyed.

Here is what God is trying to teach us: if we want life and blessings, if we want deliverance, then we must honor his word. We must hear his word. There is another truth that we must understand: if we want to be delivered, if we want his principles and his precepts, we must work to understand.

Only the Holy Spirit of God can open our eyes and our understanding. Without Him, there is absolutely nothing. Yet the Bible says in Proverbs 25:2, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." God has made us kings and priests, and it is our responsibility to search things out. Our Lord said in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

In other words, deliverance only comes from the truth. How, then, are we to acquire truth? The Apostle Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." Understanding does come from the Lord, as Proverbs 2:6 says. He must open our eyes, teach us, and enlighten us by the Holy Spirit. But then He says, "Consider what I say."

God is not going to give us truth willy-nilly. We are not going to go to bed ignorant and stupid, wake up smart and brilliant, or put an algebra book under our pillow and awaken as a mathematical genius. It does not work like that. You can sleep on your Bible all you like, but sleeping on your Bible will not make you holy.

You must consider. The word "consider" is "noeo." It means to consider and perceive with understanding; to take heed to the truth of God, think upon it, ponder it, meditate on it, and make it your own. With that in mind, I want you to go back in your Bibles.

The Necessity of Diligent Seeking

In Proverbs chapter 2, verse 1, after he said in chapter 1, verse 33, “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil,” he says: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. 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. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.”

When you look at those first few verses in Proverbs chapter 2, he says, “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.” God says if you will receive, hide, incline, apply, cry, lift up your voice, seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures, then, in verse 9, “Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.”

Deliverance from Evil Men and the Strange Woman

Consequently, you are going to have deliverance instead of destruction. What are you going to be delivered from? Proverbs 2, verse 10: “When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.” It will keep you and deliver you. From what? “To

deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths." So God says, if you will listen to His wisdom and take His counsel, you will be delivered from an evil man: the man that speaketh wicked things, walks out of the path of righteousness, and delights in that which is evil.

That is not all. "To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life." So God says, here it is: You can have biblical wisdom and biblical counsel and be delivered, or you can have humanistic wisdom and humanistic counsel and be destroyed. It's just that simple.

Now, here is the interesting thing. Proverbs chapter 2 ends with either deliverance or destruction. Proverbs chapter 2, beginning with verse 20, says, "That thou mayest walk in the way of good men"—now we're talking about biblical counsel and wisdom—"and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

When you look at Proverbs chapter 1 and Proverbs chapter 2, you see this strong contrast between humanistic counsel and wisdom and biblical counsel and wisdom. Humanism always leads to death and destruction. Biblical divine wisdom and counsel always leads to deliverance and to life. I want you to think with me and follow me through just three or four passages.

Here is the first application: God has set before us life and death. He has set before us blessings and curses. He is telling us that we may choose life and blessings, or we may choose death and curses. Let us go back first of all to Deuteronomy chapter 11, verse 26, and look at what God says.

Final Contrast: Life and Death Set Before Us

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; 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." So God said, I've set before you blessings and curses. Now, if you would turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 30. Look, if you would please, at verse 19. Deuteronomy 30 and verse 19: "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."

So what did he say? I've set before you life and death, blessing and curses. I want you to choose life.

Now, if you would turn right over in your Bibles to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 21. Look in Jeremiah chapter 21 and verse 8. Here's what God tells Jeremiah: "And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death." You know the Bible tells you in Proverbs 12 and verse 28, "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death." In the way of righteousness is life. We can say in the way of biblical counsel there is life. In the way of biblical wisdom there is life.

I want you to turn to one more passage. This is my second and last application, and you will find this in the book of Zechariah, chapter 7. Zechariah is next to the last book of the Old Testament, Zechariah, then Malachi. Look in Zechariah chapter 7 and wait there for a moment.

We have actually seen this truth that I'm going to enunciate right now in Proverbs chapter 1. When you refuse God's counsel, when you refuse God's wisdom, it always ends up in death and destruction. You remember that passage there in Proverbs chapter 1? He said, "They would have none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof." Therefore, "they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." He ends up by saying, "They shall eat of the fruit of their own way." Here's a principle.

The Law of Retribution and Call to Self-Examination

This is known as the lex talionis, which is the law of retribution. It is where God makes the punishment fit the crime. The crime in Proverbs 1 was a refusal to hear God, to listen to God, to receive His counsel and His wisdom. The retribution was that when they are in trouble, at the end of their life, and being destroyed, they cry, and God says, "I'm not listening. You wouldn't listen to Me. I'm not listening to you."

Look at Zechariah chapter 7, beginning with verse 11: "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts."

God said, "I cried, I told you to listen, I commanded you to listen, and you refused. You would not hear Me. Now, therefore, you are crying, and I am not going to hear you."

It is just as I said earlier: you do not leave something extremely valuable lying around in the open. When you refuse God's words, counsel, and wisdom, He will take it. He says, "You don't want it? Fine. When you want it, it will probably be too late. I call, you refuse; you call, I'm not listening." Our entire life will either be following biblical counsel or humanistic counsel. So here is the question: How do I know whether or not I am following humanistic counsel or biblical counsel?

The answer is very simple: examine your life. See whether what you are doing is biblical, because Scripture says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." We live out what we think and believe. David said in Psalm 116, "I believed, therefore have I spoken."

We can always tell whether we are following biblical wisdom or humanistic wisdom by what we think and do. God says, choose life

and choose blessings. Bring your life into conformity to the Word of God, and in the path of righteousness there is deliverance.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day. We thank you for your Word and your truth. Make this holy, and give us an attitude of obedience, a disposition and desire to obey. Enable us by your grace and mercy actually to obey. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 21

How to Die a Horrible Death and Destroy Others

April 27, 2024

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 52:1-8 (KJV)

Introduction: The Horrors of Zedekiah's Fate

"Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, till he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that

> there was no bread for the people of the land. Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans were by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain."
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> Who wishes to die an extremely horrible and agonizing death? Who wishes to die in anguish? Who would like to not only die in anguish, but be responsible for the deaths of others? In fact, I would say not only the death of your own family, the death of your friends, but the death of a multitude as well. Who would also not only like to die such a death and destroy all of the family and friends, but you also destroy your own country, and you also destroy your own place of worship?

The Principle of Divine Judgment

Are there any volunteers for that? Of course, you and I would say no. But the truth is, there are not only incidents like this in the Bible; there are incidents like this in history, and there are incidents like this today. It has been aptly pointed out that one thing we learn from history is that we do not learn from history. Hence the old adage that history repeats itself. The truth is, history does not repeat itself. Men continue to repeat the same sins and engage in the same rebellion and wickedness as others have, and God judges us in exactly the same way. It is not history repeating itself, but man repeating age-old sins and rebellion and receiving the same just and equitable punishments from God. God is immutable; He does not change, and neither do His judgments.

Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy 28 teach undeniably that curses follow disobedience and blessings follow obedience. Jeremiah chapter 52 is a summation of the destruction of Jerusalem, the capture and destruction of King Zedekiah and his sons, and the carrying away of captives into Babylon. The entire story is found in 2 Kings chapter 24, 2 Chronicles 36, and Jeremiah chapters 21 through 39; there it is given in detail. Until then, Jeremiah 52 is merely a summation.

Zedekiah's Wickedness and Capture

Jeremiah 52:8-9 tells us how Zedekiah was captured: “But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. And they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him.” Matthew Henry said concerning verse 9 that the king of Babylon gave judgment upon the king of Judah and Jerusalem: “One cannot think of it without the utmost vexation and regret that a king, a king of Judah, a king of the house of David, should be arraigned as a criminal at the bar of his heathen king.” But the truth was that Zedekiah was indeed a criminal.

The Bible does say in the book of Proverbs, chapter 25 and verse 26, "A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring." But the truth of the matter is, Zedekiah was not a righteous man. He was a wicked, vile man as well. In fact, if you go back and look at Jeremiah 52 and verse two, here's what the scripture says concerning Zedekiah.

"And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done." Now, Zedekiah is being compared to Jehoiakim. If you want to know something about Jehoiakim, and I want you to look very quickly, we're going to look, first of all, at 2 Chronicles chapter 36 and verse 5. Second Chronicles 36 and verse five. And here's what the Bible says concerning Jehoiakim, King Jehoiakim. Look at this. Second Chronicles chapter 36 and verse five. The word of God declares, "Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God."

Comparison with Jehoiakim

"Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon." Now, wait a minute. The Bible says that he was 25 years old when he began to reign. He reigned 11 years and he did that which was evil.

Now, I want you to turn back just another book or two to the book of Second Kings, chapter 24, because we're not finished with Jehoiakim, since Zedekiah has been compared to him. So you'll find this in 2nd Kings chapter 24 and verse 1. "In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him." So Jehoiakim then was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and he actually became the servant of Nebuchadnezzar. So the evil then that Zedekiah has committed is committed or is connected then to the evil that Jehoiakim has committed. So Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were both very evil and wicked men.

Now Zedekiah died a very horrible death, a death of anguish, and he was also the cause of the deaths of many more people. Do not think only of men like Stalin, Pol Pot, and other mass murderers. Stalin starved 20 million Ukrainians to death, and these individuals have been responsible for many deaths. Think also of our current administration in Washington, DC, and the elites in this world who plan and profit from war. Think of all the murders committed by the illegals in this country because our own government allows them to run rampant and does not judge them at all. Here is the truth: God is ultimately going to hold all these people personally responsible and personally accountable. He will bring judgment upon them, and they will answer to God.

The Horrible Judgment Executed

Go back to Jeremiah chapter 52 and look again at verse 8: “But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him.” What was this judgment? “And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah.” These were Zedekiah’s friends, in his cabinet, so to speak, in his administration.

Verse 11 says: “Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.” Before his eyes were

gouged out, Zedekiah saw his own sons killed, slain, and murdered. He saw his princes killed and slain. Then his eyes were gouged out, which undoubtedly was awful and an anguish in itself. He was taken blind and in chains and thrown into prison, where he was helpless and could not see or do anything except suffer. It must have been extremely awful to remember that the very last thing he saw was the death of his family and the death of his friends.

Now you are going to ask, or at least you should ask, how in the world did such a devastating incident come to pass? How could all of this tremendous suffering and anguish come upon individuals? Well, let me tell you, first of all, God had given all of these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar. Although Nebuchadnezzar was called a heathen, and was a heathen, God was going to use Nebuchadnezzar to chastise and to whip other evil people, people who would rebel against Him. Just like He used the Assyrians against the Northern Kingdom, Israel, so now He was going to use the Babylonians against the Southern Kingdom and all of those other wicked people who happened to be around there.

God's Sovereignty Over Nebuchadnezzar

But I want you to note this. If you will turn in your Bibles, first of all, to Jeremiah chapter 25, look at verse 9. Jeremiah 25, verse 9. Here is what God says: “Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant. And will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.” So God said, “I’m going to take Nebuchadnezzar. He’s a heathen king, but he’s my servant, and I’m going to use him to chastise all of these nations.”

If you look in Jeremiah chapter 27 and verse 6, you will read this again. Look what God says. In fact, let us begin with verse five: “I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve

him." So twice now, Nebuchadnezzar has been called the servant of God.

In Jeremiah 43:10, God speaks through Jeremiah concerning the people who had fled into Egypt contrary to His will and word: "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."

Three times now, Nebuchadnezzar has been called God's servant. God has said in His Word that He has given all these nations into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. Jeremiah told these people that if they wanted to live, they should simply submit to King Nebuchadnezzar; if they would have their city spared, they should simply submit to King Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah was told this truth personally by Jeremiah.

Zedekiah's Repeated Rejection of God's Word

The interesting thing is that after the Babylonians had actually attacked and were threatening the city, Zedekiah wanted Jeremiah to pray that the Lord would turn Nebuchadnezzar back. Jeremiah 37 gives the answer Jeremiah received from God: "And king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah." Pay attention to that: Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had made king in the land of Judah. "But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the Lord, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah. And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the Lord our God for us."

Boy, that sounds spiritual, doesn't it? It sounds like he is really interested in wanting God's blessing and help.

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 37:1-10 (KJV)

> Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison, that is, as yet. Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans

> that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem. Then came the word of the Lord unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the Lord; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.

They are not leaving. They may have left temporarily when they heard the Egyptians were coming, but the Egyptians were not going to do anything. They were not going to turn away or turn back. Ultimately, they were going to destroy this city and burn it with fire.

Jeremiah was thrown into prison. “Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord?”

The king asked him secretly, “Is there any word from the Lord?” Jeremiah answered, “There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land?”

“Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.” Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him

daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Zedekiah again asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?” Jeremiah said, “There is. You're going to be delivered to the king of Babylon.” Moreover, Jeremiah could not refrain from taking a jab at the false prophets: “Where are now all of your prophets,” he said, “that said Nebuchadnezzar is not going to come against this land?” Jeremiah was saying, Can you not see with whom the word of the Lord really is?

Obviously, it is not with the false prophets, because they have lied to you and are not truthful. Nebuchadnezzar is here now, and Jeremiah has laid it out plainly. In Jeremiah 38:14, Zedekiah again asks for a word from the Lord: “Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the Lord: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me. Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?”

Jeremiah was saying, “You are asking me something, and you are not going to like my answer. If I tell you the truth, are you going to put me to death? And if you do not, are you going to listen to me?” Verse 16 says, “So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life. Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel.”

Now see how plain and simple this is: “If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon’s princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon’s princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.”

To me, this is very cut and dry. King Zedekiah had a choice. He could submit to Nebuchadnezzar, and he, his family, and his princes would live; the city would not be burned. All he had to do was go out

and submit. Why was he unwilling to submit to the king of Babylon? Why would he not take his family and go to Nebuchadnezzar and say, “We want to live, and we want this city spared”? Why?

Why would he not surrender? When you stop and think, it was the logical thing to do, the easy thing to do, and the right thing to do. There is an answer. Jeremiah 38:19 says, “And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.” The Hebrew word translated “mock” is alal, meaning to mock and to be made a fool of. Zedekiah was afraid of being teased, criticized, made fun of, and counted as a fool by those who were already in captivity and had already been captured by Nebuchadnezzar.

The Root Cause: Pride and Oath-Breaking

I would be more afraid of having my eyes gouged out, or of being murdered and having my family murdered. But Zedekiah was afraid of being mocked and teased. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” Instead of putting his trust in the Lord, Zedekiah fell to the pride of his own heart. He was a proud, arrogant man.

Secondly, Zedekiah was compared to Jehoiakim. In 2 Kings 24:1, the Bible says, “In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him.” Jehoiakim was an oath breaker. He had promised his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and then turned against his oath.

In 2 Kings 24:17, we read, “And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.” Who made Zedekiah king? Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

The passage continues: “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah

rebelled against the king of Babylon." Jehoiakim had rebelled, and now Zedekiah had rebelled. This shows the evilness of Zedekiah.

Turn to 2 Chronicles 36:13. You might say, "Zedekiah gave his word to a heathen king. I understand how he would want to rebel against a heathen king who was a tyrant." But there is more detail than that. "And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel."

It was not merely that he gave his word to Nebuchadnezzar. He gave an oath before God. He swore by God that he would serve him. Thus, he not only violated his oath to Nebuchadnezzar; he violated his vow before God.

We might think that a light thing, but God does not consider it light at all. Turn to Ezekiel 17, and you will see what God thinks of what he did. Beginning with verse 11: "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? tell them."

"Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon; And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land: That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand."

He made Zedekiah king. He had already taken some people into captivity, and he made Zedekiah swear by God. He was trying to keep the kingdom base—that is, down—so there would not be any more rebellions. But look at this: "But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?"

"As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to

cut off many persons: Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me."

When Zedekiah, who was a wicked man, took an oath before God and gave his word to Nebuchadnezzar, who was another wicked man, God still expected Zedekiah to keep his word and honor his oath. Do you remember Psalm 15:4, where the Bible describes a godly man? A godly man is one who "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

If I slipped up and was not thinking, or made a wrong estimate, and told Gary that I would sell him my vehicle for $6,000, only to discover that it was worth $10,000, I had already given him my word. The godly man swears to his own hurt and changes not. Gary, you can have it for six thousand dollars. That is what the passage is saying.

Zedekiah had given his word. Though he may have been a wicked man, he was still in the lineage of David. If unbelievers perceive that those who are supposed to be righteous and Christian are liars, do not keep their word, and do not honor their oaths or vows, are they going to listen to us about anything else? The answer is absolutely not.

The Ultimate Reason: Refusal to Humble Before God's Word

So I am simply pointing out the fact that it is not good that he violated his oath. The third, real reason that Zedekiah died such a horrible death and caused horrible deaths in the lives of others is very simple. This is a truth that has been repeated many times over and over, not only down through history, but also in Scripture as well. It is being repeated today. You may not have to have your eyes gouged out, be captured, travel in chains, and be thrown into a

dungeon to die a horrible death, but there are other ways to die extremely horrible deaths as well.

