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Revelation: Witness, Judgment, and the Throne

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

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



140

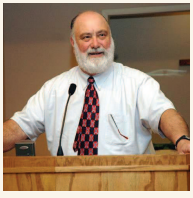
Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come.

REVELATION 14:7, EXCERPT

Witness and judgment place responsibility before both individuals and communities. In this Revelation-related collection, John Weaver considers divine sovereignty, chastening, justice, repentance, and the accountability that accompanies knowledge. These topical messages use the wider witness of Scripture to examine the seriousness of hearing and responding to God's Word.

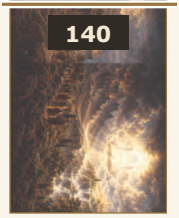
"The greatest mercy that God could show to anyone is to expose their sin and bring them to repentance."

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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Revelation: Witness, Judgment, and the Throne

New Testament Studies

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Revelation: Witness, Judgment, and the Throne

John Weaver

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CHAPTER 1

A Door of Hope

Introduction: The Need for Hope

Hosea 2, verse 15. God says, "And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope. And she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the days when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Of course, here He is talking about Israel, and He says, "I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." The truth is, everyone needs hope. Hope is basically what keeps us going. There is an old adage that hope springs eternal in the breast. You can always tell when people lose hope because it is usually shortly after they die. It is amazing that God tells His people here that He shall give us the valley of Achor for a door of hope.

I submit to you that one of the things we need in our country today is hope—that is, biblical hope. Everyone who has any grasp of the corruption, depravity, wickedness, and vileness of our nation has repeatedly asked what in the world is going to happen to us. Intuitively, each of us knows that we cannot continue much longer down the road we are traveling.

We live in a day when 40 million babies have been murdered through aborticide. The divorce rate is 50 percent, even among professing Christians. We live in a land where socialism, Marxism, and communism abound, and where sodomy is approved, condoned, and legalized. We have a judicial system that is out of control, a Congress that is corrupt and has absolutely no regard for the Constitution, and an executive branch that does exactly as it pleases. God is denied, His law is trampled underfoot, justice and righteousness are mocked, Christians are despised and persecuted, and seemingly all citizens are powerless to stop the onslaught of the new world order.

The Dominion Mandate and Our Failure

Now in light of these things, what is our hope? How do we escape? God has called us to dominion, and we have failed to exercise dominion. In Genesis chapter 1, we find what is known as the dominion mandate, the great charter, or the dominion charter: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

This dominion charter is restated in Genesis chapter 9 after Noah comes off the ark: "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand they are delivered."

Psalm 8 is indeed a psalm of dominion: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that

thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

God has called us to dominion, but the problem is that we are not exercising dominion. Some even deny the plain doctrine of dominion. The word dominion itself occurs sixty-two times in the Bible, not counting its variations. We must believe something about this doctrine. Our Lord tells us in Luke 19:13 that we are to occupy till He comes. The word occupy literally means to do business, to carry on the trade.

It does not mean to sit idly by and do nothing. Have we failed? Yes, we have failed to be obedient and to carry out the commands God has given us. Our Lord told us that we are to be the salt of the earth. One quality of salt is that it preserves, and the truth is, we have preserved nothing.

Look around today, and you find that most Christians are divisive, vindictive, uncooperative, and unwilling to be involved in anything except that which they can control. If they cannot run it, they want nothing to do with it. Most so-called patriots are even worse. If one does not follow their plan, thoughts, or ideas, he is considered either an enemy or a double agent. The community of patriots is just as fractured and divided as the church.

Many will say, “Our Lord told us that evil men would wax worse and worse, so there is nothing we can do about it. Let us sit back and wait for the Lord’s return.” That is a wonderful thought, but shall we wait like the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25:8, who said, “Our lamps are going out”? Shall we wait like the unjust steward in Luke 12:45, who began to be drunk and disobedient? Or shall we wait like the rich and foolish farmer in Luke 12, who laid up all the worldly goods he could and then died without ever enjoying them? If we are to wait, how are we to wait, and what is waiting upon the Lord? It is not my intent today to teach the biblical truth of waiting upon the

Lord, but clearly, “Wait upon the Lord” does not mean to sit idly by and do absolutely nothing, nor is it a demand for disobedience.

The Second Coming Is Not Our Only Hope

There is certainly a biblical truth to waiting on the Lord, but it has nothing to do with disobedience and sitting idly by. I certainly do not deny the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our Lord is going to return literally, visibly, and biblically.

But must we wait until He returns for things to be straightened out? I understand that things will not be righted perfectly until He returns. But does that mean there can be no justice in time and in history, that we have to wait until the Lord returns for perfect justice and perfect righteousness?

I know the Bible teaches in 1 John 3, verses 2 and 3. He said, "Behold, beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." I know that the second coming of Christ is a hope. It is our ultimate, perfect, total, and complete hope, but my question is this: Are there any other hopes revealed to us in the Bible? Is the second coming of Christ our only hope?

The answer is no. His return is the ultimate hope, the full and final hope, but there are other hopes talked about in Scripture. For instance, look at Hosea 2 and verse 15. Here is our text. God said, "And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

"And she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." God said, "I shall give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Then note the latter part of this verse: "and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." The Bible tells us that the valley of Achor has been given to us as a door of hope. What is a door of hope? It is a door of restoration and blessing, an opportunity of entrance into the will and the blessings of

God. In order to comprehend this answer, I want to show you two other passages where the valley of Achor is referred to.

The Valley of Achor: Judgment as a Door of Hope

Isaiah 65:9 says, "And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there."

"And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me. But ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number. 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 delighted not."

Note first of all that God tells us there is indeed an elect. There is indeed a remnant. That ought to be an encouragement. God always has an elect, always has a remnant. In every age, century, circumstance, and situation, there is always an elect, always a remnant, who are going to stand true to Christ.

Secondly, in verse 10, the Bible tells us that in this instance, the valley of Achor is a place for herds to lie down in. That is, it is a fat pasture. It has wonderful grazing, wonderful food, wonderful blessings. Thirdly, note in verse 10 that Sharon and Achor are promised blessings to whom? To “my people that have sought me.” So not only is there an elect, and not only is there a fat pasture to lie down in, this fat pasture is for those who have sought Him.

Then look at the fourth thing in verses 11 and 12. He says, “But ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number.” God 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 delighted not.” In other words, those who do not seek Christ, those who do not fear our Lord, shall be destroyed. Verses 11 through 15

basically deal with judgment. I did not read verses 13 through 15, but once again, it is in the context of judgment.

Do you remember the passage in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2 and verse 1, where Christ is called the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys? Have you ever considered what in the world Christ has to do with valleys? The answer is that He is the Lord of the valleys, just as He is the Lord of the mountains. In fact, He is Lord of all. He controls everything. But do you realize that valleys are often associated with judgment? Let me show you. Look in the book of Joel, chapter 3, and verse 14.

Joel chapter 3, verse 14, is usually taken out of context: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” I have heard that passage preached as though it meant, “You are in the valley of decision; you must decide for Christ.” But verse 14 has nothing to do with deciding for Christ. Verse 13 explains it: “Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”

“The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.” The valley of decision is God's decision to judge and destroy: “Put in the sickle, take care of it.” Verse 16 says, “The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.” The valley of decision therefore concerns judgment, not making a decision for Christ. In the Bible, valleys usually refer to judgment.

First Chronicles chapter 2 and verse 7 contains a passage concerning Achor. God said, “I've given you the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” What is the valley of Achor? “And the sons of Carmi; Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed.” The valley of Achor and Achar must be connected. Achar was also known by another name: Achan. Achan and Achor are the same individual; therefore, the valley of Achor is the valley of Achan. If you do not know what the valley of Achan is, find it in Joshua

chapters 6 and 7. Joshua chapter 6, verses 17 and 18, shows the children of Israel coming out of the wilderness.

SCRIPTURE READING - Joshua 6:17-18; Joshua 7:1-5 (KJV)

They are now to attack Jericho. But Jericho is a special city. It is a city that is cursed by God. It is under the ban. Everything in Jericho is to be totally and completely destroyed. God says, "And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it." Jericho is set apart for sure and certain destruction. The only people that are to be spared are Rahab and her family that are with her in the house. Everything else is reserved totally for judgment.

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down."

SCRIPTURE READING - Joshua 7:6-19 (KJV)

Wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this

people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man. And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him.

"And tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me." And Achan answered Joshua, and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it." So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua and laid them out before the Lord. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why hast thou troubled us?"

"The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day."

It is where Achan was judged by God for his sin, his wickedness, and his rebellion. The word Achor or Achan means trouble. Thus he was known as the troubler of Israel, and Israel was troubled. They lost thirty-six men in battle because of Achan's sin, the humiliation of their defeat before the people of Ai.

Achan brought upon Israel is found in chapter 7, verses 10 through 12: "And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

They did not only lose thirty-six men; they were not only defeated and humiliated—God had withdrawn from them. God had stopped His blessing, His honor, and His victory. He told Joshua and the elders, “If you don't deal with this, neither will I be with you anymore.” They were doomed to certain and definite failure. The valley of Achor was at the entrance of the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and this was the promise of their conquering the entire land. All of a sudden, that door of opportunity, that door of victory, had been slammed in their faces.

Sin must be dealt with, and it must be dealt with openly, honestly, and biblically. The valley of Achor speaks of God's way of dealing with sin, and that is through judgment. God said, “I've given you the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” “I've given you judgment for a door of hope.” This battle of Jericho and Ai was the beginning of the wars of Canaan, and their putting away the accursed thing in that place gave them ground to hope that God would continue His presence with them and give them complete victory. When sin was dealt with and judged, when it was put away, they turned to God in obedience, God turned to them in mercy, and there was the beginning of a restoration.

Judgment and Salvation Are Inseparable

Achan is known as the troubler of Israel. Do you realize the sin that troubles us will not ruin us? If we are troubled by sin, inevitably that sin will be exposed and dealt with. The greatest mercy that God could show to anyone is to expose their sin and bring them to repentance. When your sin is exposed, it may be humiliating and embarrassing, but it is mercy that humiliates and embarrasses and then brings us to deliverance. If sin is not exposed, it will never be confessed and never be repented of. So God tells us how we are to deal with sin: sin must be judged. There is a judgment of sin.

God says, “I've given you the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” He is giving you judgment for a door of hope. If you judge your sin biblically, openly, and honestly, God says, “I'm going to be with you.” If you do not deal with sin, God says, “I'm not going to be with you anymore.” Judgment. Do you realize that the average professing Christian is horrified at the thought of judgment?

How we tremble when we think we might have to suffer. We cringe and turn away from the very thought of judgment. Yet it is only in judgment that we find deliverance. It was God's righteous judgment upon Achan and his family that brought deliverance, blessing, and victory to Israel. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed the old world but saved Noah and his family alive. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah but delivered righteous Lot. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed the enemies of Canaan and delivered His people from their grip, over and over in the book of Judges. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed Babylon and Assyria and delivered His people.

Do you realize that we fail to grasp a simple truth? Judgment and salvation go together. Destruction and deliverance go together. You cannot have one without the other. Whenever God judges His enemies, He always delivers His people. Judgment and deliverance are the two sides of one coin.

You may say, “Brother Weaver, I don't like judgment.” If you do not like judgment, then you do not like salvation. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is based upon judgment. Look in Romans chapter 3, beginning in verse 24: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” We talk about God's grace and redemption in Christ, but look at verse 25.

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Note verse 25: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation." Do you know what the word propitiation means? It means to placate, to appease, to satisfy. What happened to Christ was this: the judgment, the righteous judgment of a righteous God, fell upon Him as our substitute. He died in the place of His people.

Once again, tell me you do not like judgment. Without judgment there is no salvation. Judgment and salvation go together. You cannot have one without the other.

Some might become a little pietistic and say, "Brother Weaver, I don't get involved in these kinds of issues. I just pray for the Lord's

return." I can quote these verses, but let me show you that you cannot even pray for the Lord's return without praying for judgment. Do you have any earthly idea what Christ is going to do when He returns? Second Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 7:

The apostle Paul says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

What is Christ going to do when He returns? He is going to come back in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. You cannot even pray for the return of Christ without praying for judgment. Judgment and deliverance go together. Destruction and salvation go together. God said, "I'm going to give you a door of hope." That door of hope is judgment. Now let me ask, what is a door of hope?

What is God's answer for His people in these troubling times? It is judgment—God's righteous judgment. Psalm 9:16 tells us that the Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth. One of the things God is known by and for is His righteous, holy, just judgment. Psalm 37:28 says, "For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off." The Lord loveth judgment.

The phrase, "and they shall know that I am the Lord," or its equivalent, occurs seventy-three times in the book of Ezekiel alone, and in each instance it is always in the context of judgment. We are either going to know the Lord is Lord in salvation, or we are going to know the Lord is Lord in judgment. One of the two. But we shall know that He is Lord.

The wicked will not hear God's Word, and they despise His goodness. But His judgments will get their attention. That does not necessarily mean that when God judges the wicked, they will be converted. Judgments alone are insufficient to convert. God, in His grace and mercy, may give converting grace when He judges; but if

He does not give that converting grace, the only thing left is destruction.

Revelation 9:20 says, "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

Judgment alone is insufficient, but judgment is necessary. When God judges His people, He will give them converting grace. When God judges His enemies, He does not necessarily convert them; He destroys them. In destroying them, He delivers His people.

God said, “I've given to you the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” Stop and think of the absolute total corruption, fraud, and tyrannical power that is involved in this country. Think of the magnitude of the wickedness—wickedness that you and I cannot even perceive of. It will take nothing less than the judgment of God to overthrow it.

Our Responsibility: Five Responses

What is our responsibility in light of this truth? How do we proceed? There are five answers. First, we must be children of faith. We know that God is totally, completely, and absolutely sovereign. Therefore, we can never give in, give up, or give out. We must never, ever, under any circumstances, give way to discouragement, despair, or desperation. Why? We know God's on the throne. He's on the throne of His universe, directing and controlling everything after the counsel of His own will.

We must believe that God does all things well. We must believe that whatever God does is ultimately going to be for our good and His glory. So, first of all, we must be a people of faith.

Secondly, we must understand and believe that God does and will judge the wicked in time and in history. We must understand and believe this. We do not have to wait until the end of the world to see the judgment of God. We may have to wait until the end of the world to see the perfect, total, and complete judgment of God, but there are judgments that God executes in time and in history. As Proverbs

11:31 says, “Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.”

“Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.” Now, we who are righteous in Christ, will we not be rewarded in eternity? The answer is yes. But do we have to wait to eternity to receive or experience any rewards? Of course not. God rewards us in time and in history with blessings, victory, and in so many ways. “Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth.” God is not going to be any man’s debtor. You obey Him. You honor Him. God will honor you in time and in history.

If God rewards His people in time and history, how much more the wicked and the sinner? Do you think He is going to let them escape all judgment until judgment day? God says, “You are mistaken.” If He rewards His people in time and history, how much more will He reward those who hate Him? He will give them their due in time and in history. That is why the Bible says—I believe it is Psalm 55 verse 23—the wicked and deceitful man shall not live out half his days; God will cut him off.

Look in Job chapter 19, verse 29. Job 19 verse 29 says, “Be ye afraid of the sword.” Why should we be afraid of the sword? “Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment.” Do you realize what he is saying? All of God’s judgments in time and history—our wars, our anarchy, our unrest—all of these things point to a final judgment. They are judgments in time and history. They are not the permanent judgment, they are not the full and final judgment, but they are judgments. We must understand and know that God does and will judge in time and in history.

We do not have to wait until the final day of history to see God’s judgments. We may see them in time and history. We may not see them totally, completely, or perfectly, but we can see them. Thirdly, we must learn to pray for God’s righteous judgment now, in time, and in history. Not only must we be a people of faith, and not only must we understand and believe that God does and will judge the wicked in time and history, but we must learn to pray for God’s righteous judgment now.

That God will exercise that judgment in time and in history. I've got several verses I want to show you. Look in your Bible, first of all, to the book of Luke, chapter 18. If there was no other passage in the Bible, this one would be sufficient. But I want to point out that there are a multitude of passages. I certainly cannot cover them all, but look at this one. Luke 18, verse 1.

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.” That is, give me justice. “And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.”

Now, note what he said. Here is an unjust judge. He does not fear God or man, and here is a woman who is being thoroughly vexed, dealt with unjustly and unrighteously. She comes to this unconverted, wicked king and says, “Avenge me of mine adversary. Give me justice.” He ignores her and turns her away, but finally says, “I do have a little regard for my own peace of mind. So I will avenge this widow woman lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Now look at our Lord's own application. In verse 6 He said, “Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” Ah, did you hear what he said?

"And shall not God," the just and righteous judge of all the earth, "avenge his own elect," who do what? Cry unto Him night and day. What are they crying for? Judgment. Justice. God said, if my people pray, I will give them justice.

There are numerous imprecatory prayers in the Bible. An imprecatory prayer is when you pray against God's enemies, for their defeat and downfall. Psalm 59 is a wonderful example. David begins, "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God. Defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the

mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord."

What are they doing? They are trying to destroy David, not because he has done something wrong. They are plotting against him; they are after the righteous and the just. He says, "They run and prepare themselves without my fault: awake to help me, and behold. Thou therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen." That is, rise up and open your eyes.

"Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah. They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear? But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. Because of his strength will I wait upon thee." That is the enemy's strength; I will wait upon thee.

"For God is my defence. The God of my mercy shall prevent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies."

David prays, “Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power; and bring them down, O Lord our shield. For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak. Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah.”

“And at evening let them return; and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Let them wander up and down for meat, and grudge if they be not satisfied. But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.” What a tremendous imprecatory prayer. Psalm 58 gives another imprecatory prayer. David says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.” They will not listen. Then he asks God, “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 judgeth in the earth.” Does that sound like judgment against enemies? Yes, it does. Psalm 68 begins, “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.”

"But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice." What in the world is David praying for in Psalm 68? He's praying for destruction and deliverance: the destruction of the enemies of God's people and deliverance for God's people. Judgment and deliverance go together. Read through the book of Psalms and see how many times David says, "Arise, O Lord, make bare thine arm." Every time David is praying for vengeance, he is praying that God will intervene and exercise His righteous judgment.

Fourthly, we must learn to repent of our sins and live holy, godly lives. Without taking the time to go through Hebrews 12 and 1 Corinthians 11, the Bible teaches very plainly that we who are the children of Christ by grace cannot sin and escape the chastisement of our Heavenly Father. What does Hebrews 12 say? "Every son whom he receiveth he scourgeth."

He said, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." That is, illegitimate children, and not sons. If you and I are God's children and we sin, God will chastise us.

If we do not want to be chastised, what must we do? We must repent of our sins. We must judge ourselves. First Corinthians 11:31

says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." First Peter 4:17 says, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." We must learn to judge ourselves and repent of our sins, our wickedness, and anything contrary to God.

If you really start praying for God's judgment, it will do two things. First, it will make you more faithful in warning the wicked. Second, it will make you more godly and holy, because you know that if you sin, God will nail you as well. We must learn to pray for God's judgment. We must also learn to repent of our sins and live a holy, godly life. Fifthly, we must understand that judgment is a door of hope.

Judgment is not our enemy; it is our friend. No one likes to suffer, but one willingly undergoes the knife for cancer to be cut out. Whatever suffering it takes to save our lives, that suffering is readily endured that our life might be continued. Likewise, it should be with the judgment of God. Whatever it takes to save our society, whatever it takes to save our nation, we ought to be willing to endure.

When it comes to our nation, we are helpless and impotent in and of ourselves to change things. I am not talking about prayer now, but about what we can do. We are really helpless in and of ourselves. We cannot save ourselves. Government cannot and will not save us. The Constitution cannot and will not save us. Our arms cannot and will not save us. God must save us. He is our hope. That is what we must look for. This does not mean that He will not be willing to use some of the other things mentioned.

Conclusion: Hope in God's Deliverance

Our hope is in Him. We must look for Him to exercise His righteous judgment. He has given us a door of hope. What is it? Judgment.

In Exodus chapter 5, God sent Moses to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." Things did not work out exactly the way Moses wanted them to work out. The elders even went to Pharaoh and said, "Let us go." That did not work out too well either. Moses was already gone and had said, "Let my people go."

In Exodus 5:15, the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, "Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but the fault is in thine own people." But Pharaoh said, "Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks." The officers saw that they were in evil case, after it was said, "Ye shall not minish ought from your bricks of your daily task."

They met Moses and Aaron as they came forth from Pharaoh and said, "The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us."

Moses returned unto the Lord and said, "Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all."

God had Moses and Aaron helpless. They had tried, but they could not. He had the elders and leaders of Israel helpless. They had tried, but they could not. Moses said, "God, why did you even send me? It's gotten worse. It hasn't gotten better."

Then, in chapter 6 and verse 1, "Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land." God said, You tried; you cannot. Now you are going to see what I can do. When did God deliver Israel? When the people realized how helpless they were, and that their only hope was in Him.

It is true, He did not put a sword in their hand later on, but the point is this: it is not the multitude or the magnitude of our arms that is going to save us; it is God being God. Go back in your Bibles to Hosea chapter 2 and look at verse 15, the verse we started with: “And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” That is after this, after sin is dealt with:

"I'll bless her, I'll return the blessing, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Judgment becomes a door of hope.

"And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Do you remember Exodus chapter 12? God gave them the Passover. In chapters 13 and 14 of Exodus, God brought them out of the land to the Red Sea. Pharaoh said, "They're hemmed in. They've got the wilderness here, the wilderness here, and the sea there. We're coming behind them. We're going to destroy them all."

Moses held up that rod, and the sea departed. The children of Israel went across on dry ground. But Pharaoh and his army tried to do the same thing. God brought the water in on them, and they drowned there. When you get to Exodus 15, Miriam takes the timbrel, and all the people begin singing the song of Moses: "Great is the Lord, a God of war He is. Pharaoh and his host we've seen upon the sand." What was this song they were singing? It was a song of redemption, a song of deliverance.

Why was it sung? Because the enemy had been destroyed. When God delivers His people, He destroys His enemy. If you will seriously begin to pray as our Lord taught us, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," then say, "Oh God, overthrow your enemies. Break their power, break their arms, establish thy kingdom, establish thy law, establish thy righteousness, establish thy people, judge thine enemies." Our Lord said, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." One of the greatest hopes we have is that God will judge the wickedness in this country.

When the righteous are last, they and only they will have the character, the knowledge, and the motive to rebuild biblically, honoring the Lord and His word. The valley of Achor is a door of hope. Judgment is not our enemy but our friend, because God can do in judgment what we could never do.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Make us holy, make us godly,

give us repentance, and give us faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Their Blood Cries From the Ground

Introduction: The Cry of Abel's Blood

Genesis 4:10 says, “And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

The story of Cain and Abel is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. However, what is not well known about this particular story is its many and varied implications.

While the entire story is important, and while there are many questions that should be answered and many applications that should be made, it is particularly verse 10 that requires our complete attention today. God is asking Cain, “What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

In analyzing this verse, several truths should be painfully obvious. First, blood that cries from the ground is spilled blood. That is, that blood has been shed by someone. Someone is responsible for the death or the murder of another. Someone has been killed; someone has been murdered. No one may have seen Cain murder Abel, but

God certainly knew it. I hope you also understand from this verse that God is not indifferent. God certainly sees and is cognizant of all of our acts, whether or not other men see or complain of those acts.

Secondly, the blood that is shed unrighteously and unjustly has a voice, because the Bible says that its blood cried from the ground. It cries for vindication. It cries for justice.

Thirdly, when spilled blood cries, it cries unto God. Innocent blood has a voice that men may not be able to hear, but God certainly hears. The voices of the righteous crying for justice may not be discernible to our ears, but they are most certainly and most definitely discernible unto the ears of God Himself, because that blood cries for divine vengeance.

Fourthly, in analyzing this verse, it is God Himself who will undertake to vindicate that spilled blood. The Judge of all the earth will not sit idly by and do nothing. He will bring justice, execute His vengeance, and vindicate His people.

Biblical Illustrations of Innocent Blood Crying Out

There are two very pertinent illustrations of this truth in the Bible. First, consider Manasseh, the most wicked king in the southern kingdom. Second Kings 21:16 says, “Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

The statement made in this verse is exceedingly broad: “Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.” Manasseh was a wicked king. As a wicked, ungodly civil ruler, he certainly would have been capable of shedding innocent blood—that is, putting people to death who did not deserve to be put to death.

However, there is another aspect of this, and I believe this is really what the passage refers to. Manasseh also worshipped Moloch, and Moloch demanded human sacrifice. Usually, the children were sacrificed. Second Kings 24:4, still speaking of Manasseh, says, “And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon.” Out of all those

babies that had been sacrificed to Moloch, God said that Manasseh had filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to the other, and that God would not pardon that sin.

Innocent blood was spilled. Their blood cried aloud for justice. God not only judged Manasseh for what he did, but God also judged the people for allowing Manasseh to do what he did, because they refused to stop him in executing his wicked, unlawful, and ungodly deeds.

The second illustration is found in the book of Revelation, chapter 6. Remember, we are talking about the spilling of innocent blood. Revelation 6:9-10 says, "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

White robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

In verse 9 we read: "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

Here were men and women martyred simply for their faith in Jesus Christ. Notice that they are crying aloud for justice and divine vengeance. The only crime they committed—and it was no crime—was to believe in Jesus Christ and to hold His testimony. Holy Scripture tells us that these people were put to death unjustly, unrighteously, and unlawfully. Therefore, their murders must be avenged.

There is something particular about these two passages. In each, government was responsible for the unlawful, unjust, and unrighteous deaths of those who were murdered. It was the government of King Manasseh that authorized the slaughter and sacrifice of children to the god Moloch. The civil ruler made the

slaughter legal, although he could not make it lawful. It was government that murdered these saints in Revelation chapter 6.

The Bible does not expressly say that the government murdered these saints, but government is entrusted with the death penalty. One man may kill a few people, but only a government can kill a multitude of people. The multitude killed in Revelation chapter 6, in all probability, were not killed by individuals but by government. They were legally put to death through the orders of a reprobate government.

Legal vs. Lawful: The Case of Naboth

You and I must comprehend the difference between legal and lawful. To say that an act is lawful implies that it is authorized or sanctioned by law. Murder is never authorized or sanctioned by the law of God nor common law. To say that an act is legal simply implies that it is done in accordance with the forms and usages of law. Legally speaking, an act may be performed in agreement with prescribed forms and usages, but that legality does not make a deed lawful.

I want you to see the difference between legal and lawful. Something may be legal, but not necessarily lawful. Here is a passage that everyone should be aware of.

Manasseh was the most wicked king in the southern kingdom, but Ahab was the most wicked king in the northern kingdom. In 1 Kings 21:1: "And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

And he came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, "I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers." And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. You don't have a spoiled child.

Verse 5: "But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it. And he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die."

“And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead.”

Naboth was put to death legally. He was put to death in the prescribed manner and usages of the day. The law of God required a minimum of two witnesses before a man could be executed. Jezebel said, “You proclaim this fast and you set Naboth on high, then you get two witnesses to come in to testify against him that we have heard Naboth blaspheme God and blaspheme the king.” If he blasphemed God, he deserved to die; if he blasphemed the king, he deserved to have his property confiscated. Then she said, “You take him out and stone him.” That is exactly what happened.

The point is this: the trial was legal, but the act was unlawful, because the act was murder. Ahab and Jezebel, the two witnesses, and all the people knew that Naboth was innocent. They simply used a legal maneuver to do that which was unlawful. Wicked governments will use the law unlawfully.

When Naboth said, “And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee,” he was not being hard to get along with, nor was he holding out for more money or a better exchange. God had forbidden those people to get rid of their land. It could not leave the inheritance of his fathers. God forbade Naboth to give or sell that land, and He also forbade the king to take it.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 46:16-18 (KJV)

Ezekiel 46 and verse 16:

> Thus saith the Lord God; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons'; it shall be their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons' for them. Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession.

God not only forbade Naboth to sell his land; He also forbade Ahab to confiscate it. So what did Ahab and Jezebel do? They used the law unlawfully and murdered Naboth.

Understand that they did it legally, according to the prescribed forms and usages of that particular day. They murdered him legally.

To whom did God attribute this murder? The answer is Ahab and Jezebel. Their positions as civil rulers, as king and queen, did not shelter them from the charge of murder. Whenever the law is used unlawfully, even by governments, it does not relieve them from violating God's law. Those who are legally murdered are still murdered.

This does not mean that the government lacks the right to execute the murderer, the kidnapper, or the rapist. Certainly, God has given the power of the sword to civil government, and there is a time when it may righteously execute the wicked. But when government unrighteously executes the righteous, God still holds it accountable for murder.

What about all those who were killed in a war of aggression or an unjust war? Who is responsible for those deaths? You must understand that God is concerned about innocent blood. He is so concerned about innocent blood being spilled that He required a special cleansing ceremony. If a man was found murdered in the land and no one knew who had murdered him, a special ceremony had to be accomplished.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 21:1-3 (KJV)

God's Concern for Innocent Blood

> Deuteronomy 21:1-3: “If one be found slain in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him: Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain: And it shall be, that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke; And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer’s neck there in the valley: And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near.”

"For them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried: And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley: And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shalt thou put away the guilt of

innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord."

Now, I want you to watch this very carefully. Here's a man that's murdered, but the murderer is not found. And so they measure to the nearest city, and the priests then come out. They take this heifer that's never been wrought with, take this heifer to a valley that's neither been eared nor sown, and then they cut off the heifer's neck. They chop her head off. Then they wash their hands over that heifer, saying, "We have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it." In other words, "God, if we knew who did it, it wouldn't be the heifer laying there headless. It'd be the murderer."

But, "Lord, we didn't do it and we don't know who did it. And so, Lord, lay not this sin to our charge. Because, Lord, if we knew who did it, we'd take care of it." And God says when you do that, then I'll not lay innocent blood to your charge.

Now let me ask you a question. If God is so fastidious over the death of one man who has been murdered, and the murderer is not known, do you think God is less fastidious over thousands who are murdered and slain needlessly, unlawfully, unrighteously, and unjustly?

John Locke, in his Second Treatise on Government, Chapter 19, Paragraph 22, says this: "Whenever the legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves in a state of war with the people. Who are thereupon absolved from any further obedience."

John Locke wrote during the time of our founding fathers, and his treatise on government has been reprinted many, many times. When our legislators or rulers endeavor to confiscate our property or reduce us to slavery or arbitrary power, our government is putting itself at war with the people, and the people are therefore absolved from any further obedience. In other words, you do not owe obedience to a tyrant. Understandably, we are absolved from obedience to those endeavoring to enslave and tyrannize us. But what about the culpability or guilt of those who initiate such a war? What about the unjust war?

Just War Principles and Government Guilt

St. Augustine made a distinction between just wars and unjust wars. His concept of a just war can be summarized under five simple points. Augustine lived in the fourth or fifth century, in the 400s.

First, war must have a just cause, including the failure of another state to act justly toward its inhabitants, thus allowing a war of aggression. Some say that any war of aggression is wrong, but that is not necessarily so. There are times in the Bible when God started the war and told the people to go over there and wipe them out. That would be a war of aggression. When war has a just cause, it can include attacking someone who is acting unjustly, even though you initiate the attack yourself. So the first point is that war must have a just cause.

Secondly, war must be motivated—listen carefully—by the cause of justice rather than a desire to harm or wreak vengeance, gain power, obtain oil, or establish an empire. Thirdly, war must be waged by legitimate authority. Fourthly, war must be a last resort. It is not something you jump into at the last resort. Fifthly, war must be conducted justly.

If a war is neither demanded by justice nor self-defense, but is based upon a desire to expand an empire or simply to acquire materials that another country has, who is responsible and accountable for all the deaths involved? The answer is simple: those in positions of power in government who began the war, and those in positions of power and commerce who sustain and continue it. Blood that is spilled unrighteously cries for God's justice.

The principle is the same for an individual and for a government. Cain spilled Abel's blood unjustly and unrighteously, and Abel's blood cried out to God for vengeance. Ahab and Jezebel spilled the blood of Naboth and his sons unrighteously, unjustly, and unlawfully, and that blood cried out for justice.

When Ahab and Jezebel murdered Naboth, they did not murder Naboth alone; they murdered his sons as well. Had they not murdered his sons, the inheritance would have passed to them. Thus, to confiscate the property, Ahab had to murder not only Naboth but also his sons. In 1 Kings 21:18, God shows that He is

holding Ahab and Jezebel accountable. They were the king and queen—civil government and civil rulers. God holds government accountable: “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.”

"And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." What's God saying? God said, "Ahab, you murdered. I'm going to judge you. I'm going to take care of you."

What about Jezebel? "And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

When God's righteous vengeance does come to pass on Ahab and his house, look in 2 Kings 9, verse 26. In fact, let's read verse 25.

Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, "Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this burden upon him; Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the Lord." So God required the blood of Ahab and the blood of Jezebel and the blood of their descendants for that which they did to Naboth and his descendants.

God's law applies to all, to individuals and governments as well. When an individual steals, it is theft. When a government steals, it is still theft. When an individual murders, it is murder. When a government murders, it is still murder. Just because one is in a position of authority does not give him the right to violate the law of God.

Occasionally, there will arise a man who will cry out against such injustice and expose the injustice and wickedness of the ruling elite. One such man was Major General Smedley Butler. Here is an excerpt from a speech he delivered in 1933: "War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people."

"Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses. I believe in adequate defense at the coastline and nothing else. If a nation comes over here to fight, then we'll fight. The trouble with America is that when the dollar only earns 6% over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100%. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldier follows the flag."

"I wouldn't go to war again as I've done to protect some lousy investment of the bankers. There are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes, and the other is our Bill of Rights. War, for any other reason, is simply a racket."

Now, in light of these truths that I've just enunciated from Scripture, how in the world do we understand the war of northern aggression that happened from 1861 to 1865? Was it indeed a war of aggression? Who was responsible for the blood that was needlessly spilled? Or allow me to ask it another way. Why did the blood of Abel cry from the ground? Why did the blood of Naboth and his sons cry from the ground? Why did the blood of those unrighteously slain in Revelation 6 cry from the ground? Why does the blood of our ancestors cry from the ground? And the answer is, the blood cries for vindication. It cries for justice. I want you to listen very carefully because I'm going to be talking for the next little bit primarily about the War of Northern Aggression from 1861 to 1865. And I'm going to assume certain things that I cannot develop this morning because of time. But Lord willing, in our Southern History Conference in July, I'm going to cover these things in detail.

The War of Northern Aggression: Who Started It?

It should be understood from the outset that the war was never over slavery. Slavery was not the issue. Lincoln was not interested in the slaves, and he said so on many different occasions; I can give you

quote after quote. To demonstrate that slavery was not the issue, answer this question: Why did he wait until January 1, 1863, to issue the Emancipation Proclamation? If slavery was the issue, why not issue it in April 1861, when the war began? The Emancipation Proclamation did not free one slave. It did not free one slave in the North, where there were slaves, nor did it free any slaves in the South, where the Union had already conquered and was holding the territory. The only slaves to whom the proclamation referred were those still in Southern-held territory. All it was was a military measure intended to incite an insurrection in the South.

So where Lincoln had authority to free the slaves, he did not do so. Where he had no authority to free the slaves, then he tried to do so. It was nothing less than a military measure, first and foremost.

For those who say the war was over slavery, consider this: on March 2, 1861, the United States Senate passed a proposed 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution. The House of Representatives had already passed it on February 28, 1861. You can find this proposed 13th Amendment in the 106th Congress Second Session, the Constitution of the United States of America and Unratified Amendments. Here is the proposed Article 13: "No amendment shall be made to the Constitution which will authorize or give to Congress the power to abolish or interfere, within any State, with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of said State."

The proposed 13th Amendment said, "Hey, Congress will never, ever interfere with slavery. That's a state's rights issue. It's up to the state. Congress will never, ever abolish or interfere with slavery."

If the war was over slavery, why would you fight over an issue that was being handed to you on a silver platter? Moreover, two days later, on March 4, 1861, in his inaugural address, Lincoln promised to support the amendment, even though he believed the Constitution already prohibited the federal government from interfering with Southern slavery. He said: "I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution has passed Congress, to the effect that the federal government shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the states, including that of persons held to service."

"To avoid misconstruction of what I have said, I depart from my purpose not to speak of particular amendments, so far as to say that holding such a provision to now be implied by constitutional law, I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable."

What did he just say? He said, "I believe the Constitution already prohibits Congress from messing with the state's rights." But he also said, "If you want to pass a 13th Amendment that says we can't, I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable." That is, we can never, ever touch it. The proposed 13th Amendment ratified by the Senate was March 2, 1861. Lincoln verified it March 4, 1861. Fort Sumter was not fired on until April 12, 1861.

Once again, for someone who tries to say the war was over slavery, why would you fight when, if that was the issue, the government was saying, "Here it is; we'll give it to you. You can have it"? Slavery was never the issue. It did become a smokescreen, but it was never the issue. Do you understand that the South has always been accused of starting the war?

We fired the first shot; therefore, we were the ones condemned for trying to destroy the Union, not only by secession, but also by war. In Lincoln's fourth annual message to Congress, dated December 6, 1864, listen to what Lincoln said: "In stating a single condition of peace, I mean simply to say that the war will cease on the part of the government whenever it shall cease on the part of those who began it." What was Lincoln saying? He was saying the South began the war. He was conveying the idea that the South was at fault. Now the question has to be asked: What if those who began the war were the very ones trying to cast upon others an accusation for the very act that they did?

