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Truths From
A Heathen

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

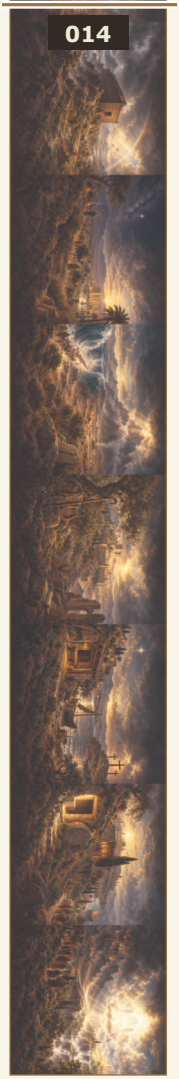
PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

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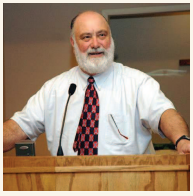
Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:21

An unexpected witness may expose a truth that familiar voices neglect. John Weaver considers the biblical account and the lessons drawn from a heathen's testimony. These messages ask readers to examine what is said by the standard of Scripture rather than judging an argument solely by its source.

“Truth from a heathen. We must know who we trust.”

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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CHAPTER 1

Truths From A Heathen

Part One of Two

June 19, 2016

Introduction: The Question of Confidence

Isaiah 36, and we're going to read the first four verses. The title of this message, which I will continue next week in two parts, is "Truths from a Heathen." I've read through the book of Isaiah just recently, and as I was working on these messages, this is about the fifth message that I've gotten from this one chapter. I thought the king of Assyria was dead. I preached two messages on praying against your enemies, and then these two. You just see Scripture and think, "Boy, I've covered all of that," and then you see things that you've just never seen before. It just shows you that you can never ever preach it all, and you can never ever learn it all.

Isaiah chapter 36, verse 1: "Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defensed cities of Judah and took them. And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem, unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the

upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field. Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder. And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

God's Sovereignty Over All Nations

Now I want you to look at that question: "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" One of the amazing truths of Scripture is the absolute sovereignty of God. He rules over everything and everyone. He is not just simply king of His people or king of the church; He is king of everything, over all the nations, Christian and heathen alike. It is the sovereignty of God that causes nations to increase or decrease, to spring forth or be destroyed. In Job 12 and verse 23, the Scripture says, "He," that is God, "increaseth the nations and destroyeth them: He enlargeth the nations and straiteneth them." Not only does God rule over all the nations, but all nations will ultimately serve Him. Psalm 22, verse 28: "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations." So God is the governor among all the nations.

Psalm 66:7 declares, "He ruleth by His power forever; His eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves." Psalm 72:11 adds, "Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him." And Psalm 86:9 promises, "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord, and shall glorify Thy name." Amazing—all nations whom God has made shall come and worship before Him and glorify His name.

So God rules over all. He not only rules over individuals, He rules over nations as well. Men and nations may not acknowledge Him; they may deny Him, blaspheme Him, curse Him, or worship false gods, but all that is immaterial. God is still sovereign, and God still rules over them. God is their creator; they are His creatures, and therefore God has the absolute right to dispose of them as He sees fit and to use them in any way He chooses. The hardiness, arrogance, pride, and rebellion of man does not and cannot stop God from accomplishing His will in their lives.

God Controls the Wicked

Hold Isaiah 36, but flip to Psalm 75, beginning at verse 4. Here is the counsel God gives to the foolish and the wicked: "I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn." That is the horn of pride, rebellion, or arrogance. "Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck," as if you are someone or something. Why? "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge." Notice: "He putteth down one, and setteth up another." So God says, "You better not speak foolishly or rebelliously, because I'm the one that puts you up and I'm the one that takes you down." It is like Daniel 4:35, where Scripture says that God "doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."

"None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" So God is absolutely sovereign. And the truth of God's sovereignty is evidenced even when the wicked are fighting against Him. Psalm 76:10: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." So how much wickedness is going to be in this world? Just enough that it is going to redound to God's honor and God's glory. And what will not redound to God's honor and God's glory, God will restrain. So God controls even the wicked.