I want you to turn back in your Bibles, if you would please, to 2 Chronicles chapter 36. Look at this. Notice, if you would please, verse 11. Here it is; we read this, but I am going to read more now. Watch carefully: “Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.”

"And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord." Verse 13 says, "And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel."

Do you realize that is exactly what is happening today? Not just in the nations all around the world. It is happening in America today. The Hebrew word for humble there is the word "kana." It means to humble, to be humbled, to be subdued, to be brought down, to be brought low, to be brought under subjection, or to be brought into subjection. What is happening today when the word of God is being preached to all the rulers and leaders? They are not humbling themselves. They are not listening to the word of God. They are refusing to bow to the sovereignty of God. They are refusing to bow to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at all of the elites and rulers who are so wicked and foul. They are thinking right now, It is party time. We are having the time of our lives, and we are doing exactly what we want to do. But hang on. God will send them a Nebuchadnezzar. God will send them someone to gouge out their eyes, put them in chains, and lead them into the dungeon. It may not work out exactly like that, but it is going to be just as bad because they are refusing to hear the word of the Lord.

Now we are reading about Zedekiah, the rebellion of this man, and his wickedness. Verse 14 says, "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. 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. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years."

In other words, God brought all of this upon these wicked people and upon Zedekiah, who was an extremely vile and wicked ruler, because they refused to listen to Jeremiah, the man of God, who was speaking the word of God. Can you not see the very same thing happening in America, Germany, and England? All of these countries that are supposed to be Christian countries are refusing to listen to the Word of God, hear the Word of God, and submit to the Word of God.

Application to Modern Leaders and Nations

Now, let me point something else out by way of application. If you have been paying attention to all of these Scriptures, the ones who were destroying Judah and Jerusalem, and those who had destroyed Israel in the Northern Kingdom, were the rulers. They were the ones who were refusing to bow to God. Yes, there were wicked people in those lands. We just read about them.

They, too, committed the same sins of the heathen. They, too, refused to listen to God, but it was the rulers who were the main

ones leading the people into destruction. Who is destroying America today? It is true that we have wicked people in this country. That is very, very true. But it is our leaders, our supposed rulers, who are doing everything they can to destroy Christianity and install what you and I would call communism. They are trying to transform a Christianized law into pagan law or Islamic law or whatever they want other than the Word of God.

Consider Psalm 94:20 in light of this message from Zedekiah: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" A throne speaks of rulership. It is a throne of iniquity, which means it is a wicked rule and a wicked authority. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government frameth mischief by law? Mischief is another word for sin in the Bible. So the question is this: Shall the throne of iniquity, the wicked civil government, have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government makes sin legal?

The answer is obviously no. But look at verse 21: "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood." You have to realize what is going on in this country: our own government is seeking to destroy it. A great-grandmother has been arrested by the FBI, by our own government, for the awful, horrible, terrible sin of praying at the Capitol.

She was there on January 6th. All she did was pray, and now she is arrested. The point is verse 21: "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood." Illegal immigrants were found with guns, knives, drugs, and a little girl being held captive or arrested. But then they were released without bail. What is going on?

A Second Application

Zedekiah refused to submit to God. He refused to hear the word of God. He brought death and destruction not only upon himself, but upon his own family and his own princes. He was responsible for the deaths of his family, the death of his princes, and the death of thousands upon thousands. He was responsible for the destruction

of Jerusalem and the temple, and for the loss of all the items in the temple because he refused to go out, as Jeremiah said from the mouth of God, and submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

Personal Application: Dying Without Christ

So here is my second application. If you wish to die a horrible death and be filled with anguish and terror, all you need to do is reject the Lord Jesus Christ and die without Him. Your wish will be fulfilled. You will die in great anguish, horror, and terror. You may use Zedekiah as your example. Our Lord said in John 8:24, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." I surely do not want to die without the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise, I do not want to live without the Lord Jesus Christ. It is undoubtedly an extremely horrible death to face a holy, righteous God with whom you have sinned and thrown your rebellion into His face. You may think it is party time now, but wait until then. I have seen bumper stickers that say, "Heaven doesn't want me and hell is afraid of me." I do not think so.

To die a horrible death, you just have to die without Jesus Christ, which I pray that you will not.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Lord, what an example Zedekiah is. May we not follow him or emulate him. May we turn the opposite way and submit to Thee, believe Thy Word, and obey Thy Word. Give us Thy grace and mercy, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 22

Where We Should Begin as a Nation - A Point of Beginning

September 29, 2024

SCRIPTURE READING - Daniel 9:1-11 (KJV)

In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by books the number of years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.

> Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

Introduction: The Need for a Point of Beginning

I've been asked repeatedly by a number of people, "What shall we do in light of the destruction of our country?" I've been asked another way, basically the same question: "Where do we begin?" The truth of the matter is, every problem has a resolution, but every resolution has a point of beginning. If you do not follow that point of beginning, you will not only not make any progress, you certainly will not reach your desired end or goal.

That old Chinese proverb, each of us can probably quote from memory, says, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." If you don't take the first step, you're certainly not going to make the journey whatsoever.

Daniel was in a position much like we are in today. He had been taken captive into Babylon. Although he had prospered there because the Lord's hand was upon him, Babylon had now been captured by the Medes and the Persians. Daniel understood by reading the prophet Jeremiah and other books that the seventy years' captivity was pretty close to an end. He didn't know exactly

when, but he understood that by the writings of the prophet Jeremiah.

Daniel then set himself to seek the Lord because he was eager to get out from under the tyranny and despotism, not only of the Babylonians, but now of the Medes and the Persians as well. What Daniel really wanted to see was the law of God established again and people obeying God's law.

Daniel's Context and Study of Scripture

Daniel says, "In the first year of his reign, I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." Daniel studied the prophet Jeremiah. Undoubtedly he studied all of the Torah, which would be the law of God. He also probably studied all of the prophets, such as Hosea and Isaiah, all of these who basically spoke.

Jeremiah spoke specifically concerning the seventy years: "And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations." Again, Jeremiah speaks of the seventy years.

"For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Thus Daniel understood that after seventy years it would end, and he was certainly eager to get out from under tyranny.

How long have we been under tyranny? I can answer that question by asking another: How long have we been without the law of God? When you think about tyranny, there are different kinds. There is indeed an economic tyranny, and that economic tyranny began with what you and I would call fiat currency. It made its headway straightforwardly under the Federal Reserve, that is for sure. But political and governmental tyranny began with the rejection of God's law.

The Extent of Modern Tyranny

When you consider how many taxes are now placed upon the American people, and how many licenses are demanded of them, you can begin to understand the extent of our tyranny. You will also understand why the average American is literally broke.

Suppose I went to work for Mike, and he paid me 1,000 Federal Reserve notes. I would be required to pay taxes on those notes. I then take the 1,000 Federal Reserve notes on which I have paid taxes and pay Marshall money that I owe him. Now he has to pay taxes on that. He turns around and pays Steve, who receives the 1,000 Federal Reserve notes and pays taxes on them. Steve pays them to Gary, and now Gary has to pay.

In other words, there is a never-ending form of taxation, and that is only what you and I would call the income tax. It does not count all the other taxes. The average individual used to have to work, I think it was through April, to pay all of his taxes before he ever really started having anything for himself. But the last I read, it was through July. Before you actually begin to accrue anything for yourself, the first six to seven months was basically to pay your taxes. When you stop and think about that, it is certainly a bad scenario. But think about the licenses.

Let me give you a quote from Black's Law Dictionary. You will also find this in Bouvier's Law Dictionary—in fact, in any dictionary of law. Here is the definition of a license: “A permission accorded by a competent authority conferring a right to do some act which without such authorization would be illegal or would be a trespass or a tort.”

A license is permission from a competent authority to do that which otherwise would be unlawful. When did it become unlawful to work? When did it become unlawful to marry, to travel, to cook, to share your food with other folks, to cut hair, or to trim nails?

Licenses are required for all of these things. I had a pastor friend who lived in Texas; he is now dead. He was thrown in jail because his church happened to be serving home-cooked meals to homeless people. They put him in jail because he did not have a license to do that. He had to have a license to do that which was biblical and right.

He asked them, “Let me ask you: if I take all of this food, get all the homeless people around here together, throw the food into the dumpster, walk away, and they crawl into the dumpster, dig it out, and eat it, is a license required?” They said, “No, you’ve thrown it away.” A license was required if he fed the hungry. I am simply pointing out the legal definition of a license: permission from a competent authority to do that which otherwise would be unlawful.

The Necessity of Self-Government Under God's Law

To be absolutely honest, I place no competency in bureaucrats or tyrants, or for any reason whatsoever. Recently, a friend asked me straightforwardly, “Pastor, do you want to overthrow our government?” I laughed and said, “Of course not. All I want to do is throw the wickedness and corruption out of our government.” You cannot live without government. The most basic government is what you and I would call self-government. If you are not willing to govern yourself by God’s law, then you are going to be ruled over by countless hordes of bureaucrats and tyrants as well.

A Point of Beginning

William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, said, “Man will be governed by God or he will be ruled by tyrants.” John Adams said, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” John Winthrop put it this way: “...must necessarily be controlled either by a power within or a power without them, either by the word of God or by the strong law of man, either by the Bible or the bayonet.”

The truth is this: if we are not going to be ruled by God, we are actually condemning ourselves to be ruled by tyrants and those hordes of bureaucrats that tyrants send out to control us. In fact, you would find out now that just about every aspect of our lives is controlled in some way, either by taxes or licensure.

I was preaching in Virginia perhaps forty or fifty years ago when I was absolutely horrified to find out that a pastor’s son had been arrested and put in jail. The reason he was arrested and jailed was that he had cut down a tree on his own property without a permit. Without a permit, you had to have permission from Fairfax County

to cut down a tree on your own property. I thought, “Lord, have mercy.” I don’t understand this.

This is what is happening: the global elite who are endeavoring to control every area of our lives are doing so more and more, and it will end in greater tyranny and greater slavery unless there is a point of beginning. So here is the title of this message: “Where We Are to Begin in This Nation,” or simply, “A Point of Beginning.” In the book of Daniel, chapter 9, Daniel perceived that the seventy years of captivity were almost at an end. He was interested in seeing the tyranny over and in seeing the holiness, the righteousness, and the law of God established again. So here, then, is our point of beginning.

First Point: Seriousness and Solemnity in Seeking God

There are two thoughts today. Number one is this: There must be seriousness and a solemnity of purpose for the will of God to be accomplished in deliverance. Daniel said, “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.”

He really and truly was. I think one of the largest problems, one of the biggest problems that we're facing today is the fact that most of us are simply playing church, and most professing Christians are simply playing at being Christians. There's no seriousness. There's no solemnity in desiring to please and honor God. And the truth is, if we genuinely desire a reformation, not just in our homes, but in our churches, in our communities, in our state, in our nation, there has to be a very serious and solemn point of beginning. And when you ask people why there is no seriousness, and why there is no solemnity, and why nothing is done, they answer, "I'm just too busy," or "I don't have enough time." But the interesting thing is, when you are arrested just for being a Christian and refusing a license and you're thrown into prison, then you're going to have plenty of time. But that's the standard answer.

First of all, we must learn that deep revolt, rebellion, and deep affliction call for what we would describe as deep and solemn humiliation. Daniel, the Bible says in verse 3, set his face to the Lord

God; that is, he made sure that he was seeking the Lord. It reminds us of Psalm 121, verses 1 and 2: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” That is what Daniel was doing. He was setting his face to seek the Lord.

Notice that he was seeking the Lord, first of all, by prayer and supplication. This was not some little prayer. He was earnest, serious, and solemn. He was not praying, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” Neither was he merely biding his time. He was beseeching God earnestly, genuinely, and sincerely.

The very fact that he was genuine and sincere is demonstrated by his seeking the Lord by prayer and supplication, which means continuous intercession. He was not ceasing in his prayer; he was continuing to pray. Then he prayed with fasting.

Probably the only time most of us fast is when we go to sleep until we wake up the next morning. In fact, that is why breakfast is called breakfast—break fast is what it amounts to. But fasting is taught very clearly in the Bible, and there are three types of fasting.

Most people do not realize that. There is an absolute fast, in which one does without food and water. The longest one could go on an absolute fast would be three days, because after three days without water one is endangering his life. However, there were men in the Bible, under divine direction, who went forty days and forty nights without food and water. Elijah was one of them. That was under divine direction.

Then there is the regular fast: one does without food but drinks water, juice, or something similar, so that he does not starve to death. Finally, there is a partial fast, which we find in Daniel chapter 10.

In Daniel chapter 10 and verse 3, he said, “I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.” For three weeks, he ate no bread. He ate peas and drank water. That was it. He kept himself alive, but he was not satisfying his flesh.

Fasting is a means not only of humiliating yourself, but also of denying your flesh. You are saying to the Lord, “I desire your will

and your answer more than my flesh and my pleasure." Daniel set his face to seek the Lord by prayer and supplication with fasting, and then he said, with sackcloth.

Sackcloth in the Bible was a coarse kind of cloth, usually made of hair. It was made basically for making bags. I could not help thinking of how, when I was a boy, flour companies put their flour in beautiful material. Women would buy the flour not just for the flour, but for the sack in which it came, so they could make skirts, blouses, and shirts. But you would not do that with a sack, or what we would call a Kroger sack today; that would be much too rough.

That is what sackcloth was: something coarse and rough, usually with animal hair on it. You would gird it about your waist or loins. It was a way of saying, "My appearance is at the same time evidencing my internal appearance." In other words, "I am humble. I am suffering, and I want that to be known."

There were also ashes. In the Bible, they were usually put on top of the head, and many times men sat on ashes as well. When Job lost his ten children and everything he had, and was afflicted with sores and worms eating his flesh, the Bible says in Job 2 and verse 8, "And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes." Undoubtedly, he put some of those on his head as well.

Humility as the Prerequisite for Prayer and Repentance

We may not wear sackcloth and ashes, but what God is demanding is that our attitude and disposition be one of humility and humiliation because of our sins, which I am going to show you momentarily. Now, let me give you a Scripture that probably everyone in this room can quote, but I want you to think about this.

Second Chronicles chapter 7 and verse 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 will heal their land." What came first? "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves."

If you do not humble yourself, you will never pray, seek His face, or turn from your wicked ways. Humility has to come first. That is what Daniel is doing. He is living under tyranny, ready for that tyranny to end, and he is humbling himself. Isaiah chapter 57 and verse 15 says, "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 said, "I dwell in the high and holy place, but I dwell also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit." Those are the ones He will revive. Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 13 says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

If there is no humility, there will be no repentance and no searching for God, because a proud, arrogant, and haughty spirit will not allow it. Daniel is making sure that he is humbled before God and that his inward attitude is evidenced by his external actions.

God's Decrees Do Not Excuse Our Duties

We must understand that God's decree and purpose do not excuse us from our duties and obligations to pray, fast, and be humble. God's purpose and decree establish our duties and responsibilities because God has not only ordained the end; He has also ordained the means to reach that end. The means to reach that end are what Daniel is doing and what 2 Chronicles 7:14 tells us.

Here is a good illustration. I know from Scripture that every tyrant is going to fall. All you have to do is read Psalm 2. The kings of the earth united in rebellion against God, saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." In other words, they do not like God's law or the limits God has placed upon them, so they want to cast them away.

We will do what we want to do. What does the Bible say? “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” I know God is going to cast them down. But that does not mean that I no longer have the duty, obligation, and privilege to pray against these individuals. I do pray against them. I call them by name before the Lord and ask Him to do to them exactly what His Word declares that He is going to do. What did David pray about

some of these men? He said, “Break their arm, O Lord.” He said, “Break their teeth in their mouth; cast them down, that they rise not up again.” Those are pretty good prayers.

I also pray that the Lord will take their power, money, and position from them, and give them to someone who is going to honor and obey God. Just because we know they are going to fall does not mean that we no longer have to pray against them. God commands us to do that. God's promises are intended not to supersede, but also to excite and encourage our prayers. When we see the day close by, as Daniel did, the more we should pray, beseech, and beg God to bring it to pass quickly.

Second Point: Acknowledging God and Admitting Sin

We must understand, in light of what Daniel is teaching us in verse 3, that we have no power in and of ourselves, that everything is of God, and that we must trust in Him totally and completely. In seeking God, there must be an acknowledging and an admission. “And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him and to them that keep his commandments.”

In a serious and solemn prayer, there must be an acknowledgment and an affirmation. The very first thing Daniel does is acknowledge God. He acknowledges God's sovereignty. He acknowledges God's righteousness and God's holiness. He acknowledges the fact that God is God, and he calls Him in verse 4 “the great and dreadful God.”