That is the standard operating procedure of a lot of people: I may be something, but I'll call you that something first, and therefore put the onus upon you. Lincoln was trying to say, "It was the South who started the war; they fired the first shot." But Hallam, in his constitutional history, states, "The aggressor in war is not the first that uses force, but the first who renders force necessary." The aggressor in war is not the first who uses force, but the first who renders force necessary.

Here I am walking down the street, minding my own business, and a man steps out of an alley with a knife pulled. In a hateful voice he says, "Give me your money or I'm going to cut your throat." I say, "Sure, sure," reach into my coat pocket, pull out a pistol, and shoot him. Who started it? I fired the first shot.

But I didn't start it. The man who makes the force necessary is the aggressor. That's what Hallam is saying. While it is undoubtedly true that the South fired the first shot at Fort Sumter, it is equally true that Lincoln and his administration made the firing of that first shot necessary. For the sake of maintaining the Union, the South made concession after concession, surrendered right after right, submitted to unjust taxation, and consented to compromises, one after the other, that tended to weaken the South and strengthen the North, and for more than 40 years held to the constitutional agreement, even when the North continued

to violate it in letter and in spirit. It is not my intent to develop exactly how the war was begun. I am going to do that in our Southern History Conference, because I have three messages on who began the war. Once you see the deceit and duplicity of Lincoln and his administration, including his direct orders, there is no question who began the war. It was Lincoln and his administration.

It was not the North that sent peace commissioners to the South before the war broke out. It was the South that sent peace commissioners to the North, saying, “Let’s settle our differences without war. Let’s settle our differences peacefully.” It was not the South who spurned, rejected, ridiculed, mocked, and deceived those peace commissioners; it was the North. The South did take the forts in her possession, but she also offered to pay into the Federal Treasury every penny that those forts were worth. The South was not trying to steal those buildings.

It was not the South that deceived the North; it was the North that deceived the South. While Lincoln and his cabinet were promising peace to the peace commissioners, they were preparing for war. It was not the South who violated her agreement with the North; it was the North who violated her agreement with the South and violated the armistice that existed between the South and the North.

An armistice existed between the United States government and South Carolina and Florida. South Carolina had entered into an armistice with the United States government on December 6, 1860, and Florida had entered into one on January 29, 1861. These concerned Fort Sumter in South Carolina and Fort Pickens in Florida. They agreed that Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens should neither be garrisoned nor provisioned as long as the armistices were in force. Papers to that effect had been filed in the United States Army and Navy departments, and Lincoln knew this. Thus the reason for his subterfuge, deceit, and secret orders.

An armistice means to stand still. It is a truce, a cessation of arms, and a suspension of hostilities by agreement of the parties. Neither side moves; neither side will do anything.

The status quo will be maintained. So if I enter into an armistice with Allison, and he has 600 rounds of ammunition while I have 700, we simply maintain the status quo. He has a week's provision, I have a week's provision, and neither of us goes out to obtain more ammunition or provisions.

Here was a legal document signed between the United States government and South Carolina, and between the United States government and Florida. Lincoln, his administration, and the United States government agreed with South Carolina and Florida that, while the armistice was in effect, they would never attempt to provision or garrison either of those forts. Yet Lincoln sent expeditions to garrison and reprovision both forts, violating the armistice in direct violation of a legally binding recorded document.

The Secretary of the United States Navy, Gideon Welles, wrote, "It is very important that the rebels strike the first blow in the conflict." Why? To make it look like we started the war. When Lincoln sent the Fox expedition under Captain G. V. Fox, it was predetermined by Lincoln and Fox to start the war. Fox proposed to Lincoln, "I simply propose three tugs, convoyed by light draft men of war, the first tug to lead in empty to open their fire." In other words, "I'm going to send an empty vessel in there just to get him to shoot."

The Fox expedition failed to provision Fort Sumter. Did that distress Lincoln? No. On May the 1st, 1861, Lincoln wrote to Captain

Fox, "I sincerely regret that the failure of the attempt to provision Fort Sumter should be the source of annoyance to you. You and I both anticipated that the cause of the country would be advanced by making the attempt to provision Fort Sumter, even if it should fail. And so it is no small consolation now to feel that our anticipation is justified by the result." Lincoln was saying, "Captain Fox, don't worry that you failed to reprovision Fort Sumter."

"We got what we wanted. We wanted a war. And we got it. And our anticipation is justified by the result." Even northerners at that time recognized that it was Lincoln who started the war. The New York Herald said, "We have no doubt that Mr. Lincoln wants the cabinet at Montgomery to take the initiative by capturing the two forts in its waters. For it would give him the opportunity of throwing upon the Southern Confederacy the responsibility of commencing hostilities. But the country and posterity will hold him just as responsible as if he struck the first blow."

Benjamin Williams of Lowell, Massachusetts, certainly no friend of the South, said, "The South was invaded and a war of subjugation was begun by the federal government against the seceding states in amazing disregard of the foundation principle of its existence. And the South accepts the contest forced upon her with the courage characteristic of this proud-spirited people."

Horton, in his history, says, "The first gun of the war was the gun put into that war fleet that sailed against Charleston. The first gun fired at Fort Sumter was the first gun fired in self-defense. This is a simple fact, stripped of all nonsense, with which it has been surrounded by the abolitionists." The first gun was loaded on that fleet that came to South Carolina in violent, wicked, ungodly, unlawful disrespect for the armistice that had been signed.

The war of 1861 through 1864 was a war against right. At its very foundation, it was a war against culture, against Christian culture, and a war waged for theological reasons as well as political and economic reasons. It was indeed a war of aggression for the North and a war of self-defense for the South. The war against the South was against the people of the South—men, women, and children.

The War Against the Southern People

Their blood cries from the ground. General Patrick Cleburne, a Confederate general, wrote in a letter dated January 1864, "The conqueror's policy is to divide the conquered into factions and stir up animosity against them. It is said that slavery is all we're fighting for."

“Even if this were true, which we deny, slavery is not all our enemies are fighting for. It is merely the pretense to establish sectional superiority, a more centralized form of government, and to deprive us of our rights and liberties.”

Cleburne was right: they were not fighting for slavery, nor were we fighting to defend it; they were not fighting to abolish it. What they were fighting for was sectional superiority.

That is, the northern section will be over the southern section. At the same time, they are going to deprive us of our rights and liberties. General Patrick Cleburne understood that the war against the South was a war against liberty. As long as the South stood in the way of Lincoln, his plans, and the plans of the controlling elite, the South must be destroyed.

The evidence is found in the words of General William Tecumseh Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Sherman said: "The young bloods of the South, sons of planters, lawyers, about town, good billiard players and sportsmen, men who never did any work and never will, must be put down. War suits them. They are splendid riders, first-rate shots, and utterly reckless. These men must all be killed or employed by us before we can hope for peace."

General Sherman, who also said, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," said that Southern men must be killed or employed by us—in other words, compelled to compromise. Then, on January 31st, 1864, Major General William T. Sherman wrote: "The government of the United States has any and all rights which they choose to enforce in war, to take their lives, their homes, their land, their everything."

"War is simply unrestrained by the Constitution. To the persistent secessionists, why, death is mercy, and the quicker he or she is disposed of is the better."

The United States government, he said, had the right to take our lives, homes, and property, and the quicker we were put to death, the better.

The war was not only against men and women; it was also against children. In a letter written June the 21st, 1864, to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Sherman said: "There is a class of people, men, women, and children, who must be killed or banished before you can hope for peace and order." Stanton replied, "Your letter of the 21st of June has just reached me and meets my approval." The Secretary of War had given Sherman permission to kill men, women, and children—not merely soldiers, but civilians. Kill them all.

The War of Northern Aggression must be laid at the feet of Abraham Lincoln and his administration, and at the feet of those who endorsed, supported, and wanted that war.

Why Their Blood Cries: Vindication and Our Response

Why did Abel's blood cry from the ground? Because he was righteous and innocent. He had done nothing worthy of death. Therefore, Cain was held accountable and responsible for his murder. Why did the blood of Naboth and his sons cry from the ground? Because they were unjustly and unrighteously condemned by wicked civil rulers. Therefore, the governments of Ahab and Jezebel were held accountable for their murders. Why did the blood of the martyrs in Revelation 6 cry for vengeance? Because they had been unrighteously and unjustly condemned by a wicked and ungodly government. Therefore, that government was held responsible for their deaths.

God did the same to Assyria, Babylon, Edom, and all those other countries that attacked and murdered His people. He held them accountable, judged them, and held them responsible. Why does the blood of our forefathers, those men who died fighting in 1861 to 1865, cry from the ground? They were righteous. They were

defending the truth, righteousness, principle, their home, their lives, their families, and their country.

The South did not invade the North; the North invaded the South. When Southern boys were asked by the Yankees, “Why are you fighting?” the most frequent answer was, “Because you're here. If you weren't here, we wouldn't be fighting. You invaded us, we didn't invade you.” The motto of the Confederate government was Deo Vindice—Latin, “God Vindicates.” God justifies. Our forefathers were saying that God Himself would vindicate their cause: they were righteous, holy, and godly in it, and were fighting a war of self-defense.

God holds governments and civil rulers just as accountable to His law as He does individuals. Murder and theft are still murder and theft no matter who commits them. Therefore, all unnecessary and unjust wars are under God's wrath and condemnation, and God will hold civil rulers responsible for murder. But remember, when God judged Manasseh, He judged the people as well, for the people never stopped him. God holds governments just as accountable as He does individuals.

Secondly, our ancestors' blood cries to God not only for vengeance and justice, but also to us for vindication. Were they wrong? Of course not. If they were not wrong, then we're the ones who must vindicate them. We must study their cause, emulate their principle, and apply their faith to our lives. It is we who now stand in their stead, and we must stand for self-government, limited civil government, states' rights, self-defense, and fight once again for our Constitutional Republic which our forefathers gave us, just as they did. How do we vindicate them? By standing where they stood.

Christ's Blood Speaks Better Things

Hebrews 12:24 says, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." The blood of Jesus Christ speaks of better things than that of Abel. It is true that Christ's blood speaks of justice, because God was absolutely just when He poured upon Christ His wrath, who there is our substitute, who stood in our place. But although Christ's blood was shed through justice, it was also shed in

the mercy and the grace of God. Hence, the blood of Christ speaks better things than that of Abel. It does not simply cry for justice. It now cries for forgiveness and reconciliation based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand that it is only in Christ and through Christ there can ever be any forgiveness and any reconciliation? The blood of Jesus Christ speaks better things than that of Abel. Their blood cries from the ground, and it does, and it shall, and it will, until God sovereignly vindicates it. And He shall, in His time, and will do it for our good and His glory.

Father, we ask that You speak to our hearts, speak to our lives. Help us see this vital principle, Lord, that governments are just as answerable and accountable to Thee as individuals are. Help us, Lord, to grasp that simple fact, and help us to stand for Thee in truth and in righteousness. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

You Can't Outsmart God

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 21:1-13 (KJV)

Introduction: The Foolishness of Trying to Outsmart God

> And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near to my house, and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it. Or if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said unto Ahab, The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy displeased, because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken him.
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> For he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth

> the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money, or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it, and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with a seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and the nobles that were in the city dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letter saying, Proclaim a fast and set Naboth on high among the people, and set two men, sons of Belial, before him to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king, and then carry him out and stone him that he may die.

"And the men of the city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants of the city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast and set Naboth on high among the people. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him. And the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city and stoned him with stones, and he died. Then they said to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money. For Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it."

"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

Last week I brought a message entitled "Objective vs. Subjective": whether or not you had an objective standard or a subjective standard. I showed from 1 Samuel chapter 15 the trouble you got into when you left God's objective standard and followed your own subjective standard. Here is an excellent illustration of that truth as well. The message is entitled, "You Can't Outsmart God."

The truth of the matter is that fallen man believes he is smart. In fact, he believes he is so smart that he can outthink, outwit, and outsmart God himself. It is not a game. Fallen man somehow actually believes that he is genuinely in control.

There is a worldly wisdom, and there are brilliant unsaved men. But this worldly wisdom is contrary to God and His wisdom.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the Scripture says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." To those who are perishing, those who are lost, the preaching of the cross and the entirety of the Word of God is nothing more than mere foolishness. "But unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

There is a worldly wisdom, but that worldly wisdom counts God's counsel and God's Word as absolute foolishness. By worldly wisdom, they deny God and, of course, deny the truth of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:5, the Apostle Paul says, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect, or mature, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

This shows how the wisdom of the world is pitted against the wisdom of God, or the wisdom of man. What did the wisdom of man

do? They crucified the Lord of glory. In the wisdom of man and the wisdom of the world, the things of God are counted as absolutely foolish. Man assumes that his wisdom is true and accurate, when in reality man's wisdom is imperfect, foolish, and contrary to God. This is the concept of fallen man by nature: here is fallen man's worldview.

The Worldview of the Wicked: Denying God's Knowledge and Justice

Here is his way of thinking. In Psalm 73, Asaph is talking about the wicked. In fact, he says in verse 7, "Their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than their heart could wish. They're corrupt." They speak wickedly concerning oppression, and they speak loftily. But look at what the wicked say in verse 11: "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the most high?" Note that question: "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the most high?"

Psalm 10 continues this worldview, or this thinking, of the ungodly. Once again, the psalmist is talking about the wicked. In verse 11, he says, "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten. He hideth his face. He will never see it." Then, in verse 13: "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it." What is the real source of the wicked's condemnation of God? Why do they condemn God, His wisdom, and His Word?

In these three passages from Psalm 73 and Psalm 10, the wicked basically believe three things. First, they believe that God does not know, that He is not omniscient. That is what is meant by the question, "How does God know?" and, "Is there knowledge with the most high?" They are basically, first and foremost, denying the omniscience of God. They are saying that God does not really, truly, and accurately know.

Secondly, according to Psalm 10, somehow they believe that they are smart enough to hide their sins from God: "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten. He hideth his face. He will never see it." They believe they are smart enough to hide their sins from God. If God does happen to take notice of their sins, they believe that somehow, ultimately, He will forget about them. He will overlook them.

Thirdly, what is the real source of the wicked's condemnation of God? In verse 13, they say, "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?" The answer is in the words, "He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it."

Here is the wicked man's third line of defense. The first is, “God doesn't know.” The second is, if God does take notice, He will probably forget it. When that is blown away, the third and final line is, “God will not require it.” That is, God would never hold me accountable or answerable. Somehow, I am going to get away with everything I have ever done. That is the worldview of the wicked.

This is the mentality and thinking of man by nature. No wonder man thinks he can outsmart God. There is one ruler who thought he was smart enough to do so: Ahab, back in 1 Kings chapter 21. Some things in Ahab's life reflect the lives of people and leaders you know today. First, Ahab tried to outsmart God by replacing God's law with his own law.

Ahab's First Attempt: Replacing God's Law with His Own Law

Look in verse 1 of chapter 21: “And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near to my house. And I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it, or if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said unto Ahab, The Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.”

Ahab was indeed generous. He said, “If you will give me your garden because it is close and convenient, I will give you a better vineyard, or, if you do not want that, I am willing to give you its value in money.” But Naboth's answer in verse 3 was, “God forbid it me that I should give unto thee the inheritance of my fathers.” Naboth was not being difficult, trying to raise the price, or seeking a better offer. He was expounding a scriptural truth: the Lord had forbidden those people to sell their land on a permanent basis. The land was theirs.

It was to be kept in their tribes and in their families. It was not to be sold. In fact, God said in Leviticus 25 and verse 23, "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is Mine. You are strangers and sojourners with Me." God says, "Here's a good reason you can't sell the land permanently. The land doesn't belong to you. It belongs to Me. And you've got to use My land the way I tell you that it can be used."

It is true that those people could lease their land for a number of years. After six years, in the sabbatical year, it came back to them. Under certain circumstances, they might even lease that land up to 49 years; in the year of Jubilee, the 50th year, it still came back to them. But the land could not be transferred to anyone on a permanent basis.

So Naboth was speaking truthfully. The Lord did indeed forbid him to give or sell his family's inheritance. Now watch this: Naboth is refusing to sell the land. Ahab wants the land. He knows that God's law forbids him from taking it, and God's law forbids Naboth from selling or giving it to him. So a question comes to his mind: I want that land. God's law forbids me to have it. How do I get around God's law? I want the land. I've got to get around God's law.

In other words, his idea was this: We cannot allow God's law to stand in the way of our lusts and our desires. I want it. I've got to have it. So I must either ignore or replace God's law. The very second the question arises in your mind, "How can I ignore or replace God's law?"—the very second that question flashes in your mind—you've already apostatized. You cannot violate any of God's commandments without violating the first one: "Thou shalt have no other gods before thee." The very minute that you contemplate violating any of God's commandments, you've already replaced God with yourself. You're already dethroning God and enthroning yourself.

It is true that God forbade Naboth to sell his vineyard. But it is equally true that God forbade Ahab from taking that vineyard. In Ezekiel chapter 46, verse 18, the Bible says, "Moreover, the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression to thrust them out of their possession, but he shall give his son's inheritance out of his own possession, that my people be not scattered every man

from his own possession." "The prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression."

God said, "Thou shalt not covet." "Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbor's, his wife, his ass, his maidservant, his manservant, his land." God's law said, "Thou shalt not covet." God's law said, "Thou shalt not steal." God's law said, "Thou shalt not murder." But such commandments are mere trifles to Ahab and his ilk.

They can always get around God's law by replacing it with their own law. Many of these rulers who want to play God make up their own law as they go. Did you ever do that as a child playing a game? "Well, what are the rules?" "I don't know. We'll make them up as we go." But the one who makes the rules always makes them in his favor. Ahab took the idea, "Well, it may be wrong for everyone else to get that garden by replacing God's law, but it's not wrong for me because I am the king. I can do what I want to do."

Do we not reason exactly the same way when we want to violate God's law? Do we not say, "Well, it may be wrong for everybody else, but it's not wrong for me. After all, I've obeyed God here. I've done this for God there. And certainly God's going to overlook my violation in this area." In other words, we take the idea that we are the exceptions.

In other words, we get to thinking like the wicked: God will not take notice of it; and if He does, He will probably forget it; and if He does not forget it, certainly He is never going to hold us accountable. Ahab wanted that garden, so he had to replace God's law with his own.

He had a little help from Jezebel. When she saw his demeanor and that he was depressed, she said, "What's wrong?" He answered, "I want that garden, but Naboth won't sell it to me." Here is her question: "Dost thou now govern the kingdom?" You are the king. You can do whatever you want to do. What is she saying? You are not bound by God's law; just replace it.

They used a man-made law to replace God's law, using man's law in contradistinction from God's law. How did they do that? They incorporated a little bit of God's law, but used the law to legally

murder Naboth and his sons. Naboth's murder was legal, albeit wicked and wrong. He was charged with blasphemy against God and the king. If Naboth blasphemed God, he deserved to die; if he blasphemed the king, then he deserved to have his property confiscated.

But the problem is this: You cannot just murder Naboth, because Naboth has sons. If Naboth is dead, his children inherit the property. So, in order to get the property, you must murder not only Naboth but also his sons. 2 Kings 9:26 says, "Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord. And I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground according to the word of the Lord." Notice: "I have seen the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons." They killed the entire family.

In every respect, the trial was legal. Letters came from the king, written by Jezebel in the king's name. She told the leaders of the city, "You proclaim a fast, you set Naboth on high, you get two witnesses to testify against him, that you've heard him blaspheme God and you have heard him blaspheme the king, and then you take him out and execute him." Certainly blasphemy against God merits the death penalty. There was a public, open trial.

There was an official indictment and two witnesses against Naboth and his sons, and they were taken out and executed. Every aspect of the trial was legal, although it was not lawful. Ahab used man's law to legally murder Naboth and his sons. Man's law was used to circumvent God's law, even though an aspect of God's law was incorporated in it. Deuteronomy 19:15 says that no man is to be put to death on the testimony of one witness; there must be a minimum of two or more. So there were two witnesses. The whole trial, although legal according to man's law, was nothing but a charade and mockery. It was the height of injustice. Naboth was innocent, and his sons were innocent. When his sons were killed, as well as Naboth, Ahab went down to claim the garden.

God's Judgment Declared on Ahab and Jezebel

Did Ahab outsmart God? The answer is no. Ahab got what he wanted, but it was a temporary victory. In 1 Kings 21:19, Elijah is

sent to meet him, and says: "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." In verse 22: "And I will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."

Ahab's victory was short-lived. He got what he wanted, but he never really had time to enjoy it. He had not outsmarted God by replacing God's law with his own law, but it was an attempt. You know what we've done in this country? We've done exactly the same thing. We've kicked God out. We've kicked His law out.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 22:1-6 (KJV)

We'd only be reminded that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And we think that we're so smart and that we're going to have a multicultural, multilingual, multireligious, multifaceted society. We're going to have a mongrelized one world government and we're going to win. No, we're not. You can never outsmart God. And when you try to replace God's law with man's law, you're ultimately going to lose. Secondly, watch very quickly. Ahab tried to outsmart God by substituting God's word with false prophets.

Ahab's Second Attempt: Substituting God's Word with False Prophets

“And there continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. And it came to pass in the third year that Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said to his servants, Know ye that Ramoth Gilead is ours, and we be still and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth Gilead? And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, of the word of the Lord

today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?

"And they said, Go up, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, sat each on his throne, having put on their robes in a void place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria."

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 22:7-28 (KJV)

And all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, made him horns of iron, and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians until thou hast consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hands. And the messenger that was going to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth. Let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak. So he came to the king, and the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered, Go and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?

And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master. Let them return every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy any good concerning me but evil? And

> he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing by him on the right hand and on the left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up to fall at Ramoth Gilead?
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> And one said on this manner, another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth and I'll be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also. Go forth and do so. Now, therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.
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> Here is another subterfuge that is very heavily relied upon by the wicked. And that is substitution. If you cannot successfully replace God's law with your own law, the next logical step would be that you substitute a false word and pretend that it is His word.

Ahab was king of Samaria, and he wanted Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to go to war with him against Ramoth Gilead, against Syria, to reclaim Ramoth Gilead. I believe with all my heart that Jehoshaphat erred greatly in what he said in verse 4. After Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to go to war with him, Jehoshaphat answered the king of Israel, "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses."

First of all, Jehoshaphat was not as Ahab. Jehoshaphat was basically a godly man. He messed up in several areas, so he really was not as Ahab was. Ahab was a wicked, ungodly reprobate.

The very first thing that you observe is this: Jehoshaphat gives his word to Ahab before he ever checks with the Lord. Then in verse 5, "Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today." Well, you should have been inquiring before you gave your word that you're going to go help him fight. So he says, "Let's inquire of the Lord."

What does Ahab do? Ahab pulls out 400 prophets to declare the word of the Lord. Four hundred prophets are saying, "Go up and

prosper. The Lord shall deliver it into your hands." Ahab must have undoubtedly been some type of religious or spiritual man to have had 400 prophets.

Most of you only have one little preacher. Boy, Ahab had 400. He must have really been spiritual. The problem was that out of all the 400, none of them were of God. They were all false prophets, even though they prophesied in the name of the Lord.

“Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about 400 men, and said unto them, Shall I go up against Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.” Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides that we may inquire of him?” How obvious was it to Jehoshaphat that these were false prophets? It was obvious, clear, and plain, even though they prophesied in the name of the Lord.

The apostle Paul writes: “For such are false prophets, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.”

What is the apostle Paul saying? Do not be deceived. Everyone who professes to be God’s preacher, or who professes to be godly, is not so. I can sit here and name them; they simply run through my mind. You can see some of these sweet, smirky television preachers who always smile and are always positive, but never preach the Word of God. They would never preach anything negative, name sin, or talk about judgment.

Yet they have multi-million-dollar ministries. How do you tell a true preacher from a false preacher? Isaiah 8:20 gives us the answer: “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Every preacher must be judged according to the totality of the Word of God. If they do not agree with His Word, then they are wrong. They are wicked.

I do not care how sweet they are or how they appear. That is why he said even Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

Since you are in the New Testament, on the way back to 1 Kings, stop at Matthew chapter 7. This warning comes from the Lord Himself. Notice Matthew 7, beginning with verse 21: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied?"

That is, have we not preached in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you that work iniquity.

Who is He talking to? A lot of preachers. It is not that He knew you and forgot you. He says, "I never knew you." You were never one of His. Yet they prophesied in His name.

Now, if you go back to 1 Kings chapter 22, you will find these four hundred prophets prophesying in the name of the Lord. In the latter part of verse 6 they said, "Go up, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Then verse 7 says, "And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides that we may inquire of him?" Jehoshaphat said, "I want a real preacher." How did he know these were false preachers?

He should have known Ahab, and he should have known Jezebel. But in verse 6, these false prophets said, "Go up, for the Lord"—and the word is Adonai—"shall deliver it into thy hand." Adonai refers to any lord, to a lord in general. But in verse 7, Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet?" Notice that the word Lord is in all caps.

That is the holy name of God, Yahweh. “Is there not here a prophet of Yahweh besides that we may inquire of him?” Jehoshaphat said, “I don't care what these false preachers say. I want to hear what God says.”

When you substitute for God's Word, when you try to replace God's Word, I want you to see the enmity that is revealed against the Word of God and the one who brings it. In verse 8, “Then the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man.” There is yet one man. Why? Because he had killed all of God's prophets or driven them out.

The Enmity Against God's True Word

Oh, but God hid a hundred of them by fifty in caves and fed them with bread and water. There was just one that Ahab knew about. “There's yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him.” Why? “For he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Let not the king say so.”

Ahab did not like Micaiah's preaching. He thought it was too negative and that all he wanted to talk about was judgment. Do you realize, folks, all you can talk about is judgment when you have such a wicked reprobate as they had on the throne? If you want to hear something else, change your life. It is like the old black preacher I heard about who preached fifteen Sundays straight on, “Thou Shalt Not Steal.” Finally, one of the deacons asked, “Preacher, when you gonna preach on something else?” He said, “When you start obeying what I'm preaching on right now.” If you want the message changed, change your life.

Why was Ahab willing to replace the true prophets with false prophets? He was willing to sacrifice truth for error and good for evil because he wanted to hear what he wanted to hear. He did not want the truth or what the truth of the living God had to say. He preferred the words of a substitute God and a substitute law.

The apostle Paul wrote something similar in the New Testament: “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 be turned unto fables.” The time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine.

If you brought a man like Jonathan Edwards to America today and let him preach, I'll bet you couldn't get a crowd if you gave away T-bone steaks. Why? Because Jonathan Edwards was a learned, erudite man. He was a scholar, a preacher, and he thundered out the truth. You can't get people today to listen to doctrine. What people want today is entertainment. They want to come for a fifteen-minute sermon and then leave.

You may not want to hear the truth, but error is not going to help you. Look in verses 11 and 12. Ahab's false prophets gave him the truth that he wanted to hear. Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, made him horns of iron and said, "Thus saith the Lord." Notice that he now changes and uses Jehovah's holy name: "With these, thou shalt push the Syrians until thou have consumed them." And the prophets prophesied so, saying, "Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper. Watch, for Yahweh shall deliver it into the king's hand."

We can change and say what the king of Judah wants to hear. The devil can quote scripture when it fits his purposes. What they told Ahab was what Ahab wanted to hear; they did not tell him the truth, that which he needed to hear.

Here comes Micaiah. The man who brings him says, "All the other prophets are prophesying good. You do the same." So Micaiah comes up with his tongue in his cheek and says, evidently very sarcastically, "Go up, go up and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king." Ahab knew that he was mocking him. He said, "How many times must I adjure thee to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

Micaiah said, "You want the truth? I'll give it to you. Here's what has happened. God has sent a lying spirit into the mouths of all your prophets. They're lying. And God has ordained it, and God has worked it out, for you'll go up to Ramoth Gilead, and there God will kill you."

The king of Israel said, “Take Micaiah and carry him back unto Ammon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son, and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with the bread of affliction, and with the water of affliction, until I come in peace.” How did they know where Micaiah was to begin with? Ahab was willing to put him in prison. They were to feed him with the bread and water of affliction until the king returned in peace.

Micaiah said, “If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me.” He said, “I’ll tell you how you can tell whether the Lord has spoken by me. If you come back, God didn’t say anything to

me. But you're not coming back in peace. You may come back in pieces, but not in peace."

Ahab had tried to replace God's Word. He had used substitution. Now Ahab tried to outsmart God by overruling His providential judgment.

Ahab's Third Attempt: Overruling God's Providential Judgment

The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead. After hearing Micaiah, if I had been Jehoshaphat, I would have said, "Wait a minute. I'm rethinking my commitment to this war. I believe you just need to go up by yourself." But he did not.

The king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and enter into the battle, but put thou on thy robes." The king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. The king of Syria commanded his thirty-two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel." When the captains saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "Surely it is the king of Israel," and turned aside to fight against him. Jehoshaphat cried out. When the captains perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him.

A certain man drew a bow at a venture and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness. Ahab said unto the driver of the chariot, "Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host, for I am wounded." The battle increased that day, and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even. The blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. A proclamation went throughout the host at the going down of the sun: "Every man to his city and every man to his own country." So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried the king in Samaria. One washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, according to the word of the Lord which he spake.

Ahab was quite aware of the judgment of God against him. When he went down into that garden, Elijah met him and said, "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?" Elijah had already told Ahab,

“Where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, they're going to lick your blood.”

Yet Ahab initially averted the immediate judgment of God by humbling himself. In 1 Kings 21:27, “When Ahab heard these words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.” The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: “Seest thou how Ahab humbled himself before me? Because he humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.” So God says he has humbled himself.

God gave Ahab only a little time. Look in chapter 22, verse 1: “And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel.” So Ahab probably enjoyed that little garden only about two years. He was just as wicked and cunning as ever. When the immediate threat of God's judgment had passed, he went back to his old ways.

It is just like today. I have had men and women come to me and say, “Brother Weaver, my child's in the hospital. It looks like he's not going to make it. Please pray with me that God will spare my child. If God spares my child, I'll be in church every Sunday the rest of my life.” We pray, and God miraculously spares the child. And guess what? They do come to church, at least for two weeks. When you get everything back the way you want it, you forget all about God.

That is what Ahab did. His humility was basically, “I've averted the judgment right now, so I'm happy. I'll get back to my life.” I can understand how Ahab wanted to avert God's judgment, and I can understand his plan to do so. What I cannot understand is Jehoshaphat's simplicity—or, more bluntly, his stupidity. In chapter 22, verse 29, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat went up to Ramoth-gilead. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will disguise myself and enter into the battle.”

“But put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.” Jehoshaphat had just heard Micaiah say that God was going to kill Ahab. Then Ahab said, “I'm not going as a king. You can be the king over this battle.” Something should have gone off in Jehoshaphat's mind: “This guy's setting me up. He

wants them to come after me and pretend that I'm Ahab and that I'm killed.” Yet Jehoshaphat, in his stupidity and simplicity, agreed.

He was the only one there arrayed in the kingly garments, and thus became a primary target. I do not understand how he agreed to such a scheme. The king of Syria had told those thirty-two captains, “You don't fight with anybody but the king of Israel. You kill him and that'll be it.” When they saw Jehoshaphat, they said, “Surely this is the king of Israel.”

When they got after Jehoshaphat, he cried to the Lord. He was not crying out, "I'm Jehoshaphat, I'm Jehoshaphat." The Lord miraculously caused those captains to understand that he was not the king of Israel, and they turned from him.

Had it not been for divine intervention, Ahab's scheme might have worked. Those captains were after the man they thought was the king of Israel. Ahab had disguised himself, and his plan was to hide in the middle of the battle.

Who can identify men in the middle of a battle? In the middle of a battle, you are doing two things: trying to save your life and trying to kill your enemy. Other than that, you are not looking around. Nobody was seeking Ahab in the midst of that battle. He had successfully disguised himself and enveloped himself in the battle. No one knew where he was or who he was.

But God was, and is still, on His throne. God still controls everything in His providence. Verse 34 tells us, "And a certain man," whom we do not even know, "drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness." Here was a battle raging, and one man pulled an arrow back and shot it into the midst, hoping to hit somebody. He never knew that he was the man who hit the king of Israel. But God, in His sovereignty, had that arrow with Ahab's name on it and directed it right between the joints of his shoulders. Ahab said, "I'm hit."

God's judgment fell exactly as God said it would. Verse 38 says, "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and they washed his armor according to the word of the Lord which he spake."

You simply cannot outsmart God. It is impossible. God is infinite, and we are finite. If you think for one minute that you can sin against God and get by with it, to use the words of Moses in Numbers 32 and verse 23, "Be sure your sins will find you out." You will never get by with it. You cannot outsmart God.

Conclusion: You Cannot Outsmart God

Let me show you how men try to outsmart God. Look in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 23, beginning with verse 30. God says, “Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbor.” Verse 31: “Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.” Verse 32: “Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness.” “Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them. Therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.”

Now, let us go back to verse 30: “Behold, I’m against the prophets of the Lord that steal my words, every one from his neighbor.” There are three things that people do primarily to get around the Word of God. First, God condemns those who steal His words. What does that mean? They remove His Word, try to replace His words, or take away from those words in some manner. That is like trying to preach only the love of God while never preaching the justice or judgment of God. It is true that God is love, folks, but God is also a just God. God said, “I’m against those who steal my words.” They take from the truth of God; they do not preach the whole counsel of God.

Next, in verse 31, He says, “Behold, I’m against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith.” In other words, they are adding to the Word of God. On the one hand, He condemns those who take from; on the other hand, He condemns those who add to. Then watch verse 32: “Behold, I’m against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness. Yet I sent them not nor commanded them.”

Now you have a substitution for. Instead of the Word of God, you have the dreams and visions of someone else. Do you realize that all

false religions, all cults, and anyone who wishes to be his own god, like Ahab, does either one or all three of these things that God condemns? They either take from, add to, or substitute for. You know what the Bible says in Deuteronomy 4, verse 2?

God said, "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." You do not add to it, and you do not take from it. Revelation 22, verses 18 and 19, says, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in this book."

You cannot outsmart God. You cannot say, "God, I want to add to this," or, "God, I want to take from this," or, "God, I want to substitute for this." Isaiah 46, verse 10, says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Do you know how much of God's counsel is going to come to pass? All of it. How much of God's plan is going to prosper? All of it.

So you might as well stop trying to outsmart God. It cannot be done. You cannot outrun Him, hide from Him, stop Him, thwart Him, hinder Him, overthrow Him, dethrone Him, or outwit Him. You cannot outsmart Him. He is God. His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure.

And all of these one-worlders and global plans—I have news for you. There is going to be a global empire and a one-world government, but it will be the government under the sovereign God of the universe, who enthrones His Son, Jesus Christ. You cannot outsmart Him.

Father, we thank You for Your love, grace, and mercy to us. We ask You, Lord, to teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. May we always take Your Word as it is—not adding to it, not taking from it, not substituting for it, but bowing to it and obeying it. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Washing Your Feet in the Blood of the Wicked

Do you indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? Do you judge uprightly, O you sons of men? Yea, in heart you work wickedness. You weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb. They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent. They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, who will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.

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.

Introduction: The Boldness of Psalm 58

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 judgeth in the earth. Psalm 58 is remarkable for the vigor of its language, the boldness of its figures, and the clarity of its doctrine. It may be compared with Psalm 12 for its desperation, where David says, Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men; with Psalm 14 for its condemnation of the wicked; and with Psalm 82 for its vindication of God's righteous judgment. Psalm 58 is a bold protest against the unrighteous in general and unrighteous judges in particular, a cry for vengeance against those who pervert justice.

Biblical Hatred and Love Can Coexist

David is known in Scripture as the sweet psalmist of Israel. Certainly, when we read Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” we see the tenderness of David’s faith. When we read Psalm 42, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God, O when shall I come and appear before my God?” and Psalm 46, “The Lord is our refuge and a stronghold in the day of trouble,” we certainly see how David is indeed the sweet psalmist of Israel.

Yet it is possible for tenderness and love and Biblical hatred to dwell in the same breast. I am not talking about personal hatred, and I am not talking about personal vindictiveness. I am talking about a biblical hatred: a hatred of sin, a hatred of those who sin against God, and a desire for biblical justice.

Psalm 94:16 asks, “Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?” God is wanting someone to rise up against the evildoers. If we stand for righteousness, we have to stand against unrighteousness. If we stand for holiness, we have to stand against that which is unholy. The question is not whether we should oppose evil, but whether we will stand up against those who work iniquity.

Psalm 97:10 says, “Ye that love the Lord. Hate evil.” If you love the Lord, you hate evil. In other words, you hate everything that is contrary to God.

Then David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, says in Psalm 139:21–22, “Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them my enemies.” There is a biblical doctrine of hatred, a biblical way of hating that is just and right. There is also a personal way of hating that is unjust, unbiblical, and not right. But that does not discount the fact that there is a biblical doctrine of hatred. David said, “Do not I hate them that hate thee, O Lord, and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies.”

The Persons of the Wicked

Certainly, everyone who hates God is not only God’s enemy, but he is also the enemy of all of those who love God.

Psalm 58 is easily divided into three distinct divisions. First of all, verses 1 through 5 present a forcible picture of the ungodly when they are in the seat of judgment and power. Secondly, verses 6 through 9 contain the prayer for the swift judgment of God to overtake the wicked and the unjust rulers. Finally, verses 10 through 11 show the joy and the rejoicing of the righteous when God’s vengeance comes upon the wicked.