Acts 4:27 gives a clear illustration. It is true that those Jews and Pharisees in the days of our Lord hated Him, despised Him, and crucified Him. But the Bible says: "For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done." So what did they do? Just exactly what God determined before to be done. God did not infuse them with wickedness or make them wicked. They were wicked, and they did what they did out of rebellion to God, not for God's honor and glory or to obey God. But God is not the infuser or instigator of wickedness; He is the controller of it. He used their wickedness and still worked out His perfect will.

Now let me give you several illustrations, because the title of this message is "Truths from a Heathen." You may think that no heathen can speak any truth at all, but that is not true. In the Bible there were

heathens who did indeed speak truth. They may not have intended to speak the truth, or understood the significance of what they said, but they still spoke truth.

Heathens Who Spoke Truth: Balaam

For instance, Balaam was a false prophet, and he is an excellent illustration. Do you remember how Balaam disobeyed God when King Balak in Numbers chapter 22 sent princes unto him and said, "Come, curse me this people," and "I'll make you exceedingly rich"? Balaam besought God, and God said, "Don't go." Then greater princes came, and God says, "You go with them only if they come to call you." But he didn't wait for them to call him.

He got up and went with them, and God was angry with him. That is when the angel stood in the way with the sword, and the ass crushed his foot against the wall. When his eyes were finally opened, he told God, "Look, I'll turn around and go back." "No," said God, "you're going to go. But with this provision: you are going to say exactly what I want you to say and absolutely nothing else." So in Numbers 22:35, God says, "Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

Now the interesting thing is this: Balaam was a false prophet, but God used Balaam to give one of the most beautiful prophecies concerning the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Numbers chapter 24, you know the story how Balak wanted him to curse Israel, but he ended up blessing Israel. We are not going to read all the prophecy, but beginning with verse 17, Balaam says, "I shall see Him, but not now. I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel," that would be Christ, "and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion," that's Christ, "and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city." So here is Balaam, a false prophet, speaking words of truth and words concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I hope you remember it was Balaam who said, "Let me die the death of the righteous." Ha! In order to die the death of the righteous, you must live the life of the righteous. And Balaam certainly was not righteous by any stretch of the imagination. And how did Balaam die? The children of Israel killed him with the sword. In Joshua 13:22: "Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them."

So they killed him. Why? Because he taught Balak—although he could not curse Israel—how to seduce the children of Israel and get them to sin against God so that God Himself would curse them. So they killed him with the sword: a false prophet whom God used to speak truth.

Heathens Who Spoke Truth: Cyrus and Caiaphas

Now turn to Isaiah 45 for another illustration of how God preserved and used a heathen. Cyrus was a Persian, certainly not an Israelite, yet God raised him up. Isaiah 45, verse 1: "Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden." God calls Cyrus His anointed and says, "I held him up." Why? "To subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut. And I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel Mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me." God said, "I named you; you still don't know who I am, but I named you." Then verse 5: "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord, and there is none else."

God used Cyrus, held him up, and gave him victory after victory. He took on the Babylonian Empire and defeated them. When Cyrus got on the throne, he gave the order for the Judahites to return home

and rebuild the temple. God said, "I've even called you by name, though you have not known Me." In Ezra 6:3, "In the first year of Cyrus the king, the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem."

"Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits." And then when you get to Ezra 6 and verse 14, again God not only used Cyrus, He used Darius, and He also used Artaxerxes—all three of these pagan kings supported and gave toward the building of the temple. So can God use a wicked man? And the answer is yes. Can a wicked man speak truth? Yes, he can. He may not understand it. Let me give you another illustration. Look in your Bibles to John chapter 11. John chapter 11, if you would please, beginning there with verse 49. John 11, verse 49. Here's a man by the name of Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the high priest. He was a Sadducee who was against Christ. He hated Christ and he wanted Christ crucified. But look what happens. John 11, verse 49: "And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Now watch: "And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." Caiaphas did not know what he was uttering. He was basically saying, "Let's kill Him and get Him out of the way, and that way we won't be scattered and we will maintain the status quo." That's all he meant to say, but that is not what he said. God used what he said, and it was indeed a prophecy concerning the atonement and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and how Jesus Christ was going to gather together in one His people. So Caiaphas was a lost man, but God used him.