We use the word “dreadful” differently than the Bible does. If Marshall told me, “I just lost $20,000,” I might say, “That’s dreadful; that’s horrible.” That is how we mean the word “dreadful.” But the Hebrew word translated “dreadful” here is yare. It literally means to be held in reverence, to be honored, and to be respected. It means to be feared and to be held in awe. It is the same exact Hebrew word translated “reverence” in Psalm 89:7: “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.”

Thus, the word “dreadful” actually means to be held in reverence as well. In verse 4, Daniel honors God and acknowledges God by placing Him first. This is like our Lord telling us to pray in Luke 11: “When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.” We honor Him before we ever get to “Give us this day our daily bread.” In other words, He comes first. Therefore, the very first confession, the very first acknowledgment, is for God, His honor, and His glory.

The second part of this confession is our admission of our sins. Look at verse 5. Here is the first admission. Daniel says, “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.”

Take careful note of the wording in verse 5. He said, “We've sinned, we've committed iniquity, we've done wickedly, we've rebelled.” How did you get all of these sins? Here is the answer: “Even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.” Once you leave God's law, you've left holiness, righteousness, and obedience, and you've gone into sin and wickedness.

Here is the second affirmation. In verse 6 he says, “Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.” They departed from God's precepts and his judgments because they refused to hear God's preachers who spoke in God's name. It was not just a sin of the people; it was also the sin of the kings, princes, and rulers.

Refusal to Hear God's Prophets

You remember when God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to the edge of the promised land and said, “Go in and conquer it.” They sent spies in, and ten brought back an evil report. The people became afraid and said, “No, no, we're not going to go in and fight.” God said, “All right, I'm going to judge you. Your men spent forty days searching the land; I'm going to give you a year per day. You're going to wander in the wilderness for forty years.” They said, “Oh, in that case, then we're going to go up and fight.”

God said through Moses, “Don't go. I'm not with you. You're going to be destroyed. Don't go.”

And so the Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 1, verse 43, "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." But you would not hear. If you'll look in your Bibles, just turn back, hold Daniel 9, but turn back to Jeremiah chapter 29. I could show you this passage in a multitude of ways in the book of Jeremiah alone, but if you look in Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 19 at what God says, Jeremiah 29 verse 19, look at this. God says, "Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord." God said, "I sent it to you. You just wouldn't listen to me. You would not hear."

May I remind you that this is actually the source of all of our problems. We won't hear. We will not listen. We do not want the truth. We do not wish the truth. We do not desire the truth. Skip down to verse 10 of Daniel chapter 9, if you would. Go back to Daniel chapter 9. Look, if you would, at verse 10 and verse 11. I want to come back to these two verses, but look at them in light of this verse: "Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets." So God had already given them his law. Then he says this: "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice."

"Therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him."

Now, look, if you would, at verse 11. "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice." We don't want to hear. We don't want to obey. And so we're just not going to listen. Our heart is hardened against you.

Now, I skipped verses 8 and 9 for a reason. I'm going to come back to verses 8 and 9, and I want to tie them in to 10 and 11, but I want you to look at verse 8. We're still talking about confession, and in this confession, there has to be an acknowledgement and an

admission. So in verse 8, you have another acknowledgement concerning God, where Daniel says, "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face."

Confusion of Face and Justifying God

"to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee." Then he says in verse 9, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him."

Go back to verse 8. He says, “O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face.” Notice that his confusion of face goes to “our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.” What is confusion of face? It is being perplexed, not knowing what to do or how to respond. A confused individual is someone who could do anything, but does nothing, because he does not know what to do.

There is an excellent illustration of this that I read years ago. Spurgeon was talking about one of the great fires in England. A huge building was on fire, and the people formed a bucket brigade, passing buckets of water to put the fire out. One man, who happened to be, I think, a blacksmith, ran in with a huge hammer and started beating on a beam.

Finally, someone stopped and said, “What are you doing? Do you realize that if you break that beam, then the building is going to collapse and fall on us? What are you doing?” The man responded, “I don’t really know. But under the circumstances, I thought I ought to be doing something.” That is what a confused person does. He usually ends up destroying everyone and everything.

The interesting thing is that the Hebrew word for “confused” here is “bosheth.” It refers not only to that which is confused, but also to that which is shameful, ashamed, or shamed face. It is the same word used in the Bible for an idol, interpreted or translated as a detestable or shameful thing. Anything that has the word “bosheth” in it in Hebrew means something very shameful, very confused.

This is what Daniel was saying: “To us belongs confusion of face.” We need to be ashamed and confused because we rebelled and sinned against God. But he said in verse 9, “To the Lord our God

belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him." Daniel is justifying God and condemning himself and his people. How can he justify God? Remember Luke 7:29, referring to the preaching of John the Baptist: "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." How in the world do you justify God?

Justification is a forensic term. It is an act and a declaration of law. When John came preaching the baptism of repentance because the people were sinning, the publicans and the harlots said, "You are right. We are sinners. We are wicked. We are wrong. And God is right in condemning us. He is just in condemning us." That is how they justified God, and that is exactly what Daniel is doing here.

He says, "To us belongeth confusion of faces." To us belongs shamefulness. We are the ones that sinned. But he says, "O Lord, to You belong mercies and forgivenesses, dear Lord, and You are just in what You have done unto us."

Everything that happened to Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem was just. Daniel is confessing that they should be ashamed because of their willful disobedience to God and His law. Consider Leviticus 26, beginning with verse 39: "And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them." To pine away means that they are suffering, whining, crying, and doing without. They will pine away in their enemies' land because of their iniquities.

Verse 40 continues: "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land." God says that if they are pining away in their sins, confess that they walked contrary to Him, acknowledge that He is walking contrary to them because of their sins, and begin to repent and seek Him, then He will hear.

But let us make this more specific. Deuteronomy 28, beginning with verse 45, says, “Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee.” Consider this carefully: What God is saying is very simple.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 28:45-58 (KJV)

> You cannot outrun God's judgment. They will chase you down, overtake you and fall over you. He says, "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."
>
> You didn't want to listen to me. You didn't want to worship me. "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 Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand."
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> We have a bunch of those already in this country. "A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young." And that's being demonstrated in every city. "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 kine, or flocks of thy 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 trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. 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 straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee."

"So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave: 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 straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, 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 straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates."

Then Moses said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD." Here is the whole point: they were warned, but they would not listen. God not only spelled it out through Moses; the prophets also preached, warned them, told them, and besought them to repent. They refused to repent.

Daniel 9:11 says, "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him." That is what was read from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. What Daniel is saying is this: "God, you are absolutely just in punishing us."

America's Parallel to Israel's Judgment

It is easy for us to sit back today and say, "Judah and Jerusalem got what they deserved." And they did. But how eager are you to say that America is getting what she deserves? We too have forsaken God's law. God is just in punishing America exactly as he was just in punishing Judah, Jerusalem, and Israel.

Isaiah 33:22 says, “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.” God is king, lawgiver, and judge. That is why James 4:12 says, “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.”

John Calvin writes concerning Daniel: “He confessed his sin and that of his people. He does not speak here of one kind of sin, but under the word ‘chata’ah,’ he comprehends all kinds of wickednesses. As if he had said, ‘When I was confessing myself as steeped in sin and drowned in iniquity, I confess the same on behalf of my people.’ We must notice also the phrase, ‘the sin of my people Israel.’

“He might have omitted this noun, but he wished to testify before God to the church being guilty of the slightest hope of absolution, unless God, who may have so deservedly offended, was graciously pleased to reconcile him to himself.” “To us belongs confusion of faces, but to you belongs mercy and forgiveness.” The truth of the matter is that our only hope lies in God himself.

Application: Our Only Hope Is God's Mercy

He must be merciful to us. If he is not merciful to us, we are just as gone as Judah and Jerusalem. We may not have the Babylonians like the southern kingdom or the Syrians like the northern kingdom, but we are being invaded left and right. So to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we've rebelled against him. We have to acknowledge God's mercies and God's forgiveness. That's why the psalmist said in Psalm 130 and verse 4, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Ephesians 1 and verse 7 says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." When you read Psalm 80, you'll find the psalmist begging God, "Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned." The truth is, if God does not turn us, we will not be turned.

In light of this message, consider the book of Joel. In Joel, destruction was coming: "For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste,

and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white."

He says, "Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the Lord; the priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn. The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth."

Then he says, "Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord."

That is a point of beginning: “Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord.”

Look at Joel chapter 2, beginning with verse 12: “Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” Note that he said, “Turn ye even to me with all your heart”—with fasting, with weeping, with mourning—and rend your heart, and not your garments.

In other words, they made the outside appear as the inside was in reality. But God says you do not have to have sackcloth and ashes if the inside—your disposition and attitude—is one of repentance and humility. He says, “Turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

What is our point of beginning? It is the same as Daniel’s. We must, with all seriousness and solemnity, set ourselves to seek the Lord with mourning, fasting, prayer and supplication, and all

humility, begging Him to forgive our sins, heal our land, and turn us from ourselves unto Himself and His law.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your grace, mercy, and kindness. Turn us, Lord, and give us seriousness and solemnity as we observe the destruction of our nation and our people. Help us to cry unto Thee with genuine sincerity and earnestness, with humility, seeking repentance and forgiveness. Give us Your grace and mercy, we ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER 23

Do You Recognize War?

November 30, 2024

Introduction: The Meaning of War

Do you recognize war? I'm sure that everyone would say, "Well, of course I do." You may not. In Joshua 24:9, the Bible says, "Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you." War is a word that usually speaks of destruction and death. We've not really seen that kind of war since World War II. Although you can recall the Korean War, in reality that was a police action because Congress never really declared war on Korea. Neither the Korean fighting nor the fighting in Vietnam took place on our soil. The American populace probably has not seen a destructive war in seventy years. In fact, we probably have not really seen a war, as you and I would imagine, since 1861 to 1865. Although in World War I and World War II we lost a lot of men, most of the fighting was done in Europe. I realize we had ships bombed at Pearl Harbor, but again, most of the fighting was done overseas. War does indeed mean destruction and death. We cannot even envision in our own minds the death and destruction that war brings, not to mention the

hardships, plagues, and pestilences that normally are associated with war.

Historical Examples of Massive Casualties

In Numbers 31:7, "And they warred against the Midianites, and as the Lord commanded Moses, they slew all the males." Every man was slain. In 1 Kings 20:1, "And Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his hosts together, and there were thirty and two kings with him, and they arose and besieged Samaria and warred against it." Can you imagine an army with thirty-two kings? How vast that must have been. When we think about war, we think about all the fighting, the bombing, the howitzers. It's one thing to bomb someone you cannot see or to shoot shells five, ten, or fifty miles away when you cannot see the destruction those shells bring. It's quite another thing to try to stick a sword in someone's heart when you see the twisted torso and the contorted face once that sword sinks in. We cannot really comprehend the gruesomeness of war, nor can we fathom fighting hand-to-hand with swords and spears and knives. In Judges 8:10, the Bible says, "Now, and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them about 15,000 men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: there fell 120,000 men that drew the sword." In this battle, 120,000 men were slain. In 2 Chronicles 28:6, "For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah 120,000 in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers." Can you imagine 120,000 men being slain in one day? Alexander the Great killed a lot of men. In the Battle of Gaugamela, an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 Persians were killed in one day. According to the research I have done, the greatest number of men killed in one day were killed under the direction of Genghis Khan. The Siege of Merv, a modern-day city in Turkmenistan, took place in 1221, and they estimate 1.3 million were killed in one day. The low number was 700,000. "Contemporary Persian chronicles estimated the number of corpses at a staggering 1.3 million, because Genghis Khan had commanded his soldiers for each one to kill 300." In obedience to him, they slew up to 1.3 million people in one day.

Balak's War Without Physical Fighting

When we think of warfare, we think of death and dying. But not all warfare is physical. Not all warfare involves immediate death or immediate dying, and not all warfare involves the destruction of a country or a nation. Joshua 24:9 says: "Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you." The Hebrew word for war here is lakam. It literally means to do battle, to make war, to fight, to engage in battle, and to wage war. It occurs 177 times in our Bibles. 149 times it is translated as fight. It is translated to war ten times, to make war eight times, and then overcome, devour, and prevail for a total of 172 times.

The Hebrew Word for War and Its Translation as 'Eat'

But there are five other times this same word is translated as eat. How can a Hebrew word that is translated 172 times meaning fight, war, dominate, and prevail be translated as eat? In Deuteronomy 28:33, God is speaking of the curses that will come upon the people who rebel against him, reject his law, and disobey: "The fruit of thy land and all thy labors shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed always." The nation that is attacking is going to eat up the nation they attack; they're going to destroy them and confiscate all their goods. In Psalm 14:4 (and also Psalm 53:4), "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord." They're killing the people without remorse, without mercy. To them, killing is like eating bread. In Psalm 27:2, David said, "When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." So death and destruction, not only of individuals but also of nations, is often referred to as eating them up.

Jephthah's Testimony: Balak Did Not Fight Physically

Although the Bible says that Balak warred against Israel, it did not mean that he actually engaged in battle against Israel. In Judges 11, Jephthah is a judge, and they're calling on him to come and defend the people. He is fighting against the children of Ammon. You have

to remember that Ammon and Moab came from the two daughters of Lot. I said brothers, but I suppose they would be cousins: one daughter bore Ammon and one bore the father of the Moabites.

Beginning with verse 12, "And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?" They're trying to take the land from Israel.

"And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably. And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon, and said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: but when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh; then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

"And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan. So now the Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?"

Verse 24 asks, "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess."

"And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, while Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? Why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?"

Jephthah is saying, we've lived on this land for three hundred years. Nobody has tried to take this land. Nobody has tried to claim this land. But the important thing is the question in verse 25: "Did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them?" Joshua 24:9 says he warred against Israel. How did he war against Israel if he never really physically fought against Israel?

It is true that Balak wanted to fight against Israel. He wanted to defeat them, dominate them, and drive them out of the land. Joshua 24:9 gives the answer: "Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you." The word curse is the Hebrew qalal, meaning to curse, to despise, to make despicable, to lightly esteem, and to count of little worth. What Balak wanted was Israel despised and discounted.

Warfare in Other Realms: Mind Control

This statement should make it clear that warfare can be in other realms besides the physical. Warfare could be in the political realm, the intellectual realm, the economic realm, or the information realm. Americans are being warred against in all of these realms, along with other nations. Whether anyone likes or agrees with Alex Jones is immaterial, but he hit the nail on the head when he named his program Infowars. There is an information war. That is true biblically and spiritually. The Bible tells you plainly in Proverbs 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Whoever controls the mind controls the body. Whoever controls the mind controls the life, the thinking, the conduct, the actions.

Whoever controls the mind basically controls everything. Why is it that unsaved men foam and rage against the Lord Jesus Christ and against his word, the Bible? Because of the way they think. They have believed error, deceit, and a lie. Because they think wickedly, they act wickedly. Why do leftists and liberals think and act the way they do? Because their mindset is that of socialism, fascism, communism, Marxism, and progressivism. They act out what they think and believe. Why do perverts think and act like they do? Because of their mindset. They deny God as the chief good and have placed pleasure and the fulfillment of their lusts as the chief good. They could care less about anything or anyone just so their lusts and desires are fulfilled. They do what they do because they think the way they think. Why do people not plan for emergencies, financial needs, or their own future? Because of their mindset. Many people do not think they are responsible to prepare or to save. They live for today, impulse spending. If I see it, I want it, I get it. They think nothing of a week later, a month later, a year later, or fifty years later. They're going to be trusting the government, some family member, or some neighbor to take care of them in emergencies and even in their old age. The same is true in the spiritual realm and in obedience to the Word of God. Why is it that men do not read the Bible, study the Bible, or think about the commands and principles of God? They just simply live their life as they please. Because of the way they think. Because of their mindset. They believe that somehow God's never going to hold them accountable, they're going to escape judgment, they're going to be the exception, and they will never be in adversity.

Psalm 10 gives the perfect description of someone like this. The question is asked in verse 1, "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" Now look at the answer. "The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined." Why are the wicked persecuting the poor? Verse 3: "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I

shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones." All of his actions, all of his conduct, is because God is not in all of his thoughts. He puffs at God, he puffs at everything, and he says, "I shall never, ever be in adversity. I shall not be moved." Because people think the way they think, they act the way they act.

Your mindset, your thinking, determines your actions and your conduct. You actually live out that which you think and that which you believe. David said in Psalm 116:10, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." We actually speak that which we believe. Our Lord said similarly in Matthew 15:18–19, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man." The heart is the mind. Verse 19 says, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." You can't do anything without thinking about it. Your mindset, your attitude, your thoughts control everything.