The Persons of the Wicked (Psalm 58:1-5)

Beginning with verses 1 through 5, we see the persons of the wicked. This is the first part of a simple three-point outline. The persons condemned are those who should condemn crime and wickedness, but who turn out to be wicked criminals themselves.

Please remember that Psalm 82 is a psalm against unjust judges. Psalm 58 is also a psalm against unjust judges, in particular, and, in general, against anyone who would pervert justice. David tells us that the biggest criminals turn out to be not the ones who commit the crime, but the ones who allow the criminals to go unpunished

when they commit the crime. Thus, they are committing a greater crime by not punishing the wicked.

So, first of all, in verse 1, we have the accusation: “Do you indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?” These two questions posed in verse 1 bring forth a negative answer. Do you indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? The answer is no. Do you judge uprightly, O you sons of men? The answer is no again.

In verse 1, he says, “Do you speak righteousness, O congregation?” To speak righteousness means to pronounce a just sentence. The accusation is directed toward those who occupy the seat of judgment and power, yet fail to speak righteousness or judge uprightly.

Righteousness and judgment belong particularly to God. Psalm 9:7–9 says, “But the Lord shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” God shall judge the world in righteousness. Whatever God speaks and whatever He gives in judgment will be absolutely just and absolutely right.

So, when the psalmist says, “Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?” he is asking, Do you honestly pass a just sentence? Do you give forth a just decree? The answer is no. Proverbs 17:15 gives this amazing statement: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.”

The word abomination literally means a stench in the nostrils. When a judge justifies the wicked, it is a stench in the nostrils of God. Likewise, when a judge condemns the just, it is a stench in the nostrils of God. Psalm 58, then, declares that in David’s time as well as ours, there were a multitude of unjust judges who did not give forth justice.

Interestingly, the word congregation in verse 1—“Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?”—is the Hebrew word elem, which is gods: “Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O gods?” Why would God refer to judges as gods? He also did so in Psalm 82. They

are called gods because of their judicial capacity; they were to act as representatives of the one true and living God, the supreme Judge of the earth. David addresses them as gods half reproachfully and half sarcastically, emphasizing that although they were supposed to represent God, they were perverting justice. They were not representing God; they themselves would be judged by the righteous Judge of all judges.

In the latter part of the verse, He refers to the judges as the sons of men, or the sons of man. This reminds them that they too are men, accountable and answerable to God, and that God will judge them.

Hold Psalm 58, but turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 1. Deuteronomy 1, beginning with verse 16. Look what Moses tells the judges: “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously, that is, pronounce a just sentence, judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. You shall not respect persons in judgment”; it does not matter if they are rich or poor. “You shall hear the small as well as the great. You shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's. And the cause that is too hard for you, bring it to me and I will hear it.” Notice that: “the judgment is God's.” Judges were ordained originally and initially to exercise God's righteous judgment, to pronounce the sentence that God demanded.

It may surprise you to learn that when our country was first founded, judges used the Bible in determining sentences for the wicked. The practice of standing when the judge enters the courtroom came from the fact that initially and originally the judge entered carrying the Bible. People stood out of respect for the Word of God, not out of respect for the man. Consequently, judges have now laid the Bible aside, and they expect you to stand for a man. Originally, juries usually had the Bible when they determined guilt or innocence and the sentence of individuals. Here God says judges are to demonstrate His justice in the earth.

The accusation in verse 1 is, “You judges are guilty of violating your office and your oath. You are not sending forth righteousness.” In verse 2 of Psalm 58, we see the denunciation. Verse 1 is the accusation; verse 2 is the denunciation. David denounces them for

their wickedness: “Yea, in heart you work wickedness. You weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.” While outwardly pretending to give justice, and pretending that they wanted justice, they were inwardly and secretly contriving injustice and planning to overthrow justice. They sat there as solemn, righteous judges, but in reality their plans and schemes were to condemn the innocent and justify the wicked. Thus he says, “You weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.”

The American symbol of justice is the balance scales. Usually, a woman or a statue holds them, and she has a blindfold over her eyes, showing that justice is blind. In other words, it metes out the same regardless of who is standing in front of it.

Isn't it interesting that God says, “You weigh the violence of your hand”? The scales of justice are turned into the scales of injustice. Justice is no longer blind. They pretended to weigh out justice, but all they were weighing out was violence and wickedness.

There is another thought that could be in this verse: “You weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.” What else was weighed out in the Bible? Money. Money was by weight in the Bible, and this could also refer to the bribes and monetary rewards that the judges received for perverting justice.

What this verse indeed tells us is that the judges were deliberately, maliciously, and intentionally doing injustice. They were actually overthrowing justice. Instead of justice being blind, the blindfold is removed, and wickedness and violence are weighed and measured by the judges. Literally, these judges in David's time, like the judges in our time, knew exactly what they could get away with, humanly speaking.

The Verification

If you really genuinely believe there is justice in our land today, you have not been in a courtroom recently, and you certainly have not been in the courtroom as a Christian claiming your biblical and constitutional rights, because you will find out that they are indeed unjust.

Let me show you what I am talking about. You remember from Russ's good home state this judge Sol Wachtler—was that his name?—the superior court judge there in New York. Sol Wachtler, was it? Wachtler. It was Wachtler, the judge who was threatening his ex-girlfriend, threatening to kidnap the child, and demanding a ransom. The judge was married to another woman. When they got through investigating who was blackmailing this woman, it turned out to be the superior court judge in New York. They do not know where he is now, but he is not listed.

You remember the people in Colorado voted down Proposition Number 2, which would have given, quote-unquote, equal rights to the sodomites. That is, you could not discriminate against them. The people of Colorado said, yes, we want to discriminate. We do not want them to have equal rights. We do not even want them around us. I just heard on the radio this week that one judge is going to intervene and stop Proposition 2 from taking effect. What right does the judge have to overthrow the will of the people of the state of Colorado?

Wickedness is being measured out. In other words, they know what they can get away with. Probably no one in the state of Colorado will even challenge that judge. So the Bible says they are weighing out the violence. Here, then, is a denunciation, because it is deliberate, purposeful, malicious, intentional, and wicked.

Now notice, thirdly, verses 3 through 5: the verification. Not only do you have an accusation and a denunciation here, but is that accusation and denunciation verified? Generally speaking, verses 3 through 5 give us a description of the class to which these wicked judges belong. They are deliberately wicked, deaf to rebuke, and incapable of reform.

Look at verse 3. God says, the wicked are estranged from the womb. They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

Verse 3 is an excellent verse on the doctrine of total depravity, because the Bible is saying that men are wicked not only from their birth, but also by practice. There is an innate depravity in man. However, verse 3 speaks of more than the doctrine of total depravity. That truth is certainly applicable here, but the verse emphasizes a

special characteristic of these men: their whole life has been one continuous, unchecked rebellion and wickedness, a bold, brazen rebellion against God. They are seasoned, habitual, hardened, wicked, ungodly characters.

The wicked are estranged from the womb; from the time they were born, they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. In other words, they are practiced in their depravity. It is not merely innate depravity under consideration, but practical, practiced, consummate depravity. Bluntly stated, these men were good at being evil. They were wicked, and they had wickedness refined. They had it down to the nth degree.

If you look around at the judicial system and our bureaucracy today, you will find that usually most of our congressmen and most of our civil officers have wickedness down to a refinement. Most of them can do so legally. They can sin and commit crimes legally and get by with it. They know exactly how to work the system.

Consider the word estranged in verse 3. When a man is separated from his wife, we normally say he is estranged from his wife. What does it mean when the Bible says the wicked are estranged from the womb? Who are they estranged from, and what are they estranged from? They are estranged from God and His law. Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 18 says that they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. Colossians chapter 1 and verse 21 says they are alienated from God and are enemies in their minds. Thus, when God says the wicked are estranged from God, it means that they are totally separated and alienated, complete enemies of God. They have absolutely no reverence for God, no concern for God, and no concern for righteousness.

An unrighteous man cannot help but be an unjust man. The word righteous in the Old Testament and the word justice in the Old Testament are synonymous; they are from the same word. If something is right, it is just; if something is just, it is right. An unrighteous man cannot be just because he does not even know what righteousness is. So God says, “They’re separated from God.” Luke 18, verse 2.

What did Jesus Christ say? There was a judge who feared not God nor regarded man. You remember that widow woman? She came to that judge and said, "Avenge me of mine adversary." Finally, he said, "Though I fear not God nor regard man, yet I'll avenge this woman, lest by her continual coming she weary me." But note what he said: "Though I fear not God, nor regard man." If you do not fear God, you will have no regard for man. The reason he was not concerned with giving this widow woman justice was that he did not fear God. He was alienated from God. The only reason he finally avenged the widow woman was to get her off his back. It was not out of a principle of justice and righteousness.

Depraved, corrupted men are haters of God, haters of righteousness, and haters of justice. It is impossible for an unrighteous, ungodly man to give forth true justice, because he does not even know what justice is.

Now let us consider verses 3, 4, and 5 together. The wicked "are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder which stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." The interesting thing is that their poison is like the poison, or venom, of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder.

The word adder occurs six times in the Old Testament, and every time except two—this instance in Psalm 58:4 and in Psalm 91:13—it is translated, as the margin reference shows, as asp. If you look in the margin references to Psalm 58:4 and Psalm 91:13, you will see the word asp. The asp was the most poisonous, most venomous serpent in the East. When an asp bit you, you were dead in a matter of a minute. There was no remedy for an asp bite. It was Cleopatra who supposedly killed herself by allowing an asp to bite her.

The word poison in verse 4 is sometimes translated in our Bible as rage, anger, wrath, or fury. God could be saying here that their fury, anger, and wrath are like venom. But the word actually means venom. What God is stressing is that wicked rulers have a great capacity to do destruction and misery.

Now, the real problem with wicked rulers is this: they will not listen to you. They will not listen to anyone. They will not even listen to God Himself. God says these wicked rulers are like the deaf adder, the deaf asp, that stoppeth her ear. Watch verse 5: "…who will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."

Every one of us has seen snake charmers. The charming of serpents is mentioned in the Bible in two specific cases: Ecclesiastes chapter 10 and verse 11, and Jeremiah chapter 8 and verse 17. In each instance, God is speaking about poisonous vipers that cannot be charmed, or will not be charmed, and thus they bite and inflict. Yet we have all seen pictures and illustrations of snake charmers sitting in front of a snake, playing music, and swaying back and forth.

I have heard all kinds of things. I have heard that all serpents are deaf, and that the snake is merely responding to the movement of the man's body. I do not know whether adders have ears or whether they can stop their ears if they have them. This verse could be speaking of snakes so venomous that even snake charmers cannot deal with them. If I were going to handle a snake, I would at least want a nonpoisonous one—or, if it were poisonous, one whose bite was not fatal. But if an asp bites you, you do not even have time to call the doctor; you are dead. God is saying that these men are like poisonous asps: they will not listen.

You cannot use logic with them, for they are illogical. You cannot use reasoning with them, for they are unreasonable. You cannot use Scripture with them, for they are unscriptural. You cannot refer them to God, for they hate and despise God and will not even confess that God is. The problem is simply that they will not listen.

Now let me ask you a question. How many of you have written your congressmen, have written judges, and have gotten those individuals to listen to your biblical reasonings on the law of God? No one. You know why? They do what they want to do. They think they are a law unto themselves. Here are the persons of the wicked. God says they are like a poisonous serpent. They will not listen. They have great capacity for destruction.

The Prayer of Vengeance (Psalm 58:6-9)

Now look very quickly in verses six through nine at the prayer of vengeance. David says, “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.”

What does the Bible say that the righteous do when the wicked are in authority? What do the righteous do when the wicked are in authority, according to the Bible? Suffer or mourn. For instance, the Bible in Proverbs 29 and verse 2 says that when the ungodly or the unrighteous are in authority, the people mourn.

We are living in a day when we have many ungodly and unrighteous leaders. Are we, as God’s people, just simply shut up to mourning and suffering? Does that mean that we have to suffer everything that they lay upon us and everything that they do to us? Do we just sit back and take it? The psalmist is saying, look, there is another avenue open. What is that avenue? It is a prayer. Before I read this, turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 18. Jesus Christ is teaching us about prayer. We do not simply pray for our needs and our wants. Look at Luke 18, verse 2, in light of what Psalm 58 teaches.

There was in a city a judge who feared not God, nor regarded man. And there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while, but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith, and shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Do you hear what He said? Do you think that God is like the unjust judge, not interested in justice? Oh no, God is not like that.

He says, “And shall not God avenge his own elect?”—those who cry day and night unto Him. God says, “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” Do you know one reason the wicked are not destroyed and overthrown? It is because God’s people have not been crying for the righteous justice of God.

“Shall not God avenge his own elect who cry unto him day and night?” This teaches us that we have a responsibility to cry for God to bring forth justice in this earth. We need not expect justice from wicked men, but we certainly expect justice from the righteous God of the earth. God says that if we cry to him, he will give it to us.

Now look back in your Bibles to Psalm 58 and note how David prays for vengeance against wicked, ungodly men. He gives us six illustrations. The first is the illustration of a lion.

A lion is a very ferocious beast. David has just spoken of the wicked as serpents, and a serpent is silent and deadly. But a lion is bolder, voracious, ferocious, and loud. He is also very capable of being destroyed. Once the wicked get themselves in the seat of power, they could care less whether they are silent anymore.

Here is what David says in verse 7, verse 6: “Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth. Break out the great teeth of the young lions.” A lion with his teeth broken out is practically helpless. It still has its claws, but if it has no teeth, it cannot eat. Lions are carnivores; they eat meat. Once their teeth are broken out, it is only a matter of time until their claws are totally useless, because they will die.

David is saying, “God, if these wicked men will not do good—and they will not—destroy their power to do evil. Break out their teeth. Destroy them.” The words are, “Smack them right in the mouth, God. Destroy their power to do evil.” A toothless lion is a helpless lion, and a lion that will soon die.

Look at Proverbs 30:14. Solomon, the wise man, says, “There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords and their jaw teeth as knives to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men.” There is a whole generation of individuals who have teeth as swords and jaw teeth as knives. It is time we learn to pray Psalm 58:6: “Break their teeth in their mouth, O God. Break out the teeth of the young lions.”

Destroy their ability and their power to do evil. In verse 7, David gives another illustration: “Let them melt away as waters which run continually.” The word melt actually means to flow or to pass away.

Most of us here are not used to snow. Russ and Brother Emmonsnider do see snow a good bit. Snow will stay on the ground until it warms up, and just as quickly as it warms up, it melts and passes away. Every one of us has spilled a glass or jug of liquid. You can take a gallon jar, fill it with water, and turn it upside down, and it is emptied quickly.

That is what David is saying: Lord, let the enemies vanish; let them pass away as quickly as the snow melts when the sun is out, and as quickly as water leaves a vessel. Let them pass away. Then, in verse 7, he gives another illustration, the third one: “When he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.”

There are two possible interpretations of the latter part of verse 7. What does it mean when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, and says, Let them be as cut in pieces? First, “them” could refer to the arrows. Let the arrows be cut in pieces. If you take an arrow and cut its head off, what good is it? Nothing. The arrow might hit you, but it will do no more than hurt you and create a little bruise. It is certainly no longer a deadly instrument. It could also mean what I have done, and so has Doc Holmes: you shoot your arrow, and it hits a limb; then it either splinters or warps. Instead of going to the mark, it may end up behind you somewhere. Thus, when they shoot the arrow, let its head be cut off, or let it be like a splintered arrow going in all directions and totally missing the mark.

But there is another possible interpretation. He could be saying, when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them—that is, the archers, the ones doing the shooting—be as cut in pieces.

Picture Doc with his bow drawn back, about to release the arrow and aiming at a target. Someone slips up behind him with a sharp sword and hacks him in two. Is that arrow going to hit the target? Obviously not. The archer has been cut in two; he has lost his capacity to aim and to shoot. He is dead. The arrow simply goes harmlessly into the air or into the earth.

So David is saying, Lord, let them be as lions; break out their teeth. Let them be as waters; let them pass away. Let them be as blunted arrows, or at least as archers who have been cut in two, with no ability to shoot and destroy. Then, in verse 8, he says, “As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away.”

The snail, as it crawls, leaves a trail of slime and appears to be wasting away. Put that snail in the hot sun, and you will literally see it waste or melt away. Some of you have stepped on a snail; once it is smeared and the sun hits it, it is simply gone.

So God says, Let God's enemies be as a snail. He gives the next illustration: "Let them be like the untimely birth of a woman that they cannot see the sun." What is an untimely birth of a woman? It is when a woman has a miscarriage. David is saying, let the enemy's lifetime pass so quickly, with such speed, that it will seem as if they have not lived at all. It seems to me that David kind of wants the enemies done away with. Doesn't it seem like that to you? He says, God, let them die, and let them die quickly, just as if they had never even been born.

Then, in verse 9, here is the other illustration: "Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away, as with a whirlwind, both living and in his wrath." What does it mean, before your pots can feel the thorns? You have to understand the way they cooked in the desert lands of the East. Usually, the fire was made up of brambles and thorns. They were very easy to obtain and very light. They would take these thorns, pile them together, and of course hang their pots over the thorn. Many times, out in the desert, there would be a whirlwind or a hot air.

What the psalmist is saying is this: before the pot can ever get hot, let the whirlwind come along and blow those thorns out from under that pot and away from that individual. God, come in your wrath and destroy them before their plans have time to come to fruition, before all their schemes can come to pass. Lord, just like a whirlwind, wipe them away. And he says God is going to do that, both living and dying. In other words, he will catch them alive and destroy them in his wrath. David not only prayed against the wicked and asked God to destroy them; he asked God to destroy them quickly.

The Praise of the Righteous (Psalm 58:10-11)

What is to be the attitude of God's people when God does indeed destroy the wicked? Look at verses 10 and 11 and the praise of the righteous. When God rises and judges the wicked, what is our response to be? It is to be one of praise and rejoicing. Verse 10 says, “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 judgeth the earth.” Our attitude should be one of praise and rejoicing. When we see God's vengeance taken upon the wicked, God says we are to rejoice.

There are a multitude of passages; I will show you about four of them. In Psalm 52:6, speaking of the wicked man, the Bible says, “The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him.” That is, they shall see his destruction and fear; they will learn from it. But then they shall also laugh at him. We will rejoice in the fact that he has been overthrown. When public judgment comes upon the wicked, the righteous will see it, fear it, and rejoice.

Look at Psalm 60:6. This passage speaks of the destruction of some of Israel's enemies: “God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.” Then, in verse 8: “Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe: Philistia, triumph thou because of me.” He is speaking of the destruction of the enemies and says, “I will rejoice.”

Psalm 137 is another powerful passage, beginning in verse 7. The Edomites delighted in the destruction of Jerusalem. They stood in the way and purposefully killed those who would have escaped. The psalmist says, “Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.” That is, burn it, destroy everything, and cut off everything. So the Edomites came and killed every one of them. Verse 8 follows.

O daughter of Babylon, this is what he calls them, who are to be destroyed: “Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.” In other words, God will judge the wickedness, and the response should be one of delight and rejoicing.

Revelation 19 gives another clear example. Note the response when the whole world system is destroyed. “After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, Hallelujah.” Hallelujah means “Praise God.” “Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.” Again they said, Hallelujah; and her smoke rose up for ever and ever. The four and twenty elders and four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne. Amen. Hallelujah.

So, dear friend, when this world is finally and fully destroyed—that is, the world system and the ungodly—it will be Hallelujah.

One other passage is Deuteronomy 32, beginning with verse 39. God says, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.” Now watch what God says: “For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword”—that is, if I sharpen my sword—“and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain, and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.” Then God says, “Rejoice, O ye his people,” for he will avenge the blood of his servants, render vengeance to his adversaries, and be merciful unto his land and to his people. Isn’t that amazing? God says, when he whets his sword and his hand takes hold on judgment, God’s people are to rejoice.

The Individual Application

Look back to Psalm 58, verse 10: “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.” Let that sink in. The righteous shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. The vengeance is not ours, but it is God's. Nevertheless, we may rejoice in the righteous judgment of God.

What does it mean when it says the righteous not only shall rejoice, but shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked?

Let me give you three applications to this statement. First, there is what I am going to call the individual application. Individually, when the judgment of God falls upon wicked individuals who have persecuted the people of God, the Bible says that the wicked and the unrighteous man shall not live out half his days. This means the judgment of God will come upon him and cut him off in the prime of his life.

Remember Ahab, who persecuted God's people and Elijah and tried to have Elijah slain. A certain man drew a bow at a venture and shot an arrow at adventure. He did not even know whom he was shooting at, but God sovereignly guided that arrow. It struck old King Ahab between the shoulder blades. He fell down in his chariot and bled out. When his chariot got back to town, the dogs licked the blood out of it. Elijah was literally vindicated because his enemy was dead. In one sense, the individual application was that Elijah washed his feet in the blood of Ahab, for God killed Ahab exactly as He said He would.

How about Jezebel? The people of God literally washed their feet, in one sense, in Jezebel when she was trodden underfoot with that chariot, and the dogs ate her and left her. Look at old Haman. He was going to hang Mordecai, but God had Haman hanged on the very same gallows that he built for Mordecai. Mordecai washed his feet in the blood of the wicked. That gallows built for Mordecai was used to hang Haman. Look at old King Herod.

Old King Herod in Acts 12 gave an oration, and the people said, “It’s the voice of a God! It’s the voice of a God!” The Bible said immediately, God smote Herod because he gave not God the glory; he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost. And the righteous wash their feet in the blood of the wicked. That is, when God smites the individual wicked men who are persecuting and hating the people of God. Not only is there the individual application; there is the literal application.

You say, what do you mean? Look in Psalm 68:23: “That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy

dogs in the same." God is going to give his people such a victory that even our dogs will participate in it.

Look in your Bibles to Isaiah 63:1-4. This is none other than Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and it is also the judgment of God in context: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength, I that speak in righteousness mighty to save"? That is the Lord Jesus. "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine vat?" He says, "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me. For I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." Jesus Christ will stain his garments in the blood of the wicked.

Now turn back to Psalm 149. There is indeed not only a great irony but a great joy in what I am about to read. If you do not see the joy, then I am sorry, but the Bible still speaks of it. Although the vengeance and the judgment are the Lord's, many times God allows His people to participate in His judgment. Did God judge the Ammonites, the Jebusites, the Hivites, and the Philistines? Yes, He did. But would you please tell me how God judged them?

He put a sword in the children of Israel's hand and said, "You go in and out of the land and kill every one of them." That's how God judged them.

Psalm 149:4 says, "For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people." I am thankful for that. "He will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand." Why do we need a two-edged sword? "To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written." This honor have all the saints. Praise ye the Lord. We will be with our Lord, and we will participate in the exercise of His vengeance.

Here is the spiritual application: I don't care where you turn in the Bible; you will find washing of the feet. In the Old Testament, washing the feet was a sign of hospitality. Most people walked in sandals. A man could be clean, but after walking in his sandals, before he entered a home, it was common hospitality to provide a basin of water. He either washed his feet, or you washed them for him. This removed the defilement and uncleanness brought upon him by walking on dusty roads.

In Genesis 18:4, when Abraham saw the Lord and the angels, he immediately brought a basin of water so they could wash their feet. One of the requirements for a godly widow in 1 Timothy 5:10 was that she had washed the saints' feet. Before the priests entered the tabernacle or temple, they had to wash their feet in a laver. Why? It spoke of cleansing. In John 13, Jesus Christ washed the disciples' feet. Why? It spoke of cleansing. Now God says, “We shall wash our feet in the blood of the wicked.” What does that mean?

Look at all the wickedness that is in this world: abortion, sodomy, murder, rape, crime, fraud, pillage—you name it, it is everywhere. You know what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 33? “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” A lot of the saints are affected by the wickedness of the wicked. The very fact that we have an unjust economic system is affecting every one of us. The very fact that we have an unjust bureaucracy is affecting every one of us. But God is saying, one day, we are going to wash our feet in the blood of the wicked. What does that mean? We are going to wash away all the defilement and all the corruption that the wicked have brought upon us and upon this world.

Do you remember back in Deuteronomy 19 and Deuteronomy 21, where God said that the murderer was to be put to death, for blood defiled the land, and the land could not be cleansed except by the blood of him who had shed it? What is God saying? God is saying He is going to use the blood of the wicked to cleanse this world from their wickedness.

When we wash our feet in the blood of the wicked, we will be washing off the defilement and the uncleanness and the corruption of this world. John said it like this: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ.” David says it

again the same way in Psalm 37: “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. I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green bay tree.”

Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, and he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together. The end of the wicked shall be cut off, 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.

Three times David says the wicked shall be cut off. God's people shall be delivered from the wicked. We'll finally wash our feet in their blood, washing away the corruption and the ungodliness and the uncleanness, and we'll be serving in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder David finished Psalm 58 with verse 11: “So that a man shall say, verily, there is a reward for the righteous. Verily, there is a God that judgeth the earth.”

The wicked may be in power now, but they shall not be in power long. The wicked may be profiting now, but they shall not profit long. For there is a God who judges in the earth, and we need to praise and honor Him.

Father, we bow to Thee this day. We thank Thee for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank thee that thou art the judge of all the earth, and that thou wilt indeed give justice. O God, help us, Lord, to be righteous, godly people, for we do know, according to your word, that judgment is coming. And Lord, when we see thee cut off the wicked, may we see it, and fear, and rejoice, and give thee the glory. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

The Sudden Works of God

Introduction and the Divine Prohibition

Open your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 3, verse 25. The Word of God says, “Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither the desolation of the wicked when it cometh.” This is a very simple verse, but when you look at Proverbs 3 and verse 25, the first thing that you should see is a divine prohibition.

That is, He is prohibiting us from doing something. What is He prohibiting us from doing? We should not be afraid of sudden fear, neither the desolation of the wicked. So this verse very clearly and pointedly indicates that the wicked shall be destroyed. In fact, they shall be left absolutely desolate. They will have nothing to cling to, nothing to hold on to, nothing to stand upon, nor any help or any hope whatsoever.

They will face the righteous judgment of God, and they will face the righteous judgment of God alone. Also, we must remember that every negative has a positive. When you look at Proverbs 3 and verse 25, the positive then indicates very clearly that the righteous, therefore, shall be delivered. Destruction may fall upon the wicked,

but it is not going to fall upon the righteous. The Bible tells us in 2 Peter 2, verse 9, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation and how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” So on the one hand, God knows how to deliver the righteous. On the other hand, He knows how to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment.

God's Eternality and Timelessness

Now, I call your attention to the concept in verse 25 of sudden fear. Have you ever really thought about the word sudden or suddenly? We use that word very frequently, but we very seldom think about the implications of the word. You will remember I have told you repeatedly in times past that God is the slowest person you will ever get hooked up with. The reason I make that statement is because God is not bound by time. God is eternal. He is above time. He is beyond time. And when time shall be no more, He is.

The Bible tells us in Revelation 10 in verse 6 that the angel “sware by Him that liveth forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that time shall be no more.” So the eternality of God then speaks of God’s timelessness. If you are eternal, you are before time and you are after time. You have nothing to do with time.

You are eternal. That is why the Bible says in Isaiah 57:15, "For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy." God is the one who inhabits eternity. In Deuteronomy 33:27, the Bible says, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." God is eternal; we are not. That means that we are creatures of time and therefore are time-conscious.

At least some of us are. Most of us are time-conscious. The fact is that we want God to do something in our time, and usually we want Him to do it in our own way as well. But the Bible says in 2 Peter 3:8, "But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day."

What does that mean? God does have a timetable, but it is not our timetable, because God is above time and beyond time and certainly is not limited by time whatsoever. History is linear; it is not cyclical. Whenever you hear someone say that history is repeating itself, going around in circles or cycles, that is a pagan concept.

It is true that we repeat the same sins because we are sinners. But the Bible teaches that time has a definite beginning, which is creation, and proceeds to a definite ending, when time shall be no more. It does not keep going around in circles. It has a beginning and an ending.

God has ordained time for us, but God is above time. God is eternal. Therefore, God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases, and to whomever He pleases, because God is above and beyond time. Simply because we understand that God is eternal and above time does not mean that God cannot move and act suddenly. In fact, Scripture teaches that there are indeed sudden works of God.

The Patience of God Misunderstood

The word sudden means straightway, immediately, quickly, surprisingly. When God moves, He often moves straightway, immediately, quickly, and surprisingly. When God moves this way, He usually catches sinners off guard because they do not expect Him to move in that way. The patience of God is usually misunderstood and misinterpreted by wicked men. Natural man, depraved man, fallen man, tends to think that just because God does not smite a man instantly, He is not going to smite him at all, or else that God has forgotten and is not going to judge.

The wicked man thinks that somehow, someway, he is never ever going to be judged or brought into account for his sins. Psalm 10:6 says, “He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved, I shall never be in adversity.” The wicked man says this in his heart. Then Psalm 10:11 says, “He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten it, he hideth his face; he will never see it.” In other words, if God does happen to observe or know, the wicked man thinks God is not going to judge him for it. He will forget all about it.

Neither of those attitudes is correct. Neither of those attitudes is biblical. God is just merely patient. The patience of God is described as that attitude or attribute of God in which He exercises power and control over Himself, causing Him to bear long with the wicked and forbear in punishing them. The patience of God is that attribute which causes God to bear long with the wicked and then forbear in punishing them. This does not mean He is not going to punish them; He simply bears long with them.

The Bible says in Nahum 1:3 that the Lord is slow to anger and great in power. Romans 15:5 tells us that He is the patient God. Now let me show you how different God is from man. Man by nature is quick-tempered and unforgiving. Usually, in man, the higher one is in authority, the higher one is in power, the quicker he is to strike out at those beneath him who do not please him. He thinks that because he is in power and has authority, he can do as he pleases, whenever he pleases; he can berate, belittle, and punish those below him at his will.

Such is the attitude of modern-day politicians when they readily, eagerly, and willingly strike out at anybody who does not agree with them. Such is not God. Do you know why man does that? Man has no control over himself. God has complete and total control; therefore, God is patient. God is not going to be bullied into a quarrel before He is ready to quarrel. God has control over Himself.

Stop and think about this. Man, who has absolutely no power, is quick-tempered and quick to punish. God, who is omnipotent—that is, He has all power—has absolute and total control over Himself. Instead of quickly smiting down the offender, He bears long with him. It is not that God is weak. It is not that God is unjust. God is simply exercising His patience.

Examples of God's Patience in Judgment

Have you ever noticed how the patience of God has been revealed in His dealing with sinners? Take those antediluvians, the people who lived before Noah’s flood. It is true that God warned them, and yet God waited 120 years, according to Genesis 6:3, before He destroyed them.

The Amorites are another example of God's wonderful patience. In Genesis 15, God told Abram that he and his seed were going to go down into a strange land and be there for 400 years. Why? Did Abram and his descendants need to go into Egypt for 400 years?

Let me read it to you. Genesis 15:13–16: "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them 400 years. And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge, and afterwards they shall come out with great substance, and thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace, and thou shalt be buried in good old age."

Now listen: "...but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." What did God do after 400 years? He brought Israel out of the land of Egypt. He put a sword in their hand and said, "Go into the land and kill every one of them."

The amazing thing is this: The Amorites were a wicked, vile, ungodly, heathenistic, idolatrous people, and God waited an additional 400 years before He smote them. But when He smote them, He totally destroyed them. I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Psalms and look at the amazing patience of God to Israel. Notice Psalm 78, verses 38 and 39. If anyone ever provoked God, it was certainly Israel. All you have to do is read about the wilderness wanderings and everything they did to provoke God. In Psalm 78, verses 38 and 39, you have it summarized.

Psalm 78:38 says, "But he, that is God, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not. Yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." Verse 40 asks, "How often did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert." Yet God did not stir up all his anger. He was patient with a sinful, disobedient people.

I am constantly amazed at the wondrous patience of God with the world today, and especially with America. We are a nation of lawbreakers. We have trampled God's law under our feet. His Word is despised and rejected daily. His preachers are slighted, His people are mocked, and we have departed from the foundational truths

upon which this country was built—the Word of God. We have turned from it, mocked God, and instituted idolatry instead of the worship of God. The amazing thing is that God still allows us to live and exist.

The only question is this: Why does the righteous wrath of heaven not make an end to all these abominations in this land? I can answer that biblically: Scripture says that God bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. God simply bears long and patiently waits until He has decided it is time for judgment.

One question I am asked repeatedly is, When is God going to do something? How much longer do we have? How can we continue in the state in which we are traveling? When I looked at the word suddenly in Proverbs, I saw this verse: "Be not afraid of sudden fear." I wondered how this word sudden is used in the Bible. When I examined sudden and suddenly, I found that the word is used in both the Old and New Testaments around two major things—and only two major things.

I am not talking about the return of Christ in general. In one sense, you might say that Christ's return will be sudden, because the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:52, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound," and so forth. The twinkling of an eye is very sudden. The Bible also says in Matthew 24:27, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth in the west, even so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Matthew 24:44 says, "Therefore be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

I understand that whether our Lord comes in judgment, comes to take His own, or comes back in what you and I would call the second coming, we could say that He comes suddenly in one sense of the word. But the point is this: the word sudden or suddenly is never used in the Bible in connection with the return of Christ. It is used, however, around two major things. What are they? One is judgment, and the other is awakening or revival. Let us take judgment first and see the theme of judgment.

When we speak of judgment, and of sudden judgment, we are talking about judgment that comes instantly, straightway, immediately, surprisingly, without warning. Now, without warning does not mean that there were no warnings at all. It means that the warnings given were unheard and unheeded; therefore, when judgment fell, it fell without warning. Let me give you an illustration.

Consider the ministry of Noah. According to the Word of God, there was a 120-year period while Noah was building the ark. The Bible tells us, "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing." When you go back to Genesis 6:3, God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for he is also flesh, yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." Evidently, there was about a hundred and twenty years while Noah was building the ark. The Bible tells us in 2 Peter 2:5 that during those 120 years, "God spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing the flood upon the world of the ungodly."

Here is my question: Since the Bible specifically tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, what do you think he did for 120 years while he was building the ark? He was preaching. Remember, when Noah was building the ark, there had never been a flood. There had never been rain. Read it for yourself: a mist came up from the ground and watered the earth. So here was Noah preaching and building an ark. What did people think about Noah? He was loony as the day is long. Now turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 24. Let us begin reading with verse 37.

For 120 years, Noah had been preaching and teaching. Matthew 24:37 says, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered in the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." What? They knew not until the flood.

How could they not know? What had Noah been doing for 120 years? Building an ark and preaching. They did not listen, hear, or heed. Were they warned? Yes. But when the flood came, it came upon them without warning because they were not expecting it. They

did not know that God was going to smite them in such a way. Luke 17:27 says, “They did eat, they drank, they married wives. They were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.”

In one passage, they knew not until the flood came; in the next, the flood destroyed them all. We are talking about sudden, instant, immediate, straightway, surprising judgment. Noah’s preaching did not penetrate their hard hearts or open their obtuse minds. They said, “We’ve got too much to do. There’s too much going on. We’ve got a life to live. We don’t have time to listen to you.” When judgment fell, it fell suddenly; they were completely surprised, and they were all destroyed.

Sudden Judgment Individually and Nationally

Consider this truth in two ways, primarily: first, individually; and secondly, nationally. We are still talking about judgment coming suddenly. First, this concerns individual Christians, who will be judged for their sin of rebellion and wickedness.

By that, I do not mean that they are going to be doomed and damned. I do not mean that at all. What I do mean is that we will reap exactly that which we have sowed. Curses still follow disobedience. For instance, let us suppose Doc and I went out to a bar and got drunk. When we got drunk, we got into a fight. In that fight, he knocked out two of my teeth, but I knocked out his eye. Will God forgive us for getting drunk? Yes. Will God forgive us for fighting? Yes. Will that restore his teeth or my teeth, or his eye? No. My teeth are still gone, and his eye is still out.

Although we may be forgiven, we are still reaping the consequences of our sins. God is going to make sure that you and I understand that we do not escape the consequences of our sins. In Numbers chapter 12, who could be greater in the faith than Moses, Aaron, and Miriam? And yet Aaron and Miriam began to berate and belittle Moses. In Numbers 12 and verse 4, the Bible says, "and the Lord spake suddenly to Moses and Aaron and Miriam coming to the tabernacle of the congregation and the three came there." And guess what God did? He smote Miriam with leprosy. Had not Moses prayed for her and for Aaron, they may have both been killed.

What do we learn from this? Listen carefully. Here is what we should learn. First Peter 4 and verse 17 says, "For the time has come that judgment must begin first where? At the house of God. And if it begins first with us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel?"

You and I have to understand that we cannot get away with sin, period. Just because God does not chastise us instantly and immediately does not mean He is not going to chastise us at all. I remember when I was a boy, my sister and I were in the back seat of the car, and we got to fussing. My daddy said, "When I get home, I am going to give you a whipping." He did not just jerk us out right then; he said it when we got home. It was a miserable ride home.

My dad did not forget. He always kept his word, and I knew what was waiting for me when I got out. I have news for you: our Heavenly Father does not forget. You will reap exactly what you sow. If you are His child, you need to read Hebrews chapter 12, because if you sin, you will get chastened. You will get whipped. Sometimes it will come rather quickly.