War does not necessarily have to be in the physical realm to be war. I want to give you two quotes. The first is from John Trapp, the old Puritan. Talking about Balak, he said, "He did not," that is, he did not make war, although the Bible says he warred. He said he did not because he durst not, howbeit because he intended, if he could have accomplished it, to fight with Israel and prepare for that purpose, it is spoken of as a done thing. I would add that since Balak did not physically fight with Israel, he did war against them spiritually. Here's the one by Matthew Poole: "One prince may commence a war against another, though he never come to a battle, nor strike one stroke. So Balak warred, though not by open force, yet by crafty counsel and warlike stratagems, by magical arts and by wicked devices, and by making bait betwixt them and God, their confederate, or by warlike preparations." Although Balak never fought against Israel physically, he warred against them by crafty counsel, by warlike stratagems, by magical arts (because he was calling Balaam to curse them), and by wicked devices. Matthew

Poole said that he made bait between Israel and God, who was their confederate.

Numbers 22 shows that Balak did indeed intend to war against Israel physically. In Numbers 22:1, "And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." His intention, in reality, was to fight if they were cursed by Balaam.

Balaam was a false prophet. It is true that God used Balaam. I've been asked, could God use a lost preacher? Well, he used Balaam's ass to preach, so I guess so. Balaam was a false prophet, and all he was interested in was the reward. You will find two passages in the New Testament that speak of this. The first is 2 Peter 2:15, "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." In Jude 11, "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." There are three here that we are warned about: Balaam, Korah, and Cain. Both of these passages talk about the fact that Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness. Balak sent for Balaam so that Balaam might curse Israel, that somehow Balak would gain an advantage and be able to defeat Israel. You know the story: when Balaam set out to curse Israel, God would not allow him to curse Israel. He turned every

curse into a blessing. Every time he went to curse Israel, he ended up blessing Israel.

Although there are many aspects to this, the important point right now is this: he never once cursed Israel. He ended up blessing them, and Balak was so upset. You remember when Balak sent to call Balaam, he sent princes and God told Balaam not to go with them. Then he sent a second time greater princes promising more money, and God told Balaam not to go, and he didn't go. The third time he sent higher princes with greater promises, and God told Balaam, "If they come to you in the morning, arise and go with them." Well, they didn't come to him, and Balaam got up and just went on his own. That's when the angel stood in the way and tried to slay him. That's when his ass turned aside out of the field, crushed his foot against the wall, and then fell down under him. Balaam was so upset with his ass, he said, "If I had a sword in my hand, surely I would slay thee." And the ass said to Balaam, "Am I not thine own ass? Have I ever done this before?" Balaam said, "Nay." So the ass was speaking and preaching, and the prophet was naying. Then God opened his eyes, and he saw the angel standing there with a sword in his hand. The angel said, "If the ass had not turned aside and crushed your foot and fallen down, surely you would have been dead by now." Balaam said, "Well, I'll go back." But the angel said, "No, no, no." He said, "You're going forward, but you're going to say exactly what I tell you to say." This is why he was blessed. He was blessing Israel instead of cursing. Notice in Numbers 24:10-11: "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place. Get out of my sight. I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour." He was really upset with Balaam and said, "I'm not giving you a dime. You haven't earned anything. You've ended up blessing my enemies instead of cursing them."

Balaam was not ready to lose his reward so easily. In Numbers 24:14, Balaam tells Balak, "And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days." The word advertise is a very interesting Hebrew word, ya'ats. It means to counsel, to advise, to

devise a plan, and even to conspire. It is true, if you read the rest of the context, that Balaam not only speaks of Moab, but also of Edom, the Amalekites, the Kenites, and Asshur, which is Assyria. But it was the Moabites who wanted at this time to war against Israel, but they could not do so physically. Just because they could not do so physically did not mean that their hatred ceased or was abated.

The Premeditated Plan: Seduction into Sin

There was a plan now devised between Balaam and Balak. This plan was premeditated and, in one sense, absolutely simple and brilliant. The plan was, if Balak could not fight against Israel and destroy them, he wanted to get them to destroy themselves. Balaam came up with a plan to fight without fighting. How in the world do you fight without fighting? Let's suppose that Dinah is really upset with Steve, but she knows she can't beat Steve. She really wants to get him, so she gets me into an argument with Steve. It gets so out of hand that I end up hurting Steve or even killing Steve. There was nothing between us previously, but what she did was make something between us so that I would fight against the man she despised and counted her enemy. She has learned to fight without fighting, because she's getting someone else to fight for her. What we would call that, and what our author called it, is making bait between them. God and Israel were together at this particular point. You remember one time, I think it was the third time, that Balaam went to curse Israel and ended up blessing them, and he said, "God doth not behold iniquity in Jacob." The Lord God was not seeing their sin. The plan was, if we can get Israel to sin against God and rebel against God, then God's going to fight against them and destroy them, and we won't have to. They're learning to fight without fighting.

Numbers 25 records what happened: "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab." I wonder how this came about. "And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods." We're not fighting against them physically. We're inviting them to our idolatry and our immorality. "And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all

the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor. And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand."

This incident is mentioned again by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10. Verse 1 refers to everything that happened to Israel in the wilderness. Beginning with verse 6: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." Moses said in Numbers 25 there were 24,000. Paul says there are 23,000. Which one is right? They're both right. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is talking about the people, the ordinary, everyday Israelites. If you go back to Numbers 25, verses 4 and 5, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor." These two verses are referring to the chiefs, the princes. There were about two million people that came out of Egypt. You had heads over tens, over hundreds, over thousands. You had the heads of the tribes. So Moses lists the whole number of people that were slain: the thousand of the chiefs and the princes that were slain, plus the 23,000 that died in one day, which is 24,000. Paul only lists the 23,000 that died at one time in one day. He's not counting all the chiefs that were slain. Clearly, all 24,000 died. In Numbers 25, the Bible says, "Now the

name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites." Here was one of the princes that were killed by Phinehas. This is who they were killing by the order of God through Moses, all these chiefs that were tied up in this idolatry and fornication. A total of 24,000, but Paul only mentions the 23,000 that perished in one day.

Here's the lesson that you and I are to learn right now: do not emulate your rulers when they sin. You cannot excuse your sin, your trespass, or your transgression by saying, "But everybody's doing it," or "Look what they're doing in Washington. Look what they're doing in Atlanta. Look what they're doing in Tallahassee. Why, if the politicians can do it, if the governor can do it, if the president can do it, if the senators can do it, why I can do it?" No, no, no. You're responsible for your own life. They're going to die. They're going to be judged. And if you sin with them, you will be judged with them.

I told you earlier that this plan to get Israel to sin was a premeditated plan between Balak and Balaam. Balaam gave counsel to Balak. Balak asked, "How can we get God to curse Israel?" Balaam answered him. All of this seduction of the people into idolatry and fornication was a premeditated plan. How do I know that? Two ways, both from Scripture. In Numbers 31:16, "Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord." Balaam said to Balak, "Here's how you get God to kill his own people." In Micah 6:5, "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." Balak asked and Balaam answered: "This is what you do. This is how you get God to judge his own people."

Modern Applications: Governmental Warfare

Balak warred against Israel without physically fighting against them. Do you now understand it is possible for a government to war against its own people without physically fighting against them? It is possible for a government to war against its own people by

controlling information, by perverting the news, and by spewing forth propaganda. Do you understand that governmental programs such as welfare for the undeserving and welfare for those who refuse to work is a type of warfare against honest, hardworking people? It is theft, pure and simple. Government is not a producer; it does not produce any goods, nothing of value. About the only thing that government produces is debt, bureaucracy, regulations, control, and slavery. It produces nothing of value, nothing that could be sold to any other nation or country. Do you understand that the promotion of foreign wars and supplying aid for unbiblical and unconstitutional wars is warring against the economy of a nation and consequently warring against the individuals and the inhabitants of that nation? The silent tax of inflation is taking its toll on America even right now. You cannot continue to print fiat money without destroying the economy and without destroying the inhabitants, the individuals in that economy.

Here are two quotes, synonymous in one sense, but not quite exactly the same. So far this year, the United States has given $24,400,000,000 to Ukraine, $11,300,000,000 to Israel, $1,950,000,000 to Ethiopia, $1,600,000,000 to Jordan, $1,400,000,000 to Egypt, $1,100,000,000 to Afghanistan. Why are we giving money to Afghanistan? We left all of those planes and war machines for them. I guess we have to pay for them to keep them up and learn how to drive them. I don't know. $1,100,000,000 to Somalia, $1,000,000,000 to Yemen, $987 million to Congo, $896 million to Syria, $9,000 per illegal immigrant that has entered the US. And Americans have lost everything to Hurricane Helene. We'll be getting $750, courtesy of FEMA. Here's the one quote: "The government doesn't care about you. Last week, the Biden regime gave Ukraine $8 billion in aid, Israel $8.7 billion, and $567 million to Taiwan. Biden just announced the government will give no additional resources to areas devastated by Hurricane Helene. Yesterday, I saw a comment: the $8 billion given to Ukraine could have rebuilt every house Helene destroyed. I didn't see the math. But it sounds plausible. Fact is, Biden and his government care more for foreigners than for their own people." —Franklin Sanders, the money changer. When you stop and think about that, $8 billion could rebuild a lot of homes.

Do you understand that the promotion of immorality, fornication, adultery, perverted sexual acts, is warfare against morality and moral folks? It is an attempt to break down the moral fiber of the nation, the character of the individual, as well as the family. You must consider the open, blatant, and immoral acts that are now legal in this country and made legal by a corrupt and perverted government. That's warfare. Do you understand that the promotion of statism, fascism, Marxism, communism, and progressivism are warfare against the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians, and the Bible? Our Lord made it very plain in Luke 11:23, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth."

Spiritual Warfare and the Christian's Armor

Here's the point: we are at war. We have been at war, we are now at war, and we are going to continue to be in war. Ephesians 6, beginning with verse 10, says: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye 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 armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand 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; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye 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 in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Here's my question: if we are not at war, why does God command us to put on armor? Why does God provide armor if we're not at war? Here's the sad truth: most Christians do not even recognize war. They don't realize we are in a war. And consequently, they're being overcome and dominated.

The only way that we can be protected is by biblical truth with a biblical mindset. You remember I quoted the passage, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If you believe right, if you think right,

you're going to act right. If you believe wrongly and you think wrongly, you're going to act wickedly. We cannot fight and we cannot win with the armor of the world. You remember when David went to fight Goliath, Saul put his own armor upon David. David said, "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." And he took the armor off. He went in just his everyday clothes, picked up five smooth stones, and went to meet him with his sling. David had proved God because he had already killed the lion and the bear. He said, "This Philistine's going to be just like the lion and the bear." The truth of the matter is this: if we don't learn to think biblically, if we don't learn to keep a biblical mindset, we're going to be subjugated. We're going to be dominated. We cannot compromise. We cannot give up. We cannot give out. We cannot quit. Our minds must be made up, and we have to understand whoever controls our minds controls our lives, our conduct, our actions, everything. The only way that we cannot be overcome in this world of wickedness that is constantly bombarding us with error, deceit, and lies is by believing the truth, holding the truth, and applying the truth. Whoever controls your mind controls your life. If you are not dominated by biblical principles, you will be dominated, subjugated, and controlled by the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is imperative that we have the mind of Jesus Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Father, we ask your blessing. We ask your help. We ask, Lord, for a biblical mindset. We ask, Father, for a mind that is controlled by the word of God and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to see, Lord, we are at war. We just don't even recognize it. We're being warred against on every hand. Give us, Lord, your mercy and your grace, and the ability to perceive the truth, understand the truth, and apply the truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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CHAPTER 24

What Kind of Liberty do you Want?

December 1, 2024

Introduction: Two Kinds of Liberty

Today I want to deal with a subject entitled, “What Kind of Liberty Do You Want?” Turn in your Bibles to two passages: Leviticus chapter 25 and Jeremiah 34. We will be looking at both passages, primarily Leviticus to begin with.

In Leviticus chapter 25 and verse 10, we read about the year of Jubilee, which happened every fiftieth year. The Bible says, “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee unto you, and you shall return every man into his possession, and you shall return every man unto his family.” Truly, there are basically two kinds of liberty that I will be discussing today, shown to us in the Word of God. However, we could actually enumerate different kinds of liberty.

For instance, you remember the speech that Patrick Henry gave at the House of Burgesses in Virginia, which he concluded with these words: “Give me liberty or give me death.” He was speaking about civil liberty, because the colonists were getting ready to fight George III because of his tyranny, and the tyranny then also of Parliament.

When we talk about liberty and freedom, these words are used synonymously. We speak about liberty to act or freedom to perform, and we certainly use those words interchangeably. Amazingly, liberty and freedom mean different things to different people. One of the main reasons is simply that most people do not understand or know the biblical definition of liberty and freedom. Instead, they place a fleshly or humanistic interpretation or meaning upon them.

Therefore, when we read Leviticus chapter 25 and verse 10, we should understand that this passage speaks not only of economic freedom, but also of land freedom. If you will remember, this is the verse inscribed on the Liberty Bell: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land.”

The Year of Jubilee and God's Ownership of the Land

The year of Jubilee was the year in which possessions—and actually, it was not the possessions, but the fruits of the land—were bought and or sold. At the end of the sabbatical years, when you came to the year of Jubilee, all of these fields and all of the fruits thereof went back to the original owner to whom the land had been divided when Joshua and the priests divided it. And here is why: in Leviticus chapter 25 and verse 23, the Bible says, “The land shall not be sold forever,” God is speaking, “for the land is mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with me.” God has said that the land is His; it is not to be sold forever.

Consequently, the Word of God tells us so many times—I think either three or four; I know it is in the Psalms, and I know it is in the New Testament—but three or four times, the Bible says, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein.” God is the Creator, God is the owner, and God is the possessor of all the earth. I find it absolutely astounding how so many states can claim ownership of the land and therefore tax you

for it as if it were theirs, when in reality it is not theirs. It belongs to God Himself.

Now I want to give you the context of Leviticus 25 and verse 10. Look with me, beginning there with verse 1, and I want to read through verse 18. Then I am going to start explaining this passage so that we can make some proper applications from it. Look in Leviticus 25, verse 1: “And the Lord spake unto Moses at Mount Sinai saying, Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, when you come into the land which I give you, then shall you keep a sabbath unto the Lord.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Leviticus 25:1-18 (KJV)

"Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof. But in the seventh year it shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord. Thou shalt neither sow thy field nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed, for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee. And for thy cattle, and for the beasts that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat. And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years, which would be 49, and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee 49 years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month in the day of atonement.

Shall you make the trumpet sound throughout all your land? And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee unto you. You shall return every man into his possession, and you shall return every man into his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you. You shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed, for it is the jubilee.

It shall be holy unto you. You shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In the year of this jubilee, you shall return every

> man unto his possession. And if thou sell aught unto thy neighbor, or buyest out of thy neighbor's land, you shall not oppress one another. According to the number of years after the jubilee, thou shalt buy of thy neighbor, and according to the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee. According to the multitude of years, thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years, thou shalt diminish the price of it, for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell it unto thee. You shall not therefore oppress one another, but thou shalt fear thy God, for I am the Lord your God."

The Sabbatical System and Its Purposes

“Wherefore, you shall do my statutes and keep my judgments and do them, and you shall dwell in the land in safety.” Every seventh year was a sabbatical year. During that year, debts were forgiven, and every Hebrew servant, maid or man, was released from bondage. The owner furnished them liberally out of what he had so that they might begin life anew on an independent basis. After seven times seven sabbatical years, which would be 49, the 49th year would itself be a sabbatical year. Then the year of Jubilee would also be considered a sabbatical year. God required that the year of Jubilee be kept.

There are many people today, especially the Seventh-day Adventists, though there are others, who insist on keeping the weekly Sabbath and claim that Saturday is the Sabbath. I have gone over this before, but if you read Exodus chapter 12, and Exodus chapter 14 particularly, God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt on Aviv 14. He said, “This date, this day, Aviv 14 shall be the beginning of your year.” In other words, every year their calendar began on Aviv 14, the first day of their new year. Was Saturday a Sabbath? Saturday did not even exist back then. I am explaining this so we can understand it.

My birthday happens to be on September 3rd. One year it may be on Wednesday; the next year, Thursday; the year after that, Friday; and the year after that, Saturday. If the date is set, the day of the week changes. So Saturday would have been a weekly sabbath once

every seven years, but so would every other day of the week be a weekly sabbath as well.

Here is the point I am emphasizing: If someone insists on keeping a weekly sabbath, why do they not keep the new moon sabbaths? Why do they not keep the sabbatical year? Why do they not keep the year of Jubilee? God required that all Sabbaths be kept. The word Sabbath simply means rest. In this sabbatical year, the land had to rest. There was a method in God's requirement. Why did God say, "You do this every seventh year"? Why did He not say every eighth year or every ninth year?

The truth of the matter is this: It just so happens that most insects are on a seven-year cycle. In the seventh year, if nothing is planted and everyone freely eats whatever grows of itself, no one harvests it. All the animals are eating it, too. When the insects come out, guess what? There is not much for them to live on, and they die off. Thus, it is a means of pest control. Moreover, once everything dies of itself and returns to the ground, it fertilizes the soil.

And so this was God's way of keeping agriculture going. Today, we put all the chemicals and fertilizers on the land and literally rape it until it will produce nothing, becoming absolutely barren. Years ago, we came up with crop rotation, eventually understanding that certain sections of a field should simply lie dormant for one year. That was a biblical act. God had a reason for all this.

In every seventh year, debts were forgiven, and Hebrew servants, or slaves, were set free and furnished by their masters; then, in the year of Jubilee, everything returned to its original owner. There are vitally important lessons to learn from all this. The first is Proverbs 22:7: "The rich ruleth over the poor and the borrower is slave to the lender." The Word of God says this. The word servant actually means slave.

Debt as Slavery and the Principle of Obedience

The Bible is teaching us that not only is debt slavery, but debt is the opposite of liberty and freedom. Think about this: If I am in debt and owe Steve, that means I am not working for myself but for Steve, because I owe him. I am enslaved to him until I pay back that debt

that I borrowed from him. Debt is slavery in and of itself. The one who is in debt cannot do as he pleases, cannot do as he wills, because he is now the servant to the individual who loaned him that money.

Judah and Jerusalem went into captivity for violating God's Sabbaths. God was the owner of the land and of everything, and He had told them what they were to do, which they did not do. Leviticus 26:33 gives the curse for disobedience: "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. Then shall the land enjoy her Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate. And you being in your enemy's land, even then shall the land rest and enjoy her Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate. It shall rest, because it did not rest in your Sabbaths when ye dwelt upon it." God says that if they do not keep His Sabbaths, He will send them into captivity, and the land will rest. They will not be planting anything or doing anything because they will be in captivity.

Leviticus 26:43 says, "The land also shall be left of them, and she shall enjoy her sabbaths while she lies desolate without them. And they shall accept the punishment of their iniquity because, even because they despised my judgments and because their soul abhorred my statutes." Clearly, God is saying that there is a principle here.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 36, and look at verse 21. There is an awful lot in the Bible about these sabbatical years. In fact, let us read verse 20: “And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths. For as long as she lay desolate, she kept sabbath to fulfill threescore and ten years.”

For the seventy years that Judah and Jerusalem were in captivity in Babylon, the land was enjoying her sabbaths, or enjoying a rest. They had abused this principle for a long, long time.

Now turn to Daniel chapter 9 and look at verses 1 and 2. You will see how Daniel understood that the captivity was about to come to

an end. Daniel chapter 9, beginning with verse 1: “In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, the

Daniel wrote of Darius, the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans: “In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by books”—that is, the writings of the Old Testament—“the number of the years where the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” We are going to look at some of that, but the point is this: seventy years of captivity was for violating the sabbatical years.

In light of these passages, a principle of truth should be absolutely obvious: freedom and liberty are to be found in obedience. Destruction and, of course, destitution are found in disobedience. These people were taken off the land; they were dying, suffering, and destitute of everything. Freedom or liberty happens to be found in obedience, while death and destruction are found in disobedience.

Let me make this clear: liberty or freedom is not the power to do what you please. Liberty or freedom is not the power to do as you desire. That is licentiousness. Liberty and freedom are the power to obey God, to keep and honor His Word. We have seen this in all these passages, but let me make it even plainer.

Sin as Slavery and Freedom in Christ

Sin not only brings slavery; sin is slavery. Our Lord said it in John 8:34: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” The word servant is doulos in the Greek, which literally means slave. Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin.

Romans 6 teaches this very plainly, because the Bible teaches us that sin is slavery. In that chapter, we see two kingdoms, two dominions, and two kings. Sin is called a lord, is called a king, and sin has dominion. Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord, and He has a dominion. The chapter begins by speaking of how we have died in Christ: we were crucified in Him, buried with Him in baptism, and raised from the dead in Him to newness of life. Therefore, we are to walk in obedience.

God tells us, “Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” We have died to the kingdom, dominion, and lordship of sin. We are to reckon ourselves alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lust thereof.” He did not say, Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies. It is in our mortal bodies. But we are not to let it reign. The power of sin has been broken. Sin is no longer our Lord or master, and we do not have to obey it whenever it says, “Jump.” We do not ask how high.

The Bible tells us in 1 John 2 and verse 1, “My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not.” We do not have to sin because sin is not our Lord. “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.” That is what we used to do. Now we are to “yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God”—our hands, bodies, minds, legs, and feet.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law”—as a means of justification—“but under grace.” “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.”

“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? But God be thanked that ye were”—past tense—“the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin”—from the lordship of sin—“ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Paul says, “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh. For as ye have yielded your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity”—that is what you used to do—“even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.” So freedom from the lordship of sin is found only in Jesus Christ. We were bond slaves to sin; we were under the dominion of sin, and sin was our Lord. When sin was our Lord, we yielded our bodies to sin. We voluntarily and willingly

satisfied the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Now the apostle is saying that, just as we willingly and deliberately served sin, now that we are saved, we willingly and deliberately serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We yield all of our members unto Him and not unto sin.

The Nature of True Liberty

In Galatians chapter 5 and verse 1, the apostle writes, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Our church is named Freedom Baptist Church, and there is a reason it is called Freedom Baptist Church: it is taken from this text. We are to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. The word liberty and the word free are used synonymously in the Bible. Both come from the Greek word eleutheria, which literally speaks of true liberty and true freedom. Therefore, any sin, any legalism, or anything that is bondage, we are free from by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word bondage is douleia, which means slavery, bondage, or the condition of being a slave.

Why did Jesus Christ come? You could answer that in a number of ways. You could say that Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins. He came to save His people. He came to redeem us. All of that would be true. But look in the book of Luke, chapter 4, and verse 18.

Look in your Bibles to Luke chapter 4, verse 18, because here the Bible gives us specifically why Jesus Christ came. Yes, He came to save sinners. But what is involved in salvation? In fact, let us read verse 17: “And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,”

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Verse 18 is taken specifically from Isaiah chapter 61, verses 1 and 2. In this verse, He speaks about deliverance, and He also speaks

about liberty. The interesting thing is that, in each instance, the Greek word is aphesis, which means a release from bondage, a release from imprisonment, and includes remission from the penalty of sin.

True liberty and true freedom are found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. David said it like this in Psalm 119, verse 45: “I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.” It is the Word of God, then, that gives us true liberty.

There are several names for the Bible, the Scriptures, and the Word of God. For instance, James 2, verse 12, says, “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” The law of liberty is another name for the Word of God, and it teaches us that God's law does indeed give us true liberty.

If I am not an adulterer, I have freedom to love my wife. If I am not a thief, I have freedom to love honest work. Thus it is called the law of liberty. But in James 2, verse 8, God says, “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Why is it called the royal law? Because it comes from the King of kings, and because it is given to us in mercy and grace.

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.” If 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 and tyranny.

Civil liberty and all other liberties are based upon spiritual liberty. Where there is no spiritual liberty, there is no civil liberty. Stop and think about this. Even Samuel Adams, I think it was, said that our Constitution is made for a moral and religious people, and that it is totally inadequate for any other. They used the word religious, or the word Christian; so basically, he said that our Constitution is made for a moral and Christian people. It is totally inadequate for any other.

When you look at what we call the third-world countries, and at all the countries where there is tyranny, despotism, bondage, and slavery, guess what? None of them have the Word of God. I do not care if you are looking at China, African countries, or South American countries; where the Word of God is not, there is no

liberty and no freedom, because the Spirit of God is not there. It is the Spirit of God who wrote the Word of God and inspired it to be written.

We have been called unto liberty. Understand that liberty is not freedom to sin. Freedom is not liberty to do as we please. Doing as we please and fulfilling the desires of the lusts in the flesh is nothing more than licentiousness and wickedness. If you think for one instant that liberty gives you the right to do as you please, you are badly mistaken. You have no right to go out and murder someone, steal something, or come up and try to hit me.

The War Between Flesh and Spirit

The old adage says, "Your freedom ends where my nose begins." In other words, you do not have the freedom to harm someone. You do not have the freedom to do whatever you want to do. Some folks have found out that they do not have real freedom when they picked on the wrong individual, and the wrong individual just took them out. But we cannot use our liberty and freedom that we have in Jesus Christ as a cover for our sin.

Galatians 5:13 says, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." We have been called into liberty; we have been called into freedom. But we cannot use our liberty as an occasion of the flesh.

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" You cannot continue in sin. That is, you cannot continue in willful disobedience if you have been saved by the grace of God.

In 1 Peter 2:16, we read, "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." That is freedom, but we cannot use our liberty, our freedom in Christ, as a cloak of maliciousness. Nor can we use it to satisfy our flesh and do that which is displeasing, unbiblical, unholy, and ungodly.

Now look at Galatians 5:17. Here is why we cannot do that: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh:

and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." First of all, when he says, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh," he is showing why our liberty cannot become an occasion for the flesh.

The word lusteth actually means to fight against. Your flesh is fighting against the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is fighting against the flesh. Paul says, "And these are contrary, the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." The Greek word for contrary means to set over against, to oppose, to be opposite, to be adverse to, and to withstand—thus, to fight. The flesh is warring against the Spirit, and the Spirit is warring against the flesh. Therefore, you cannot do the things which you would.

Here is how you can tell whether you are walking in the Spirit or in the flesh. Paul says, "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." The works of the flesh are these, and he goes on. How do I know whether I am walking in the Spirit? If I am walking in the Spirit, I am not fulfilling the lust of the flesh or the desires of the heart and mind. I am not walking in the pride of life. If I am seeking fulfillment of my fleshly lust, I am walking in the flesh, not in the Spirit, because these are contrary, the one to the other. Thus, we are, in one sense, in a constant state of war.

R. J. Rushdoony, a good friend of mine whose funeral I attended in California in 1999, said, "Men cannot find peace in Christ until they accept the necessity for war with a fallen world, and Christ is the principle of that warfare." Stop and think about that. Christ is the principle of that warfare.

Why do we fight against the flesh and against wickedness? Why do we fight? Because of Jesus Christ. Why do we seek to obey the Word of God? Because of Jesus Christ. Why do we oppose tyranny? Because of Jesus Christ. Christ is the principle of this warfare. We have been set free from the tyranny and bondage of sin that we might serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He did not free us so that we could indulge our flesh; He freed us that we might obey Him.

The Fourfold State of Man

If you interpret liberty or freedom as freedom to sin, you are badly mistaken. Thomas Boston, a Puritan, wrote The Fourfold State of Man, in which he brings out the fact that man is in four totally different states.

The first state is what he calls the state of innocence. That was when God created Adam. God created Adam with original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. Yet although Adam had original holiness, righteousness, and knowledge, God created him mutable. He could fall; he could sin. And he did fall, and he did sin.

Many people like to say, “Each man is his own Adam.” That is what Arminius said. No, each man is not his own Adam. You do not come into this world with original righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. You come into this world sinful and depraved. The tabula rasa that philosophers talk about—that you come in as a blank slate and must write upon the slate what you become—is not true whatsoever. Adam is the only individual who ever existed in that particular state.

The second state is the state of depravity, because when Adam sinned, he fell. He was driven from the garden, and cherubim with flaming swords were there to keep him out. The Bible says in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” The very proof that we are sinners is that we die. If we were not sinners, we would not die. Now you have man in the second state, the state of depravity. And what does the Bible say in Romans chapter eight?

"So then they that are flesh cannot please God." There is no way a fallen, unsaved man can do anything that would please God. The third state is what we would call the state of grace. We have been saved and delivered from the bondage of sin, from Satan, and from the realm of darkness. We have been translated into the kingdom of light and into the kingdom of God's dear Son. In grace, we have the ability to please God. But there is still a problem. Although we now have the ability to please God, we also have the ability to displease

Him. We can be disobedient and dishonor Him. Consequently, we are not made perfect under the state of grace.

The fourth state is that of immortality. That is where we are absolutely perfect and will never sin again, period. Man is different in all four of these states. When you think about where we are right now, we are in the state of grace, where God has saved us, brought us into His kingdom, and given us the ability to please Him, obey Him, and honor Him. At the same time, we also have the ability to displease Him and dishonor Him.

If you look back in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8, you will see that when God cursed fallen man, He also cursed the earth. You can read about that in Genesis chapter 3. Romans 8:19 says, "For the earnest expectation of the creature"—or the creation—"waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." The whole creation is waiting for the sons of God to be made manifest. Why? "For the creature"—or the creation—"was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope." God has subjected the creation in hope as well as us, "because the creature"—or creation—"itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Creation's Bondage and Future Liberty

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." The whole creation is groaning and is under a curse until the sons of God are made manifest. When we are totally and completely glorified, the earth will be released as well. I smile so many times, not because I think it is funny, but because it is so true: you plant a garden.

What Kind of Liberty Do You Want?

And guess what you do? You fight the weeds. You fight the grass. You have to fertilize. You have to do everything just to protect your plants and make them produce. But if you do not plant a garden, you never have to fertilize; you never have to work. The weeds and the grass are coming up anyhow. This is part of what God was telling those

people back in Leviticus 25: You had better obey Me if you want to prosper.

So, when you look in verse 21 of Romans 8, "because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty," that word delivered and liberty actually come from the same Greek word, eleutheroo, which is the verb that means to be set at liberty from the dominion of sin.

Now, let me ask you this question: What kind of liberty do you want? That is the title of this message. I have shown you so far one kind of liberty. That is the true liberty: liberty to obey God, honor Him, and glorify Him. But there is another liberty.

Go in your Bibles to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 34, and hold that passage, because I am going to tell you a little about it before we begin reading. In Jeremiah 34, Judah and Jerusalem are under attack from Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Jeremiah has already spelled things out very clearly and distinctly for King Zedekiah. God had said that they would go into captivity if they did not keep His Sabbaths, and that, when they were in captivity, the land would rest. Let us begin reading in Jeremiah 34 with verse 6.

Jeremiah 34: The Liberty of Judgment

"Then Jeremiah, the prophet, spake all these words unto Zedekiah, king of Judah and Jerusalem, when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah, for these defenced cities remained in the cities of Judah. This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, after that the king, Zedekiah, had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty unto them, that every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free, that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother. Now when all the princes and all the people which had entered into the covenant heard that everyone should let his manservant, and everyone his maidservant go free, that none should serve themselves of them anymore, then they obeyed and let them go."

Why did they let them go? You have to remember that Jeremiah had spoken very plainly to King Zedekiah and said, if you do not do this, you are going to die. In Jeremiah 34, beginning with verse 1: "The word which came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and all of his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Go and speak to Zedekiah, king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shall surely be taken and delivered into his hand. And thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth and thou shalt go to Babylon."

That is why they said, We need to make a covenant. We need to let our menservants and maidservants who are Hebrews go. And they did—temporarily. Jeremiah 34:11 says, "But afterward"—that is, after they let them go, after they did that which was right and obedient—"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 handmaids." So they brought them back again into bondage.

Therefore, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus saith 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 bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee, and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee. But your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned and had done right in my sight in

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 34:6-22 (KJV)

> proclaiming liberty to every man to his neighbor. And ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name." They went in the temple and made this covenant. "But ye turned and polluted my name and caused every man his servant and every man his handmaid, whom ye 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, Ye have not hearkened unto me in proclaiming liberty everyone to his brother and every man to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine, and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth."
>
> "And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they have made before me, when they cut the calf in twain and passed between the parts thereof, the princes of Judah and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs and the priests and all the people of the land which passed between the parts of the calf. I will even give them into the hand of their enemies and of the hand of them that seek their life and their dead bodies shall be for meat for the fowls of the heaven and for the beasts of the field. And Zedekiah, king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of them that seek their life and to the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you."

"Behold, I will command, saith the Lord, and cause them to return to this city, and they shall fight against it and take it and burn it with fire. And I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant."

Now, look back at verse 17. "Therefore, thus saith the Lord, Ye have not hearkened unto me in proclaiming liberty everyone to his brother, and every man to his neighbor. Behold," God says, "I proclaim a liberty for you." What kind of liberty? A liberty to the sword, and to the pestilence, and to the famine, and I'll make you be moved into all the kingdoms of the earth. There are two kinds of liberty. There is a liberty that God gives us that we might obey, and there is a liberty that God gives the disobedient: death and destruction.

Applications and Call to Choose

The first application is this: Liberty to sin is not liberty; it is slavery. No one has the right to sin against God. I do not have the right to take out a pistol and shoot Steve, to go up and slap Lorraine, or to

steal because I am low on funds. No one has a right to violate the law of God and sin against God. When men claim liberty and freedom to sin, they are asking for liberty and freedom to be judged, condemned, and destroyed by God. In light of our present situation and circumstances in America, we should begin a heartfelt obedience unto God and return to Him, or else we will find the liberty of judgment.