Secondly, I want you to understand that this is also true in relationship to sinners, that is, unsaved individuals. They shall not escape the righteous judgment of God. God has said this in the book of Nahum 1, in verse 3: “The Lord is slow to anger and great in power and will not at all acquit the wicked.” The wicked are not going to escape. They are not going to get by. The Bible says in Psalm 9, in verse 16, that “the Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth and the wicked is snared in the work of His own hands.”

Psalm 64 relates to the wicked, and there is one verse that I really want to point out. This whole Psalm should be read. David prays, “Hear my voice, O my God, in my prayer. Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.” There is an enemy trying to take David’s life. He says, “Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked, from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity, who wet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows and shoot their arrows with even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect, suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.”

"They encourage themselves in an evil manner, and commune of laying snares proudly, and say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities, they accomplish a diligent search. Both in the inward thought, every one of them, and the heart is very deep."

Now we have been talking about all these enemies. Look at the wicked. "But God shall shoot at them with an arrow. Suddenly shall they be wounded." The wicked is on the advance. The wicked is doing the attacking. The wicked are being the persecutors. What is going to happen? Suddenly God shall shoot at them. Suddenly shall they be wounded. This applies to wicked sinners as well.

Proverbs 6, verse 12, says, "A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth, he winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers, frowardness in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually, he soweth discord, therefore shall his calamity come suddenly, suddenly shall he be broken down without remedy." God will get them suddenly. Proverbs 29, verse 1, says, "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy."

God said He will do it suddenly. Ecclesiastes 9:12 says, "For man also knoweth not his time, as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Mark this down: under the theme of judgment, God moves suddenly. He will move suddenly to discipline His own children, and He will move suddenly to destroy sinners.

This is also applied nationally. God destroys nations suddenly. He may have sent out His messengers and preachers, and they may have uttered multitudinous warnings, but the people did not hear or heed. Therefore, they were taken suddenly in judgment.

Isaiah 29 relates to Jerusalem. Ariel is another name for Jerusalem in the Bible. God says, "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt. Add ye year to year, let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow, and it shall be unto me as Ariel." He continues, "And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and

shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit." God said, "I will destroy you." He was speaking about Jerusalem and Judah.

Isaiah 47 shows what God does to Babylon: "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon. Sit on the ground. There is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldees. For thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate." He was speaking about Babylon. Then verse 11 says, "Therefore shall evil come upon thee. Thou shalt not know from whence it riseth. And mischief shall fall upon thee. Thou shalt not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon thee suddenly. Which thou shalt not know."

God has been talking about destroying Judah and Jerusalem suddenly. Now He is talking about destroying Babylon suddenly. Again, He speaks of Judah and Jerusalem. Verse 1 says: Isaiah 48: "Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth from the waters of Judah." So we are talking about Israel and Judah. Verse 3 says: "I have declared the former things from the beginning, and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them. I did them suddenly, and they came to pass." He is talking, once again, about judgment.

Many times we think, My Lord, are You ever going to strike the wicked? Are You ever going to destroy wicked, ungodly nations? When He does, it will be suddenly.

Jeremiah 4:14 says, "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee? For a voice declares from Dan, and publisheth affliction from Mount Ephraim. Make ye mention to the nations. Behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. As a keeper of the field were they against her round about, because she had been rebellious against me, said the Lord. Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee. This is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth even to thy heart."

Jeremiah continues, "My bowels, my bowels, I'm pained at my very heart. My heart maketh a noise, and me, I cannot hold my

peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Here it is. Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is spoiled. Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment." Jeremiah 6:26 says, "O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth and wallow thyself in ashes. Make thee mourning as for an only son. Most bitter lamentation for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us."

I don't care where you turn in the Bible. When God speaks of judgment, it is sudden judgment. Jeremiah 15:5-8 says, "For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? Or who shall bemoan thee? Or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord. Thou art going backward. Therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee."

"I am weary with repenting, and I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land. I will bereave them of children. I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways. Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas. I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noonday. I have caused them to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city." Suddenly. Jeremiah prays against Judah and Jerusalem: "Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword. And let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows. And let their young men be put to death, and let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them. For they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares from my feet."

Jeremiah 49 speaks about the sudden destruction of Edom. It does not matter whether you are talking about Judah and Jerusalem, Babylon, Edom, Moab, Assyria, or any of the nations: when God destroys them, He does so suddenly. It comes immediately, straightway, without warning.

I find it absolutely amazing that there are people in this country today who have no clue as to what is happening in our land. Why do they have no clue? They are marrying and giving in marriage, eating and drinking, getting on with their lives, and simply refusing to be bothered. They do not understand that all of a sudden, we are going

to wake up in this country under the heavy hand of God. It is already heavy upon us, folks, but it is going to get heavier.

You say, "But Brother Weaver, all these verses that you have showed me are in the Old Testament." That is true, but the Old Testament is just as much the Word of God as the New Testament. We have one Bible, not two. Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:3: "For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." When they shall say peace and safety, then what? Sudden destruction. That is in the New Testament. When God moves in judgment, He moves suddenly, straightway, immediately.

When it is God's time to judge, you will not have time to blink an eye. It will be instantaneous, and He will catch the wicked in a most awkward position. Just because God is the slowest person you will ever get hooked up with does not mean that He cannot move suddenly.

Sudden Awakening and Revival

Secondly, the word sudden also occurs under the theme of awakening or revival. Plenty of people have cried and prayed to God for revival, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. We ask the Lord to do again what He did under Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, what is now known as the Great Awakening, when thousands were swept into the kingdom of God. Whole towns, whole cities, and whole colonies were transformed.

Those who are genuine Christians long for the time of Isaiah 11:9: "They shall not hurt or destroy any longer in my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as waters cover the sea." Would it be wonderful if the entire earth were full of the knowledge of the Lord as waters cover the sea? Of course.

But understand this: awakening or revival is the work of God. It is not the work of man. Men may plan, hold meetings, preach, and pray, but revival is the work of God. Revival is in God's hand; it is not in man's hand. David prayed in Psalm 85:6, "Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?" Wilt thou, that is God, revive us again? Habakkuk prayed in chapter 3, verse 2, "O Lord, I

have heard thy speech and I 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." Notice that he prayed, "revive thy work." David prayed in Psalm 138:7, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me." Whether individual revival, national revival, or revival of the work of God, it is all from God.

Isaiah 57:15 says, “For thus saith the Lord, 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 contrite and humble spirit to revive the heart or the spirit of the humble and revive the heart of the contrite ones.” So God specifically declares that revival is His work.

It does not take a multiplicity of years for God to judge, nor does it take a multiplicity of years for God to accomplish an awakening or revival. When God does it, it will be done instantly, straightway, immediately, suddenly, and surprisingly. That truth is true not only individually, but nationally as well.

On the day of Pentecost, three thousand converts were added to the church. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, Acts 2:2 says, “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” How did it come? It came suddenly.

Under the theme of revival or awakening, as under the theme of judgment, this is true individually and nationally. Consider the Apostle Paul. In Galatians 1:15–16, he said, “But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the heathen. I immediately conferred not with flesh and blood.” He said, “but when it pleased God.” God separated him from his mother’s womb; it pleased God to allow him to be born, and he was born in God’s time physically. Likewise, he was born in God’s time spiritually, when God saved him by His grace.

In Acts 9, concerning the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Bible says, “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus and suddenly there shined about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou

me?" Even in his personal testimony in Acts 22:6, Paul said, "And it came to pass that as I made my journey and was come nigh to Damascus at about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me." Even the conversion of sinners is a sudden work of God.

Many of you may remember Rolf Barnard, who has been dead for a number of years. Rolf was a tremendous preacher, and he used to say, "God saves you so fast you cannot even talk about it in the present tense. You have to say, I have been saved. You cannot say I am being saved." That is a fact because salvation is a sudden work of God. When God revives or saves an individual, it is done suddenly, instantly, immediately, straight away.

The same thing is true nationally. It does not take years for God to awaken a nation of people; He may do it suddenly. Malachi 3:1 tells us, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." That is talking about Jesus Christ. How will He come? He will come suddenly.

Remember the great revival that took place under King Hezekiah. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, reigned twenty-nine years, and was what we would call a good king, a godly man. In the first year of his reign, he opened the house of the Lord, which had been closed because of the wickedness of previous kings. He ordered it cleansed from all its filth and pollution, and once it was cleansed, he restored all the sacrifices.

He also endeavored to evangelize his apostate brethren, the ten northern tribes. He removed all the false altars and idols, and there was a great national awakening and revival. He restored the Passover. In 2 Chronicles 30 we read about this great Passover under King Hezekiah. The temple had been cleansed. Verse 26 says, "So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven." Thus this great revival took place under King Hezekiah, and the people rejoiced nationally.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 29:29-34 (KJV)

They cleansed the temple in eight days. Eight days! After the eighth day, the sacrifices were restored. Hezekiah gave orders to evangelize and invite every one of his brethren to renewal of the covenant and to the Passover. Look in 2 Chronicles 29 and verse 29:

"And when they made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves and worshipped. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise of the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praise of the gladness, and they bowed their heads in worship. Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now you have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord. Come near and bring sacrifices and thank-offerings in the house of the Lord. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank-offerings and, as many as there were of free heart, burnt offerings. And the number of the burnt offerings which the congregation brought were three score and ten bullocks, a hundred rams, two hundred lambs, all these were for a burnt offering to the Lord. And the consecrated things were six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep. But the priests were too few so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings. Wherefore, their brethren, the Levites, did help them till the work was ended and until the other priests had sanctified themselves."

“For the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests.” The burnt offerings were in abundance, as were the fat of the peace offerings, the drink offerings, and every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order. Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, “that God had prepared the people, for the thing was done.” What? Suddenly. How did God awaken the nation? He awakened them suddenly. It is just as simple for God to awaken a multitude as it is to awaken an individual.

The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save. God is omnipotent. As He asked Jeremiah, “Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?” The answer is no. God can move either in judgment or in revival suddenly.

Applications and Prayer

There are saints, thankfully, who want to see the wicked overthrown and the kingdom of God fully established. Wouldn't you like to see the kingdom of God established fully on this earth? Wouldn't you like to see the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, His righteousness, His law, and His people in authority? Wouldn't you like to see wickedness overthrown? If you have ever prayed the model prayer taught by our Lord, that is exactly what you are praying for.

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." You are saying, Lord, overthrow those humanistic, ungodly, reprobate kingdoms and establish Your kingdom, Your law, and Your people. You cannot pray for God's kingdom to be established without also praying for the overthrow of humanistic kingdoms. I like that psalmist, David, when he said, "O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just."

God is going to overthrow these wicked rulers instantly, suddenly, and surprisingly. They think they have the new world order mapped out, with everything under their control. They have their plans and schemes—everything except God under control. And suddenly shall He smite them? Suddenly shall He overthrow them? Suddenly shall He destroy them.

When you pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come," listen: "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." You are praying for the overthrow of every humanistic kingdom imaginable.

The second application is this: the wicked are deceived, and they will continue to be deceived apart from the grace of God. It can only be deception that makes a man think he can fight against God and succeed. How can a finite man think for a moment that he can defeat the infinite God?

When you think about what is going on in our country today, stop and think about this. Our paganistic, heathenistic, humanistic civil rulers tell us that everything is under control: the recession is ending; you just need to spend more money; everything is under control—peace and safety and joy. What does the Scripture say? "For

when they shall say peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh upon them." I would rather believe the Word of God than the word of man.

We need to learn to pray that God will revive His people. People have asked me, "Brother Weaver, how can we do anything at all in this country? There are just too few of us." Let me tell you, God can multiply us overnight. Besides, as I taught you before, you do not need a multitude; you just need God. God is quite capable of taking care of the wicked by Himself. We need to pray that God would awaken us and give us wisdom. I am looking forward to the time when we see old Babylon fall, God's law and God's righteousness established in this land, and the earth full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

God can and will do it instantly—suddenly, straightway, immediately, and to some, surprisingly.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your truth and Your Word. You have told us not to be afraid of sudden fear. When You do move, You move suddenly and strike fear in the hearts of the wicked. Help us to obey Thee, to look unto Thee, and to worship Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Chastened? Thank the Lord

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 24:1-10 (KJV)

Introduction: The Two Baskets of Figs

The Lord showed me, and behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord, after that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the carpenters and smiths from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that were first ripe, and the other basket had very naughty figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad. Then said the Lord unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs, the good figs, very good, and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.

The Good Figs: Those in Captivity

> For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, And I will bring them again to this land, and I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord, and that they shall be my people, and I will be their God. For they shall return unto me with their whole heart. And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil, Surely, thus saith the Lord, so will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah and all of his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt.
>
> And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach, and a proverb, and a taunt, and a curse in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword and the famine and the pestilence among them till they be consumed from all the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.

When I was a boy, my father disciplined me regularly. And I can attest to the effectiveness of razor straps and peach tree limbs. I was in the barbershop a few weeks ago, and I saw one of those old razor straps hanging on the wall, and I just had to ask the barber. I said, now, how do you pronounce that? Do you call that a razor strap or a razor strop?

The Bad Figs: Those Left in Jerusalem

He looked at me and smiled. He said, “It’s a razor strap.” He said, “But I know what you’re talking about, because all the old-timers always call them razor strops.” That leather would really sting when Dad held it, I can assure you. The peach-tree limbs and those razor straps could indeed change your attitude as well as your behavior. One thing my father always said to me as he was about to whip me was, “Now, son, this is going to hurt me more than it’s going to hurt you.” I remember thinking, “That cannot possibly be true, because I was on the receiving end and he was on the giving end.”

I never really understood what he meant by that until I had children of my own and had to discipline them. No godly parent

derives any pleasure from disciplining his children. He does it only for the child's good, because he is commanded by the Lord, and to instill in them the concept of right and wrong, and good and evil. Many times, when I had to whip my own girls, we wept. Sometimes I would do it after I had whipped them, and they had never seen me weeping.

God's Sovereignty in Determining Destiny

The point I'm trying to make is that I was grieved that I had to chasten them. I was grieved that I had to correct them, and I never derived any pleasure from it. Do you realize that our Heavenly Father is the same way? He does not chasten us willingly. He does not delight in afflicting us or chastening us. Jeremiah 24 tells us to turn over a few pages to Lamentations, chapter 3, verse 33. Remember, Jeremiah is watching Jerusalem destroyed, and he writes in Lamentations 3:33, talking about our Heavenly Father: "For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."

God is not some old meanie in heaven just wanting to pounce upon us and whip us. No. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. God does not derive any pleasure from chasing us, yet there is a purpose and a reasoning for our chastening.

I do not ever remember being thankful for the chastening I received as a child until I was grown. Can anybody in this room say that, as a child, you were really thankful that you got whipped? No. But later, when you became an adult and understood everything, you became thankful that your father and mother did not leave you to your own ways and devices. I have had to confess many times that, although I was chastened quite regularly as a child, I probably never got nearly as many as I deserved. While I am thankful for that in one sense, I am even more thankful that the ones I did receive produced a profound effect upon me and changed me in many ways.

Point 1: Chastisement Acknowledges We Belong to the Lord

In order to understand the truths I am going to share with you today in relationship to chastisement, we must comprehend the picture God sets before Jeremiah. Once you understand Jeremiah chapter

24, I believe it will be extremely easy to be thankful for chastisement. In fact, it will not be as difficult as it may seem at the beginning. In Jeremiah chapter 24, God shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket is full of very good figs—delicious figs. The other basket is full of very bad figs.

Look at verses 2 and 3. The Bible says, "One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe," and the other basket had "very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad." Then said the Lord unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good, and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. When you go back to verse 2 and he speaks of the good figs, he says they are very good, even like the first ripe.

We happen to have a number of fig trees, and I always enjoy the first ripe figs. They are usually larger and more delicious than the others that come afterward because they ripen first. Somehow, they seemingly get the most growth and the most juice in them. The rest come on all at once, but these come early. So Jeremiah said, when he saw these good figs, they were like the first ripe figs—very good. But then he had the basket full of figs that were very bad, so bad that they could not be eaten.

Point 2: Chastisement Is for Our Good

So you have two pictures here: a picture of a basket of good figs and a picture of a basket of bad figs. But what are they pictures of, or what do they represent? If you go back to verse 1, the Lord showed me that the two baskets of figs were before the temple of the Lord. What is the significance of these two baskets of figs being before the temple of the Lord? Let me try to answer those questions before I get started in the message today.

First of all, the basket of figs that were really good figs, the first ripe figs, represented those people who had already been sent—and you can use the word taken—into captivity into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Look in verse 1: "The Lord showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths from Jerusalem, and had

brought them to Babylon." So obviously, this basket of good figs represents those who were already in captivity in Babylon.

Now skip down to verse 5. "Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."

Point 3: The Alternative to Chastisement Is Destruction

Obviously, then, he is talking about these people who were already in Babylon, who went there with the captivity of Jeconiah and his men. Now, here are the bad things. The bad figs represent King Zedekiah and the people who had been left in Jerusalem. So look in verse 8: "And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt, and I will deliver"

"Them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their hurt, to be a reproach, and a proverb, and a taunt, and a curse in all the places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, and the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they be consumed from off the land which I have given them." So, here are the two baskets of things. One basket represents the people who had already been sent into captivity. The other basket, the basket of bad figs, represents Zedekiah and the people who remained in Jerusalem.

Applications: Early Discipline, Providence, and Quick Submission

If an enemy came and took away half of your city, while you were spared—left, never killed, never captured—would you not breathe a sigh of relief and say, "The Lord was good to me. He spared me"? It

is not difficult to imagine Zedekiah and all those people simply saying, “Wow, we made it. We did not get captured.”

Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land and carried away captives four times. The first time he came was 605 B.C.; the second time, 597 B.C.; the third time was when he came back and literally destroyed the city in 586 B.C.; and then he came back again in 582 B.C. The full and final destruction of Jerusalem was in 586 B.C.

In 2 Chronicles 36:10, the Bible says, “And when the year was expired, King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, that is, Jeconiah, with the goodly vessels of the house of the Lord, and made Zedekiah his brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem.” Nebuchadnezzar had already come and taken Jeconiah and all these other people into captivity, and Zedekiah was left. “And Zedekiah was 1 in 20 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.” Furthermore, “...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.”

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 his fathers. Moreover, all the chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, including the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

According to 2 Kings 24:18, Zedekiah was 1 in 20 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

The baskets of figs were before the temple. Zedekiah reigned eleven years. If you add eleven years to 586, you get 597. That was the second deportation. In 597, Nebuchadnezzar came and took Jeconiah and all these other people into captivity. The destruction was in 586, so Zedekiah reigned from 597 down to 586. Thus these two baskets of figs were before the temple.

What is the significance of these two baskets of figs set before the temple? You have to remember that the temple represented God's throne. These two baskets of figs were sitting there because it was God, who is the sovereign, who determined their end and their destiny. God is sovereign. He rules and He reigns supremely.

Here is a truth that most individuals do not want to hear, but it is still the truth: our destiny is not in our hands. It is in God's hands. God is the determiner of our destiny.

You say, “But wait a minute, Brother Weaver, you don't understand. I repented of my sins and I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm saved, and I'm going to heaven by the grace of God.” Yes, and I rejoice with that. But let me ask you a couple of questions. The first one is this: How did you repent, and why did you repent? How did you believe, and why did you believe?

The answer has to come back: the how and the why refer to God. God gave you repentance, and God gave you faith. Therefore you repented, and therefore you believed. You have to understand that both repentance and faith are gifts from God.

Acts 5:30 says, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” Him, that is Jesus Christ, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” For to give repentance. Repentance is a gift.

You cannot work it up. You cannot earn it. You cannot merit it. It's a gift. In Acts 11:18, after Peter preached to Cornelius, the centurion, and some others, and reported how God had opened the eyes of these Gentiles and they had believed, we read: “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted or given repentance unto life.” Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted or given repentance unto life.

And 2 Timothy 2:24 begins, “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.”

This is so simple, and yet so many people stumble over this one truth. Second Timothy, chapter two, verse 24: “And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to each patient, Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

When do men recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, according to verse 25? It is when they acknowledge the truth. When do men acknowledge the truth, based upon verse 25? It is when God gives them repentance. If God does not give His gift of repentance, there is no acknowledging of the truth. If there is no acknowledging of the truth, there is no recovering oneself from the snare of the devil.

Everybody in this room can quote Ephesians 2:8–9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." If God gave you repentance and God gave you faith, who is the ultimate determiner of your destiny? God. If God does not give you repentance, if God does not give you faith, if God withholds His gifts from you because He does not owe them to anyone, who is the ultimate decider and determiner of your destiny? It is God.

These two baskets of figs are sitting before the temple. The temple was where God revealed Himself; it was God's throne. God is the determiner of the baskets, and of whoever happens to be in those baskets.

Had you rather have gone into captivity with the faithful few in 597 B.C., or had you rather have been spared and stayed with Zedekiah and the remainder of those people in Jerusalem for eleven more years, until 586 B.C.? If you opt for 586 B.C., saying, "I think I'd rather be free eleven more years," you would not only be choosing rejection by God; you would also be choosing destruction by God. What God was doing was culling the figs. He sent the good figs into captivity, and He was saving the bad figs for destruction.

Obviously, in this light, the former captivity and chastisement is vastly preferable to those who thought they escaped and remained in the land. Zedekiah and all these other people were treated as double traitors and double rebels. That is why they were so harshly judged by God. They were not only traitors to God, His law, and His covenant; they were also traitors to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah king of Jerusalem and Judah, and Zedekiah had sworn with an oath before God that he would support Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, he turned to Pharaoh of Egypt and wanted to use Pharaoh to throw off the shackles of

Nebuchadnezzar. God, of course, marked him and the people for destruction.

The point I want to emphasize is this: the graciousness, goodness, and mercy of God are demonstrated when God sent the first ones into captivity, while the justice and wrath of God were reserved for those who were spared. At this point, we could really say that chastisement does not look so bad. We could actually say that we should be thankful for chastisement. It is much to be preferred over destruction.

If you look in your Bibles at the whole of Jeremiah 24, and then go back to 2 Kings 24, verse 12, you read about Jeconiah. The Bible says, "And Jeconiah the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his princes and his officers; and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign." Do you remember that God promised life to all who would go out to Nebuchadnezzar? Jeconiah and these people did so. They went out, and God spared them.

Have you ever wondered how Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Ezekiel got into captivity in Babylon? They were part of the good figs that God sent there for their good and His glory. As difficult as captivity may seem, can you not see that it was for the good of these people that God sent them? Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Ezekiel, and probably a host of others were used by God for His honor and glory in the land of captivity. They had ministries while they were there.

The first one is obvious: chastisement acknowledges that we belong to the Lord. Look in Jeremiah 24:5: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, like these good things, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." Chastisement acknowledges that we belong to the Lord. Note that God specifically sent these good figs out of the land, and He said, "I will acknowledge them."

We must learn a simple truth. If one can sin consistently and constantly against God, that individual is not saved, especially if he can sin consistently and constantly and get away with it. You have to

understand: he does not belong to the Lord. He is not saved. First of all, if he was saved, he would not be constantly and continually sinning. Yes, saved sinners sin; understand that. But we are not constantly and continually sinning. Moreover, if we do sin as Christians, then we are chastened. The Bible says we are chastened that we might not be condemned with the world.

You have to consider this. Normally speaking, a father only chastens his children. He does not chasten the children of strangers. He does not chasten his neighbor's children. He only chastens his children. They belong to him, and he is responsible for their learning and their behavior.

Now consider what God says. In Deuteronomy 8:5, He tells His people, "Thou shalt also consider thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord by God chasteneth thee." What does God tell you to consider? That as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord by God chasteneth thee. In 2 Samuel 7:14, speaking of Solomon, God tells David, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son."

If he commit iniquity, I will chase him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men. In other words, "I'll be a father to him." When he does wrong, I want to whip him.

You have to remember now that chastening demonstrates that we belong to Him. In Proverbs chapter 13 and verse 24, the Word of God says this: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son." Note that: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son," but "he that loveth him chasteneth him betides." So God says, if you spare the rod, you hate your son. But if you love him, you're going to chase him as necessary.

Now turn over to Hebrews chapter 12, particularly verses six and eight. We will certainly be coming back to that passage, but notice what it says. In fact, let's read verse five. The Bible says, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speak of the US and children, My son. Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourget every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the

Father chastened not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons."

Now, I want to call your attention to several things. First of all, the Bible says that God deals with us as sons when He chastens us. Moreover, He tells us that everyone whom He chastens is considered a son. "For what son is he whom the Father chastened not?" There are very few individuals who get by without a whipping in life, in real life—in other words, physically. Rebecca got the fewest whippings of any of my children. Lately, I've never whipped her at all. I'm simply saying that there are some who get by, but very few.

Do you realize what He said? If you can sin and get away with it, if you be without chastisement, "whereof all are partakers," then are you "bastards and not son."

A bastard is an illegitimate child, one who does not have a father, or else—the one that has sired him has abandoned him. Chastisement and education are both expressions of love and concern. If we love our children, we will chasten them as our Father chastens His own. Chastisement, then, is an acknowledgment that the child belongs to us. When I whip my children, they are my children; they are mine. The same is true of our heavenly Father. When He chastens us, it is an acknowledgment that we belong to Him. He does not chasten the wicked; they are not His. He judges and punishes them, but He does not chasten them.

Do you know what our Lord said in Revelation 3:19? "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." What does that mean? If you can live and sin and not be rebuked and chastened, you are unloved by our Lord.

He only chastens those whom He loves. Chastisement is indeed a good sign that we belong to the Lord. Just as a loving father will not allow his child to sin and get away with it, so our heavenly Father will not allow His own to sin and get away with it. We cannot escape the consequences of our sin. He may forgive us our sins, but we are still going to suffer the consequences of our sins. You can mark it down: He will chasten us if we belong to Him. So first and foremost, chastisement is an acknowledgment that we belong to the Lord.

Secondly, chastisement is for our good. In Jeremiah chapter 24, verse 6, God is still acknowledging these good figs: “For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land, and I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up.” Note that God said, “I will set my eyes upon them for good.” Back in verse 5, He said, “Whom I have sent out of this place on the land of the Chaldeans for their good.”

Do you realize that we often shape under discipline? We do not like it; it hurts. I can truthfully say I never really enjoyed any of the whippings that I received. There were a few that were not as bad as the others, but I still did not enjoy them. Chastisement is designed to teach us submission, obedience, and love. It is a demonstration of love. It is not only an acknowledgment; it is also a demonstration of love.

Proverbs 13:24 says, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” Years ago, I taught a fourth-grade class. In that class was one boy whom my wife can remember and probably Henry and Janet as well. That boy was only big for his age, a fourth grader. He was also from a broken home.

In our Christian school, when you enrolled your child, the parents had to sign a form that allowed us to use corporal punishment. In other words, we could spank your child.

There were rules that we followed, but we had permission from the parents to whip the children. One boy in my fourth-grade class, big for his age, would do something almost every day that merited a spanking. It seemed as if he would never learn. I would take any child I disciplined into the office and sit him in front of me. I would question him and get him to tell me in his own words what he had done. I would then take the Scripture and show him where he had sinned and where I was commanded to discipline him. I explained that I was not mad at him, did not hate him, but was disciplining him for his good, so that he could learn what was acceptable and what was not acceptable; that I was commanded to do so; and that I loved him. When I would get through chastening the child, I would always put my arm around him, have prayer, and ask the Lord to bless the discipline. Then I would tell the child that I loved him and send him back to class.

One day I was thinking about this boy and the broken home he came from. I thought, “You know, I'll bet you, if I were a gambling man, what that kid really wants is just love and an expression of love.” The next day, before school had even started, I called him into my office, put my arm around him, and said, “Son, I just want to tell you today that I love you. I appreciate you, and I want to have prayer that the Lord is going to bless you today and help you.” I did that every day for a number of weeks, and I never had to whip that kid again. Never. Do you know what that child had done? He had associated love with discipline. He would do something wrong to get me to discipline him, just so I could tell him I loved him and put my arm around him.

You have to understand something, folks. When God chastens us, it is always for our good, and it is because He loves us. I want you to look back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12, and this time let us read verses 9 through 11. Look in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 9 through 11. Here it is. Hebrews chapter 12, look in verse 9. He says, “Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence.” Now, wait a minute. If any of you—

Had you ever been whipped the way I was whipped with a peach tree limb, I can assure you, you would learn very quickly to say, “Yes, sir.” Yes, sir, that is exactly what this verse means. He says, furthermore, “We’ve had fathers of our flesh who correct us, and we gave them reference.” That is, we obeyed them. We listened to them. It taught us something. Now watch this question: “Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father’s spirits, and live?” For they, that is, the earthly fathers, verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he, for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterwards, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby. God always chastens us for our profit. His chastening works. It always yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby. That is, we learn to submit, we learn to obey. Moreover, we learn to trust our Heavenly Father. We learn not only to believe, but to trust not only His promises, but His threatenings as well. We

understand that His chastenings are equally true, as well as His blessings. And we learn, as He chastens us, not to do those things that displease Him.

In Job 34 and verse 31, Job said, “Surely it is meet to be said of God, I have borne chastisement. I will not offend anymore.” I have learned my lesson. David said it like this in Psalm 119 verse 71: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn my statutes.” I listened. Look in Jeremiah chapter 24 and verse 7. Here is the ultimate end of chastisement, the ultimate end of our Father’s chastisement of His own: “And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.”

There are two ways that you can whip a child. You can whip him just enough to make him mad, and he will hate you. Or you can literally beat the devil out of him, and he will love you. That is exactly what God is saying here. When He disciplines you, you will understand that He wants you to love Him and turn to Him with your whole heart. We can thank our Heavenly Father for our chastisement because it increases our love and obedience to Him. It is designed to make us holy and godly.

You may say, “I still do not like to be chastened.” I do not suppose anybody likes to be chastened. No chastening for the moment appears to be joyous, but grievous. Only afterward do we understand that it is for our profit and yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby.

Consider the alternative to chastisement. “As the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the Lord, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt. And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and their fathers.”

Would you rather be chastened or consumed? Would you rather be disciplined or destroyed? The alternative to chastisement makes

chastisement appear more desirable, especially since the alternative is destruction. It should make us extremely thankful that we are being chastened. Chastisement is used when the Word is neglected, rejected, or disobeyed. We have two ways of dealing with our children: we speak to them and use words. If they hear and obey, there is no problem. If they fail to heed, hear, and obey, there is the rod.

I asked Trip to do something, and he looked at me and said, "Papa, I don't want to do it." I said, "Well, I appreciate that, son. I'll give you a choice. You may either do it, or you may get a whipping and do it." He looked at me and said, "I think I'll just do it." I said, "I think you're a wise son."

You know, that's how God deals with us. If we listen to His Word, there is no problem. If we submit to Him and obey Him, there is no problem. The Bible says in 1 Peter that we are to gird up the loins of our mind, be sober, and hope to the end as obedient children. It is only when we fail to hear God's Word that He brings the rod. The Bible says in Micah 6 and verse 9, "Hear ye the rod, and him who hath appointed it." God said, "If you will not listen to My Word, you are going to hear My rod." If we listen to God's Word, we are not going to receive His rod.

The desire of our hearts should be that we want to be so obedient and submissive that we can say, like Samuel, "Speak Lord, for thy servant herein." Lord, I do not have to be reproved, rebuked, admonished, or chastened. Just let me know what You want, and I will do it.

That should be our attitude. According to the Word of God, a Christian, a child of God, is either going to be living a changed life—an obedient life, continually and constantly bringing his life into greater conformity to the Word of God—or a chastised life. If you are a child of God and living wrongly, you are not going to get by with it. You would not let your child get by with bad-mouthing you, talking back, stealing, and lying. You are going to whip them, and you are not going to wait six months; you are going to do it while they know why you are whipping them. As God's people, we are either going to be living a changed life or a chastised life. The more we bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God, the less

needful the rod is. You do not need a rod as long as there is obedience. Personally, I do not want the rod.

I do not want to have to be chastised. I do not even want to have to be rebuked, or to have the Father upset with me. I would rather simply obey and ask God to give me an obedient heart.

Early discipline and chastisement work best. We are told in Proverbs 19:18, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for its crying." There comes a time when there is no hope, and when chastening will not do any good. Therefore, chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for its crying.

Jeremiah 24 is an excellent example of this truth. Those who went first into captivity were those whom the Father loves and chastens betimes. But those who remained, who would not take discipline or hear God, were like the child left to himself and were destroyed. On the first group, the discipline took; the chastisement worked. On the second group, nothing worked. They were a child left to themselves, and they were destroyed.

Often those kind providences of God that we view as so awful are actually for our good and benefit. What do you think was going through the minds of Jeconiah, his princes, and all those good and godly people who were being sent into Babylon?

They were probably thinking, "Oh, my, what am I doing here? How did I get myself into this? Why am I being treated this way? This is awful and terrible. We have been captured, enslaved, and taken into a foreign country. This is horrible." It may have been temporarily, but what did God say? It is for your good. I am going to bring you back, build you, and plant you. So many times, when things go wrong in our lives, we think, "Oh God, how can there ever be any good out of this?" God simply works it out for good every time.

We do not even know the end of a thing or of God's providence until He brings it to pass in our lives. We may think it is horrible and terrible, but it is not. God said in Jeremiah 29:11, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." God said, "I know what

I am thinking about you. You may not know, but I know. It is going to be for your good, and it is going to be for My glory."

On the other hand, some think, "We missed that little judgment. We missed that chastisement. We must be all right." They do not realize that God has just called them and left them to be destroyed. Chastisement is always for our good. The third application is this: the sooner we submit and obey, the more quickly our chastisement will end. The quickest way out of chastisement is to repent, submit, and obey.

My father could really whip, and I would much rather have been whipped by my mother. But once I looked at my father and said, "I am sorry, Dad. I will not do it anymore." It was just that simple; it was over. When God chastens us, the more quickly we submit and obey, the sooner our chastisement will be over. If we do not hear the word, we will hear the rod.

When you are chastened, you should be thankful, because the Lord is acknowledging that you are His. He is doing it for your good and profit, that you might be partakers of His holiness. Afterwards, it will produce and yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, and Your chastisement.

I pray, Lord, that You would give us a submissive, obedient heart, and that our attitude be like Samuel: Speak, Lord, for Thy servant herein. Give us grace and mercy, Father, and an obedient heart. In Thy name we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Greater Responsibility, Greater Culpability

Introduction and Text

Today I want you to open your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of Lamentations chapter 4. Lamentations chapter 4. And we're going to be looking at verse 6. Lamentations chapter 4 and verse 6. The title of the message is, "The Greater the Responsibility, the Greater the Culpability." You will understand that momentarily. The greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability. So look in Lamentations chapter 4. We're going to read just one verse, that is verse 6 for right now.

The Nature of Lamentations

Where Jeremiah says, "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment and no hands stayed on her." Now we're looking at the book of Lamentations. The word Lamentations or the act of lamentations is from the ancient custom of composing and singing lamentations over deceased friends. David

composed lamentations over Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel chapter 1 and over Abner in 2 Samuel chapter 3.

In early times this practice also was applied to cities and to countries, especially in relationship to their fall and judgment. Now I won't get into whole Lamentations, we're coming right back there, but I want you to go to Jeremiah chapter 7 to begin with, and let me just show you exactly what I'm talking about. Singing these lamentations over countries and their fall and their judgment. So Lamentations chapter 7 to begin with and verse 29.

Note if you would, God says this. Jeremiah 7 verse 29: "Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places, for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath." So God says, since I've rejected you, there's not going to be anything but judgment. So you need to take up a lamentation. Now look in Jeremiah chapter 9. And we'll begin at verse 9 and then skip down to verse 17. Jeremiah 9, and look if you would please at verse 9. God asked, "Shall I not visit them for these things, saith the Lord?"

"Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" So he's talking about Jerusalem. Skip down now to verse 17 and watch what he says. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come, and send for cunning women, that they may come, and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion. How are we spoiled?"

“We are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out. Yet hear the word of the Lord, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbor lamentation. Why? For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets. Speak, thus saith the Lord, even the carcasses of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.”

In Amos 5:1, God says concerning Israel: “Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel.” Lamentations, then, were sung not only over dead friends and family members, but also over cities and countries. Someone has said that the Book of Lamentations is a memorial dirge written on the destruction and humiliation of Jerusalem.

Overview of Lamentations' Five Poems

It is indeed a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, and a sea of sobs. It has rightly been called an elegy written in a graveyard. There are only five chapters in the Book of Lamentations. Each chapter is a poem, and each poem pictures the destruction of Jerusalem from a different perspective. Chapter 1 reveals the effects of sin: the people in captivity, and the acts of oppression, starvation, tyranny, and scoffing. In chapter 2, we see the destruction of Jerusalem as an act of God’s wrath against the sins of the people and their inability to avert that wrath. In chapter 3, we see the deep sufferings of God’s people amid general distress, yet also their ability to perceive the justice, mercy, and compassion of God. In chapter 4, we see the punishment for the sins of the people and their leaders. Finally, in chapter 5, the Lord is entreated to remove the distress and disgrace of His people.

Jerusalem's Punishment Greater than Sodom's

Looking back to Lamentations 4:6, under the general heading of punishment for the sins of the people and their leaders, one particular truth deserves emphasis: “For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom that was overthrown as in a moment, no hands stayed on her.”