Here is the second application: “Hard times create strong men. Strong men create good times. Good times create weak men. And weak men create hard times.” As Americans and Christians, we must confess that we are weak in faith, obedience, morality, truth, justice, biblical work ethic, and plain old common sense. Very few Christians can give us biblical principles of liberty and freedom, and very few Americans can tell us the principles upon which our nation was founded and by which we were given liberty and freedom. We must choose whether we will obey Christ in the liberty and freedom He purchased for us, or disobey Him and have the liberty of judgment, condemnation, and destruction.

When you consider that it is not just your life, but your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren, your society, your family, your friends, and your nation, you better choose wisely. Moreover, liberty, true liberty, true freedom begins in grace, in coming savingly to Jesus Christ. Our Lord said in John 6:44, “No man can come unto me except the Father who sent me draw him.” No one has the ability by nature to come savingly to Jesus Christ. But when the Father draws us to Christ and we bow before Him in repentance and faith, that is where true liberty and true freedom begin. Now we may obey Him and honor Him, but no one can come to Him apart from grace and mercy. Our Lord said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” So what kind of liberty do you want? Do you want liberty to obey or liberty to be judged?

You wonder what is going on in this country? It is judgment. The more we disobey, the more severe it is going to become. Choose wisely. What was it Joshua said? Choose which god you are going to serve: the gods on the other side of the flood, or the one true and

living God? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord God. That is where we need to be.

Closing Prayer

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. Give us, Lord, Your true freedom to obey and to honor. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 25

Incrementalism, Invasion and Replacement

February 9, 2025

We are going to read the first six verses, but we are actually going to be using the entire chapter. I was reading and studying this week, and this truth stood out to me. In light of the circumstances and the election that is going on, and possibly whatever is going to be happening, this would be a good time to bring this truth to light. Let us look in 2 Kings chapter 17, beginning with verse 1:

"In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. 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 present 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.

"In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."

The title of the message is "Incrementalism, Invasion, and Replacement." I am sure that everyone understands these three terms, or at least they certainly should understand them. Incrementalism is simply doing something slowly, piece by piece, little by little, until a goal is accomplished.

Introduction to Incrementalism

There are many things that can only be done by increments. Building a house is only done by increments; you must first lay the foundation. Once you get all the plumbing done, you start up the walls. Once that is done, you can put up the roof—just increments, little by little. Moreover, any large task is done by increments; you have to start somewhere. Little by little, you accomplish that task.

Education is accomplished by incrementalism. We begin teaching our children phonics and, at the very minimum, sight reading and arithmetic. We do not begin with physics and calculus. We lay the foundation and slowly but surely build upon it.

God created the universe incrementally, one day at a time, until He accomplished it in six days. Exodus 20:11 says, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."

According to Psalm 33:8–9, God simply spoke the world into existence: "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." God could have spoken it into existence in an instant, but He did not do so. He took six days and built this universe incrementally, based upon His own wisdom and counsel, determining what would bring Him the most honor and glory.

Colossians 1:16 says, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things

were created by him, and for him." Revelation 4:11 declares, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." God created this earth in six days.

God's providence is incremental. He does not dump everything upon us at one time. We are taught to pray for our daily bread, not our annual bread. He gives us seasons in which we gather fruits and vegetables. Acts 14:17 says, "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Everything is basically done by increments. Everything that you know about the Bible and about God was given to you incrementally. When God saved you, you did not become an instant theologian.

Incrementalism in Spiritual Growth and Sin

You could not discuss theology. You may have known two great truths: first, that you were a sinner, and second, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. You knew that for sure, but you could not discuss the rest of theology because you did not know it. How did you get to the place where you are now with your knowledge? The answer is incrementally.

In fact, Isaiah chapter 28, verses 9 and 10, says: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." So God taught us by increments. We understand what we understand today simply because of incrementalism.

Do you realize, then, that our lives, everything in them, and everything about them involve increments? I'm 80 years old. I was not born 80 years old. It took me 79 long years to reach 80. We tend to forget about the weight that we gain. You do not go to bed slender and wake up the next morning 40 pounds overweight. You put those 40 pounds on incrementally, and the only way you can take them off is incrementally. It is easier to put them on than to take them off, and when you start taking them off, they come off very, very slowly.

Those increments seem not even noticeable for the longest period of time.

I am pointing all this out for a specific reason, because we are going to grasp, I hope, a vast spiritual truth that we need to understand in our lives. As Christians, we do not fall into deep sin suddenly and instantly. It is done by increments, little by little. We do not go to sleep one night and wake up the next morning with a seared conscience. If our conscience becomes seared, it is because we have listened to untruth and lies, and have spent time around people with whom we should not have spent time.

The Bible tells you in 1 Timothy 4, beginning at verse 1: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

Another verse fits what I am telling you: 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 33. Usually, if we are listening to lies or untruth, we are around people who speak untruths and believe lies. The verse says, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” Evil communications corrupt good manners. The Greek word for “communications” is homilia, and it refers to companionship, communion, and fellowship—what we would call hanging around together or hanging out together.

Psalm 1 and the Progression of Sin

Holding 2 Kings 17, where we will be going over most of this chapter, look at Psalm 1:1. Here is an excellent truth concerning incrementalism. God says, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” Believe it or not, God is giving us some incrementalism in this verse. He tells us what the blessed man does not do. The blessed man does not walk in the advice or counsel of the ungodly.

What happens if a man begins to listen to, heed, obey, and walk in the advice of the ungodly? According to verse 1, the next step is that

he stands in the way of sinners. That is, he associates with them. If you listen to their advice, you will be associating with them.

If you listen to their advice and associate with them, what will you be doing next? The verse says, "nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." That is agreement; you end up agreeing with them. What began with advice began next with association and ended in agreement. The truth of the matter is that a little listening to and hearing of the ungodly leads to association with them, and then ultimately leads to agreement with them. I will be showing you this in 2 Kings 17.

Christian men and women do not wake up one morning and say to themselves, "Hey, I think I am going to go commit adultery today." It does not work like that—not at all. If it is done today, it began a long time back with ungodly and unlawful thoughts, and with entertaining those thoughts in the mind.

Once you have those thoughts in your mind, once you have thought about the subject, the next thing you have to do is justify those thoughts or that action in your mind. You justify them with unbiblical, ungodly thinking: "Well, my husband doesn't love me," or "My wife doesn't love me," or "They don't understand me," or "I'm not getting the attention I deserve," or "I think my spouse has stepped out on me, so I'm going to get even."

It does not happen all at one time. You begin to have unlawful and ungodly thoughts; then you begin to justify those thoughts, and you begin planning. Next, you pick out someone, begin to flirt with them, and give them suggestive statements and ideas. Before you know it, you have agreed to meet. Everything is done incrementally.

I have preached for nearly sixty years. I have seen an awful lot of professing Christians leave the church and the fellowship of the saints. Many of these men and women, once they made their profession of faith, would sit on the front row, full of vim and vigor, wanting everything they could get. They wanted teaching and preaching, books recommended to them, and everything else. It was gung-ho. But then they became upset with the preacher, a sermon, someone in the church, or truth they did not understand and did not like. Instead of sitting on the front row, they moved somewhere to

the middle of the church, where they were more obscure. After a while, they were on the back row.

Then they began missing prayer meeting, and then Sunday night. The only service they attended was Sunday morning. After a while, they were not even there on Sunday morning, and they never came back. How did they leave? Incrementally. Sin is always accomplished incrementally, and it always leads to judgment. The point of 2 Kings 17 is that it is not only individuals who sin incrementally. Families may sin incrementally, churches may sin incrementally, and nations may sin incrementally. What we have in 2 Kings 17 is what you and I are seeing today. Israel had slowly but surely left the commandments of God and the worship of God. Hoshea was king in Israel at the time.

Israel's Incremental Idolatry in 2 Kings 17

Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom, just as Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom. Thus, there were two kingdoms. Hoshea was king of the northern kingdom and a servant to Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king. After three years, Israel, or Samaria, was captured.

"And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present 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. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." Israel had sinned, and God sent the Assyrians to invade them.

Israel is about to be replaced as well. I have told you this before, but since it is in this chapter and context, I want you to see the real reason why Israel went into captivity.

There are other reasons given in Scripture, but this main reason summarizes all the others. Look in 2 Kings 17, beginning at verse 7. Hoshea has been captured and imprisoned, and Samaria has been

conquered. Verse 7 says, “For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods.”

They had gone into idolatry and feared other gods. What most people do not understand is the very basis of idolatry. We think of idolatry as bowing down to an idol, but Colossians 3:5 tells us that covetousness is idolatry. There is more to idolatry than simply bowing down before an idol. How did they fear other gods? Verse 8 says, “And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.”

There were no godly kings in Israel. They were obeying the laws of the heathen, man-made laws, and the man-made laws of the kings of Israel, while refusing and rejecting God’s law and rebelling against Him. God equates idolatry with walking in the statutes, or laws, of the ungodly.

The same sin in 1 Samuel 8 is known as trading God for a man. Israel demanded a human king when God was their King. God told Samuel, “Fear not: they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” When we reject God’s law and God’s Word, we reject God as King and Sovereign. We then establish and replace God with man as king and sovereign.

Remember Isaiah 33:22: “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.” What is God? God is king, judge, and lawgiver. He is the only one with authority and power to give law. Men are not to make law, so to speak; they are to implement God's law, because God has already made the law. Therefore, in the New Testament, James 4:12 says, “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.” There is only one lawgiver, and that is God.

There would be nothing wrong with obeying man's law as long as man's law is in agreement with and in conformity to God's law. But when man's law contradicts God's law, Peter and the rest of the apostles said to their rulers, according to Acts 5:29, “We ought to

obey God rather than men." God is supreme and sovereign, and God is to be obeyed more than man.

Hold 2 Kings, and turn in your Bible to the little book of Micah, right after Jonah and right before Nahum. Look at Micah, chapter 6. God is going to show us a curse, but He is also going to show us the reason for the curse. Think about this in our land today. Begin with verse 14; we could have started earlier, but notice verse 14. God says, "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied. And thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people."

Here is why God says He is cursing them: they are walking in the statutes of Omri, in all the works of the house of Ahab, and in their counsels. Omri was the father of Ahab, so they had continued the statutes, or laws, of Omri.

God says, "I'm putting you under a curse." Everything is falling apart because you have rejected Him as king, judge, and lawgiver, and have turned to man. Therefore, you are cursed with a curse. Refusing and rebelling against God's lawful authority, while submitting to man's usurped authority, is treasonous in the sight of God.

Stop and think about 1 Samuel chapter 8 again. God said, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them." It is treason in the sight of God, because God is to be obeyed at all costs. He is the king, the judge, and the lawgiver.

What if someone came into this room—perhaps the president, a judge, or a police officer—and demanded that each one of you reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Would you do that? No, you would not. What if someone came in with a pistol pointed at you and said, "Right now you reject Jesus Christ or you are going to die"? There

might be a few who would cave in, but most would not—not if they really and truly knew the Lord Jesus Christ.

The professing Christians who would not denounce Jesus Christ, deny Him, or deny His Word or truth by request or coercion would do it by incrementalism, because they would not realize what was happening until it was too late.

Now watch this. Go back to 2 Kings chapter 17. Read verse 8 and then verse 9: "And they walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. 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 watchmen to the fenced city."

This rebellion and idolatry began secretly. That is where all sin begins: secretly. The word "secretly" is the Hebrew word chatha, meaning to do something covertly or secretly. When we were children on the farm and wanted to do something bad, perhaps smoke a cigarette, we would go out behind the barn. Why would you go behind the barn?

Nobody could see you. Secret. The Bible talks about people doing things at night because of darkness: folks cannot see you. When the Bible speaks of doing these things secretly, it refers to that which is done in the mind, where no one can see what you are thinking. No one knows your thoughts except you and, of course, God.

In Ezekiel 8:12, God shows Ezekiel what the ancients of Israel were doing: "Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?" "For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." Doing it in the dark means the chambers of the imagery. He is speaking of the idolatry of these ancients, which began in their minds.

Here is what was happening in 2 Kings 17. All this idolatry and rebellion was in the minds and hearts of the Israelites. When it could no longer be contained in the mind, they began to practice their heathenistic worship out in the forest, under the trees, in the mountains, and, as God says, "under every green tree."

They did these things over and over. Watch this: “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 watchmen to the fenced city.” This is a proverbial expression referring simply to the abundance of altars and high places.

John Trapp said, “From one corner of the country to another, a proverbial form of speech.” Matthew Poole wrote, “In all parts and places, both in cities and in the country, yea, in the most uninhabited and neglected parts, where few or none dwell beside the watchmen who are left there in towers to preserve the cattle and fruits of the earth or to give notice of the approach of enemies.”

Keil and Delitzsch stated, “In all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city.” They explained, “The Hebrew word for tower, migdal, is a tower built for the protection of the flocks in the steppes, that is, in the mountains, and is mentioned here as the smallest and most solitary place of human abode in antithesis to the large and fortified city.”

In other words, they had these altars everywhere—originally in the country, but then in the cities as well. Verses 10 and 11 say, “And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: And there they burnt 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.”

Look again at verse 10: “and they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree.” The word “image” refers simply to statues. They had statues—statues which God had forbidden—and they made idols.

But what does he mean by “groves”? A grove is not what we ordinarily mean by a grove of trees, such as a pecan grove, or a grove of oak or hickory trees. With the exception of the passage in Genesis where Abraham planted a grove of trees, every time the word “grove” appears in the Old Testament, it refers to a false idol. The Hebrew word is Asherah, the false goddess Astarte, the consort of Baal and the Canaanite goddess.

She may have been carved from a tree; it was an image. But it was not a grove of trees. It was simply this Canaanite goddess, and she was an idol. Thus verse 11 says, “And there they burnt 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.” That goes back to the grove and to the image: “For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.”

These people had totally rejected God, rejected His law, rejected His covenant, rejected Him, and yet in His grace, mercy, and compassion, He warned them and pleaded with them. The Lord testified against Israel and Judah by all the prophets and seers, saying, "Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God."

God sent His prophets, beseeching them and commanding them to turn from their wicked ways, yet they would not. They would not even listen. The next thing to see is that this secret sin became open: they worshiped under trees, on mountains, and on mounds. Verses 15 through 17 show how total their rejection of God was. This led to the point where they completely and totally repudiated God, His covenant, and His Word. Their rejection of God was total.

"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, 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."

Notice the fact that the Bible says they sold themselves. Anytime we sin, we are selling ourselves into slavery and bondage; we are selling ourselves to judgment and destruction.

Here is the final insult. God had His house in Jerusalem, built by Solomon. These people not only grew tired of worshipping their idols on the mountains, on the mounds, and under every green tree; they built houses for them. Thus, they totally rejected and repudiated the house of God. Verse 29 of 2 Kings 17 says, "Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt."

Verse 32 says, "So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places."

The word "houses" is bayith in Hebrew, meaning a house, dwelling place, or habitation. They had totally rejected the house of God in Jerusalem and made different houses for their false gods. Previously, they had worshipped under every green tree and on the mountains; now they had houses for their idols and completely rejected God.

Now here is the sad thing. Judah, the southern kingdom, had stayed true for a while, but they finally capitulated, compromised, and went with the heathen. In 2 Kings 17:19, we read, “Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. 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.”

Here is something we need to understand: civil unrest, invasion, confusion, and chaos in a nation are the judgment of God for rejecting His statutes, His rule, and His worship. Israel, and later Judah, were both invaded and replaced. “For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.”

God's Judgment: Invasion and Replacement

“And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.”

Nations that have been invaded, overwhelmed, captured, removed, and replaced are clear evidences of God’s judgment. It is important to note that the Assyrian king took the Israelites out of the northern kingdom, especially around Samaria, since it was the capital, and put them over in Assyria in different areas. He then took heathen from different parts of the country—Babylon, Ava, and Hamath—and brought them over and put them into Samaria.

Why would he import foreigners? Why would he not just leave the Samaritans where they were? The answer is very simple: because he was a tyrant. He did not want any uprisings or rebellions. He took the Israelites out, placed them in foreign lands and different places, divided them, and brought all these different heathen into the same country. There could not be any collaboration, identification, or collusion between all these people. Probably some of them could not even speak the same language. When you have different religions, cultures, and habits, how could there be any uprising against the king?

Because you cannot get together on anything. When you read this chapter, you will find that they worshipped many different gods: Nibhaz, Baal, Tartak, and all of these gods. How in the world are you going to get people together when they cannot agree on religion, culture, habits, or anything?

The king knew exactly what he was doing. The few Samaritans left in the land intermarried with the heathen. Judah, remember, for a while did not capitulate or compromise. Eventually, Judah did. But this is why, when you read in the New Testament, the Judahites referred to the Samaritans as dogs: they had intermarried with the heathen. You remember in John chapter 4, when our Lord went to Samaria and the woman came to the well, our Lord asked her for a drink of water. She said, "Whoa. Whoa, wait, stop. How is it that thou, being a Judean, speakest unto me, a woman of Samaria?" The

Judeans would not even speak to the Samaritans because they counted them as dogs.

So here is what God has done. God took these people who wanted to worship foreign idols and put them in a foreign land where they could get their belly full of foreign idols. In other words, this is perfect justice. This is the lex talionis, where God makes the punishment fit the crime. He put them in those foreign countries. Now they are going to find out the futility and impotence of serving those gods.

God said this specifically. This is part of the curses for disobedience: "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 Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour 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 kine, or flocks of thy 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 trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.”

In other words, God said, “I'm going to teach you the difference between my service and the service of these idols.” Look again at 2 Kings, chapter 18, verses 11 and 12: “And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor

by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them." So they would not obey, and they would not listen.

Now skip down to verses 33 and 34 in the same chapter: "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" Notice that he is talking about all of these foreign gods that were in Samaria. Yes, God sent them into captivity because of those foreign gods. Foreign gods cannot save; they cannot deliver.

All of the time, all of the expense, and all of the self-gratification that they had with all these heathenistic gods only merited and brought forth judgment. Now, I want you to think. I only have one application today, and it is going to take me a few minutes to make it. Have you been thinking about what is going on in America? Have you been thinking incrementally? Where we are today in America did not start yesterday.

Application to Modern America

It started a multitude of years back. Incrementally, we have left our status as a Christian nation. That does not mean that everyone in the nation is a Christian. A Christian nation is a nation that has God for its God and His law for its laws. Originally, that is exactly the way this country was set up. I can give you charter after charter where you could not even hold public office unless you confessed that Jesus Christ was Lord and King and believed in both the inspiration of the Old and the New Testaments.

That was in every colony. Look at all the original charters. The point is this: we have left all of our Christian principles incrementally. We kicked prayer and Bible reading out of the governmental schools years back. I saw a picture—not a cartoon—of people hollering, crying, and screaming about school shootings and

the children who were killed. They were saying, “Why didn’t God allow this in our schools?” Someone had written under it, “You kick God out, He’s not there.” I understand that God is omnipresent, but that is the principle: they kicked Him out.

Not only that, we have allowed Moloch worship in the sacrifice of our children, in abortion, and also in governmental indoctrination. When they worshiped Moloch, some children were actually sacrificed; they were burned to death for Moloch. Others were passed over the fire in purification and dedicated to the worship and service of Moloch. Unhappily, many of our governmental and public educational students are nothing more than good little statists. They know nothing of the Lord God because you cannot have the Bible, prayer, or the Ten Commandments in a government educational unit.

We have also allowed drag queens, sodomites, transvestites, and other “ites” to express themselves and seduce our children. We have allowed the social gospel to take over and gain a foothold in our churches, to the exclusion of the true gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

We have turned our churches into social clubs and entertainment centers. I have had people tell me, “I go to such and such church because I have a good time.” Really? You do not go to church to have a good time; you go to church to worship God. Others say, “I go to such and such church. It makes me feel good.” You do not go to church to feel good; you go to church to worship God. We have turned them into entertainment centers. We have also allowed sports, hunting, fishing, and other hobbies and habits to take precedence over the worship of God.

Alice and I, just about every Sunday, especially during the summer, pass people in boats or towing boats on the way to the river or the ocean. It is hunting season, and I am sure folks are out hunting today. I saw something a while back that really tickled me. One husband told his wife, “It is a beautiful morning. I am going to get up and go hunting.” She said, “But today is Sunday; we need to go to church.” He said, “No, no, I am going hunting today.” He got dressed and left. An hour or so later, he was back. She asked, “Well, what brought you back?”

He said, "The Lord, the Lord convicted me. And I came back; I'm going to church." She said, "Well, how did He convict you?" He held his phone up and showed her a picture. There was a huge black bear sitting in his stand. He said, "I got the message. I'm coming back to go to church."

Yet we let anything take precedence over the worship of God. "Well, I had company." Stop and think about this: my company can come to church with me. I've often thought—I would never do it—about not showing up one Sunday. When everybody called to check on me, I could say, "Well, I just didn't feel like going today." That's what I hear all the time: "Well, I just didn't feel like going."

We have allowed foreign temples, mosques, and other buildings to be built in abundance in this nation, to the exclusion of Christianity. In fact, our government has built some of these mosques and temples in other countries for the pagans. I know that for a fact. I would suspect—I do not have the evidence—that they have built some of those in this country as well. When you pass some of these temples, you should see the one near Atlanta and the one an hour up the road from us. When you see these huge mosques in Michigan and elsewhere, you have to wonder: where did they get the funds to build such magnificent structures?

These things are not easily built the way they are built. Think about how they are now on almost every corner, almost like the churches are. Our government, at first secretly and then openly, allowed us to be invaded by communist, Marxist, terrorist, criminals, and sociopaths. We have been deliberately and premeditatedly invaded. There is no two ways about it.

We have also allowed our government to steal our silver and our gold and give us nothing but this funny money, this fiat paper money, which is absolutely worthless. Everybody keeps talking about inflation. Inflation is not our problem; inflation is the symptom. High prices are a symptom. Inflation is caused by the continual printing of money, and therefore our paper money continues to go down in value. It is worthless, and therefore it takes more and more to purchase what we used to purchase. It is just that simple. Yet we have allowed all of that, contrary to the Bible and

even the Constitution demanding silver and gold as our standard for money.

Stop and think about some of the Christian folks who have already fled this country, expatriated, because they think other countries will be safer. Also consider the foreigners coming in, and many of our people marrying them. What you will have is divided households, divided loyalties, and divided religions.

We're not even gonna have Americans anymore. Let me give you a quote. You may have heard this. This is from President Theodore Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt—may not agree with everything in this quote, but at least he's hitting the nail on the head. Here's the quote. He said, "In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with anyone else.

For it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room but for one flag, the American flag. We have room but for one language here, and that is the English language, and we have room for but one sole loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people." Wow.

Where is Teddy Roosevelt today? Incrementally, we are being destroyed, destroying ourselves, and being judged. Unless there is repentance, you had better buckle up, because it is going to get a whole lot worse than it is.

God is immutable: He is unchangeable, and His judgments are unchangeable. The reason He judged people hundreds and thousands of years ago is the same reason He judges people today. The reason He judged Israel as a nation is the same reason He will judge America as a nation.

Our only hope is repentance and restoration. Unless we turn back to God in humility, faith, and repentance, there is no hope. Our hope is not in politics, man, or even our Constitution. Our hope is in God

alone. If God does not turn our hearts and minds, we will never be turned. It is just that simple.

Hope in Incremental Repentance

I want you to think about this: We sin by increments, and we may also be restored by increments. What do I mean? There is not one person in this room, nor anyone listening to me, who can go to Washington, D.C., and drain the swamp. We are not going to have a revival from the top down. I cannot control Washington, D.C., or Atlanta, Georgia. But by the grace of God, there is one person I can control: myself. I must start with myself, making sure that I am right with God and that my repentance is real and genuine.

Once my heart is right with God, I can work on my family. Once my family gets right with God, I can work on my church. Once my church gets right with God, I can work on my community. Once my community gets right with God, I can work on my city or my county. You see what I am saying? It will be from the bottom up, incrementally; it will not be from the top down.

The question is: “But there’s not enough time.” Oh, hang on. Proverbs chapter 16, verse 7: “When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” If we started pleasing God and obeying Him, we would have opportunity and time, because He is capable of making our enemies be at peace with us, leaving us alone so we could accomplish what He has ordained.

Incrementalism. Just as we sin incrementally, have been invaded incrementally, and have been replaced incrementally, we can repent and seek restoration incrementally. The road back to God will be by increments, unless God, in His mercy, does something suddenly, as He did in the Old Testament under the revival of Hezekiah.

Incrementalism, invasion, and replacement. Let us seek the Lord and ask Him to turn our hearts.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You for Your grace. We ask You for Your mercy. We pray, Lord, that You would show us the importance of this message. And, Lord, what is happening in our country? Whether it is chaos, confusion, or civil war, I do not know what is coming. But, Lord, help us to know that You are the answer,

and obedience to Thee is part of that answer. Help us, Lord, to honor Thee and glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

We ask You for Your mercy. We pray, Lord, that You would show us the importance of this message. Lord, whether chaos, confusion, or civil war is coming, I do not know. But help us to know that You are the answer, and obedience to Thee is part of that answer. Help us, Lord, to honor Thee and glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 26

Why Bad Things Happen to Good People

August 11, 2025

Introduction: Interpreting 'Bad' and 'Good'

In Genesis 42:36, Jacob said, “And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.” The term “bad things” is a matter of interpretation.

One person may designate something as bad, while another person would not say that that was bad at all. Moreover, what you and I might call bad, God would not necessarily call bad. Something that we designate as bad may turn out to be something that is good. Let me give you a couple of illustrations. If I happen to be walking and tripped over a clod of dirt and fell, and when I hit the dirt I broke my arm, you and I would say that was bad. But in falling and hitting the dirt and breaking my arm, my face not only hit the dirt, but it uncovered a gold coin. It happened to be an ancient gold coin worth millions. Now would you call my fall bad?

Would you not have a broken arm for two or three months if you could end up being a multimillionaire? So you see, when I say bad and good are terms of interpretation, it depends on how you look at things and how you interpret things.

Let me give you another illustration before we get into the Scripture. I have a friend who is now with the Lord. Some of you may have known him. Years ago, he was pulled up into a roadblock. He could not escape it. My friend was very knowledgeable and very kind, so he had his window down. When the state trooper walked up to him, he said, "Sir, may I ask you a question?" The state trooper said, "Yes." Very politely, my friend asked, "Well, may I ask you what right do you have? What constitutional right do you have to stop a citizen without probable cause?" The state trooper said, "I will show you."

He jerked the door open, jerked my friend out, slapped him, arrested him, threw him in the squad car, and threatened to have his children taken away from him. My friend called me from jail. I called an attorney, and we got him out. Clearly, my friend was then going to file a civil suit against the state of Georgia, and he gave them notice that he was going to file a suit.

Interestingly enough, this same state trooper was being sued by another man. The court case was in Brunswick, Georgia, not far from where I was at that particular time. My friend could not go, so he asked me to go, and I sat through the trial. It was a similar trial. This state trooper had pulled over a black man, decided that he could whip up on him, and this black man turned out to be a captain of the United States Army. He filed suit against the trooper.

During that trial, a whole list of things was exposed that this trooper had done—things that were not only unconstitutional, but illegal and unlawful. He was basically unfit to be a cop. I cannot tell you everything that was exposed in that trial. When I came back and showed my friend the list of things this man had been reprimanded for and sued about, once the verdict came in—and it was guilty—the black man had won his suit against the state trooper. The state of Georgia called my friend and offered him 50,000 bucks not to file a suit.

He accepted the offer. Since then, I have joked with him, “You know, I’ll let you slap me a few times for 50,000 a slap.”

The point I am trying to make is that what you and I would term bad—and it was bad—turned out to be something good for himself and his family. The second thing I want to clear up before we get started is this: the title of the message is “Why Bad Things Happen to Good People.” I told you that the terms bad and good were a matter of interpretation. In reality, according to Scripture, there is no such thing as good people.

Biblical Definition of 'Good People'

We take someone who is moral, upright, honest, and hardworking, and we say he is a good man. We take someone who is immoral, dishonest, sluggardly, lazy, and slothful, and we say he is a bad man. But in reality, according to Scripture, there are no good people. If you look in your Bibles, hold Genesis; we are coming back there. Look in Romans chapter 3, beginning with verse 10. Look at what the Scripture says: Romans 3 and verse 10.

As it is written, “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

So he says there is none good, no, not one. You remember what the Apostle Paul said in Romans chapter 7, verses 18 and 19: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” He said, “The good that I would, I do not: and that which I would not, that is which I do.” The reason he said that is because there is no good thing in him.

Remember the passage in Mark chapter 10 where the rich young ruler came running to Jesus Christ, knelt, and said, “Good Master, what must I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Our Lord responded,

“Why callest thou me good? There is none good but God. None good but one, and that is God.”

What Jesus Christ was saying at that point was a rebuke to this rich young ruler. He was not denying that he was not God. He said, “There is none good but one, and that is God.” In other words, he was telling this young man, if I am good, then I am God. If I am God, you do not come running into my presence demanding something of me. You come humbly beseeching me. First, there is none good, not one. Secondly, I am God. Therefore, if I am good, I am God. God is the only good. God is the chief good.

As you look through the Bible, you will find the term “a good man.” Every time you see this phrase, it refers to someone who is biblical, principled, and saved by the grace of God. Psalm 112 and verse 5 says, “A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.” A good man is generous and kind, and guides his affairs with discretion.

In other words, he knows what he is doing. Proverbs chapter 2 and verse 20 says, “That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.” Good men, then, are righteous men, and they walk in righteous paths. Proverbs chapter 12 and verse 2 says, “A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.” A good man is one who obtains favor, or grace, from the Lord. Then Proverbs 13:22 says, “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.”

Micah chapter 7 and verse 2 says, “The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.” The interesting thing about this verse is that the Hebrew word is chasid. When it says, “The good man is perished out of the earth,” the word “good” in Hebrew means the godly, the saint, the pious, those who are faithful and true.

Our Lord in Matthew 12 and verse 38 said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things: but an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.” A good man has to have a good heart if he is going to bring out good treasures. It

is God, then, who gives that good heart. In Acts 11, verse 25, referring to Barnabas, the Scripture says, “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.” Here is a good man, but he is a man of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

Truthfully, Scripture tells us that there are none who are good in and of themselves. The only good men are those who have been made good by the grace and mercy of God and who have the principles of God in their lives. Please keep this truth in mind as we discuss this question: Why bad things happen to good people.

Jacob's Misinterpretation in Genesis 42

Our understanding must be based upon Scripture; otherwise, we will make our own personal interpretations of these words. Look back in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 42. I want to explain verse 36 before we really get started.

Jacob's sons had already gone into Egypt and gotten grain once. Joseph, of course, made himself difficult, and they did not recognize him. He said, "You're spies. That's what you are. You're all spies." They answered, "Oh, no, no, no. We be honest men. We be twelve brethren. One is not, and one is with the father unto this day."

Joseph said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'm going to put you all in prison until that one comes and proves that you're not spies." They said they could not do that. Joseph replied, "I'll keep one of you. I'll keep Simeon and lock him up. You take all the food back to your family. But know this: you're not going to get any more grain from me. You're not going to see my face unless you say that baby brother comes," Benjamin, the real, true brother of Joseph. So they ate up all the grain.

Jacob then said, "Go back and buy some more." They answered, "Daddy, we can't go back, not without Benjamin. If we don't have Benjamin, the man has already said we are not going to see his face."

Look again at verse 36: "And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not"—these boys had sold Joseph into Egypt, taking his coat of many colors, dipping it in sheep's blood, and making their father think Joseph was dead. "Now

Simeon is locked up." Jacob continued, "Joseph is not, and Simeon, why he's not here, and now you're going to take Benjamin away."

Then he makes this statement: “All these things are against me.” How many of those things were really against Jacob? Not one. Joseph was sold into Egypt in order that he might preserve Jacob and the entire family alive. Joseph told his brethren, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God sent me here.” Simeon was being held only temporarily, and now Jacob was saying that he would probably end up losing Benjamin. None of those things were against him. I am sure it grieved him when he thought Joseph was dead, and when he could not see Simeon. Yet he was saying, “All of these things are bad. All of these things are against me.” None of them were. Every one of them was for him. This is why our terms, bad and good, are matters of interpretation in one sense of the word.

You remember the passage in Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” For the child of God, everything works for our good. It may not seem good to us, and we may not think it is good. In many ways we may interpret it as bad, but Scripture says everything is for our good. There may be temporary pain, temporary discomfort, a few doubts along the way, and things we may not understand, but God still said all things are going to work together for our good. We are talking about suffering and why bad things happen to good people. All of us have suffered in some ways, and some have suffered more than others. Yet the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:18 says, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy

“To be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” So why do bad things happen to good people? We could ask the question another way: Why do bad things happen to Christians, or to what you and I would call godly people? I am going to give you three answers. Here is the first: Why do bad things happen to good or godly people? Number one, because we are sinners. We may be saved sinners, but we are still sinners.