This is a very amazing statement, and yet at the same time it illuminates a wonderful, yet what I would call a very dreadful truth. Notice that Jeremiah is saying that the punishment of Jerusalem was greater than the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why was Jerusalem punished so strenuously? We all know the wickedness, perversity, and depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah. We also know that they deserved exactly that which they received: utter

destruction. So you have to ask this question: Was Jerusalem more vile and wicked than Sodom?

Jerusalem Called Sodom and Gomorrah

The answer is yes. Jerusalem was more vile and wicked than Sodom. In fact, many times in the Bible, God refers to Jerusalem as Sodom and Gomorrah, or Sodom and Egypt. Hold Lamentations 4, but look first in the book of Revelation, chapter 11 and verse 8. We are talking about the two witnesses that have been killed. The Bible says, “And their dead bodies shall lie on the street of that great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” Where was our Lord crucified? Jerusalem. Did you hear what God says? Jerusalem is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 32 and verse 32. We are going to look at several passages. Here is what God says about Israel: “For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.” He is talking about Israel. Their vine is the vine of Sodom, and they are the fields of Gomorrah.

Turn over to the book of Isaiah, chapter 1, and look at verses 8 through 10. It is interesting how many times God refers to Jerusalem and to Israel as a whole as Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah says, “And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.” Then he says, “Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been made like unto Gomorrah.” Now watch verse 10. God is speaking to the rulers of Israel: “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom.”

"Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah." He is talking to Jerusalem, to Israel. Isaiah 3:9 says concerning Israel, "The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, and they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves." He continues, "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." But note this: they declare their sin as Sodom and hide it not.

Jeremiah 23:14 gives another interesting passage: "I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah." Over and over, God refers to Judah and Jerusalem particularly as Sodom and Gomorrah. Jerusalem committed not only physical sins, but spiritual sins as well.

Spiritual Sins Greater than Physical

Let me give you something to ponder. Spiritual sins are greater than physical sins. I understand that all sin is against God. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah the Hittite killed with the sword of the children of Ammon, he said in Psalm 51:4, "Against thee, and against thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." He understood that his sin was primarily against God. Yes, he sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, their family, his family, and the whole nation. But primarily, sin is against God.

Spiritual sins are directed specifically against God. Idolatry, blasphemy, hypocrisy, and many other spiritual sins target God directly. They not only assault and assail His person, but His attributes as well.

Do you really know what the sins of Sodom were? It is true that sodomy is a sin, and it is from Sodom that we derive the name of that particular sin. But there were a multitude of other sins in Sodom and Gomorrah as well. When God lists the category of her sins in Ezekiel, He does not even mention the sin of sodomy. In Ezekiel 16, God is knocking not only Judah and Jerusalem, but Israel and Samaria. Samaria was the capital of the ten northern tribes, and Jerusalem was the capital of the two southern tribes.

The Sins of Sodom Listed in Ezekiel 16

“Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter.” God says about Judah and Jerusalem, Samaria and Israel: “Thou art thy mother’s daughter, that loatheth her husband and her children; and thou art

the sister of thy sisters, which loathed their husbands and their children: your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite."

He is not simply talking about physical adultery, but spiritual adultery. "And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters." Here is Judah sitting in the middle. On the left hand is Samaria; on the right hand is Sodom. He is talking about Judah and Jerusalem: "Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters."

Did you hear what God has just said? God has just said that Jerusalem and Judah were greater sinners than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. As wicked and vile as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain were, Judah and Jerusalem's sins exceeded their sins.

Remember the declaration of Jeremiah in Lamentations 4:6: the punishment of my people, that is, the punishment of Jerusalem, was greater than the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. If I were to ask what the sin of Sodom was, most everyone would answer, "Sodomy." Sodomy was certainly included in Sodom's sin, but there was far more to their sin than that.

Let us look at verses 49 and 50 and find out what their sins really were. Remember, Jerusalem had done worse than Sodom. He says, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me." Therefore, God says, "I took them away as I saw good."

Note the sins God particularly lists in relationship to Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain: pride, fullness of bread, idleness, haughtiness, and hardness toward the poor and needy. Because they were haughty, proud, and rebellious, God took them away as He saw good. In this passage, God does not even list sodomy as one of their sins, although we know it really was. He begins with

pride. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Pride says, “God will not judge me. I will not be held accountable. I will escape.” Not only pride, but fullness of bread: they had plenty.

They had everything they needed. They were haughty and selfish. They did not consider the poor and the needy. Then he said this: the abundance of idleness. We have an old adage, “An idle mind is the devil's workshop,” and that comes from this passage. But if an idle mind is the devil's workshop, so likewise are idle hands. When you have nothing to do, that is why it is wise to stay busy, especially busy in the things of God. Yet God says, “I dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah and those cities of the plain as I saw good.”

Sodom's Instant Destruction vs. Jerusalem's Prolonged Siege

God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain in a moment. Jeremiah says in Lamentations 4:6, “For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment and no hand stayed on her.”

Now observe how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 19, beginning with verse 12:

“And the men,” that is, the angels, “said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters? and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.” And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, “Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city.” But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, “Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.” And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

"And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) And my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar."

"The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain were overthrown in a heartbeat. It was instantaneous. It was sure, sudden, and solemn. One moment they were alive, reveling in their sins, pride, and haughtiness; the next moment they were dead and facing the judgment of God. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain instantaneously. They never knew what hit them.

Jeremiah said that the judgment of the daughter of his people was greater than the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. The destruction of Jerusalem was not like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem two major times. The first time was in 605 B.C.; the second time was in 586 B.C. The first time, he left the city standing. He merely made it a tribute city, received tribute, and took prisoners. However, he made Zedekiah king, and Zedekiah rebelled and revolted against him and sought help from Egypt. Therefore, when Nebuchadnezzar came back a second time, he intended to make sure he would not have to come back a third time. The Bible tells us concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 in Jeremiah chapter 52.

Jeremiah 52:1 says, “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 unto 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.”

The siege of Jerusalem lasted nearly two years. It started in the ninth year of Zedekiah and did not end until his eleventh year. Verse six continues: “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.”

When Nebuchadnezzar came back, he besieged the city for two years. He was going to make sure that there were no more revolts, so there was going to be a total destruction of the city. The walls were going to be broken down, the palace was going to be destroyed, and the temple was going to be destroyed. Thus famine and pestilence and wild beasts and even the sword stalked the city.

Turn to Ezekiel, chapter 14, and look at verse 21. Watch carefully. In Ezekiel 14:21, God decreed four sore judgments against Jerusalem: “For thus saith the Lord God; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast?” God said, I am going to send four sore judgments against Jerusalem. Famine would be one; the sword would be one; the pestilence would be one. All of these came to pass. Famine was

one of them. The sword was one of them. The pestilence was one of them. God said He was going to cut them off. That is all there is to it. The noisome beasts, all of it, would come against Jerusalem.

Now come back in your Bibles to Lamentations, chapter 4. We already know that God said one of the judgments He would send was famine. We have already read in Jeremiah 52 about the destruction of Jerusalem and the famine that stalked the city. Let us begin looking to see how bad it really was. In Lamentations 4:6, we read, "For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hand stayed on her." Now watch.

Her Nazarites—you remember the Nazarite vow—were purer than snow, whiter than milk, more ruddy in body than rubies; their polishing was of sapphire. This describes young men who were good-looking and well-filled out. Ah, but look in verse 8. But verse 8 shows what they became: "Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick." They were starving to death, their skin withered and barely clinging to their bones.

Then verse 9 says, "They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger." "For these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field." Jeremiah said that at least when the Babylonians killed them with the sword, they died quickly.

You are in the city, starving to death, and it is a slow death. How bad was the famine? The famine was so harsh that murder and cannibalism were rampant. Look at 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." Mothers killed, cooked, and ate their own children.

May I remind you that the devastation of Jerusalem lasted for nearly two years? What did Jeremiah say in verse 6 concerning Sodom and Gomorrah? They were overthrown as in a moment, and no hand stayed on her. In the destruction of Jerusalem, hands stayed on Jerusalem—human hands, wicked hands, vile hands—for two years.

Why did Jerusalem suffer more than Sodom? The answer is obvious: her sins were greater. Turn to Ezekiel 16 again, and look at verses 47–48. He is speaking about Judah and Jerusalem. He says, "Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters." God says that the sins of Jerusalem were greater than the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why were they considered greater?

The Principle: Greater Responsibility, Greater Culpability

Many individuals say, "Sin is sin." I understand that all sin is wicked, vile, and abominable. Yet some sins are more wicked, grievous, and heinous than others. How can that be? Stop and think. If a man steals, God requires restitution; but if a man murders, God requires the death penalty. Murder is obviously a greater sin than theft. Kidnapping is also greater than theft. There are some sins that are greater than others.

Understand this principle, which is the title of the message: The greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability. Culpability is from the Latin and denotes one who deserves censure or condemnation. The more opportunities, advantages, and blessings we have, the greater our responsibilities. The greater our blameworthiness, censure, and culpability, the greater the condemnation we deserve. The more advantages and blessings we have, the more, if we are condemned, we deserve greater condemnation.

Suppose you woke up one morning, bought a newspaper, and saw the headline: "Ron Brown captured robbing the First National Bank." What? That cannot be true. I know Ron. He is a Christian, a believer; he sat in church with us for years. That would be bad—really bad. But let me tell you something worse. What if the headline read, "Pastor John Weaver arrested for robbing the First National Bank"? Now, wait a minute. He is a Christian; he ought to know better. He deserves condemnation. But I have preached for

forty-nine years and taught right and wrong. Do you think my condemnation should be greater than his? Of course. Why?

Because of my position of authority, responsibility, and trust, the greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability.

Without turning there, let me point this out: if you take the time to read Leviticus chapter 4, you will find that different sacrifices are demanded by God based upon a person's office, lot, or responsibilities. For instance, Leviticus 4:3 says that if a priest sinned, he had to bring a bullock to the Lord for a sacrifice—a bullock.

If the entire congregation of Israel sinned, the entire congregation was equal to the priest; in verse 13, they had to bring a bullock as well. If an individual ruler sinned, according to verse 22, he had to bring a male kid of the goats. A male goat is not nearly as valuable as a bullock. Why did God say the priest had to have a greater sacrifice, and the whole congregation a greater sacrifice, while a ruler had to have a lesser sacrifice? When you get to verses 27 through 32, if one of the common people sinned, he could bring a kid of the goats, or a kid of the lambs or sheep, and it could be a female. Their sacrifice was of less value than that of the ruler, and the ruler's was less valuable than that of the whole congregation or the priest.

God is arguing from the greater to the lesser, showing that the greater the responsibility, the greater the advantages, the greater the blessings, and the greater the culpability. God required a greater sacrifice from those in positions of responsibility. People who have more light, knowledge, blessings, and advantages are more culpable. They deserve a greater condemnation; they are more criminal in their actions.

That ought to tell you something about our politicians and elected officials. It is bad enough when an ordinary, everyday citizen does something like they are doing, but it is even worse when they are doing it.

James writes, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” This is a very interesting statement. “Be not many masters”—why? Knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. The greater the responsibility, the

greater the culpability. The greater the advantages and the greater the blessings, the more responsible and the more culpable you are. I want to tie this together for you.

James 4:17 says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” You know to do good and you do not do it? To you it is sin. God says this plainly: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

New Testament Confirmation

Our Lord teaches this same principle in Luke 12. This is the one principle that explains Lamentations 4:6: the greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability. Beginning with verse 40, our Lord says, “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”

Note how our Lord makes application of this truth: “And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

If you know to do right, have the opportunity to do right, and do not do right, condemnation says, many stripes. He who is ignorant and does wrong will be beaten, but with only a few stripes. Why? He did not have the knowledge, the light, the advantages, or the blessing. To whom much is given, much is required.

Adultery and fornication are bad, wicked, and wrong for anyone. But when pastors fall into that sin, it is even more wicked and vile because they are more responsible, and it is more criminal on their part. To whom much is given, much is required. There is a vast difference between a sin of ignorance and a deliberate sin. There is also a vast difference between someone who sins from an office of trust, responsibility, and opportunity and someone who holds no such office or trust.

Look at Numbers chapter 15, verses 29 through 31. We are still enunciating a principle here. God says, "Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them."

It does not matter who you are. If you sin through ignorance, God says, I understand that. But verse 30 says, "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him."

There is a difference between an ignorant sin and a deliberate sin. What advantage did Jerusalem have over Sodom and Gomorrah? What advantage did she have over anyone else or any other country? What made the sins of Judah and Jerusalem more heinous, more vile, more wicked, and greater than the sins of Sodom? Romans 3, verses 1 and 2, says, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" Here is the answer.

Jerusalem's Advantages and Presumptuous Sin

"Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." They had the law. They had the word of God. Deuteronomy 4:6-8 says, "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that

hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

What advantage did they have? They had the law of God. They had the word of God. They had the truth of God. Ephesians 2:11-12 reminds us, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." What did Israel have? They had the law of God. They had the covenants. They had the ordinances.

It was in Judah, at Jerusalem, where the tabernacle and the temple were located. It was in Judah, at Jerusalem, where God revealed Himself in the Shekinah glory. It was in Judah, at Jerusalem, where there were the teaching priests and the Levites. There were the ordinances, the ceremonies, the sacrifices, and the law. Yet the priests and the Levites, as well as all the people, turned their backs upon God. The sins of Jerusalem were not sins of ignorance. They were sins of presumption. They were deliberate, premeditated sins against light, against truth, and against all the advantages, opportunities, and responsibilities that they held. Do you understand?

David's prayer request in Psalm 19:13 was, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." He called it a great transgression to commit presumptuous sin. It is one thing to sin ignorantly and unwittingly. It is quite another thing to sin knowingly, willingly, premeditatedly, and presumptuously against God and His Word.

Numbers 15, verses 29 through 31, says: “Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.”

Applications for Believers Today

That is why James says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Jerusalem knew to do good. They had all the advantages, opportunities, and blessings. Would God judge them? Jeremiah rightly said, the punishment of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown as in a moment. No hands stayed on her.

Let me make a couple of applications. If Israel had all those advantages and blessings in the Old Testament, what do we have in the New Testament? We are blessed with the Word of God, opportunities, advantages, knowledge, truth, light, and responsibilities. We have a far greater responsibility to do good to others, honor and glorify God, and worship God now in truth and reality than they had in the Old Testament. Yet at the same time, we face a greater culpability.

Our Lord said, “To whom much is given, much is required.” We know more, have been taught more, and have more light and knowledge. Therefore, we have more responsibility. When we sin, we incur a greater culpability. Even as Christians, I am not talking about losing our salvation, but about being chastened by God.

The truth is that we have far greater blessings and advantages than Israel did. Second Thessalonians 2, verse 10, shows that when one sins against knowledge, conscience, and truth, he places himself in a very dangerous predicament. If you can do this consistently and constantly, then something is dreadfully wrong with you.

Second Thessalonians, chapter two, verse 10 says, “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” They hated the truth. They would not have the truth. “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” If you can turn your back on truth, if you can turn your back upon Christ and His so great salvation and His Word, you are in a very precarious situation.

The proof that we've ever savingly believed is that we will continue in faith. The proof that we've ever savingly repented is that

we will continue in repentance. We'll continue in faith and trust and obedience to the Word of God. The greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability. It's an awesome thing to think we'll give an account for what we know. If you try to tell me, “Well, it's best then that a man stays ignorant,” oh, no, because then God is going to judge you for remaining ignorant when you could have had truth and knowledge. You cannot sin against God and escape. I'd rather have the knowledge to be right and do right than to be ignorant and do wrong and still be judged by God. It's only His grace and mercy that gives us truth, light, and blessings. But once He gives them, what a greater responsibility we have. When we sin against that truth, we deserve a greater censure.

We have a greater culpability because of the advantages God has given us. Father, in Jesus Christ's name, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word, truth, and blessings. We ask, Lord, that you would teach us and help us to see and understand the advantages that you've given us. May we not despise them, but use them for your honor and your glory, and serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear, and maintain our obedience to thee in every area of our lives. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 8

How To Witness Based Upon The Absolute Sovereignty Of God

How to Witness Based Upon God's Absolute Sovereignty

Introduction: The Call to Be Witnesses

The title of the message is How to Witness Based Upon God's Absolute Sovereignty. Consider two passages, Isaiah 43:10 and Acts 1:8. Isaiah 43:10 says, "You are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me." Notice what God says to His people: “You are my witnesses.”

Then Acts 1:8 says, "But you shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and in the

uttermost parts of the earth." Our Lord is speaking to His disciples. Notice again that He said, “You shall be witnesses unto me.”

I could begin by asking a number of questions. The first one is, are you a witness? Secondly, do you want to be a witness? And thirdly, are you absolutely sure you want to be a witness? Because once you begin examining the word witness in the Word of God, you are going to find some very uncomfortable answers.

Do you realize that the law of God demands two things of every believer, of every Christian? The law of God demands, first of all, obedience, and secondly, enforcement. Man's law basically does the same thing, because man's law also demands obedience, and then we have the power of citizen's arrest. So: law and enforcement.

In biblical law, the witness was required to do two things. First of all, he had to give an accurate and true account. He had to present the truth absolutely truthfully and honestly. And then, secondly, he also helped enforce the law.

The Old Testament Role of a Witness

Leviticus 24:13–14 says, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Bring forth him that cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him."

The witnesses participated. What would keep a witness absolutely honest and prevent him from perjuring himself? If you understand God's law, a perjurer really hurts himself. Deuteronomy 19:15–19 says, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin that he committed: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise up against any man, to testify against him that which is wrong; then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; and the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be found a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother."

"So shalt thou put the evil away from among you." The law of retribution, or the lex talionis of Scripture, says that if a man perjures himself and gives false witness, whatever he intended to do to his brother is to be done to him. It does not matter whether it is confiscation of goods or death. He is to suffer the exact same penalty he was trying to inflict upon his brother.

Deuteronomy 17:6–7 says, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you."

The word witness here not only indicates a true, accurate, and honest account; it also indicates enforcement. Deuteronomy 13 deals with false prophets—those trying to seduce the people of God away from God. It deals with false prophets in the family, in the city, and in the nation. Listen to what God said in Deuteronomy 13:6-9: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, namely the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth, thou shalt not consent to him, thou shalt not hearken unto him, neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him, but thou shalt surely kill him. Thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people."

A witness, then, had to give not only a true and accurate account; a witness had to aid in the execution of the criminal as well.

In Joshua 22, the two and a half tribes on the other side of Jordan erected an altar, and all the other tribes said, "They built an altar to sacrifice on." They determined to go to war because they could not have two altars. The tribe of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh explained that they were not building the altar for sacrifice. They understood there was only one altar. They were building a replica of it lest the tribes on the other side of the river say, "Those over there, they're not Israelites; they're not part of us."

This altar was to be a witness that they were indeed the children of God. The Bible says in verse 34 that they called the altar Ed, E-D. That is a witness. Ed is the Hebrew word for witness, or at least in our language. The altar was not built for rebellion, but simply to say that they, too, were the people of God. Thus, in the Old Testament, a witness not only testifies truthfully, honestly, and accurately; he also helps enforce the law of God.

The New Testament Witness and the Word 'Martus'

You are probably about to say, “I’m glad I’m not living in Old Testament times.” Really? In Acts chapter 1, verse 8, our Lord said, “But you shall receive power. After that, the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses.” Wow. You shall be witnesses.

In Matthew chapter 18, verse 15, the Bible says, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen and as a publican.” This passage gives a specific order for dealing with a trespass: first privately, then with one or two more, and finally before the church. The purpose is that every word may be established, and the brother may be gained. Note the word witnesses in verse 16. The word witness here is a very special word. This is not a casual use of the term.

In Mark chapter 14, the high priest questioned our Lord. The Bible says, “But he held his peace and answered nothing. Again, the high priest asked him and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am. And you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes and said, What need we of further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy.” They all condemned him to be guilty of death.

The interesting thing is that anywhere in the New Testament where you see the word witness—whether in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, Matthew chapter 16, or Mark chapter 14—the Greek word is martus.

It is where we get our English word martyr. When we think of a martyr, we think of someone who dies for his faith. Originally, however, the word simply meant a witness. It did not come to mean someone who died for his faith until after the Roman persecution.

This same word is used of God Himself in Romans 1, verse 9. The Apostle Paul said, "God is my witness," and the word witness there is martus. Literally, he said, "God is my martyr." Obviously, God is not dead, and God did not die for the faith. Paul was simply saying, God is my witness.

Now turn in your Bibles to the book of Revelation, chapter 1. The law demanded two things of every witness: a true, honest, and accurate account, and help in the enforcement of the law. Notice what is said concerning Jesus Christ in Revelation chapter 1, verses 5 and 6: "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

The Bible says that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness. If Jesus Christ is the witness according to God's law, what is He going to do? He will give an accurate, honest, and truthful testimony, and then He will enforce God's law. Proverbs 14, verse 5, says, "A faithful witness will not lie, but a false witness will utter lies." A faithful witness will not and cannot lie. Jesus Christ, as a faithful witness, always gives a true, honest, and accurate account, even concerning His church.

In Revelation 3:14–16, Jesus says to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans: “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 that thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”

Now notice what Jesus Christ does. First, He witnesses against this corrupt, compromising, and complacent church. He is a true, faithful, honest, and accurate witness against them. Secondly, He

says, “I will spew you out of my mouth.” In other words, He is going to force judgment against them.

If you look back in your Bibles to Revelation 2:5, notice what He says to the church at Ephesus: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Notice what He has done. He has also given a true and accurate account of the church at Ephesus. But now He says, “Unless you repent, I will come and remove thy candlestick out of his place.” He will judge them; He will enforce His law.

The Lord, as the true and faithful witness, not only testifies accurately, truthfully, and honestly; He also judges and executes as well. Now consider two passages that will come into play toward the end of the message: 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and Revelation chapter 19. First, turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Consider what the Apostle Paul says there, beginning with verse 7. Then we will look at Revelation chapter 19.

Paul writes, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, because our testimony among you was believed in that day.”

Notice how our Lord will execute His wrath and judgment. He will be applying the law of God, and this will take place in the presence of the saints.

In Revelation chapter 19, the first three verses, we again see the enforcement of God's law in the presence of the saints: “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven saying, Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God. For true and righteous are his judgments. For he hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

And again they said, Hallelujah, and her smoke rose up forever and ever."

The point is this: in God's judgment, the saints are here, giving honor and glory to God for this true and accurate testimony and for the enforcement of His law upon the ungodly.

The importance of being a true and faithful witness must be emphasized. We say that we believe God is absolutely sovereign. When we stop and think about it, there can only be one sovereign, one ultimate, and one absolute. God does not share His power or His sovereignty with anybody in that sense of the word. He is God, and beside Him there is no other.

If we believe that God is absolutely sovereign, how do we witness based upon that sovereignty? Does believing that God is the sovereign God of heaven and earth affect the way we witness?

Sovereignty and Soteriology Shape Witnessing

Will those who believe in God's absolute sovereignty witness differently from those who do not believe in God's sovereignty? The answer is yes. One's view of soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, and one's view of theology, the doctrine of God, dictate the manner and matter in which one witnesses. If we believe that salvation is the work of God from start to finish, then we will witness differently from someone who believes in synergism.

Synergism is the teaching, in Arminian teaching, that God and man work together for man's salvation. Man must do his part, and then God does His part. Usually, such a position is held by those who refer to themselves as Arminians or semi-Pelagians. They believe that somehow man can initiate his own salvation. It is like the old saying: It is mine to be willing, and it is His to do the completion. If I will to be saved, then God is obligated to finish that and save me. That certainly is not found anywhere in the Word of God.

Yet a multitude teach it. Years ago, I heard about a man who went into a basically semi-Pelagian church during a testimony meeting. He stood and said, "I want to praise God for His gracious salvation, who saved my sin-sick soul. I give Him all the honor and all the glory." When he sat down, the pastor said, "Brother, I'm sure that

you had to do your part, too." The man stood again and said, "Yes, sir, I did my part. I furnished the sin."

He did all the rest of it. That is all we can do: furnish the sin. Most of us have heard this all our lives, having been raised in what we would call fundamental, independent, Bible-believing churches. They would say, "You must take the first step. It's up to you." What is that saying? It is saying that you initiate the act of salvation. Once you initiate it, it is up to God.

Someone who believes in decisional regeneration, or someone who believes that man is capable of initiating salvation on his own, is certainly going to witness and testify completely and totally differently from someone who believes that salvation is the Lord's from start to finish. I remember years ago hearing about one famous Baptist preacher who is now dead. He sent some of his people down to Florida, and in one weekend they had over 3,000 professions of faith. I thought to myself, if 3,000 people really got converted in one weekend, that part of the country would be changed. But nothing ever changed. Everything went on exactly the same.

If you believe that man is incapable of taking the first step, that man is dead in trespasses and sin, that God must open a man's eyes, give him understanding, and release his will from its captivity to sin and wickedness and its own vile affections, then you are going to say, "My witnessing has to be different" from someone who says that man can save himself.

First Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 14, is a very plain passage. The Bible says, "But the natural man, that is, the unsaved man, that's man by nature; that's the way we're all born. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him." Notice: "Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

There is a difference between the word can and the word may. The word may is a term of permission. When we were children, we all played that game, "Mother, may I?" If you did not say "may I," then you did not do it. Can is a term of ability. Brother Ernie could ask me, "Brother Weaver, can I play the piano?" My response would be, "You may, if you have the ability." Can is a term of ability.

Look at what he says very clearly: “They are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them.” In other words, fallen man does not have the ability to know the things of God or to see the things of God.

Three Illustrations of Salvation as God's Work Alone

There are three basic illustrations of salvation in the New Testament. Each clearly demonstrates that salvation is a work of God alone, God’s work from start to finish. The first is that of birth. If you look in your Bibles very quickly to John chapter 3, you will remember this.

Nicodemus came to Jesus Christ by night. In John chapter 3, beginning with verse 1, the Bible says, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

Notice that our Lord said, unless a man is born again, he cannot even see the kingdom of God. Then, in verse 5, unless he is born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. If all men cannot see the kingdom, they cannot enter the kingdom in and of themselves. Our Lord is saying, “You must be born.” Nicodemus was a ruler and a brilliant man, but this had him stumped. He did not understand what our Lord was talking about at all.

When our Lord says, “You must be born again,” the Greek word is anothen, which means you must be born from above. Our Lord told Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, you must be born from above.”

Years ago, Billy Graham wrote a book titled How to Be Born Again. I have often wondered about that. If our Lord is liking the new birth to the physical birth, consider this: He says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." Just as a man was born of the flesh the first time, our Lord said he must be born of the Spirit the second time—born from above. If salvation is likened to your physical birth, how many of you had anything to do with your physical birth? How many of you sat down and said, "Now here's what's going to happen"?

Consider physical birth. You had no say in your parents coming together. You had nothing to do with it; you were not even around. The fact that your mother and father came together at their own pleasure and in their own time had nothing to do with you. If your spiritual birth is anything like your physical birth, you can have nothing to do with it. You did not move upon the will of your father or your mother to birth you.

Do you know what the Bible says in James 1:18? "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Of his own will. You had no influence over your parents, and you had no influence over God. You know what the Bible says in Revelation 4:11? "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." It pleased God to give you physical existence. It pleased God to create you, to allow you to be born, to regenerate you, to open your eyes, to release your will from the bondage of sin, and to give you faith. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth."

Years ago, a young lady in our church came into my office. She had just come to the church and said, "I need to talk to you." She told me her problem and asked, "What do you think?" I looked at her and said, "Well, I think the problem is that you're just lost. You've never been saved. You've never been regenerated. You've never been converted."

She became angry and left the church. I could not help that; it was still the truth. After two years, she called and wanted to come back and talk to me. When she came into my office, she sat for five or ten minutes, weeping. Finally, when she had regained her composure,

she said, “You were right. I’m lost.” She said, “I know I can’t be a member of this church, but if you don’t mind, if I could just come and listen—” I told her, “That’s what the church is here for. You’re more than welcome to come and listen. I want you to come and listen.” That young wife sat through service after service and wept and wept and wept. Her mascara ran.

She looked like a zebra—really—and was open with her tears. She knew, and I knew she was under conviction. One of our ladies, one of the most tenderhearted women I have ever known, saw this young woman walk out of the church. She grabbed my hand and said, “Please keep praying, please keep praying.” I said, “Oh, I am.” After she walked out the door, the lady behind her, an older woman, threw her arms around my neck.

She began to weep and said, “O Pastor, can’t you do anything for her?” I looked at her and said, “No, ma’am. The reason she is in the trouble she is in now is that somebody did something for her other than God.” It was not a month or two later before God gloriously saved her, for which I am thankful. Yes, I witnessed to her. I showed her and told her, but I cannot save her.

Salvation is a birth of His own will: “begat he us.” The second illustration of salvation in the Bible is that of creation. Stop and think about this. How was the world created? The Bible says, “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” How did God create it? Psalm 33:9 tells us, “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” God literally spoke the worlds into existence. The things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. God simply spoke, and it came into being.

Was creation the work of God alone? Were you there to assist Him, to give Him counsel, or to help Him in any way? Of course not. God created the world by His own power, absolutely and totally.

Now look in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” or creation. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, or a new creation.

Turn to Romans 8, beginning with verse 19. “For the earnest expectation of the creature or the creation waiteth for the

manifestation of the sons of God. 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. Because the creature or the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Verse 22 says, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." We are talking about creation. What did God do?

He spoke the worlds into existence. Look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 4:6. In verse 5, the apostle Paul says, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake, for God. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that's creation, has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Do you realize that the same God who spoke the worlds into existence, and commanded light to shine out of darkness, is the same sovereign, powerful God who shined in our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Did you have to help God give you that shining and knowledge, or did God sovereignly do it for you, as He did creation?

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, the apostle Paul asks, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" Who maketh thee to differ from another? That is an excellent question.

I would imagine each one of us has family members and friends who are lost. Yet here we are, saved by the grace of God, who made us to differ. We were just as big sinners, just as lost, and just as ungodly. Who made us to differ? And what do we have that we have not received? Everything that we have, God gave to us—spiritually, physically, mentally, morally, materially, every way imaginable.

When God talks about His salvation, He says it is a birth. If salvation is a birth and we are born of Him, obviously it is of His own will begetting us. If salvation is a creation, it must be God who creates. We cannot create. The third illustration of salvation in the Bible is resurrection. In Ephesians 2:1, the Bible says, "And you hath

he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Then, in Ephesians 2:5, again he says, "even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ."

"By grace are you saved." Stop and think about this. God has likened salvation, first, to a birth; secondly, to a creation; and now to a resurrection. How many of you have ever passed a cemetery? As you pass that cemetery, do you see graves partially open and body parts sticking up because somebody in the grave says, "Move, foot, move. Go up, arm, go up"? You never see that. Do you know why? Because those people are dead.

Do you realize that if there is a resurrection, it has to be from an outside power? Those who are in the grave are absolutely dead and powerless. Unless an outside power comes and brings them up, they will never bring themselves up. The clearest illustration is found in John 11. You remember Lazarus. He died, and Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "I go, that I may wake Lazarus from his sleep." They said, "If he sleeps, he does well." Our Lord said, "You do not understand. That is not the sleep I am talking about."

When He arrived, Martha came, and then she sent Mary. Jesus asked, "Where is he?" She said, "Lord, by now he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." Jesus said, "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." They rolled the stone away, and Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth." The Bible says that he who was bound with grave clothes came forth.

Now here is my question: Did our Lord sovereignly give Lazarus life inside that tomb, enabling him to get up and walk out, or did He give him life only after he got up and walked out? Obviously, if God had not done something for him inside the tomb, he never would have gotten up or walked out. Inside the tomb is a picture of regeneration; walking out is a picture of conversion. God sovereignly and graciously gave him life inside that tomb, and that allowed him to come out.

When you talk about salvation, you have to talk about a birth, a creation, or a resurrection. Each one of these demonstrates conclusively that salvation is of the Lord. Everybody in this room can probably quote Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through

faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." What did he say? By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.

You did not drum it up or manufacture it. You could not; it was impossible. Even our faith is the gift of God. You say, "But wait a minute, Brother Weaver. When I came to Jesus Christ, I was willing to come to Christ." Yes, you were. But who made you willing to come to Christ? And why is it that when you came to Christ, you were willing to come to Him, whereas all your life previously you had been unwilling to come to Him? Philippians 2:13 tells you, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Yes, you came, and you were willing to come, but it was He who put the "to will" in you. And when He put the "to will" in you, He also put the "to do" in you as well.

The Rich Young Ruler: Witnessing with Law and Inability

Now turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 10. I want to show you what I will call the most conclusive evidence of what I am teaching you tonight. Everyone knows this story of the rich young ruler. Mark chapter 10, verse 17: "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running and kneeled to him and asked him, Good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God. Thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honour thy father and thy mother." And he answered and said unto him, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, "One thing thou lackest, go thy way. Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and take up thy cross and follow me."

And he was sad at that saying and went away grieved, for he had great possessions. Jesus looked round about and said unto his disciples, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.” His disciples were astonished at these words. But Jesus answered again and said unto them, “Children, how hard is it

for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

Salvation is the question: Who then can be saved? Here is our Lord's answer: "With men, it is impossible. But not with God, for with God all things are possible." With men, it is impossible. I was preaching one time, and after the service someone said to me, "Pastor, you make it mighty hard for somebody to be saved." I said, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I didn't mean to make it hard. I meant to make it impossible." That is what the Scripture says. With men, it is impossible.

No one can save himself. No one can help save himself. No one can pray enough, read enough of the Bible, or be good enough. You cannot walk down enough aisles, join enough churches, or be baptized enough. You cannot do anything enough to be saved yourself. It is impossible. With men, it is impossible.

Our Lord witnessed to this young man, but I want you to see how He witnessed and understand what He was doing. A faithful witness will not lie. A faithful witness always gives a true, accurate, and honest testimony. Remember that this young man who came to Jesus Christ was cut above the average. In fact, he had so much going for him. He was unlike a multitude today.

What did he have going for him? First of all, he had manners. He came running and kneeled to Jesus Christ. He said, "Good Master." He addressed Him reverently and respectfully. He had not only good manners, but also a good motive. He wanted eternal life: "What must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" That is a good motive. He also had good morals. Our Lord said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal." He answered, "All these have I observed from my youth."

He was a moral young man, not reproachable: decent in manners, motive, and morals. He had been a decent young man. He also had money—lots of it—and was extremely rich. Either he had received it by inheritance or earned it. When our Lord said, "Thou shalt not steal, and thou shalt not defraud," what did he say? "All these have I

kept from my youth up." Evidently, therefore, he had come by his great riches honestly. He had not obtained them through dishonest means.

If this young man were alive today and came to the average Baptist pastor and the average Baptist church, he would have been immediately accepted into membership. He would probably have been nominated to be a deacon. He would soon have financed a new addition to the building, and the wing would have been named after him. But our Lord said, "Your life is not enough. No, it's not enough; you're lost." He had a lot going for him, but he was still lost when our Lord got through with him.

He was not a candidate for baptism or church membership, because he was thoroughly, totally lost.

Here is what I want you to see: how our Lord witnessed to this young man. Our Lord emphasized two truths: responsibility and inability. They are two totally different things. When you look through the New Testament at how our Lord witnessed, whether you are talking about the woman in John 4, this young man in Mark 10, or another occasion, our Lord always pressed upon individuals their responsibility to keep God's law and honor God. At the same time, He showed them their inability to do what they were commanded.

Look in verse 18, because our Lord began witnessing to this young man with a rebuke. In verse 17, the young man came running, knelt, and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus said unto him, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, and that is God."

Here is what our Lord is saying: If I am good, I am God. And if I am God, you do not come running into My presence demanding something of Me. A lot of people need to hear that. You might beseech God, beg God, and ask God, but you do not demand that God do anything.

When the young man finally said he wanted eternal life, after our Lord rebuked him, He said, "Look, verse 19, thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour thy father and thy mother." Why would our Lord use the Ten Commandments? You

and I both know that justification is not by the law of God. It is taught throughout Scripture: by the deeds of the law shall no man be justified. And yet our Lord is using the law here very clearly. Why?

He is showing responsibility and accountability. Every man, whether saved or unsaved, is responsible and accountable to God, for we are His creatures. We owe Him. He created us, gave us life, and gave us all things. As His supposedly rational creatures, we are responsible to give Him the glory due His name. We are responsible to worship Him, praise Him, and glorify Him. We are not only His creatures; we are sinful creatures as well. We owe Him repentance. We do.

Can you stop and think for a moment? Look at all of God's gifts that He has given to you. Look at His mercies and His love that you have abused and misused for your own selfish and wicked gratifications all your life. He gives us breath, life, health, and everything, and we abuse and misuse it. We owe Him; we are responsible and accountable.

Not only as creatures, but as sinful creatures as well. So here is my question: Why did our Lord use the law in witnessing? Why did He quote the Ten Commandments? Why did He not say, like the Apostle Paul, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”? Why, in this instance, did He quote the Ten Commandments? Here is the answer. Romans 3 and verse 20 says, “For by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Do you realize that it is impossible to know what sin is without the law of God? First John 3 and verse 4 tells us very plainly, “whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is a transgression of the law.” You cannot sin without violating God's law. One of the real reasons, I believe, that we are not seeing real, genuine, solid conversions the way we used to is because God's law is not preached the way it used to be preached.