Reason 1: Because We Are Sinners

Sin resides in us, but it is not to reign over us. In Romans, chapter six, verses 11 and 12, the Apostle Paul writes, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Now look at verse 12: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

He did not say, “Let not sin therefore be in your mortal bodies.” He said, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies.” The reason is that sin is no longer our lord; sin no longer has dominion over us. The dominion of sin has been broken by the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, “Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.” Jesus Christ holds sway and dominion over us, not sin. We have been saved from the dominion and lordship of sin, but we are still sinners.

Many times our chastisement is a bodily disease because of our sins. Not all sickness is due to sin specifically. There are some sicknesses directly related to sin. Venereal disease, of course, would be related to fornication and wickedness. Drunkenness has its own peculiar diseases of the body and failures of the body. In one sense, all sickness is related to sin, because had there not been any sin, there would not be any sickness. Death comes as a result of sin as well.

Sometimes God chastens us, or sometimes God causes a little suffering in us, either to prevent sin or to control sin. In 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul may indeed have had a problem with pride. He said, "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)" Many people think this was what happened to him on the Damascus Road. No one can know for sure. He continued, "such an one caught up to the third heaven."

Some could say this is when Paul was stoned and left for dead. Maybe so. I don't know. He doesn't make that clear. He said, "And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot

tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

Paul had this tremendous experience that no one else knew about or could explain. He said, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations," in other words, lest he become bent out of pride, "there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities."

Now notice, if you would please, he said this thorn in the flesh was given to him lest he should be exalted above measure, lest he get filled up with pride, lest he start glorying in what God has done for him. Now, what was that thorn in the flesh? Well, the truth is no one knows exactly. However, there are a number of scholars that believe that Paul's thorn in the flesh was what we know as ophthalmia, which is a horrible eye disease. And the Apostle Paul, you remember what the Corinthians said about him.

They said, "Let's see, his letters are weighty, but his appearance is weak and his speech is contemptible." Wow. And the word for weak is the word asthenes, which means someone who is weak, someone who is feeble, someone who is infirm. And so Paul was having some type of physical difficulty, whatever it was. But if you look in your Bibles to the book of Galatians chapter five, you might find another hint as to what his problem may have really been. So notice if you would, it's actually chapter six. Look in chapter six, verse 11. Chapter six, verse 11. Look what he said: "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." Now, Paul usually had an amanuensis, that is, he had a secretary. And in fact, at the end of these epistles by Paul, you will usually see written by, and there is an amanuensis or a secretary that wrote Paul's letter for him. But he said in verse 11 of chapter 6, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand."

Paul said, "I didn't have a secretary. I had to write this." Well, Galatians only six chapters. And that's not a large letter. I mean, when you look at the book of Romans, it's much larger. First Corinthians is larger. Second Corinthians is larger. The word "large" has nothing to do with length. It has to do with the magnitude of the letters in which Paul wrote. So his Greek letters then had to be rather large because his eyesight was so terrible. And that's what they were saying. And of course, this eye disease would not only account for this, but it would also make his appearance weak and undoubtedly contemptible as well, in one sense, his speech.

Jonathan Edwards preached that great sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." What many people do not know is that his eyesight was so bad that he read his sermons holding them up like this; he could not even hold them down to look at the people. God used him so graciously. What many also do not know is that all of his deacons and other men had been in the basement of the church praying all night before he preached that sermon as well.

The truth of the matter is that many people have physical problems. Just because you have a physical problem does not mean that you are some type of horrible, vile, and excruciatingly wicked sinner. We do not have to say that. You can be sick without being an exceedingly vile and wicked sinner. You do not have to be vile to have appendicitis, pneumonia, or the flu.

Yes, we are sinners; that is part of our humanity and our weakness. But you do not have to be a vile sinner to be sick like that. Sometimes, however, sickness does come because of our sins. So, if you look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 28, this is where you find the blessings and the curses. Beginning with verse 27, you will see what God says concerning sickness and smiting people because of their disobedience and sin.

In verse 27 He says, "The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart." Then, in verse 35: "The Lord shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head."

Obviously, there are some sins that directly bring sickness upon us. Micah 6:13 says, "Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins." God said, "I will make you sick in smiting you." Then Micah 7:9 says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him."

"I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." In other words, God's anger has been unleashed in chastisement. He said, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord." In Lamentations 3:27, he said, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." In other words, you're going to suffer for your sins. That's all there is to it. So when we talk about this, why bad things happen to good people, we must consider these things.

There's not a person in this room who has not been sick. Thankfully, we got well. There's probably not a person in this room who has not suffered in some manner. Some suffer more than others, that is for sure. But let me point something out: the truth is, we've still had more good days than bad days, more good years than bad years, and more days of plenty than days of want, hunger, and famine.

When we look at this, we have to come to the realization and the truth that Jacob came to in Genesis chapter 32 and verse 10. On his way back home, having been all that time with Laban in Syria, Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." When you stop and think how good, gracious, and kind God has been unto us, and we are sinners, you have to admit and confess, I am not worthy of the least of these mercies.

The truth is also enunciated by Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:22–23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

I try, though I may not always be successful, every night before I go to sleep to thank the Lord for allowing me and Alice to live through the day. When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I thank him for is keeping me alive during the night. It's of his mercies that we're not consumed. It's compassion that we're not consumed.

Reason 2: Because of Salvation

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do bad things happen to godly people? The first answer is because we are sinners. Here is the second answer, and it may surprise you: bad things happen to godly people because of salvation. You may ask, "You mean I am suffering because I am saved?" Yes. Think with me about the Scriptures.

Turn to Acts chapter 9. Saul of Tarsus had been struck down on the road to Damascus. God told him to go into Damascus, and now He was telling Ananias to go and touch Paul, who had been struck with blindness, and heal him. Acts 9:11 says: "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight."

Then Ananias answered: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." Ananias was hesitant. He knew about this man, and Saul's reputation preceded him.

But look at what the Lord said in verse 15: "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." Paul was going to suffer because God had chosen him, saved him, and was going to use him.

Now turn to Philippians chapter 3. The interesting thing in this passage is Paul's desire to suffer. Begin reading with verse 7.

Philippians 3, verse 7: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

Paul continues, “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” Isn’t that amazing? Paul wanted to know Christ not just in the power of His resurrection, but also in the fellowship of His sufferings. He said, “I’m willing to be made conformable unto His death. I’m willing to be crucified as well. I’m willing to suffer.”

Think of the martyrs—those burned at the stake, those beheaded, and those who spent most of their lives in dungeons because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you realize that our suffering, even as Christians, oftentimes helps to sanctify us? It weans us from the world and makes us more conscious of our need of the Lord.

Heavenly home as well. The Apostle Paul said in 2nd Timothy chapter 2, “If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” Now look at Philippians chapter 1 and verse 29: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Look at that: it is given not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake. I want you to look at it, because I want to ask you some questions.

Everyone in this room could probably quote Ephesians 2:8-9. We all know that faith is the gift of God. So look what he said: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Is faith the gift of God? Yes. Does he give the gift of faith to every man? No, not at all. In this verse, suffering is also the gift of God. Do all men suffer the way the Apostle Paul did? No. Paul said he was night and day in the deep. Thrice was he beaten with rods, up to 40 lashes with a whip. I mean, I forget how many times, five times I think he said. None of us have ever been beaten. We have not been thrown in a dungeon, nor spent a night and day in the deep.

Here is the point: just as God does not give every man the gift of faith, God does not give every individual the gift of suffering. That is a special gift. You say, “But I don't think I want that gift.”

We have four kids here. I could ask Jennifer or Mama: Do you love all four kids? Yes. Do you give attention to all four kids? Yes. But what happens when one of them gets sick, when one of them starts suffering? That sick one, that suffering one, gets more attention than the other three. That is true in our earthly homes, and it is also true in our heavenly home. It is true of our heavenly Father. The one that suffers the most is the one who gets the most of the Father's attention.

I just lost a dear friend several weeks back. He lived on this verse, Philippians 1:29. He had dementia and all kind of other problems. He would call me sometimes three and four times a day, asking me the same question. I would answer it for him over and over, and I was glad to do so. He hung on this verse because he said, “I'm willing to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now look back at verse 29: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,” or “to suffer for his sake.” Unto you it is given.

The Greek word normally used for gift is didomi. Didomi means, “I give”; it is a gift, something I bestow upon you. But that is not the word used in Philippians 1:29. The word used there for “given” is charizomai. Charizomai means to do something pleasant for someone, to show favor to someone, or to gratify someone. Charis is where we get our word grace. Charizomai means that we have been graced with faith, or we have been graced with suffering. Isn’t that amazing? God, in his grace, oftentimes gives suffering. Those who are accounted as sufferers for Jesus Christ have been given a special gift.

Reason 3: Because of God's Sovereignty

It is not one that everyone gets. There is a lot of suffering that is simple. What did our Lord say? “If they hated me, they’ll hate you. If they receive my word, they’ll receive your word.” He also said, “The servant is not above the master.” There is suffering that amounts to, “I don’t like him. He’s too plain. I’m not going to listen to him.” That is nothing. Real suffering is the gift of God.

Sometimes we suffer not just because we are sinners, but because of our salvation. We may be like Paul; the Lord may show us how great things we must suffer for his sake. Here is the third reason why bad things happen to good people: not just because we are sinners and not just because of salvation, but also because of God's sovereignty.

God has the absolute right to do with us as he pleases. We are the child; he is the Father. We are the creature; he is the Creator. We are the sinner; he is the Lord. He is the potter; we are the clay. He does that which pleases him in our lives, which will bring him the most glory and us the most good.

Have you ever wondered about children—special children? Why are some children born with Down syndrome, or with some horrible disease they must face until they die, usually at a very early age? What about children born with organic brain problems, who are adults yet still look and act like children? I believe that somehow, some way, God is going to get special glory from these individuals. I really do. I had a good friend who had two daughters, and one was a Down syndrome child. Her name was Michelle, by the way.

I visited that home many, many times. I would sit and watch that child, who was in her thirties, coloring in her coloring book. She would write little notes, and I would read them: "I love my daddy. I love my mama." Every time I was in the home, she would hug my neck and say, "I love your preaching. I love your preaching," over and over.

I have often thought about that. I would much rather have a child like that than one who is mean as hell and wicked and godly as she or he could be. I really believe that God gives those special children to special parents.

Just a few weeks ago, I was in the airport and saw a little girl running down the aisle while I was waiting for a plane. Her young mother was chasing her. I came up beside the mother and said, "They will wear you out." She said, "I know it." Then the little girl turned and came back to her mother, and I saw that she was a Down syndrome child. The mother picked her up. I stopped, looked at her, took her little hand, and said, "I just want you to know, sweetheart, I

think you're beautiful." She just smiled. God, in his grace and mercy, gives special children to special parents.

Now, what about those who are born blind? Everybody in this room has heard of Fanny Crosby. Fanny Crosby was blind from six weeks of age. Many people think that she was born blind; they simply did not discover it until six weeks later. She is one of the most prolific poem and hymn writers who has ever lived. She wrote between 5,500 and 9,000 hymns and poems.

The reason there is such a wide range is that many times she wrote under pseudonyms—that is, false names. Although Fanny Crosby is not ascribed to that poem or hymn, she wrote it. Fanny Crosby was not only a hymn writer; she also became a missionary in New York City, where she lived. She was a missionary to the poor, the needy, and the downtrodden. She herself was barely above poverty because they paid her very poorly for her poems and hymns.

And yet she spent thirty years ministering to those who were worse off than she was. When Fanny Crosby was asked to speak to a group, here was her opening: "It is a joy to walk in the light." And she was blind. Of course, the light she referred to was the light of the Word of God.

Sometimes bad things are based upon God's sovereignty. In John chapter 9, there was a man who was born blind: "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" They were connecting sin and blindness, or diseases. "Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." He said it was not because of this man's sin, nor because of his parents, that he was born blind. It was because of God's sovereignty.

Our Lord healed this blind man, and the Pharisees wanted to know how he was healed. "Well, he spit and made clay and put it on my eyes and told me to go wash in the pool of Siloam. And I did, and I was healed." They did not believe that he had been born blind until they called his parents. "Is this your son? Was he born blind?" "Yes." "Well, how was he healed?" "We don't know; he is of age; ask him."

The Bible says they feared the Pharisees, lest they be thrown out of the synagogue. “He is of age; ask him; he will speak for himself.” So they asked him again, “How did he heal thee?” He answered, “I’ve told you already; if I tell you again, will ye also be his disciples?”

They scoffed and laughed at him. He said, "You can be his disciple; we're Moses' disciple." They asked him, "Who is he?" He said, "I don't really know, but one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." This man was born blind so that, through the sovereignty of God, he might be healed by the Son of God for the glory of God. Do you realize that a lot of times suffering in our lives is just so God can do something special for us? Suffering also makes us far more appreciative of, and grateful for, what God does for us.

In Deuteronomy chapter 8, beginning with verse 2, God says, "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger." He allowed them to become hungry. Why? "And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

What did the Bible say? "He suffered thee to hunger, that he might feed thee." He fed them with something they had never heard about, neither had their fathers. He fed them with manna. The Hebrew word for manna means, "What is it?" They did not know what it was. It tasted like honey and looked like a coriander seed, but they did not know what it was.

Nothing happens by accident, luck, chance, fate, or fortune in a world ruled by God. Everything is by God's divine providence. Anything that comes to pass in our life is by God's providence. God is too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake.

So let me say this again: Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good." Not some things, a few things, or most things, but all things work together for good to them that love God and to them who are the called according to His purpose.

Sometimes our definitions of bad and good depend upon how we interpret things and how we look at and define them. If we really understood God's divine providence, we would understand that everything that comes to pass in our life is for our good and His glory.

Historical Example: Stonewall Jackson

I have a lot of historical sermons, including three or four on Stonewall Jackson. Stonewall Jackson was one of the most godly men I believe ever lived, and Romans 8:28 was his favorite passage. At Chancellorsville, Stonewall Jackson was shot by his own men in the dark. They thought he was the enemy. He was hit in his right arm, his left arm, and by a few other shots, I think. The bone in his left arm was crushed.

They called for a litter and placed Jackson on it. Lieutenant Smith was helping carry him from the field to the ambulance when his foot caught in a vine. He tripped and dropped Jackson onto that already broken arm. Jackson let out one piteous little groan. Lieutenant Smith asked, "General Jackson, are you all right?" General Jackson replied, "Lieutenant Smith, don't concern yourself about me, I'm fine."

In excruciating pain, Jackson was taken to the ambulance. Dr. Hunter McGuire, his doctor, examined him, and they amputated his left arm and bandaged his right. After surgery, Chaplain Beverly Tucker Lacy, a wonderful preacher, visited his tent. Seeing the stub of the amputated arm, Chaplain Lacy said, "Oh, General, what a calamity." I want to read to you Jackson's response to his preacher.

He first thanked him for his concern and then said, “You see me severely wounded, but not depressed, not unhappy. I believe that it has been done according to God's holy will, and I acquiesce entirely in it. You may think it strange, but you never saw me more perfectly contented than I am today, for I am sure that my Heavenly Father designs this affliction for my good. I'm perfectly satisfied that either in this life or in that which is to come, I shall discover that what is now regarded as a calamity is a blessing. And if it appears a great calamity, as it surely will be a great inconvenience to be deprived of my arm, it will result in a great blessing.”

"I can wait until God in his own time shall make known to me the object he has in thus afflicting me. But why should I not rather rejoice in it as a blessing and not look upon it as a calamity at all?" Listen to what he said last: "If it were in my power to replace my arm, I would not dare do it unless I could know it was the will of my Heavenly Father."

Applications and Conclusion

I have two applications. First, we need the faith, understanding, and contentment that Jackson had. If we had his faith and his understanding of Romans 8:28 alone, it would cure most of our whining, griping, and complaining, because we would begin to see how God is directing our lives and bringing everything in them for His glory and our good.

My second application is this: My earthly father's chastisement was not good to me. My father was larger and bigger than I am, and he could wield a switch. He knew how to use it. Although I did not enjoy those whippings as a child, and did not think or believe they were good to me, when I grew up I realized they were really good for me. So, when our heavenly Father chastens us—sometimes to prevent problems, sometimes because of our sins—it may not necessarily be good to us, but it is always good for us.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

"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 chastening always works, and it always produces holiness and righteousness in our lives. Whatever God brings our way, in His sovereign providence, is always for our good and His glory.

We need to learn to interpret everything through the lenses of Scripture. Look through the glasses of the Word of God, and we will see what God is doing in our lives. A lot of bad things happen to good

people because we are sinners, because we are saved, and because of God's sovereignty. The title of this message was “Why Bad Things Happen to Good People.” Lord willing, next week, the message will be “Why Good Things Happen to Bad People.” There is a reason—several reasons—in the Word of God.

But let us make sure that we understand Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them who are the called according to His purpose.” We may interpret something as bad, and we may think something is bad. But if God has ordained it for us, ultimately it is going to be good for us. We will, like Stonewall, see the goodness either in this life or the next.

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