The old Puritans had a saying: The sharp needle of the law must precede the scarlet thread of the gospel. Until an individual is pricked in his heart, until he knows that he is a sinner—not just intellectually or rationally, but knows what he is—he will never be ready for salvation. I was preaching in North Carolina, and there was a lady who came to church every single night. She sat there and wept and wept every night, just wept and wept and wept.

Finally, toward the end of the week, she asked the pastor and me to come by and talk with her. I thought to myself, "Oh, Lord, thank you." This woman had been so broken and weeping. We went by, and I sat down with her while the pastor was there. I said, "You're concerned about your soul, are you not?" She said yes. I said, "Let me take the Bible and show you what God says."

I started in the Old Testament, going through the Bible and showing her the pictures of sin: where God says we are like the scum of a boiling pot, where we are likened to a filthy cloth, and where we are likened to a dead and rotting body. I got through about seven of those pictures, and all of a sudden she did this. Then she said, "I may be bad, but I'm not that bad." I looked at the pastor and said, "Neither is she a candidate for salvation. We're wasting our time. Let's leave."

Let me tell you something, folks. When God convicts you, you will argue with the Apostle Paul about being the chief of sinners. You will fight for that place because you will recognize how wicked and wretched you really were.

Our Lord here uses the law to convict this young man. This young man naively—and I'm going to say it, stupidly—said to our Lord, after He quoted the law of God, "All these have I observed from my youth." Really? Really?

In verse 21, our Lord says, "One thing thou lackest. Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, take up thy cross, and follow me." And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possession.

Now, our Lord said, "If you really want to be saved, here's what you need to do: sell everything you have and give to the poor, take up your cross, and follow me." How many of you, when you were saved, sold everything you had and gave to the poor? Not one. Is that a requirement for salvation? That's what our Lord told this man. So you have to ask yourself: Why did our Lord tell him to sell everything he had, give to the poor, take up his cross, and follow Him? Here's why.

Remember, he began quoting the law of God: “All these have I observed from my youth.” Really? The Apostle Paul said it like this in Romans 7:9: “For I was alive without law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” Paul was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. At one point he said he was touching the law blameless. Was he really blameless? Of course not.

All he had was simple outward, external conformity. He had nothing internal, nothing inside. He said, “I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came,” when he truly saw its spirituality, “sin revived and I died.” This young man, like Saul of Tarsus, was a good Pharisee. He had all the externals. Our Lord said, “You really want to be saved? You really want eternal life? I’ll tell you what you do. Go sell everything that you have and give it to the poor, take up your cross, and follow me.”

Why did our Lord tell him that? He was applying His law. The young man said, “All these have I observed from my youth.” Really? Honestly? Go sell everything you have and give to the poor. He went away grieved. What does our Lord say? “You think you’ve kept my law? You haven’t even obeyed the first commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” His money was his god.

This young man believed he could keep the commandments and earn eternal life. He may have been responsible to obey them, but he did not have the ability to obey them. He had external conformity, but not internal spirituality.

Romans 8:7–8 says, “Because the carnal mind, that is, the fleshly mind, man’s mind by nature, because the carnal mind is enmity with God, or against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” We do not have the ability to please God in and of ourselves. No one can please God in and of himself.

Responsibility Does Not Imply Ability

You read John 4 when you get home, and you will see our Lord witness to the Samaritan woman the same way. How do all these truths affect our witnessing? As a faithful witness, I want to declare the truth about God. I want to declare the truth about His Word. At

the same time, I want to declare the truth about man and the truth about sin.

Look at Acts 17, verses 30 and 31. Acts 17:30 says, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” Here is my question: Why does God command all men everywhere to repent? The first answer is because God is God. He may do as He pleases. God is the sovereign God of heaven and earth. He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and always as He pleases. He has the absolute right to command us to repent. We owe Him repentance.

But look at verse 31. Here is another reason why He has commanded us to repent: “Because he that is God, the father. hath appointed a day in which he, God the Father, will judge the world in righteousness by that man, that is, Jesus Christ, whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, and that he hath raised him from the dead.” Just as surely as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, just that surely there is going to be a judgment. Men are responsible and accountable to repent, and they are going to face God if they do not.

Now, men have a responsibility to repent before God, but they also have a responsibility to believe. The Bible says in 1 John 3:23, “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

Responsibility does not imply ability. We might have the responsibility, but we do not have the ability. The Bible says in Acts 5:30–31, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with or at his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.”

Are you looking for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins—to give repentance? Repentance is the gift of God, just like faith is the gift of God. Repentance does not belong to man; it belongs to God.

Someone says, “I’m going to believe. I’m going to make myself believe. I’m going to work this faith up.” No, you cannot work it up, because faith is a gift of God. One of the tricks and wiles of the devil

is that he tempts you into sinning and then promises you an easy and speedy repentance. Repentance is not his to give.

"But all I have to do is confess my sins. The Bible says, 'If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'" Yes, the Bible does say that—1 John 1:9. But do you know what the word confess means? Confess is homologeo in the Greek. Homo means one or the same; lego means I say. Confession is when you say the same thing that God says about your sins and take the attitude that God takes toward them. No one ever really confesses their sins until they turn from them, hate them, repent of them, and take the same attitude that God does toward them.

Repentance is not the devil's to give. Repentance is not yours to give. Repentance cannot be worked up just like faith cannot be worked. Repentance is the gift of God. Look in Acts 11, verse 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted or given repentance unto life." God granted it; God gave it.

One other passage: look in your Bibles to 2 Timothy, chapter 2, beginning with verse 24. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach patience. In meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves, watch if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Now, here is my question. When men recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, according to verse 25, it is when they acknowledge the truth. When do men acknowledge the truth? The answer is when God gives them repentance. Repentance is the gift of God. Do men have the responsibility to repent? Yes. Do men have the ability to repent? No. Do men have the responsibility to believe on Jesus Christ? Yes. Do men have the ability to believe on Jesus Christ? No.

Application: Witnessing as a Faithful Witness

So what do I do when I witness? If I believe that God is absolutely sovereign, I want to be a true, faithful, honest, and accurate witness. I want to testify to the grace, goodness, mercy, and justice of God. But I also want to testify to the total depravity of man and his total inability to do anything to please God. Show him that he has responsibility, and show him that he has inability. He has no ability whatsoever.

If someone really believes that he is totally, absolutely responsible to the sovereign God of heaven and earth, and yet has no ability to do anything, where does that leave him? At the grace, mercy, and feet of Jesus Christ. If He does not save him, he will never be saved. He needs to say, "Father, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, you have commanded me to repent. But I cannot. I do not have the ability."

You must give me that gift. You have commanded me to believe, but I cannot. If You do not save me, I will never be saved. If You do not give me repentance, I will never repent. If You do not give me faith, I will never believe. Do you want a sinner to seek after God? You take the key out of his hand. As long as a man thinks that he can repent and believe whenever he pleases, he will not seek God. I have heard people say, "I'm going to repent and believe right before I die. Until then, I'm going to enjoy myself." Really? You may die and never have one second to repent or one second to believe. Repentance and faith are gifts of God. They are not yours or in your hand; they are in God's hand.

Do you remember what our Lord said in Matthew 11:27? "All things are delivered unto me and my Father. And no man knoweth the Son, but the Father. And no man knoweth the Father, but the Son, and He to Whomsoever He revealeth." Salvation is not walking down a church aisle, being baptized, or doing good. Salvation is trusting totally, completely, and solely in Jesus Christ, which results in obedience in your life.

If I believe that God is absolutely and totally sovereign, I have to be a true and faithful witness. I must testify not only to the grace, goodness, mercy, and justice of God, but also to the inability of man.

God is sovereign. As Jonah found out in Jonah 2:9, “Salvation is of the Lord.”

Father, help us tonight. Give us grace and mercy. Teach us. Build us up in the most holy faith. Help us learn to apply the responsibility and accountability of man, yet at the same time our inability. Give everyone the truth about the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

Come Into the House

Introduction: The Invitation to Enter a House

Open your Bibles to Job chapter 30. The title of the message is "Come Into the House." I have often invited people into our home simply by saying, "Come into the house." I have also joked about the French words "entrez-vous," which, for a non-speaking Frenchman, I use to mean "come in." Sometimes I play on the words and say "entre vous."

An entrée, you remember, is a main dish, and "vous" means "you." Thus, "entre vous" means "the main dish, you." But "entrez-vous" actually means "come in." So, when I use those words jokingly, I say, "That's French for 'get in here.'"

It is always a joy and a relief to be invited into a home, especially when one may rest and refresh himself there and enjoy fellowship. Usually, you need an invitation from the owner before entering a house. Even when houses are being shown by realtors, you must have an invitation, reservation, or appointment to enter.

But there is a house into which one may enter—and, I would say, must enter—that is not simply entered by invitation only. You are

invited to this particular house, yes; but whether or not you understand that you have a particular invitation, you will enter it, because it has been divinely appointed and there is absolutely no escape. The invitation and appointment to enter are real and genuine.

Job's Certainty of Death

What is this house? Look in your Bibles at Job chapter 30, verse 23. Job says, “For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all the living.” He speaks of the house of death appointed for all the living.

Observe several things in this passage. First, Job knew that he would die. He had personal knowledge of that fact and reality. With all his suffering, physical torment, and emotional trauma, he probably believed it would be sooner rather than later.

Many of us have never truly come to grips with the reality of death. It is a subject on which we do not wish to meditate, do not care to think, and certainly do not want to discuss. In truth, we tend to ignore both the subject and the reality of death.

Death is usually something that is supposed to happen to someone else, but not to us. Oftentimes, we put it so far from our minds that we tend to forget it will indeed happen to us. We expect old, sickly, diseased, and feeble people to die. We can grasp that fact and live with it. However, when one is young, middle-aged, or in apparent good health suddenly keels over and dies, it is a shock. It is not only a shock; it is sometimes something we cannot wrap our minds around. The truth is this: young, middle-aged, old, sickly, healthy, active, and inactive people die on a regular basis. Do not think that one must be old or sickly in order to die.

The Universality and Appointment of Death

The Bible says in Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 27, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The interesting thing is that the word "appointed" literally means that which is reserved, laid up, or appointed. Death, therefore, is reserved and appointed for all because all have sinned, and the wages of sin

happens to be death. When the Bible says, "as it is appointed unto men once to die," the word "men" is from the Greek word "anthropos," which literally means mankind in general and refers to men and women. It is going to happen; it is appointed, reserved, and laid up. Here is a fact, here is a reality: we will die. God is emphasizing the fact of our mortality, telling us that we must wrestle with this fact and face the reality of death. No one is really and truly ready to live until he is ready to die.

Once you are ready to die, you are really and truly ready to live. There are many passages in the Bible that teach and demonstrate what I would call the frailty of life. Let me show you some of these. Turn first, if you would please, to Psalm 39. Let me point out a number of truths there to show you the frailty of life. The Bible says in Psalm 39, beginning with verse 3, David said, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned."

Biblical Illustrations of Life's Frailty

David said, “Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” He asked the Lord to let him know his end and the measure of his days, that he might know how frail he was.

Moses wrote Psalm 90 and said, “Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.” Our days are carried away as a flood. They are as a sleep in the morning, like grass that grows up, flourishes, and then withers and dies.

He gives us more illustrations: “For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

Our days are passed. If we make it to seventy, that is normal today. If we make it to eighty, he says, usually it is trouble and sorrow. Psalm 102:11 says, "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass." My days are like a shadow that declineth. How quickly does a shadow move?

It declines, it goes away. And then he goes on to say that he is withered like the grass. Look, if you would, in Isaiah 40, beginning with verse 6. The Bible gives us some pictures, very quickly, of how it speaks about the frailty of life. Isaiah 40 gives us another picture of the frailty of life: "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. Now watch. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Then, if you will turn into the New Testament to the book of James chapter 4, beginning with verse 13, James says, "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

Notice carefully: each one of these passages demonstrates the frailty of our life. They speak of our lives being washed away instantaneously as with a flood. They describe our being mowed down like grass and withering like grass. They speak of a fading flower and of life as a tale that is told. These passages show how quickly life passes away, no matter how long it may appear to us.

Think of some of the biographical messages I have given on certain men in times past. I may spend an hour, or an hour and a half, talking about their lives. Stop and think: that is an hour and a half—a tale that is told. They may have lived seventy or eighty years, but it is still over. It is now just a tale being told. And then he speaks of life as a handbreadth.

So none of these passages and none of these illustrations indicate longevity. None of them indicate permanence. Each illustration indicates brevity and the fragility of life and a lack of endurance. Alice and I have often sat around and think, since we've been married 58 years, where has 58 years gone? It seems like just yesterday she was chasing after me. 58 years! When I was thinking about this, I got tickled and I started laughing. You remember Methuselah? He was the oldest man in the Bible, lived 969 years. I got to thinking, can you imagine he and his wife sitting around and saying, and he says, "Honey, where's the last 900 years go?" Well, you know, it really doesn't matter if you live 50 years, 75 years or a thousand years, it passes very quickly. It's over and it's gone.

So Job was absolutely certain that he was going to die. Now, I want you to go back to Job, chapter 30, and I want you to look again, because here is another observation. I want you to watch it. Job, chapter 30. And notice, if you would please, verse 23. He said, "For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." So Job not only knew that he was going to die, he also knew the second truth, and that was that God would bring him into the house of death. For he said, "I know that thou wilt bring me to death."

God's Sovereignty Over the Day of Death

Have you ever considered the fact that our days are numbered? Have you ever understood the fact that it was not just the day of your birth that was ordained by God, but it's also the day of your death as well? You see, David said it like this in Psalm 66 and verse 9. He says, concerning God, "...which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." And then he said in Psalm 31 and verse 15, "...my times are in thy hand." So it's God who holds our soul in life. It's God, therefore, who makes sure that our feet do not stumble, and our feet do not fall.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Job, and I want you to look at chapter 7, and then we're going to chapter 14. Look, if you would, at chapter 7. Job chapter 7. Look, if you would, please, at verse 1. Job 7 and verse 1. Look what the Bible says concerning man.

Job 7 and verse 1. Watch carefully what God says. Job 7 verse 1, "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?

"Is there not an appointed time to man upon the earth?" God has not only determined the day of our birth; He has also determined the day of our death. Job 14, beginning with verse 1, says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. Now that's a fact. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."

Now note what he says: "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day." Note verse 5: "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:1, "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." So it is not just the day of our birth that has been ordained by God in His sovereignty. It is also the day of our death. He ordained it.

He will bring it to us and bring us to it. Now, this truth should be very comforting to the child of God. It should also be very disconcerting to those who are lost and unsaved. David said it in Psalm 23, verse 4, and everyone can quote this verse: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Now notice what he says: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." For the child of God, death is merely a shadow. It is not reality; it is just a shadow. I have said it before.

Death for the Believer: Shadow, Sleep, and Gathering

If you are in the shade of a tree, you are not in the tree. The tree is the reality; the shade is only a picture of that tree. That is all it is. So the child of God merely goes through the shadow of death and is never alone, neither in life nor in death. He said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Why? "For thou art with me."

When it comes time to die, our Lord does not leave us. In the Bible, death is also likened, for the child of God, to sleep. How many are afraid to go to sleep? None of you. In fact, we want sleep. I pray every night that the Lord will help me to sleep. I do. I woke up at four o'clock this morning and said, "Oh, Lord, I sure would love to go back to sleep." I did not really, but I wanted it. I crave it. I need it.

There is no one afraid of simply lying down to rest, lying down to sleep. For the child of God, that is what death is like; it is like going to sleep. Death is also likened in the Bible to being gathered unto one's people. Abraham died and was gathered unto his people. Jacob died and was gathered unto his people. Who is afraid of being gathered together with friends and family? No one. No one.

In Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 22, we read about being gathered to our people: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

Being gathered together with our people, what do we do? We come to the New Jerusalem. We come to the City of the Living God, to an innumerable host of angels, to the General Assembly of the Church, and to the Church of the Firstborn—that is, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We come to God, who is the Judge of all, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the mediator of the new covenant. So there is certainly nothing to fear for the child of God.

Death for the Unsaved: Terrors and Judgment

For the unsaved, it is quite different. They will cross the channel of death alone. They will face the horrors of death alone, the judgment of God alone, and the wrath of God alone. In Job 6:4, the Bible says, "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." The terrors of God. The arrows of God. Job 24:17 says, "For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death."

In Psalm 73, the psalm that Asaph wrote, he speaks of the wicked dying: “How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.” All the bravado will disappear from the unsaved when it comes time to die. I read years ago about the French atheist Voltaire, who invited his friends to watch how an atheist dies. It was recorded that Voltaire laid back and closed his eyes peacefully. Then, all of a sudden, he sat straight up in abrupt horror and terror and screamed, “There is a God!” Then he fell back dead. In a moment.

They are utterly consumed with terrors. You see, the house for all the living is the house of death. It is the grave. No one escapes it. It is appointed, reserved, ordained, and destined to the saved and the unsaved alike. The difference is that the saved will enter a house prior to the house of death. Job said it like this in Job 17:13: “If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.” If I wait, the grave is my house.

The House of Death Has Gates and Doors

Now stop and think about this for a moment. Do you realize that a house usually has doors and gates? Likewise, the house of death has doors and gates. We look at someone and see how sickly they appear, and we say, “Death is knocking at his door,” or, “He’s knocking at the door of death.” We also say of someone who is very sick, “He’s almost at the gates.” That means he is about to enter the area, knock on the door, and die.

Look in your Bible to Job 38. God is asking Job questions. Beginning with verse 16, He asks, “Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all. Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof?”

Note that He asks, “Have the gates of death been opened unto thee?” Death has gates. Then He asks about “the doors of death,” the

doors of the shadow of death. Death has gates, and death has doors as well.

We often say that many are at death's door and do not even know it. I have often thought of how easily it is to die. David said to Jonathan, "There is but a step between me and death." As I was praying this week and driving through all the rain, my tire hit a hole at the edge of the road. My truck bounced, and I thought, "Lord, it could be just that quick." And it could be. So many people are at death's door without realizing it. Many are knocking on the gate to get in, and they will get in. They are going to arrive, knock on the gate, and find it open. They are going to the house of death; they will knock on the door, and it will be opened.

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Grave as a House

Job said, "For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all the living." Matthew Henry commented, "The grave is a house, a narrow, dark, cold, ill-furnished house. But it will be our residence, where we shall rest and be safe. It is our long home, our own home, for it is our mother's lap, and in it we are gathered to our fathers. It is the house appointed for us by Him that has appointed us the bounds of all our habitations. It is appointed for all the living. It is the common receptacle where rich and poor meet. It is appointed for the general rendezvous.

"We must all be brought thither shortly. It is God that brings us to it, for the keys of death and the grave are in His hand, and we may all know that sooner or later He will bring us thither. It would be well for us if we would duly consider it. The living know that they shall die. Let us, each of us, know it with application."

Death and the grave, according to the Bible, are the houses for all the living. We are going to enter there. Whether we are young or old, healthy or sick, it does not matter. Each of us will enter into this house. There is no escaping the entrance into this house.

The Proper Application: Enter the House of the Lord First

Henry says that the living know that they should die, or at least they should know that they should die. Let us then make application of this fact. How do you make application of the fact that you know that you are going to die? What would be a proper application? I could think of many, but I will give you one, the main one, and that is this: If we are going to make application of the fact that we know we are going to die, and that we are going to enter into the house of death, the grave, we know it. Then the proper application, I believe, is this: We should enter into another house prior to the house of death. There are many invitations to enter into this house, and that house is indeed the house of the Lord.

Paul states concerning death, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” He continues, “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”

There is the house of the Lord. If we enter His house, when we enter into our physical house, the grave, the physical house of death, we have a new house. We have a new body, eternal in the heavens. If one does not enter into the house of the Lord before he enters into the house of death, it will be his eternal loss and destruction. The Bible says in Proverbs 3:33, “The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked:

SCRIPTURE READING - Isaiah 55:1-4 (KJV)

> But he blesseth the habitation of the just. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked. He said in Proverbs 15:25, "The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow." So the curse of God is upon the wicked. The Lord is going to destroy the house of the proud.

In Isaiah 55, beginning with verse 1, the Scripture says:

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call"

Here is a gracious invitation.

“A nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. 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.” Look at the invitation. God says, if you’re thirsty, come. If you’re hungry, come.

You can buy milk, you can buy wine, you can drink water without money and without price. He is talking about His grace and His mercy. He said, “I will make unto you a covenant, even the sure mercies of David.” Then He says, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him turn to the Lord and he’ll have mercy upon him.” It is this house, the house of the Lord, where we receive mercy and pardon and forgiveness. It is in His house that we learn truth and His law. It is in His house that we behold His goodness and His greatness. That is why David said in Psalm 122 and verse 1, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.”

The Blessings of Dwelling in God's House

Look at something in Isaiah, chapter two, beginning with verse two: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the

LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Here is the invitation: Come, let us go up to the mountain of God, to the house of God. He will teach us.

We need to understand that it is in His house and His house alone that we find mercy and grace. David said it like this in Psalm 5 and verse 7: "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." It is only in the house of God that we find mercy and grace. Once we get into that house, we learn to love it.

We no longer desire to be sinners. I know that we sin, and I understand that, but we no longer genuinely want to sin, neither do we want to be with sinners. David said concerning the house of the Lord, "LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth. Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men." I do not want to be around them.

He talks about wicked men "in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me. My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD." What did he say? "I love the habitation of thy house."

David said in Psalm 27:4, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple." It is the house of the Lord that makes the house of death easy. It makes the house of death a passport unto glory. It takes the fear out of death and dying.

I do not want to die, but I am not afraid to die. Why am I not afraid? Hebrews 2:14–15 gives the answer concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the

devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." When we are saved by the grace of God, we are delivered from the fear of death. We may not want to die, but we are not afraid to die. Another reason Christians should never be afraid of death and the grave is that our Lord Jesus Christ has the keys to death and the grave.

The Bible says in Revelation 1:18, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Our Lord has the keys.

Death could not hold the Son of God, and likewise it cannot hold His people. He is our head, and we are His body. We are already a resurrected and risen people.

Applications and Illustrations of Peaceful Death

How can I say that? Because we are in Him. When He died, we died. When He was buried, we were buried. When He was raised from the dead, we were raised from the dead. When He ascended into glory, we ascended into glory. In other words, we are one with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have to understand that when it comes time for a Christian to die, the grave and death are nothing more than the dropping-off point for a sinful, fleshly body and the beginning of a new, glorified, heavenly body given to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no need to fear death if you are a child of God.

It is just like when we lie down and go to sleep at night, tired and weary, and God gives us not only sleep but rest. We awaken the next morning refreshed, invigorated, and ready for another day. So, for the child of God, when we die, we simply awaken to newness of life—real, genuine life.

Real blessings flow from being in the house of God. David said it in Psalm 84:10: "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. If you really understood the reality of God and His worship, you would say with David, "I'd rather come one Sunday and really worship God than spend a thousand days doing anything else."

David also said in Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." Along with eternal life, once we enter into the house of the Lord, we always have goodness and mercy with us—perpetually.

I want to give you two illustrations. You may read about these yourselves, but they are wonderful to me. The first refers to the Scottish preacher Robert Bruce. He was a widower in his mid-seventies and wondered why the Lord had left him on earth so long. Just before his death, he had eaten an egg for breakfast and remarked to his daughter Martha to prepare him another egg, for he was still hungry. Before she could do it, and while musing a little, he said, “Hold, daughter. My Master calls me.”

Upon repeating these words, his sight failed, and he called for his Bible. He asked his children to open it to Romans chapter 8, where the Scripture says, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” He then asked that his finger be placed upon that verse. They did so. He asked, “Is my finger there?” They said yes. Then he said, “Now God be with you, my dear children. I have breakfast with you this morning. I shall sup with the Lord Jesus Christ this evening.” And he died.

Can you imagine being so sensitive to the call of God as to know that God was calling him to come home?

Dr. Thomas Goodwin, who lived from 1600 to 1680, was dying very peacefully. When it came his time to die, he said, “Is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend? I am going to the three persons with whom I have communion. They have taken me. I did not take them. I shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. All my lusts and corruptions I shall be rid of, which I could not be rid of here. Those croaking toads will fall off in a moment.”

He spoke of the great examples of faith in Hebrews 11 and said, “And these all died in the faith. I could not have imagined I should ever had such a measure of faith in this hour. No, I could never have

imagined it. My bow abides in strength. Is Christ divided? No. I have the whole of His righteousness. I am found in Him, not in my own righteousness, which is of the law, but in the righteousness which is of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Christ cannot love me better than He does, and I cannot love Christ better than I do. I am swallowed up in God."

If you enter the house of the Lord before you enter the house of death, which is appointed to all the living, you will find that death is nothing more than a shadow, a sleep, and a passport to glory. I can say, "Come into the house." There is one house that each of us most assuredly will enter, and no one is prepared to live until he is prepared to die.

It is the grace and mercy of God that prepares our lives. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee to stay. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth, and that there is indeed the house of the Lord, and we may enter it. We have been invited. You have said, "Come. Without money. Without price." You have said, "Let the wicked forsake his ways and his evil thoughts, and let him turn unto Thee, and Thou wilt have mercy and Thou wilt pardon." Help us to seek Thee, knock at the door of Your house, and ask for grace and mercy to turn from our sins and turn to Thee. Enable us, by Your infinite grace, to enter Your house before we enter our house. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

CHAPTER 10

Hemlock Justice

Introduction: Hemlock Justice Defined

Amos chapter 6 and verse 12. Today's message is an exposition of Amos 6:12. Next week, Lord willing, I will give a historical example of this in the life and death of one particular man, and I think you will see the connection. This is not part one with next week as part two. Each message will stand or fall together, but there is indeed a connection. If you know from where you have come and where you are at the present, you will have a pretty good idea of where you are going. So let us look in Amos chapter 6 at the subject of hemlock justice.

Amos 6:12 says: "Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen? For you have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock." The Greek philosopher Socrates killed himself by drinking poisoned hemlock. The Old West had what was known as hemp justice, where wicked men were hanged by a hemp rope as they were executed. We no longer have hemp justice today; we now have what is known as hemlock justice, which in reality is not justice, but rather injustice.

We live in a day of injustice, immorality, unrighteousness, and confusion. One of the greatest sins of men in general, and of government in particular, is the lack of justice or the perversion of justice. Hold Amos chapter 6, but look quickly in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 59, because I want you to see one of the main charges that God levels against society as well as civil rulers.

God's Concern for Justice

In Isaiah 59 and verse 4, look what God says: "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity." Notice that He says, "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth." What are they doing? They are trusting in vanity, speaking lies, conceiving mischief, and bringing forth iniquity. That almost sounds exactly like today.

Now skip down to verse 14. In Isaiah 59, God says: "And judgment is turned away backwards, and justice standeth afar off, and truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." Judgment is turned away backwards, justice standeth afar off, truth is fallen in the street, and equity, that which is right, cannot enter. Certainly it cannot enter, because righteousness and truth and justice have fallen.

God is indeed concerned with justice. He is the just God. Deuteronomy 32 and verse 4 proclaims it like this: "He is the rock, His work is perfect, all of His ways are judgment, a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He."

Again, the Word of God declares in Isaiah 45 and verse 21, "There is no God beside me, a just God and Savior, there is none beside me." Over and over in Scripture, God is referred to as the just God. If I were to ask you why in the world God established judges, or why we have a judicial system, you would respond, hopefully, that it is the duty of judges to condemn the guilty and to justify the innocent.

The Role of Judges and the Abomination of Injustice

But when you live in a hemlock society with hemlock justice, you find that the wicked are justified and oftentimes the righteous are condemned. The Bible declares in Proverbs 17:15, "He that justifieth

the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord." Both the acts and the judges become an abomination to the Lord. The judge or the individual who will justify the wicked and condemn the just—both are an abomination to the Lord. The word "abomination" means literally a stench in God's nostrils.

Keep in mind that God is just. Since God is just, God will in no wise justify the wicked. In fact, He said in Exodus 23:7: "Keep thee far from a false matter, and the innocent and the righteous slay thou not, for I," says God, "for I will not justify the wicked."

And the reason God will not justify the wicked is because God is just. Why did God establish judges? Why did God give us men to judge in these matters in the first place? Notice what God says to the judges in 2 Chronicles 19, verses 6 and 7: “And said to the judges, Take heed what you do, for you judge not for man, but for the Lord who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you, take heed and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.”

Note what He said to the judges: “Take heed what you do.” Why? “For you judge not for man, but you judge for the Lord.” In other words, judges are responsible and accountable to represent God and His law to the people, and in doing so, they are to rule justly and righteously.

The problem that existed in the day of Amos, and the problem that exists in our day, is that men turn from God and His law, and they invent their own statutes, their own laws, their own ordinances, and their own regulations, which are diametrically opposed to the law of God. Thus, instead of justice, you have injustice, graft, fraud, and corruption. In the book of Isaiah, chapter 5 and verse 23, God is speaking of these wicked, corrupt judges: “Who justify the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.” So what does a hemlock justice do? A hemlock justice then justifies the wicked for reward and takes away the righteousness from the righteous.

As you read through the Bible, you find that men are still sinners and still in rebellion against God, just as in the days of Amos.

Likewise, in our day, there is basically no difference between the time of Amos and this day and age in 2008.

Let us go back to Amos chapter 6, because I want you to see the context before I begin expounding verse 12. In Amos 6:1, the chapter begins with a woe, or curse, upon those who are at ease in Zion: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion and trust in the mountain of Samaria which are named chief of the nations to whom the house of Israel came." The word "woe" refers to a calamity or a curse. When God speaks of those who are at ease in Zion, He refers not only to Judah and Jerusalem, but also to the northern kingdom, which had Samaria as its capital.

Context of Amos 6: Carnal Security and Wickedness

Notice again what he says: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria." The mountain of Israel was Samaria, its capital; the mountain of Judah was Jerusalem, its capital. Basically, they were trusting in their fortified capitals, their military defense, their economics, and their politics.

In other words, these were people who thought, "We cannot fall. This would never happen in Samaria. This would never happen in Jerusalem. After all, we are God's covenant people. Nothing bad can ever happen to us. We are special."

But look what God does in verse 2. After saying, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion," He says, "Pass you into Calna and see, and from thence go ye to Hamath the great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Be they better than these kingdoms, or their border greater than your border?"

God is saying, "Consider how graciously, beneficently, and wonderfully I have dealt with you. Compare where you are and what you have with these other heathen, and see the advantages you had. I destroyed them for their sins. I have given you thus and thus. Yet, because I have given you all these great advantages, you now think that you are exempt from My chastisement and My judgment."

"Ye that put far away the evil day and cause the seed of violence to come near." Verse 3 gives us ample evidence of an insane mentality. They would not consider the grace or the goodness of God.

Moreover, they would not consider the curses and the threats that God had pronounced against them for their rebellion and their wickedness. In other words, they were saying, “Look, that evil day will never come upon us. That’s not going to happen to us. That will not be in our generation. That will not be in our time. It may happen to somebody else down the road, but it will never happen to us.”

“Ye that put far away the evil day.” In other words, you do not really believe that God is going to judge you. You do not really believe that God’s threats and God’s curses are real. What is the result? “You cause the seed of violence to come near.” In other words, you increase in wickedness; you increase in rebellion. Paul said it something like this: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” When you do not believe the blessings or the curses of God, it merely increases wickedness.

Our Lord taught this same truth in the New Testament. Cursed carnal security and the hope of impunity—that is, thinking that somehow you can get away with your sins and your wickedness—is the source of even greater wickedness. If you do not think that you are going to be judged for an action, would you not tend to think, “Well, if I’m not going to be judged for this action, I can do thus and thus because I will not be judged for those actions either”?

Our Lord gives a perfect illustration in Matthew 24. He is talking about a wicked servant: “But and if that evil servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming,” that is, he is not coming back or he is not going to judge, “and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.”

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The evil servant said in his heart, "He's not coming back. It's not going to happen. Nothing's going to happen to us in our time." What does this cause him to do? It causes him to be drunken and to smite his fellow servants. In other words, it increases wickedness.

God has pronounced a woe, a curse. He said, "Look at the nations around you." Now, in verse 3, you do not believe anything is going to

happen to you, and because you do not believe that, it increases your wickedness. Verses 4 through 6 give evidence of their carnal security: "that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall, that chant to the sound of the vial, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David, that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

It reminds you of the economic summit our leaders had recently, where they were served $300 bottles of wine. The world's in collapse, people are losing their homes, people cannot eat, and they are having $300 bottles of wine with their meal. All I am trying to show you is simply this.

When you believe in a false carnal security and a false hope of impunity, you increase in wickedness. These people were adding to themselves luxuries, leisure, and licentiousness. Isn't that happening today? Look at the ruling elite and see where in the world they are and what they are doing. Amos says they "drink wine in bowls," plenty of it, and "anoint themselves with the chief ointments"; they spare nothing.

But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Let me spell this out for you in good South Georgia lingo: They couldn't give a flip concerning anybody else. They were only interested in themselves. The persecutions, afflictions, injustices, and suffering of their people did not faze them one little bit. They viewed their brethren as sheep to be shorn, a people that needed to be ruled, and a prize ripe for the picking.

I certainly disagree with what our government has done in these bailouts. They are not only unconstitutional and unbiblical, but contrary to common sense. How many of the little people are going to be helped by these bailouts? Not one. But I'll guarantee you the cronies of the ruling elite are going to prosper. While they are building themselves beds of ivory, drinking wine out of bowls, increasing their portfolios, and ripping off the people left and right, they do not care one little bit for the people.

Judgment Pronounced on the Rulers

That is what God says in the day of Amos. These rulers were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Now note the judgment upon them: "Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretch themselves shall be removed. The Lord God hath sworn by himself, saith the Lord God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city and all that is therein." God said that all these rulers, making hay while the sun was shining, robbing and stealing amid corruption and fraud, would go into captivity first. Everything they had would be removed. They would lose. They had become so wicked that God said, "I hate the excellency of Jacob," their palaces, and would deliver everyone up.

Now let me show you how thorough and complete the judgment is going to be. Skip down to verse 11: "For behold, the Lord commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches and the little house with clefts." If God is going to smite the great house with breaches—that is, break it open—and the little house with clefts, break it open and cleave it asunder too, what is left? Nothing. What is God saying? In essence, "I'll get them all. They're not going to escape. I shall get them all."

The Absurdity of Perversion: Horses on Rocks

Now look at verse 12 with this context in mind, remembering that it is a context of judgment: "Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen? For you have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock."

Amos has given them the curse of God upon them and told them exactly what God is going to do. He now grabs their attention with two powerful illustrations and asks two simple questions: "Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen?" You and I both know that horses were not made to run upon rocks. Today, horses may be shod and travel upon some hard surfaces, but even those shoes do not last; they have to be replaced. Even with shoes, horses still cannot run upon rocks. If you try to run a horse upon rocks without proper shoeing, it will destroy its hooves, ankles, and limbs.

In other words, the animal would become absolutely useless and worthless. Everyone has seen the old western where the horse supposedly breaks its leg. What does the cowboy do? He shoots the horse. Why? Because the horse is worthless. It is useless; it cannot do anything.

Amos is trying to get them to think this through. “Shall horses run upon the rocks?” No. They do not run upon rocks. It is impossible; if a horse tried it, it would be self-destruction. Then he asks another simple question: “Do oxen plow upon the rocks?” Oxen are no more suited to climbing upon rocks than horses are. Even if an ox could get upon the rocks, what would happen to the point of the plow falling behind it? It would be broken. Plows are not intended to rip open rocks and mountains; they are intended to rip open dirt.

Amos asks two simple questions: “Shall horses run upon the rocks?” No. “Shall oxen plow upon the rocks?” No. How stupid could anyone be to think such a thing? What they were doing was not only against nature; it was also against common sense. Why did he ask those questions? Go back to verse 12: “Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen?”

Then he charges them: “For you have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.” Having established the impossibility of running horses upon the rock and plowing with oxen upon the rock, the prophet continues his charge: “You’ve turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.” As absurd as it is to run horses upon the rocks and try to plow with oxen upon the rocks, it is equally absurd to seek gain from injustice and oppression, to which God has annexed both loss and woe, both temporal and eternal.

One cannot change the course of nature any more than he can hinder or change God’s providence or God’s laws of retribution. What they were doing in their society and judicial system was not only against nature; it was against common sense. If they thought they could profit from running horses upon rocks and plowing upon rocks with oxen, they were equally foolish to think they could pervert God’s law and God’s justice and escape His righteous vengeance. It is impossible.

Turning Judgment into Gall and Hemlock

The Hebrew word for “judgment” is mishpat, indicating judgment, justice, and righteousness. The rulers were turning justice or judgment and righteousness into gall. The word for “gall” is rosh, translated as gall, venom, poison, and hemlock. In Amos 6:12, judgment means justice, and the fruit of righteousness refers not only to justice but to the sweet results obtained thereby—the equity and justice that would have been produced through the application of God’s law. Thus, they had turned judgment or justice into gall or poison, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock. Hemlock is a known and notorious poison. The Hebrew word la’anah refers to wormwood or hemlock, an extremely bitter poison that produces sickness and death. Sometimes it is translated “wormwood” in our Bibles, but even when it is so translated, it still indicates death.

Look in your Bibles, hold Amos 6, but turn if you would please to Deuteronomy 29 and verse 18. Deuteronomy 29 and verse 18. Deuteronomy 29 verse 18. Watch carefully now. "Lest there should be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations. Lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood."

And if you read on down, it's talking about idolatry. It's the curse of God upon the idolaters. And by the way, someone tell me, what was the penalty for idolatry? Death. And notice how he uses it, "lest there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood" or hemlock. You drink hemlock, you're dead. You leave God and go to idols, you're dead. You have the curse of God upon you.

Skip right over to the book of Proverbs chapter 5 and verse 4. Proverbs 5 and verse 4. Now I want you to note in this passage, Proverbs 5 and verse 4, he's talking about the harlot. Proverbs 5 verse 4, and look what God says concerning those who visit the harlots. He says in Proverbs 5 and verse 4, "Her end is bitter as wormwood" or hemlock, "sharp as a two-edged sword, her feet go down to death, her step takes hold in hell." Huh. What's he talking about? Death, wormwood, hemlock, but it's still death. Look in your Bibles to the book of Revelation chapter 8 and verse 11. Revelation 8

and verse 11. Notice the word "wormwood" and notice if you would that death is associated with it. Revelation 8 and verse 11.

"And the name of that star is called Wormwood and the third part of the waters became wormwood and many men died of the waters because they were made bitter." Wormwood equals death.

Now go back to the book of Amos. Because I want you to see in Amos 5 and verse 7. Amos 5 verse 7. Here's the word "wormwood" again. Look at Amos 5 verse 7. He says, "You who turn judgment to wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth." You who turn judgment or justice into wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth. Now the Hebrew word for "judgment" in Amos 5 and verse 7 is the word "mishpat," which is exactly the same word that is used in Amos 6 and verse 12. Notice that turning judgment into wormwood is the same as turning justice into hemlock. It is death. Death to individuals, death to families, death to cultures, death to societies, and death to nations. Once judgment is turned into wormwood, gall, or hemlock, righteousness is no more. It is gone. It is perverted.

It has now become injustice, corruption, and fraud. John Calvin, in his commentary, gave three possible interpretations of Amos 6:12. The verse asks, “Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plow there with oxen? For you've turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.”

Calvin's Interpretations and the Correct View

Calvin says that some think the prophet means, by these figurative expressions, that the people were wholly unprofitable as to anything good. As someone says, “The slothful ox wishes for the saddle, the horse wishes to plow.” They suppose the meaning is: You are no more fitted to lead a good life than a horse is to run on a rock or an ox to plow upon a rock.

The second interpretation is that the prophet complains that the order of things was subverted: “You have alike confounded all equity in government and justice. In short, you have subverted all right, as when one tries to ride swiftly over a high rock or attempts to plow

there, contrary to the nature of things. You have therefore become monsters."

The third interpretation is that the prophet complains he had lost all his labor, having been singing according to the common proverb to the deaf: "What do I affect as to this iron generation? It is the same as if one tried to ride on the rock, to mount a rock on a swift horse, or as one attempted to plow there, both which are impossible. So now when I address stupid men, there is no fruit to my labor, and no advantage is gained." These are three simple interpretations. One says the people are not fitted for anything.

Number two, the government has perverted all right and justice, and society as well. Third, Amos is complaining that nobody listens to him. I believe the second interpretation is right because it fits both immediate and remote contexts. Amos is complaining that they had confounded all equity in government and justice. It had become so polluted, poisoned, and perverted that the only remedy was for God to destroy them in judgment and justice. In other words, there was no longer any justice in the nation; therefore, there was no hope for the nation.

I want you to turn in your Bibles—hold Amos 6, but turn to Jeremiah, chapter 22. I hope you can put two and two together. I want you to see the impact and implication of hemlock justice.

Jehoiakim: An Example of Hemlock Justice

Before I read this, I have used this illustration before, but I want you to think about it. I tell people that I am not a communist. I have no sympathies for communism and no leanings toward communism. But there is one communist who said one thing that I quote fairly often. Gus Hall said, "The reason we referred our judicial system as the halls of justice is because the only place you can get any justice is out in the halls." That is basically true. You cannot get any in the courtroom today because no one is interested in justice.

Not the judges, not the attorneys. There is a big difference between justice and legalities and technicalities and wanting to win. Look in Jeremiah chapter 22, beginning with verse 13. Compare our society today with what is said there. God says, "Woe unto him that

buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong, that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work, that saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth them out windows, and it is sealed with cedar, and painted with vermilion." In other words, it is a very expensive house. How did he get it? Through fraud, corruption, and deceit.

Now watch what God asks in verse 15: "Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice? And then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then it was well with him. Was not this to know me, saith the Lord?"

"But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence to do it. Therefore, thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, my brother, or Ah, my sister. They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, Lord, or Ah, his glory. He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

God is saying, "You are building your great palaces and expensive homes, sealed with cedar and painted with vermilion." Then He asks, "Shalt thou reign because you have all of this—all this wealth, money, riches, power, and prestige?" What did He mean by doing justice and judgment? Verse 16 explains it: "He judged the cause of the poor and the needy, then it was well with him." "Was not this to know me, saith the Lord?" What is it to know God? To obey Him, to honor Him, and to follow His law.

"Your fathers obeyed Me, but you don't. They didn't have all of this, but it was well with them because they obeyed Me. You've got all of this and you disobey Me. And you think things are going to go well for you now? Oh no." Now look what God does. God singles them out and tells them in verse 17, here's what they are doing.

"Thine eyes and thine heart are not but for covetousness." In other words, the only thing they want is for themselves. And by the way, if that doesn't describe this generation, I don't know what does. Everyone is out for themselves, period. They could care less about anyone else. He says, "But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for

thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence to do it."

Now God picks out a prime example of this injustice, corruption, and fraud. It happens to be Jehoiakim, a wicked, ungodly king and the son of Josiah of Judah. God says, "Look, here's what's going to happen, Jehoiakim. I'm going to kill you. No one's going to lament for you; no one's going to mourn for you. In fact," He said, "you're going to be buried with the burial of an ass. You're going to be drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

How did they bury asses? They didn't. They just threw them on the dung heap and let them rot.

Now, here's what God is saying: I don't think too highly of those individuals who pervert justice, violate My law, and refuse to bow to Me. I don't think too highly of those who pervert justice and turn it into hemlock, or who exercise covetousness, oppression, and violence. When He says Jehoiakim was going to be buried with the burial of an ass, He meant that Jehoiakim was going to be unloved, unmourned, uncared for, and treated as unclean. When Jehoiakim died, no one lost anything. It was good riddance.

The nation benefited from his death. He was a wicked, corrupt, perverted ruler who had met his match in God. And God said, "I'll show you what I think of him. Drag him out of Jerusalem and throw him on the dung heap. Let him rot."

And the people said, "Good riddance." Let me ask you: if God would not let Jehoiakim, Jerusalem, or Samaria escape because they had perverted His law and His justice, do you somehow think that we are going to be permitted to escape? Do you think those men who are in high positions, with high power and lots of money, are somehow going to escape? Oh no. Like Jehoiakim, they'll be buried with the burial of an ass.

In Amos 6:12, God asks, "Shall horses run upon the rock?" The answer is no. "Will one plow there with oxen?" The answer is no. He says, "For you have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock." Here is what will happen because they have done this. Verse 13 says, "You who rejoice in a thing of naught, who say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?"

Rejoicing in Naught and Self-Exaltation

They were rejoicing in a thing of naught. Naught is nothing: zilch, zero, nada. It was not one thing. Their rejoicing was totally empty. Why? Because they were rejoicing in themselves. They were rejoicing in absolutely nothing. Look again at verse 13: "You who rejoice in a thing of naught, who say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?"

Somehow, in those days and in our days, we rejoice in government. We rejoice in our political leaders, our political programs, and our political parties. How many people really think that Obama will change this country for the better? He will change it, but not for the better. If McCain had gotten in, would he have changed it for the better? No. The answer is the same regardless of the person, party, or program in which people place their confidence.

Salvation is not in man. Salvation is not in parties. Salvation is not in programs. Salvation is in the Lord alone.

Here is the epitome of the pride of Jerusalem and the pride of Samaria: "You who rejoice in a thing of naught, who say, Have we not taken us horns by our own strength?" They were claiming that they had taken horns by their own strength. Horns in the Bible speak of power, strength, pride, and position.

The word "horn," or "horns," may be used in a good sense, and it may also be used in a bad sense. In 1 Samuel chapter 2, the word "horn," or "horns," is used in a good sense. Remember, the word "horn" speaks of power and strength. When you think of a rhinoceros, you think of its horn.

At our place, there is an eight-foot harrow, one of those big implements that turns soil, and it probably weighs 1,000 pounds. When Voregard was alive and in his prime, that big bull, Alice and I went out to hook up to that harrow because I was going to plow up some land. I found that harrow turned upside down, totally, completely flipped over. That big bull had stood there, put his horns under it, raised his head, and totally flipped that harrow over. I had to take a chain in the tractor and pull it back over before I could hook up to it. Horns speak of strength. Horns speak of power.

Here is the good use of it. Look in 1 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 1: "And Hannah prayed and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, my horn is exalted in the Lord, my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation." What was Hannah doing? She was rejoicing in her power, in her strength over her enemies, which only was in the Lord. It was not anywhere else.

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 148 and verse 14. Referring to our God, the Bible says, "He also exalted the horn of His people, the praise of all of His saints, even of the children of Israel, the people near them, praise ye the Lord." He exalted the horn of His people. In other words, it is God who gives us strength. It is God who gives us power. So it is used in a good sense.

Here is another passage, back in 1 Samuel 2 and verse 10: "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces. Out of the heaven shall He thunder upon them, the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed." So here are three passages, and there are a multitude more, where the word "horn" is used in a good sense.

But turn now to Psalm 75. Here is a warning for men not to exalt themselves. Beginning with verse 4: "I said unto the fools, lift not up the horn, lift not up your horn on high, speak not with a stiff neck." What do the wicked do when they lift up their horn? They speak with a stiff neck.

They were glorying in their power, their strength, and their position. God says you better not do it. Look in Jeremiah chapter 48, verse 25. Here is another example of the horn of power of the wicked being cut off: "The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the Lord." What does God do when He cuts off the horn? He breaks the arm. When your arm is broken, what have you lost? Your power, your strength, your ability.

Then, in Lamentations chapter 2 and verse 3, you will see that this is exactly what God did to Jerusalem. This is what Amos chapter 6 is talking about: "He hath cut off in His fierce anger all the horn of Israel. He hath drawn back His right hand from before the enemy, and He burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoured

round about him." What did God do? He cut off the horn of Jerusalem. He broke their power, their strength, and their back.

Now look back in your Bibles to Amos chapter 6, verse 13. In light of verse 12, what were they doing? They were turning judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock. Then he says, "You who rejoice in a thing of naught, who say, Have we not taken us horns by our own strength?" In other words, we do not need God. We do not need God's law. We do not need anyone to tell us what to do or how to do it. We can handle it ourselves.

God's Certain Judgment and Applications

Get to verse 14. God says, "But behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD, the God of hosts, and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness." What did the people in Amos's day say? "We have strength. We have power. We can work things out. Why, in the next two years I'm going to create two and a half million jobs. I'm going to turn this economy around."

"I will do this and I will do that. And we're going to keep the same old gang in power, and we'll rejoice in our perversion, in our corruption, in our fraud, and we will continue to turn judgment into gall and the fruits of righteousness into hemlock." God had a word for the haughty rulers of Israel and Jerusalem who imagined that they could defy God and His law and escape judgment. God says, "Listen, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the Lord God of hosts, and they shall afflict you."

By the time they get into the country, they will start afflicting you until they finish the job. God sent Assyria against the northern kingdom and against the southern kingdom, as well as Babylon. You know what the Bible says in Isaiah 28:21? Judgment is the work of God. It is something that God does. He will do it: "For the Lord shall rise up in Mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act." Judgment is referred to as God's strange act and God's strange work, but He said, "I will bring it to pass. I will do it."

Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 7. God is not embarrassed to bring forth His judgment. If you think that God is embarrassed or will act slowly in judging, you need to read these verses, beginning with verse 9: "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keepeth His commandments to a thousand generations, and repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack to him that hateth Him. He will repay Him to His face."

God is not embarrassed to bring forth His judgment. He was not embarrassed to raise up those Assyrians or those Babylonians. God continued to send them until the nation was basically destroyed and the people carried into captivity. Those rulers who perverted and poisoned justice finally received their justice. They discovered that God is the just God. As they had done to others, so God did unto them.

Let me make a couple of applications. As you look at Amos 6 and verse 12, Amos uses illustrations from agriculture to illustrate the stupidity and insanity of fighting against God and seeking to profit from poisoned justice—which is not justice, but injustice, corruption, and fraud. Those who seek to run horses upon rocks and those who seek to plow upon rocks with oxen will soon discover that they are not merely fighting against nature; they are fighting against divine providence and, ultimately, the sovereign God of heaven and earth, who happens to be the judge of all the earth.

If you look, when you get home, to Psalm 82, you will find a psalm against judges. God says that because of their corruption and perversion, they literally turned the world upside down. When hemlock justice issues forth, the world is turned upside down, society dies, righteousness dies, and wickedness flourishes.

"When the unrighteous are exalted, the wicked walk on every side." God is the determiner of justice. God is the one who defines justice and tells us what is just and what is unjust, what is right and what is not right. It is absolutely impossible to have justice without God, just as it is impossible to have righteousness without God. When men violate God's law and go contrary to the truth of the Bible, they are neither right nor just, nor can they be.

Conclusion: Love Christ, Love Life

Our Lord said it plainly in Proverbs 8:35–36: "For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me love death." What is hemlock justice? It is death: death to the individual, death to the family, death to the church, death to society, death to the culture, and death to the nation. All they that hate Christ love death. If we love Christ and love His Word, we will bring our lives into conformity to that Word and bring forth true justice and true righteousness.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ for Your love, grace, and mercy. Strengthen us and give us wisdom, discernment, and understanding. Help us to know where we have come from and where we are, that we may see where we are going. Father, overthrow the wicked; break their horn, their power, and their arm. We pray for the establishment of Thy kingdom. Thou didst teach us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We pray for the establishment of Thy righteousness, Thy people, and Thy law. Once again, we would worship Thee and serve Thee in obedience and truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

The Sinful Cycle

Amos chapter 2, verse 4: "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem."

Introduction: Linear History with Sinful Cycles

If Henry were here, he would try to tell me that the sinful cycle refers to a bicycle that has gone bad. No, that is not what it refers to.

History is linear and not cyclical. By linear, I mean that history runs in a straight line rather than simply going around in huge circles. It had a definite beginning and proceeds to a definite conclusion. God began history with the words, "In the beginning, God," and He concludes history with these words from Revelation 11:15: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Paganism teaches that all history is cyclical. The pagans teach that we are simply going around in one huge circle.

Consequently, in the cyclical view of history, there is no meaning to life, there's no purpose to anything that happens. In fact, according to the pagans, it is just simply luck, chance, fate, karma, or whatever you want to call it. We have to acknowledge that history is definitely linear. But at the same time, while we acknowledge that, we also have to acknowledge that history is proceeding to the predestinated and ordained end that God has purposed and ordained before the world ever began. But in that linear predestinated straight line, yes, there are circles as it proceeds to that definite conclusion. And the reason there are circles is not because history is cyclical, but simply because man keeps repeating the same sins over and over.

Let me give you two quotes. One of them you will recognize, the other you will not. But the Scottish historian Alexander Tyler supposedly said this: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largess from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy."

The Cycle from Freedom to Bondage

That is exactly what is happening today. The following quote, also attributed to Alexander Tyler, shows the cycle from freedom to slavery: “From bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to complacency, from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependence, and from dependence back into bondage.” The quote indicates a cycle, but it is a cycle based upon man’s sins, failures, disobediences, and rebellion.

Biblical Illustration: The Book of Judges

It is something that happens in the linear progress of history. A biblical illustration will help explain this. In the book of Judges, there is a definite cycle as they progressed in a linear line. First, there was freedom under God and His law. Second, there was sin and rebellion, whereby they gave themselves over to idolatry.

Thirdly, God raised up adversaries against them who persecuted them. Fourthly, they began to repent and cry to the Lord for help and mercy. Fifthly, God raised up a deliverer, a judge, and sent him to deliver His people.

The Sinful Cycle

It is a cycle. You can study the book of Judges and see it repeated over and over, throughout the Bible. But that does not mean history is cyclical. History is still linear. As men repeat these same sins, they are heading toward that definite, predestined, ordained end that God ordained, though they keep repeating the same sins. In Amos chapter 2, verses 4 and 5, we see this sinful cycle.

Step 1: Despisement of God's Law

The cycle has four parts: despisement, disobedience, deceit, and destruction. It begins with despisement, leads to disobedience, then to deceit, and finally to destruction. Let us take these one at a time. First, look at verse 4 and their despisement: “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because, look, they have despised the law of the Lord.” Judah was supposed to be God’s people. It was there that we found the temple; there the Levitical priesthood did their work; there the law was to be taught.

Yet they despised the law of God. Can it be possible for God’s people to despise His law? Is it also possible to despise God Himself? We use many euphemisms today—a light word replacing one that we would call heavy. For instance, most people do not talk about folks dying; they say they passed.

Today, we use euphemisms to ameliorate our sins. Instead of speaking of adultery and fornication, we say, “He’s having an affair.” Why not call it adultery or fornication? Instead of calling it sodomy, we just call it being gay. Why not call it what it is, sodomites? Instead of despising God’s law today, we just refer to such people as independent thinkers.

Euphemisms may work for us, but they do not work for God. God sees things as they really are, and He calls things as they really are.

The Word of God teaches us very plainly that we either love Him or hate Him. We are either for Him or against Him; there is no in-between at all.

Is it possible, then, to despise the name of God, the law of God, the Word of God, the judgments of God—yea, even to despise God Himself?

In Amos 2:4, when the Bible says, "because they have despised the law of the Lord," the Hebrew word is ma'as, which means to despise, abhor, reject, and to become loathsome. So the law of God became loathsome to them. They did not even want to think about it or consider it. This was not a new danger, nor was it hidden from them; the Lord had already warned them what would follow when they rejected His statutes and hated His judgments. The warning appears plainly in Leviticus 26.

Leviticus 26:15 says, "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." Notice that He said, "if you despise my statutes and your soul abhor"—that is a strong word for hatred—"if your soul hate my judgments." Verse 43 continues, "The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes."

Someone may object and say, "But pastor, I would not and I could not despise God or His word. I love the Lord and His word. I could never despise Him. I want to honor Him." Well, let me ask you a few questions. Have you ever put yourself ahead of God? Have you ever turned from His will to do your will? Have you known what the Word of God proclaimed on a subject, yet ignored the plain teaching of the Word of God in order to do what you wanted to do and have what you wanted to have? You know the answer to those questions. Every answer is yes.

Let me explain and demonstrate the sinfulness and ramifications of despising God and His law by considering one of the greatest men of the Old Testament: King David. Remember, King David is known

as the sweet psalmist of Israel. He was a man after God's own heart, a man who wrote most of the Psalms, and a man known for his love and devotion to God. He was chosen by God to be king, captain, and leader of God's people. You would think that such a man as David could never despise God or His law. Yet if you look in your Bibles at 2 Samuel chapter 12, you understand that this is where David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah her husband killed with the sword of the children of Ammon.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 12:1-6 (KJV)

> And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.
>
> And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; are you looking, because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy

wife." God said to David, "You've not only despised my commandments, you've despised me."

The Hebrew word for despise here is bazah. Literally, it means to treat with contempt, disdain, or vileness; to scorn as worthless and despicable. Notice that it is treating God as worthless and despicable. David despised God's commandments, but God is the author of those commandments. He gave His law for our benefit, direction, and guidance. When we despise His word, we despise God. How, then, did David despise God? The answer is by despising His commandments.

He refused to obey Him. He did that which he wanted instead of that which God wanted. He did that which he willed instead of that which God willed. Consequently, God told David, "Thou hast despised Me."

Now let me show you how this develops in Scripture. In 2 Chronicles 36, we live in a land that despises the law of God. We live in a land where churches and Christian people despise the law of God. Notice verse 15: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

Verse 16 says, "they mocked the messengers of God," and then, "despised his words." "His" is singular. Whose words were the messengers carrying? God's. The prophets were preaching the Word of God; therefore, when they mocked God's messengers and despised His words, they were despising God who gave that Word. In other words, when you despise the preached Word of God, you are in essence despising God Himself. Do you remember in 1 Samuel 8, when Israel demanded a king, although the Lord God was their King? God told Samuel, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee,"

"But they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." So the Lord said to Samuel, "This is a personal rejection of Me." In verse 8, God also says, "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 people forsake the Word of God, they forsake the people or preachers who preach the Word of God. When you forsake the preacher who preaches the Word of God, you are guilty of forsaking the Word of God. When you forsake the Word of God, you are equally guilty of forsaking the One who gave the Law of God. When you despise the preachers of God, you are despising the Word of God; when you despise the Word of God, you are despising the God who gave the Word. Thus, God charged Judah and Jerusalem with despisement of His Word, and therefore with despising God Himself.

The despisement of God and of His Word is not a light and trifling sin. It is a monstrous sin, and everyone ought to dread it as such. We cannot despise the law of God without insulting God, because we are insulting His holiness, His majesty, and His greatness. When we despise the law of God, in essence, we despise God Himself.

Step 2: Disobedience Follows Despisement

Now go back to Amos 2 and look at verse 4: "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof." Here is the first step: they have despised the law of God. Now here is the second step in the cycle: "And have not kept his commandments." Disobedience. Despisement always leads to disobedience. If we did not despise the Word of God, we would obey it. When we treat the Word of God contemptuously, with disdain and disregard, and do not believe it, we quickly, easily, and readily disobey it. In Proverbs chapter 1 and verse 30, God says this concerning the people.

He said, "They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof." What is the charge? They would not listen to God. They despised God's counsel; they would not have His reproof. Thus, verses 31 and 32 say: "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."

They would not listen to God, so what did they do? They disobeyed. Despisement always leads to disobedience. Anytime you despise the Word of God, you turn to your own devices. This is why, whenever you despise the law of God, it always leads to disobedience.

If I were to ask you, why is it that adultery and fornication abound? Why is it everywhere you turn there are sexual perversions? Just try to find a television show today that does not promote fornication, sodomy, bestiality, transsexuals, or voyeurism. It is everywhere you turn. Why? Proverbs 5:12 gives the answer: "And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof?"

To understand verse 12, go back to verse 1: "My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof?"

What is the instruction and reproof being despised? It is God's law, including "thou shalt not commit adultery" and "thou shalt not covet," and God's law forbidding fornication. Yet, when you look around, you find all this disobedience. Why? Because God's law is despised.

Now let me put it to you the way David and Paul did. David said it in Psalm 36 and verse 1: "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes." Paul said it very simply in Romans 3 and verse 18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." They despise God. They despise His Word. They do not fear Him. Therefore they disobey Him.

Why do men despise the Word of God? Why do men despise God? Psalm 10 shows us what it takes to despise God and His Word. “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. 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.

“He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it. Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.”

Notice the attitude of the wicked: God does not see this. God does not care. And if He cares, and if He does see it, so what? He will never require it.

He will not bring us to justice. In other words, to the wicked, God is a non-person. He does not exist. Or, if He does exist, He is a poor, helpless, impotent being that can do nothing. Therefore, the Ten Commandments to them are nothing more than ten suggestions, which they may easily, quickly, and readily forget and disobey. Because you despise God and His law, you always disobey. Despisement always leads to disobedience.

Go back in your Bibles to Amos chapter 2. I want you to see the third step in this sinful cycle. Notice Amos 2 and verse 4: “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not

turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord." That is the first step. "And have not kept his commandments"—disobedience. That is the second step. Here is the third: "And their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked." That is their deceit. Their lies cause them to err after which their fathers had walked.

Step 3: Deceit Follows Disobedience

Second Thessalonians 2 and verse 11 speaks of the wicked believing a lie. When you refuse to believe the truth, the only thing left is a lie. If you will not believe the truth, you will believe a lie.

When the Bible, in Amos 2 and verse 4, says, "their lies cause them to err," the lies here would either refer to their idols, to their own delusional thinking, or to both. But when you read the latter part of verse 4, "after the which their fathers have walked," you would tend to think that it refers to their idols, because idols in the Bible are often called lies. Yet lying vanities cause you to think delusionally; in other words, you do not think in reality.

Psalm 115, beginning at verse 4, describes these idols, or lies, that are nothing more than deceit: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 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. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

If an idol is a dumb thing that cannot speak, see, hear, handle, walk, or move—if it is dumb and dead—what does it say? "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." They are deluded and deceived. Despisement leads to disobedience, and disobedience leads to deceit. They would never have been deceived by these idols had they not first despised God and His law and then disobeyed God. If they had not despised and disobeyed God, they would know and understand. Just as disobedience follows despisement, deceit follows disobedience. You either hate God or love Him; you either hate His law or abhor His law.

There is no in-between. When one rejects God and His Word, he will always choose his own lie, and his own lie will always deceive him. Our Lord said it plainly in Matthew 6:24: “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.”

John Calvin wrote concerning this verse: “As soon then as men swerve from God's word, they involve themselves in many delusions and cannot but go astray, and this is deserving of special notice. We indeed see how much wisdom the world claims for itself. For as soon as we invent anything, we're greatly delighted with it. And the ape, according to the old proverb, is pleased with his own offspring. But this vice especially prevails when by our devices we corrupt and adulterate the worship of God. Hence the prophet, he declares that whatever is added to God's word and whatever men invent in their own brains is a lie.” All this, he says, is nothing but an imposture.

That is why we see stupid, spurious signs in front of church buildings, such as “God loves you, have a safe and happy trick or treat,” or, “Hang out with Jesus, He hung out for you.” How can people be so flippant and ignorant? Because they have despised the law of God and disobeyed; now they are deceived by their own inventions and delusions. Isaiah 30:12 says, “Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon.” In other words, you despise God's word, trust in your own perverseness, and stay with it.

Look at Ezekiel chapter 20. This passage shows how despisement leads to disobedience, and how disobedience always leads to deceit. It cannot get any plainer than this. In verse 16, God says, "Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols." Then verse 24 says, "Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols." What is God saying? God is saying that deceit follows disobedience, and disobedience follows despisement. This is the order He sets before us.

Step 4: Destruction as Judgment

When you despise, you disobey. When you disobey, you become deceived. The last step in the cycle is destruction. In Amos 2:5, God says, “But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.” That is their destruction.

In verse 4, God says, “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.” If we took time to go through the first several chapters of Amos, we would see an amazing thing. In Amos 2:1, concerning Moab, God says, “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.” The same formula appears in verse 4 concerning Judah: “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.”

Were the Moabites the people of God? No. Yet in verse 6, God says, “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.” Was it Israel, especially the southern tribes—Judah and Benjamin in Jerusalem—the people of God? Isn’t it amazing that the same formula God pronounces against the heathen nations He also uses against His own people? If His people transgress and act like the heathen, they will be judged like the heathen. For three transgressions and for four, God said, “I’m not going to turn away the punishment of Judah. I’m not going to turn away the punishment of Jerusalem.” No, no, no. He said, “I’ll send a fire upon Judah, and I’ll devour the palaces of Jerusalem.”

Isaiah 5:24 speaks of their destruction: “Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.”

Let me put this in New Testament language. You do not have to turn there; I am sure you can quote it. First Peter 4:17 says, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” The point I am trying to make is this: God is not

going to allow any people to escape who despise Him and His law and who disobey Him. They will always go into deceit, and their deceit will always bring them into judgment.

Principles of Judgment

There are several principles of judgment clearly taught in the New Testament. The first one is found in Romans 2:12. “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.” No sinner will escape God’s righteous judgment. What about some of those people over darkest Africa who have never heard the law of God? They have never heard the law of God, but they are still going to be judged. If they have sinned without law, they are going to be judged without law. They are going to be judged. What about us who have the law? We are going to be judged in the law. No one is going to escape the righteous judgment of God.

Sinners have the responsibility to seek God and seek His law. They do not. They will not. That just adds to their condemnation. That simply adds to their judgment. But those who have the law and refuse to hear, heed, and obey the law shall also be punished in the law. They shall not escape either.

The next principle is in Luke 12:47–48. This principle is easily understood as well. Our Lord is talking about a servant; in fact, He gives an illustration of two servants. “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.”

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” Our Lord said that he who knew his Lord’s will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes, while he who did not know the Lord’s will and did wrong shall be beaten with fewer stripes. Then He says, “of whom much is given, much is required.” The greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability. The more light, knowledge, and opportunity we have, the greater our responsibility and condemnation.

Let me ask you to consider a pagan nation as an illustration—say, China. China has never been Christian as a nation. Certainly, there have been Christian missionaries there, the gospel has been taught, and probably there are believers; but as a nation, it has never had the law or truth of God. If they do wrong, what will happen? God will judge them. God will destroy them.

But here we are in this country, built upon the foundation of the Word of God, with churches on every corner and thousands of Bibles everywhere. The average home has four or five Bibles. That does not mean people read them, but they have them. Do we have greater opportunities? Do we have greater responsibility? Yes. What does that mean? When God whips the living daylights out of us, He will give us more stripes, because to whomever you give more, you expect more. The greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability.

Knowledge compounds responsibility. When one has truth and deliberately turns from it, or refuses to obey it, the greater is his sin. That is why the Bible says in James 4:17, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Look back in Amos chapter 2. Notice verse 4: "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, they have not kept his commandments,"—disobedience—"their lies have caused them"—their deceit. Then comes the judgment: "But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem."

Did God send a fire upon Judah? Did He devour the palaces of Jerusalem? All one has to do is ask a simple question: Where are they today?

The specific answer is yes. He sent Nebuchadnezzar against Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC and destroyed them. Jeremiah 52:12–14 records: "Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, which served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, And burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire: And all the army of the

Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about." That was 586.

What did he do in 70 AD? He sent the Romans. Where is the temple? It was destroyed. Amos 2:5 says, "But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem." Jerusalem was the chief city of Judah's kingdom, the city of God, where the temple of God was located and the seats of justice were to be. It was the very place from which God's law was to go forth and rule, yet it was destroyed.

Judah's position as a God-fearing nation, and as a nation professing to be God's people, did not hinder, thwart, or deter God's judgment. Jerusalem was destroyed for its sins, just like Babylon, Moab, and Edom. The objection often heard concerning judgment falling on America is, "Ah, but we're a Christian nation." Oh?

If God destroyed Judah and Jerusalem, He is not going to hold back when it comes to America. If God destroyed Babylon and Assyria, He is not going to hold back when it comes to America, because we are just as pagan and heathenistic as those nations. We despise the law of God, disobeyed the law of God, and held to deceit. The only thing left is destruction.

The only difference between God's dealing with the heathen nations and His dealing with His own people is this: when God deals with His own people, He always leaves a remnant. There is always a minority, always an elect. God will totally destroy the heathen, but He never totally destroys His own people. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 9:29, quoting Isaiah: "And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha." God was merciful, and God left a remnant.

Here is the sinful cycle that is repeated over and over: despisement, disobedience, deceit, and destruction. Despisement led to disobedience; disobedience led to deceit; and deceit led to destruction. Wherever you turn in the Bible or in history, you will find it.

Application: Breaking the Sinful Cycle

All these go hand in hand. Destruction without grace only leads to more despisement. It means that people are hardened in their sins. Like those men in Revelation chapter 9, when God judged them, “Yet they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.” They were hardened in their rebellion and sins. Now let me make just two applications.

If you and I are going to break the sinful cycle—not only in our lives, but in our families, churches, states, and nations—we must repent and learn to honor and obey God as He clearly demands in His Word. First Samuel 2:30 says, "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 did God say? Them that honor me will I honor. If you want to be honored by God, you must honor God. But if you despise God, God says you will be lightly esteemed. God will not think well of you.

Warning to America

He will not think well of any nation, country, church, or people who despise Him and His Word. If we do not repent, we cannot expect the most favored nation status with God. He will judge and destroy America just as easily and quickly as He judges and destroys any other heathen nation. There is a great difference between a people who profess to be God's people in name only and those who profess to be His people and obey Him. It does no good to say, "but we're a Christian nation, we're a Christian people." God does not honor an empty, meaningless, worthless profession. If we are His people, the evidence is that we honor and obey Him. If we are not His people, the evidence is that we despise and disobey Him, hold our own deceits, and end up in destruction.

A sinful cycle can only be broken with repentance and obedience. Let's pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace and your mercy. We pray that you would indeed help us, build us up in the most holy faith. Give us wisdom, dear Lord, to know how to obey thee and how to honor thee, how to exalt thee. Grant us

repentance, we pray. Move in our hearts. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

A Whore's Forehead

Introduction: The Charge of a Whore's Forehead

Jeremiah chapter 3, beginning with verse 1: “They say, If a man put away his wife and she go from him and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? For thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, saith the Lord. Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lain with. In the ways hast thou set for them as the Arabian in the wilderness, and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withholding, and there hath been no latter rain, and thou hast a whore's forehead, thou refusest to be ashamed.”

It may surprise you to learn that the Word of God is very specific in warning against whoring, prostitution, and harlotry. It may also surprise you to learn that whoredom and harlotry are frequently mentioned in the Bible. In fact, many passages deal with this subject. Proverbs chapters 5 through 7 are some of the best-known passages, but there are many others as well.

We are going to look at a number of them shortly. It is not my intent today to deal with each passage, because I want to convey a specific truth in relationship to the general truth of harlotry. As I was reading through the book of Jeremiah, chapter 3 and verse 3 caught my eye, when God said to His professing and covenantal people, “Thou hast a whore's forehead and refusest to be ashamed.”

So I have a question for you this morning. Do not be offended when I ask it, because I am asking it to show you the implication of the subject: Do you have a whore's forehead? The implication should be clear: none of us have one, want to have one, or expect to have one. How in the world, then, can I ask such a question? We must understand that when the Bible speaks of harlotry or whoredom, there is a spiritual as well as a physical harlotry and whoredom.

Spiritual Harlotry in Scripture

In fact, God calls apostate Israel a whore. He says that she is worse than a whore. Look in Ezekiel chapter 16, at verses 30 through 35, and notice what God says concerning apostate Israel.

God says, “How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman.” Israel was doing the work of an imperious, whorish woman. In verse 31 He continues: “In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street, and hast not been as a harlot, in that thou scornest hire; but as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband.”

Then, in verse 33, He says, “They give gifts to all whores, but thou givest thy gifts to thy lovers, and hirest them that they may come unto thee on every side of thy whoredom. And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms, whereas none followeth thee to commit whoredoms. And in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary. Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord.” God tells Israel that she is not only apostate; He says she is a spiritual whore.

He says Israel is contrary to all the others because the others get paid for their services. Israel, on the other hand, pays her hired lovers. That is what she does, and this is His condemnation of them.

The book of Hosea also concerns the adulteries and whoredoms of Israel. In fact, Israel became so wicked, so vile, and so rebellious that God divorced her. Jeremiah 3:8 says, “And I saw when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed the adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.” God specifically said He had given Israel a divorce, yet when Judah saw it, it did not bother her; she went and played the harlot as well.

Ezekiel 20:30 says, “Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers, and commit ye whoredom after their abominations?” God is saying to His people that they are whores and harlots, but worse than that: they pay their lovers.

Those who have experienced the heartache of an unfaithful spouse should be able to understand, in a small degree, the hurt, the rejection, and the scorn that is heaped upon a holy, righteous God in such an instance. However, when we consider the fact that all mankind are sinners and that we have sinned individually, we must confess that we are not being judged according to our iniquities. We are not receiving exactly everything that we deserve, even though what is thrown upon us by an unfaithful spouse may hurt. In one sense of the word, we merit and deserve all that which is thrown upon us. Even as much as it hurts, we still have to confess that we are not getting exactly everything that we deserve.

The Blasphemy of Making Christ Serve with Sin

On the other hand, God is absolutely, perfectly, totally holy, righteous, just, and innocent. He deserves no scorn, no rejection, and no revilement at all. And yet, in idolatrous whoredom, the Bible says that God is made to serve with our sins. Isaiah 43:24 says, "Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast Thou filled me with the fat of Thy sacrifices, but Thou hast made me to serve with Thy sins, and hast wearied me with Thine iniquities."

Notice what God said to Israel: "Thou hast made me to serve with Thy sins." How could they make God to serve with their sins?

They were in a covenantal relationship with Him. But stop and think about this: the wickedness and the blasphemy do not go away from these actions in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the wickedness is intensified. We have to remember that we are not simply in a covenantal relationship with our heavenly Father. We are, but we are far more than that. Scripture teaches that He is the head and we are the body—the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is our divine Head.

Therefore, consider what the Bible says concerning adultery, prostitution, and harlotry. First Corinthians 6:15-16 says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he which is joined to a harlot is one body?"

"For two, saith he, shall be one flesh." Now watch. "But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body. But he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

"For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are God's." So in Isaiah 43 and verse 24, God says, "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins." When you get to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, he tells you that adultery and fornication and all of this is actually a joining of Jesus Christ to that sin because if you are a child of God, you are His body. He is the head. It's utter, total, complete blasphemy.

So, clearly, every Christian then has a duty and a responsibility and an obligation as well as an incentive to avoid adultery, fornication, harlotry, and whoredom. Our bodies as well as our spirits belong to Christ. He is our head, we're his body. And we cannot commit such sins without making him serve with our sins. Even such a thought is blasphemous. How much more the action.

In relation to this, when God is ready to point out the extreme wickedness of idolatry, He does so in such a way that it is bold and it is very evident. Revelation chapter 17, verse 5, writes upon the forehead of Mystery Babylon: "And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth." Notice, if you would please, the mother of harlots and the abomination of the earth.

Before sharing the truth that motivated this sermon, the Bible gives several truths concerning harlotry and God's warnings against it. In Proverbs chapter 7, God first warns against the attire of a harlot. Certainly, decent, God-fearing young women, as well as older women, have no desire to dress or to have the attire of a harlot. But note in Proverbs 7, beginning there with verse 6, the warnings against harlotry. We will spend a few minutes in Proverbs before looking at Jeremiah 3 and verse 3.

Warnings Against Harlotry in Proverbs

"For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner, and he went the way to her house. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night, and behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot and subtle of heart." Have you ever stopped to think that women who are on the prowl dress differently from women who are decent, modest, and godly? There is a certain attire that God says belongs to the harlot.

I remember the very first time I took two of my grandsons to a Front Sight outside Las Vegas, Nevada. I took them to a restaurant for supper. As we were leaving, a woman was coming toward us dressed in anything but modest attire. She was absolutely smothered in makeup. You could have gotten enough grease off her, I imagine, to grease an automobile. She had an extremely low-cut, tight blouse, a very tight miniskirt that left nothing to the imagination, and fishnet stockings. Before I could stop myself, I said aloud, "Wow, you don't have to wonder what her occupation is."

My grandson said, "Pop, she heard me, heard you." I said, "Well, she should have heard me. She ought not to be dressing like that."

Very obviously, there was the attire of a harlot. You did not have to guess. It was plain and obvious.

Turn to 1 Timothy chapter 2, verses 9 and 10. Let me show you the difference. God is speaking about godliness in women. In 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 9, the Bible says, "...in like manner also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel..." Not necessarily modern, but modest. "...that women adorn themselves in modest apparel with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with broidered hair, gold, or pearls, or costly array, but that which becometh women, professing godliness with good works."

So God says a godly woman is going to dress modestly. Modest attire adorns the godly woman, and immodest attire adorns a harlot. So God, in Proverbs chapter 7, first warns about the attire of a harlot. Notice, back in Proverbs 7, secondly, He warns about the attitude of a harlot. It is not just the attire that you have to be concerned with, but also a wicked attitude.

Now, I want you to note how God exposes a wicked, loud, arrogant, and impudent attitude in Proverbs 7, beginning there with verse 11. We will read through verse 14.

Proverbs 7, verse 11, says, "She is loud and stubborn. Her feet abide not in her house." "Now she is without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner. So she caught him and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me, this day have I paid my vows."

Now notice this woman who is not satisfied to stay at home. She is loud-mouthed, boisterous, self-willed, and rebellious. She thinks that her religious exercises, rituals, and ceremonies gloss over her blatant rebellion against God's law. She is not ashamed to claim to be right with God while openly violating His law. I want to show you her attitude. Her attitude is this: "I paid my vows."

"I have gone through my ceremony. I have gone through my ritual. I have gone to church. I have given God my token worship. Now I am able to do as I please." Let me point something out to you. There are a lot of professing Christians who have a harlot attitude. What is that harlot attitude? It is the reduction of Christianity to the church building. They come on Sunday morning, sit very piously,

listen, sing, and give; then they turn around, walk out of the building, and live and do as they please.

Look at it. She says in verse 14, "I have peace offerings with me. This day have I paid my vows." "I have already given God what He requires, so now I can do as I please and live as I please." There are plenty of Christians with a harlot attitude because they think that once they give God a little token worship, they can do whatever they please.

Thirdly, God not only warns of the attire and attitude of a harlot; He also warns about the actions of a harlot. Look back at verse 7, verse 11. "She is loud and stubborn, her feet abide not in her house." Look at the next verse: "Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner." The harlot aggressively seeks her prey. She is always on the move and always on the prowl. She does not wait for her prey to come to her; she seeks her prey in the streets and on every corner. Let me point something out. You may have missed this, but she is a natural con artist and very persuasive. She flatters, cajoles, and entices. She is adept in her ways.

It does no good to argue with her. She is a master of deceit. "With her much fair speech, she caused him to yield. With the flattering of her lips, she forced him." She forced him—not the man forcing her in this instance, but her forcing the man with persuasive and flattering speech.

So God warns about the actions of such women: they are not content to stay home; they go out seeking and looking for sin. God also warns about the assurance of a harlot. She assures her prey that all will be well. Having caught, ensnared, and forced him with her lips, she entices him by telling him they may revel in their sin and rebellion. She persuades him that all will be right with God and that her husband will never find out, so all will be well with man as well.

Her argument is this: she has made her sacrifices to God, so God will not mind; her husband is away, so he will never catch her or know. Proverbs 7 says, "I have peace offerings with me. This day have I paid my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face. I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry and carved works with fine linen of Egypt. I

have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning. Let us solace ourselves with love, for the good man is not at home."

"He has gone a long journey. He has taken a bag of money with him and will come home at the day appointed." Then the Bible says, "With her much fair speech, she caused him to yield. With the flattering of her lips, she forced him." Everything will be all right between God and man: God does not mind, because she has paid her vows; her husband will never find out.

Her philosophy is, "Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." May I remind you that no one has the right or power to deny the just punishment of sin? Man cannot absolve sin.

The Abomination of a Harlot

"Come, let us commit these sins. I've already paid my vows. I've given my sacrifices. God is not going to mind." How can anyone say that there are no consequences to sin? How can anyone promise absolution from sin? "Well, you can do this and get by with it. We can do this and God doesn't mind and no one will ever find out about it." Yet countless men and women fall for the very same deception.

God is the judge and not man. It is God alone that has the power to cleanse and forgive. No one has the right to promise anyone that there will be no consequences for their sins. There will be.

Fifthly, God warns about the abomination of a harlot. What is her abomination? It is not only a sin against God and a rebellion to God and His law; it is also the destruction of lives, homes, and society.

Look in Proverbs 7, beginning there, verse 21. Watch. Talking about destruction: "With her much fair speech, she caused him to yield. With the flattery of her lips, she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

What does God say? It's for His death. It's for His destruction. She is promising excitement and pleasure, but God said it's death and destruction.

Turn back to Proverbs chapter 5, and let's read the first 13 verses, beginning with verse 1. God says, "My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding, that thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge. Now watch, for the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil, but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to hell, her feet go down to death, her steps take hold on hell, lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life. Her ways are movable, but thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house, lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel. Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labors in the house of a stranger, and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction?"

"My heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me." God says, "Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house, lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years to the cruel, lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labors be in the house of a stranger."

I never will forget when I was a boy, there was a wealthy farmer that lived in our community. He had a fine brick home and a nice farm, but he got involved with a harlot—well known. I never will forget how he lost his family, lost his farm, and finally lost his life. I read these verses, "that strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labors be in the house of a stranger." Everything he had worked for all his life, right toward the end, he ended up giving to a stranger—not his wife of all those years, not his children. She stole everything.

That's exactly what God is talking about. It is destruction, pure and simple, not just of lives and homes, but of society. God says, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither. As for him that wanteth understanding, she saith unto him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell."

One pauses to think that harlots and whores and adulterers do not really care one iota for their partners in their sin. They only care for themselves. It is their pleasure and their profit that they engage in such activities. The counsel God gives applies not only physically to husbands and wives, but spiritually as well: "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of water in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe. Let her breast satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love, and why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?"

The ways of a man are before the Lord; the eyes of the Lord ponder all his goings. With this in mind, look back to Jeremiah chapter 3, because God says something to Israel that is very revealing: “Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore’s forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.” What has all this to do with this?

The Meaning of a Whore's Forehead

The charge that God levels against His professing people is that they are impudent, arrogant, and unconcerned. They refused to repent not only of their sin; they also refused to be ashamed and blush for their sins. They refused to hear the prophets and the God who sent the prophets. They refused to listen to judgments. Drought, famine, and other punishments did not deter them at all from their wickedness, idolatry, and rebellion.

They had no concern for God’s truth. Look in Jeremiah chapter 5 and verse 3: “O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.” God said they had been stricken, but they did not grieve. God judged them and consumed them, yet they refused to receive correction. They made their faces harder than a rock and refused to be ashamed.

Everything they were doing was ungodly, unholy, and unbiblical, but it did not bother them. Their idolatries were an insult to God and a denial of His Godhood, yet they refused to be ashamed. They sinned openly, deliberately, and premeditatedly. Everyone who saw them knew what they were doing, and yet they refused to blush.

What is a whore's forehead? It is a forehead that refuses to be ashamed. It is hardened in rebellion. It glories in shame, sin, and filth, unable to blush or be ashamed over sin or wicked deeds. God asks, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush."

SCRIPTURE READING - Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12 (KJV)

> "Therefore they shall fall among them that fall. At that time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, saith the Lord." Were they ashamed? No. Neither could they blush. In Jeremiah 8:12, God repeats the same truth concerning a whore's forehead: "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush. Therefore they shall fall among them that fall in the time of their visitation. They shall be cast down, saith the Lord."

Shame and blushing are connected. The word ashamed is exclusively a moral term. It implies confusion or abashment through consciousness of guilt and its exposure. It also includes a fear of disgrace and terror because of exposure and being connected with some action. The word ashamed occurs 118 times in the Old Testament, and 96 of those times it refers to shame, disgrace, and reproach. What happens when you are ashamed? What happens when you get caught in a lie or in your sin? You blush.

Evidently, blushing begins in the forehead, though it will come down and cover the entire face. Under the skin are lots of tiny blood vessels known as capillaries. When they dilate, or widen, more blood can pass between the walls of the vessels, and one appears much redder than before. Sometimes there is a sensation of heat because the blood carries heat. When we get caught in our sins, we blush. We are ashamed and embarrassed, and our embarrassment leads to more blushing. A whore's forehead is one that cannot and will not blush, one that cannot and will not be ashamed of sin, wickedness, and ungodly actions.

A whore is not ashamed of her conduct. She sees nothing wrong with it. Why should she be ashamed? It is just a job to her. Years ago, when Alice and I had television, we watched a PBS special on the Mustang Ranch in Las Vegas, Nevada, a famous brothel. I never will forget that these women were being interviewed. One was a fairly attractive woman, and the interviewer asked if she was married. She said, "Well, yes, I am married." The man was aghast and asked, "What does your husband think? Or does he care? Or does he mind?" She answered, "No, he doesn't mind. He knows what I do. Just so I bring the money home."

I looked at Alice and thought, "What?" I could not believe what I was hearing. She was not ashamed. He was not ashamed. What is a whore's forehead? It is someone who cannot blush and cannot be ashamed of sin. A whore's forehead is someone who has crossed the deadline.

And there is no hope for such an individual. A whore's forehead is not only when one crosses the deadline. Do you know what the deadline is? All the prisons have them. It may be an imaginary line, a small obstacle, or a small fence. The guards on the wall, if you step across that deadline, shoot you, kill you, and you are dead. That's it. It's over; it's done with.

A whore's forehead simply means that a person or a people—in this instance, it was a nation—had crossed the deadline. There was no hope for such a people. God was going to judge them, and God was going to destroy them.

Foreheads in Ezekiel: Divine Headbutt

Look at an interesting passage concerning foreheads in Ezekiel chapter 3, beginning with verse 4 through verse 11. “And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee into the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech or of a hard language, but to the house of Israel. Not to many people of a strange speech or of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee, for they will not hearken unto me. For all the

house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted." That is, they have a whore's forehead.

"Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead. Fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover, he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee, receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears, and go, get thee to them of the captivity, and to the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them."

"Thus saith the Lord God, whether they will hear, whether they will forbear." Go back to verse 5: "For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech, of a hard language, but the house of Israel." Ezekiel did not have to understand a foreign language or learn one. He was being sent to his own people. Verse 6 says, "Not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand." Then God said, "Surely had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto you." If He had sent Ezekiel to an alien people, they would have listened. But He was sending him to his own people, and they would not listen.

Then, in verse 8, He said, "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead. Fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house."

This part of your head is extremely hard. At Front Sight, they tell about a police officer who was chasing a fleeing felon. The felon turned without even looking and fired his weapon, a .45, and it hit the officer right here. The officer chased the man down, took the weapon away from him, and handcuffed him. By that time, his partner ran up and said, "You're bleeding." He said, "What?" The .45 had hit him right here, gone under the skin, traveled around, and exited. The man did not even know he had been hit.

There is such a thing as a headbutt in martial arts, in fighting. I can put you out in a heartbeat with a headbutt. If I grab hold of you, pull your face toward me, and butt you with this part of my head,

hitting your eyes and your nose, you are either going out or down, or you are going to be out of service temporarily. What did God say to Ezekiel?

"I've made your forehead harder than flint." God used Ezekiel to give Israel a divine headbutt, just as He used Jeremiah to give Judah a divine headbutt. He took them out. When God said to Israel, "You are an impudent and hard-hearted people," He was saying again, "Thou hast a whore's forehead." That forehead is one that crosses the deadline.

The first application is this: If you can openly, maliciously, and deliberately sin against God, violate His law, and not be ashamed, you are in dangerous territory. It is evidence of a whore's forehead.

Applications: Sensitivity to Sin and Repentance

The Word of God says in Proverbs 29:1, "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." That is what God does to a whorish people: He destroys them without remedy.

The second application is this. If you are shamed, sorrowful, embarrassed, and convicted over your sins, the first thing you should do is be thankful. One of the greatest blessings that God can give an individual is to make him aware of his sins and make him shameful, sorrowful, and embarrassed over those sins. The second thing you should do, after being thankful, is repent of your sins. Turn from them. The third thing is to rejoice that you have not been given over to a whore's forehead.

1 John 1:9 is still true: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But we must repent, and we must confess.

Thirdly, one of the most grievous judgments that God can inflict upon any people is to give them over to their sins. Do you know all that God has to do to destroy a person, a people, or a nation? Nothing. Just let them alone. We will destroy ourselves. Our Lord said concerning the Pharisees, "Let them alone." In Matthew 15:14, He said, "They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

All God has to do to destroy this nation, an individual, a family, a church, or a society is to let us alone. We definitely do not want a whore's forehead. We should be thankful that we are still sensitive to our sins and can blush and be ashamed because we violated God's law.

When you lose that blushing and that shamelessness, you are in trouble. What did God say? "Thou hast a whore's forehead, and refusest to be ashamed." Let us do as Ezra and Daniel did. Let us confess our sins and the sins of our people and be ashamed. A governmental report this week stated that there had been 780,000 abortions this year—that is only those reported or known about. Can you imagine a million babies being murdered in one year? We need to blush, be ashamed, and confess our sins.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for salvation through Jesus Christ and that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. May we be ashamed at ourselves, even ashamed that we are not ashamed. Help us to be tender toward Thee, sensitive to sin, and turn from it. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 13

A Holy War

Introduction: Can War Be Holy?

Psalm 45. Notice, beginning with verse 1: “My heart is indicting a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips. Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.”

Can war be holy? The answer is yes, and in a number of ways. Obviously, when I am talking about war, I am not referring to jihad, the Muslim definition of a holy war, for absolutely nothing is holy about their wars.

John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, was also the author of numerous other books, one of which is entitled The Holy War. Most wars are absolutely unholy, ungodly, and unbiblical,

because most wars arise out of conquest—a desire to conquer, dominate, subjugate, plunder, possess, and confiscate.

The attitude of our modern-day politicians is simply this: You have it; we want it. If you do not give it to us, we will take it. That is not just national politics; it is also international politics. If you do not believe that, read Confessions of an Economic Hitman by John Perkins. That book is also available on audio. Perkins was an economic hitman, and he tells exactly how we conquer other countries.

He says the first thing we try to do is get them in debt. If they do not fall for the debt so that we can confiscate their resources, then we assassinate their leaders. If that does not work, then we have a real war with them until we get exactly what we want. Our wars today are mostly not defensive wars. They are offensive wars, designed to dominate and subjugate.

However, in Psalm 45 we find a holy war accomplished by our Lord, because our Lord is a warrior. In verse 4: “And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness.”

The Warrior King Identified as Jesus Christ

"And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things." I will hasten to point out that in this passage we're talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. However, David's son was Solomon. Solomon was a type of Christ, and Christ is actually the fulfillment of that. There is in the Bible that which is known as prophetic telescoping, where you're looking at one individual, but you have to look beyond that other individual and see the true individual. And our Lord in Matthew 12:42 said this: "...the queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." So Jesus Christ is the greater Solomon. When you look in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 1, that verse says this: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." So Jesus Christ then is the true seed of David, not Solomon, and He is also the true Son of Abraham.

Now if there is any doubt as to whom Psalm 45 is referring, you should look at verses 6 and 7. Psalm 45, verse 6, says: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." These words identify the one being addressed as God, whose throne is forever and whose kingdom is righteous. So, if you will look in your Bibles, holding Psalm 45, to the book of Hebrews chapter 1, at verses 8 and 9, notice what the Word of God says. Hebrews 1, verse 8: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Now we're talking about the Lord Jesus. So clearly, in Hebrews 1, you have Psalm 45, verses 6 and 7, applied directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the true warrior king. Revelation chapter 6, verses 1 and 2, continues to show us the warrior king: "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see." Now look closely at verse 2: "And I saw, and behold a white horse."

"And he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." Some commentators on the book of Revelation say that the man on the white horse with the bow, who goes forth conquering and to conquer, is the Antichrist. I do not believe that for one second. I believe the man in verse 2 is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Revelation is full of symbolism, and you really cannot understand it without understanding the books of Daniel and Ezekiel as well. But although Revelation is full of symbolism, the symbolism is consistent. It does not change figures, neither does it change persons. The white horse is mentioned only twice in the book of Revelation, and Revelation 19 identifies its rider: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse."

"And he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 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." Here, obviously, the rider on the white horse is indeed the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the same person, I believe, back in Psalm 45. The context shows that the king in view is none other than Jesus Christ. For he says in verse 1, "My heart is indicting a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king." In verse 2, here is the same king now.

"Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." The king is fairer than the children of men because the Lord Jesus Christ, although He is the Son of Man, is also the Son of God. Grace is poured into His lips; therefore God hath blessed Him for ever. John 3:34 speaks of Jesus Christ: "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." Grace is truly poured into His lips. He does not receive a measure of the Spirit, but all of the Spirit.

The King's Preparation and Success in Battle

Verse 3 presents a preparation for war: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty." As you read through the Old Testament, especially concerning David, anytime he was about to go to battle, he would look at his men and say, "Gird on your swords." That meant they were going to fight and must get ready. That is exactly what is happening here: He is girding on His sword.

Verse 4 demonstrates the absolute success of our Lord's campaign: "And in thy majesty ride prosperously," because of "truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee

terrible things." Interestingly, the Hebrew word for "prosperously" means to be successful—to complete a campaign successfully or end it victoriously. He is going to ride prosperously; He is going to succeed. He is not going to fail. He never loses any of His battles.

The Plurality and Variety of the King's Arrows

Verse 5 caught my attention: "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." Notice first that "arrows" is plural: "thine arrows." Our Lord has a multitude of arrows, designed for certain things. I used to be an archer, and still am in some sense, though not as I once was. An archer has various kinds of arrows available: target arrows, hunting arrows, and blunted arrows.

Even when I was a boy and was making my own bow and arrows, when I wanted to shoot a squirrel, I would not use a target tip, but I would take a spent casing of a .38, tap it on the end of an arrow, and use it to knock him out, that kind of thing, or knock him out of the tree. It is just a blunted arrow.

An interesting thing is this: there are also flu-flu arrows, and I used to have some of them a long time ago. A flu-flu arrow is something like this: it has an arrowhead that goes on the shaft, and it will spin. It is designed to shoot a bird out of the air. It actually catches the bird, twists him, and brings him down to the ground. There are all kinds of arrows that are even available. Of course, today you have exploding arrows and all this. But when you think about arrows, the Lord has different kinds of arrows. Let me show you.

In Ezekiel 5, our Lord speaks of famine, pestilence, and wild beasts as arrows. For instance, the Bible says, "So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that are round about thee, when I shall execute judgments in thee in anger and in fury, and in furious rebukes; I the LORD have spoken it."

"When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread: so will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall

bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I the LORD have spoken it."

He is talking about evil arrows. In the context, he is talking about famine, wild beasts, pestilence, and the sword, but they are referred to as evil arrows. Psalm 18:14 says, "Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them." So here his arrows are lightnings.

And, of course, you can do a lot of things with a lightning strike. Here's an interesting thought. Psalm 77 gives another picture of the arrows of the divine archer. Verses 17 and 18 say, “The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.” So now we're talking about arrows that involve the weather: droughts, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes. And they are called arrows: “Thine arrows also went abroad.”

So the first thing you need to notice in Psalm 45 and verse 5 is the plurality of the arrows. There are a multitude of arrows that are available to the divine archer. If you'll look back to Psalm 45, here's the second thing you should note about verse 5: it is not just a plurality of arrows, but also the target for the arrows.

“Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies.” Those arrows are shot to the heart, and they are sharp. The third thing to notice in verse 5 is the result, or consequence, of the divine archer: “the people fall under thee.” “Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.”

In other words, our Lord is victorious. He conquers, subdues, and dominates.

Although we are talking about a plurality of arrows, I want to point out two specific arrows that we can read about in the Word of God. First, there are arrows of deliverance—an arrow of deliverance.

The Arrow of Deliverance: Conviction of Sin

When you think about deliverance, you do not necessarily think of war and pain. You think of being delivered. But I want you to see something. Hold Psalm 45 and turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter

13. Elisha is dying, and King Joash comes to visit him. It is interesting what Joash says to Elisha, the man of God. 2 Kings 13, beginning with verse 14: “Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

When the Lord parted Elijah and Elisha, taking Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, do you know what Elisha said? “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” What is he saying? This is what Joash is saying to Elisha: the true protection of a people is in the Lord and in His Word, through His prophets who preach and teach His Word.

If God does not protect us, we are not protected, no matter what we have. Joash comes down and weeps over Elisha. Verse 15 says: “And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.”

The prophet Elisha said, “Open the window eastward.” And he opened it. Then Elisha said, “Shoot.” And he shot. And he said, “The arrow of the LORD's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them.” And he said, “Take the arrows.” And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, “Smite upon the ground.” And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.”

Although this was called the arrow of deliverance, it still involved war, suffering, and pain. Anytime there is deliverance, there is always pain and suffering. All you have to do is read the book of Judges. So many times they sinned against God, and they were suffering; then God raised up a judge who delivered them, and there was always war. Although there is pain and suffering, we understand that it is sometimes necessary in order to be delivered.

It is like cancer in the body. You do not want to face surgery. No one wants to face surgery. But if you have cancer in your body, surgery is willing to be endured. It is necessary sometimes to cut out the cancer. And so this is the way it is with deliverance.

The arrow of deliverance, so to speak, from the perspective of the Word of God is an arrow of conviction. Conviction is very painful and very distressful, yet it is absolutely necessary. No one will ever be converted without being convicted. If you have never been convicted of your sins, then you have never really genuinely been converted. You remember what our Lord said in Matthew chapter 9, when those Pharisees came up and complained to His disciples, saying, "Thy master is eating with publicans and sinners." And our Lord said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth."

As long as you think you are whole, you will never come to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only when you realize how desperately sick you really are that you will seek the great physician. I have told you many times that the word "heart" refers to the mind, the understanding, and what you and I would call the conscience. When our Lord intends an arrow of deliverance, He always sends that arrow of deliverance, which is conviction, into our heart.

The Bible says that we are by nature enemies of the King. That is why the Bible says we are dead in trespasses and sins: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." So he sends this arrow of conviction. When Peter was preaching in Acts chapter 2, the Bible said his hearers were pricked in their hearts. When Stephen was preaching in Acts chapter 7, the Bible says his hearers were cut to the heart.

In Job chapter 6 and verse 4, Job makes this statement: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." He said, "the arrows of the Almighty are within me." God had shot him with his arrows. It is true that Job was basically what you and I would call a righteous man. However, that does not mean that he did not have sins and certainly needed correcting in certain areas, because God corrected him beginning in Job chapter 38.

Job's response was, "I have spoken once; yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." In other words, I've learned my lesson. I've said enough. But notice: "the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit." He is just absolutely almost dead. That is why he said also, "the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." He sees the sin and the wickedness of that sin.

The same thing is true when you understand the sin of David. Everyone is aware of David's sin. Yes, David committed adultery. Yes, David committed murder. A lot of people today are more than willing to identify with the sin of David. They are willing to commit adultery if necessary. They are willing to commit murder.

It does not matter to them. They will admit, "Well, David did it. I can do it too." But what they are not willing to identify with is David's conviction and David's repentance. It is true that David sinned. But out of all the Psalms David wrote, seven are known as Penitential Psalms. Seven times David writes a psalm saying how sorry he is, how wicked he is, and how horrible his sin is. They are Psalm 6, Psalm 32, Psalm 38, Psalm 51, Psalm 102, Psalm 130, and Psalm 143. Seven penitential psalms.

You need to read all of these psalms, because they are so graphic and show us what real, genuine conviction is. Look at Psalm 38 and think about David acknowledging and confessing his sin. He says in verse 1, "O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure." In other words, I know I have sinned, and if You give me what I deserve, I am going to be done. I cannot handle that.

Then he says in verse 2, "For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore." God has shot him with the arrows of conviction. See how he describes himself: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin." David says, I am totally, absolutely depraved; totally wicked; absolutely helpless. My sin will not allow me to rest. Verse 4 says, "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." I am drowning. I cannot handle this.

I remember when God convicted me many years ago. I did not understand conviction, but I honestly thought that I was dying. Yet you cannot use your experience and press it upon someone else. God brings us along the same line; everyone is convicted, but not everyone has committed the same sins, and not everyone has the same main sin, and not everyone is

As wicked as some of the others—we are all totally depraved, but that does not mean that we are as wicked as we possibly can be. Some are far more wicked than others, but all are totally wicked. So I cannot say to Steve, "Unless you have been through what I have been through, you are not saved." No. My experience is not the standard. The Word of God is the standard. David is saying here that he is about to drown; he is about to die.

"My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." Even after we have been saved, and after God has given us repentance, when we think back about our sins, they still stink, and we still count them as foolishness. If you are saved by the grace of God, you wish there were some things you had never done or said. Although God forgives our sin, He does not necessarily wipe it from our minds. We still remember it. Therefore David says, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness."

"I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." In other words, I cannot get any rest. These things are pressing me sore. "For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart." Lord, I am crying, begging, and pleading. "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me."

In other words, I am dying—or at least that is what I think. "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs."

I've thought about this as I read this verse, verse 13 particularly. I've thought of how many times I've spoken to people and declared the truth of God to them, and they never heard it. It is kind of like Martin Luther said. He had heard the gospel all of his life, and then one day he heard it. So this is what David said: "I was deaf."

Then look at what he said in verse 15: "For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God." In other words, You are my only hope. "For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me." Now look at what he said in verse 18: "For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin."

If you read any of these penitential Psalms, you have to come to this conclusion: real biblical conviction is painful and distressful, but it is absolutely, totally necessary.

David said he was going to be sorry for his sins. There is a difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow says, "Oh no, I've been caught. I've been discovered. I'm so embarrassed. How am I going to lift my face up in front of these people? They caught me; I was doing this, I was doing that, and it's now in the open. Everybody knows what I've been doing. I'm so embarrassed." That's the world.

When you have been convicted by the Holy Spirit of God, you may be embarrassed, but here is what you are going to say: "Let me tell you how God delivered me. Let me tell you how wicked I was and what I was doing, and God broke me out of it." Yes, you're embarrassed, but at the same time, you're willing to confess it and acknowledge it. It is not simply, "I'm sorry I got caught."

The Nature of True Conviction and Repentance

The apostle Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians 7:9–10: "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh

death." The sorrow of the world is, "I'm caught, I'm embarrassed, I don't want to show my face." That is not conviction.

"Convict" translates the Greek word elencho, meaning to convince someone of a truth, reprove, accuse, refute, and cross-examine a witness. In real conviction, the Holy Spirit of God is the prosecuting attorney who exposes our sin and iniquities, reproves us, and convicts us of our need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Convicted by the Holy Spirit, we sense the sheer loathsomeness of our sin.

Psalm 5:4 says, "Neither shall evil dwell with thee." God is infinitely holy and righteous. Isaiah understood this. In Isaiah 6, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," and his train filled the temple. The seraphim had six wings: with two they covered their feet, with two their face, and with two they flew. They cried, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Whenever we see who God is and who we are, we see the loathsomeness of our sin and the dreadfulness of having sinned against a holy, righteous, loving God.

We will end up taking the attitude of Joseph. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him in Genesis 39, he left his coat and ran out, saying, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" We are convicted when we understand that our sin dishonors God. Everyone remembers Psalm 51, where David confesses and acknowledges his sin. In verse 4 he says to God, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

Did David not sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, their families, his own family, and the nation? Of course he did. Why, then, does he say, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight"? It is because he saw that, primarily, his sin was a dishonoring of God. Surely it dishonored other people, but since God is infinitely holy, David focused on the fact that his sin was dishonoring to God.

We are also convicted when we see the just deserts of our sin. Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the

truth in unrighteousness." Remember the Philippian jailer in Acts 16. He came in trembling and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He understood that he was under the wrath of God and that, if God did not save him, he was doomed and damned.

When the Holy Spirit of God convicts us, He convicts us of our sin and of the righteous judgment of God, and there is no appeal of this verdict. We have to agree that we are sinners, wicked, transgressors, and iniquitous, and that we have done everything of which we are being convicted.

No matter how stressful conviction is, we must praise the Lord for it, for without conviction there is no turning to the Lord and no repentance. In John 6:44 our Lord said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Part of that drawing is conviction. You cannot be drawn savingly to Jesus Christ without conviction.

I want to give you a quote. I got this from John L. Dagg. I have Dagg's Systematic Theology. And listen to this quote. He summarizes what I just told you. He said, "Genuine repentance is a deep-felt and abiding sense of sin, a condemnation of ourselves before God on account of it, a turning away from it with abhorrence and loathing, and a fixed purpose of soul never again to commit it or to be at peace with it. This sense of sin drives the soul to Christ and unites with the exercise of faith in Christ to distinguish genuine religion or genuine Christianity from the counterfeits with which the world abounds." So he is saying basically what I just said. Without true conviction, you never ever get savingly to Jesus Christ, because it is conviction that shows you your desperate need of Jesus Christ. Now, I want you to look at Psalm 45 again and verse 5. I want to point something out very quickly. Look at this. Psalm 45 and verse 5, he said, "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee."

It would be interesting for you to look up the Hebrew word "fall," because there are various definitions. A couple of the definitions happen to be these. It refers to "to fall prostrate before," or "to lay prostrate." So, you could have this, look at verse 5 again: "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people lay prostrate under thee, or before thee." You remember that

passage in Psalm 110, verse 3? "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." So it is the power of God, it's the arrows of conviction from the divine archer, which are arrows of deliverance that convicts us and enables us to prostrate ourselves at His feet, trusting only in Him. So you not only have an arrow of deliverance, here's the second one. There is an arrow of destruction. Again, I want to point out something in verse 5 of Psalm 45. "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies." In hunting and in war, a heart shot is a death shot.

The Arrow of Destruction: Judgment on Enemies

His enemies fall under him. Now, if you will look up the word "fall" in Psalm 45 and verse 5, I told you it can mean to lay prostrate. But there are other definitions as well. It can also mean to fail, to fall, to be thrown down violently which results in death. And it also means to rot. So we're told in the Scripture that God will not at all acquit the wicked.

He will render to every man according to his works. Listen carefully. Those who refuse His grace and mercy will receive arrows of destruction. There are arrows of deliverance. There are arrows of destruction. I want you to turn back in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 32. Deuteronomy 32, and get ready because I want to show you a number of passages before I make the applications. Look at Deuteronomy 32 beginning there with verse 23. Look what God says. We're talking about arrows of destruction. Deuteronomy 32, verse 23, God said, "I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction."

"I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs." Wow! Note, if you would, He said, "I will spend mine arrows upon them." Arrows of destruction. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 7. Psalm 7. And let's begin reading there with verse 11. Psalm 7 and verse 11. Watch carefully. Psalm 7, verse 11: "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If

he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready."

"He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors." Wow. Hmm. Did you see what God said? He will shoot his arrows of destruction. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 21. Psalm 21, and let's begin reading there with verse 8. Psalm 21, verse 8: "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee." You know, that is an awesome statement. No one can hide from God. No one can deceive Him. You may pretend to be righteous and pretend to be a Christian, but God will find you out. So He says in verse 8, watch it: "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee."

Would someone like to tell me where the Lord Jesus Christ is seated today? At the right hand of God the Father. You remember that passage in John 5, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." So it's the right hand man who's going to find out all those that hate him. Now watch verse 9.

"Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform. Therefore shalt thou make them turn their back, when thou shalt make ready thine arrows upon thy strings against the face of them. Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power."

There are arrows of destruction. In Psalm 58, David is praying against the Lord's enemies. This is a prayer, I think, that you and I need to learn to pray: "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD." What happens when you break out the teeth of lions? They starve. Then he says, "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 judgeth in the earth." So the Bible talks about God shooting His arrows.

In Psalm 64, David says, "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity."

Psalm 64 describes the wicked: “Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep.”

But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away. God shall shoot at them.

Psalm 66 says: “Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee.”

Applications: Deliverance and Destruction Are Inseparable

So you have an arrow of deliverance, and you also have an arrow of destruction. You must understand the difference. The arrow of deliverance is for the reconciliation of His people, while the arrow of destruction is for the ruin of His enemies. The arrow of deliverance causes us to rule and reign with Him; the arrow of destruction makes His enemies His footstool. The arrow of deliverance enables us to be obedient and submissive, ruled by His golden scepter. The arrow of

destruction means that He rules with a rod of iron. Remember Revelation 19: “He shall rule them with a rod of iron.” There is a difference between an arrow of deliverance and an arrow of destruction.

When God arises, there will be both deliverance and destruction. They are inseparable; you cannot have one without the other. I've heard people say, “I don't know about all this war stuff and all this fighting stuff. All I'm going to do is just pray the Lord returns.” You cannot even pray for the Lord's return without praying for destruction. What did He say in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1? “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You cannot pray for the Lord to return without praying for deliverance and destruction. When our Lord delivered Noah and his family in the old world, He destroyed the old world. When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He destroyed Egypt. When God delivered the land of Canaan to His people, He destroyed the Canaanites who were in the land. When our Lord Jesus Christ delivered His people, He destroyed sin and Satan. You cannot have deliverance without destruction.

Psalm 68 makes this plain: “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.” What do you see? You see destruction, and you see deliverance. You cannot have one without the other.

The Apostle Paul says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.”

“To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” When Christ is preached, we are a sweet savour unto God

our Father. If there were a hundred lost people in this room, and I preached Jesus Christ, and everyone repented and trusted in Him, God the Father would say, “That’s a sweet smell. My Son is preached, and I’m satisfied.”

But suppose there were a hundred lost people in this room, and I preached Jesus Christ, and they shook their fists in the face of God, gnashed their teeth, and said, “I don’t want to have this man reign over us.” Suppose they hated Christ and cast me out. God the Father would still say, “That’s a sweet smell. My Son is preached.” We are the savour of life unto life and death unto death, the sweet savour in them that are saved and in them that perish.

Then He asks, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Only Jesus Christ. The sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. The gospel that always draws will also drive. You will either be drawn to Christ, bow before Him, and kneel before His golden scepter in love and obedience, or, in rebellion and sin, be forced to kneel before Him with His rod of iron. Everyone will kneel and everyone will confess, whether in deliverance or destruction.

Philippians chapter 2, verses 9 through 11, speaking of Jesus Christ, says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Everyone will confess, either in salvation or damnation, either in deliverance or destruction. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess.

Jesus Christ, who is a true, holy warrior, shoots His arrows of deliverance, but He also shoots His arrows of destruction. Even after we are saved, we often need those arrows of conviction in our hearts, because we are still sinners. I usually tell people that I have done far more repenting since I have been saved than when I got saved. When I got saved, I repented of sin in general and perhaps a few sins in specific. But since I started studying Scripture, I found there was a whole lot more wrong in my life than I thought.

I just have to continue in repentance. Whenever God convicts us, we need to make sure that we turn from those sins and do that which

is right. There is, even going on right now, a holy war. Jesus Christ is the warrior King, and He is victorious. He will be victorious in His people, and He will be victorious over His enemies.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You that in righteousness You do judge and make war. We are thankful that Your arrows are sharp in our hearts. We need the convicting arrow of deliverance. We need repentance and faith. When we stop and think, Lord, of all the enemies today that are marshalling themselves against Thee and against Thy people, we know, Lord, that they shall fail and they shall fall. You will make them fall into the very pit which they have dug, and You will bring their violence down upon the tops of their own heads, because Thou art God of gods and King of kings and Lord of lords. Thou art sovereign, and Thou doest according to Thy will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay Thy hand or say unto Thee, What doest Thou? We bow before Thee, O Lord, and glory in Thy power, majesty, righteousness, and truth. We glory in Thy mercy and Thy justice. Help us, Lord, always to lay prostrate before Thee and worship Thee in spirit and in truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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Chapter 3: You Can't Outsmart God
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