In light of these truths, it should not be unusual for us to find in Scripture that oftentimes a heathen man will utter something very profound and truthful, although he may not even understand what he is saying, and he certainly does not understand the implications of it. With that in mind, go back to Isaiah chapter 36, verse 4,

because Sennacherib the king of Assyria has sent Rabshakeh to Hezekiah. "And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" So here's the question: What is your confidence? What is your ground of confidence? In what or in whom do you trust? Rabshakeh could not figure out why Hezekiah was not surrendering. Hezekiah was in no position to fight the Assyrians. In verse 5, Rabshakeh says, "I say, sayest thou, but they are but vain words. I have counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?" In other words, he looks at Hezekiah and says, "You know you can't defeat us. You have no counsel. You are militarily deficient."

Hezekiah's Confidence in God's Word

He was so sure that the Assyrians would wipe out Jerusalem. In verses 8 and 9 he says: "Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?"

Now he said, "Look, I can prove to you you can't fight against us and win. If you give me some pledges—that is, if you give me some folks to hold as hostage to guarantee this—I'll give you two thousand horses if you can set riders on them. And if you can come up with two thousand riders to fight against us, how in the world are they going to turn away the least of my master's captains? You can't win. You might as well give up. You might as well lose."

He knew that he was militarily weak. Moreover, if you'll go back to verse 6—and he's already mentioned it in verse 9—he's proving that outside help is unavailable. He says, "Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him." So he says, "Egypt may be close to you, but if you think Pharaoh is going to come up and help you, you're mistaken. You lean upon him, it's going to pierce right through your hand. You don't have any outside help. No help is coming. It's just you. You're here all alone." Now let me show you something. The impact of this

question in verse 4 is this: when he asks, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

So here is what they could not figure out. They could not figure out why Hezekiah was not surrendering. He was militarily weak. He had no outside help. He was really not able to fight against them at all. Moreover, on top of that, go back to verse 1. Look at this. Isaiah 36, verse 1: "Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defensed cities of Judah, and took them." How many of the defensed cities stood? Not one.

Jerusalem is the only thing left. Everything else has been taken, captured, destroyed, and now Jerusalem seemingly is about to be surrounded, and they can't fight, and they can't get help. So, the question is, "What is keeping you encouraged? What is making you happy? Why is it you're not surrendering? Why is it you're not giving up?" So, the question then, he asked, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

"How can you deny reality? How can you escape this situation? How can you get out of these circumstances?" So, he could not figure out why he was not surrendering. By the way, this would be a good question to ask in light of all the martyrs who have died. "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" Can you imagine that many of those martyrs who were burned at the stake died singing?

You remember some time ago I preached a message on the martyrdom of Thomas Hawks. If you've not heard that message, I would encourage you to hear it, because Thomas Hawks was to be burned at the stake, and all the Christians around him said, "This is awful." He said, "No, the Lord will sustain me." They asked, "Will you give us a sign that it is possible for a Christian to go through the fire and still be upheld?" He said, "Sure, I'll raise one arm." They tied him to the stake and lit the fire. As the fire consumed his body, he flopped over. All the people thought he was dead; the flesh was actually falling off his arms. Then all of a sudden, he raised both hands. Yes, it's possible. "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

So let me answer the question. Why was Hezekiah holding out? Because God had spoken, and he believed God. Look in Isaiah 36 and verse 10. Rabshakeh and Sennacherib are claiming that God had sent them to destroy Jerusalem: "Am I now come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? The Lord said unto me, Go up against this land, and destroy it." So they now claim that God sent them just to destroy the land.

Now, please let's put this together. What you see right now is an age-old conflict coming to play right before our eyes. All the defensed cities have been taken. Jerusalem happens to be helpless. There's no outside help, no inside help. They can't fight the king of Assyria. And yet they're not surrendering. They are maintaining their courage, their position, their confidence. So Rabshakeh says, "What confidence is this? Wherein dost thou trust?" In other words, it is vain when you look out here and see the situation you are in. You are hopeless. Give it up.

There is a guy who said, "No. I will not give it up." Why? Because he had already heard from God. When Rabshakeh had sent these words to Hezekiah, Hezekiah sent to Isaiah the prophet and said, "Pray for us and the remnant that are left." And if you look in Isaiah 37, verses 6 and 7—in fact, read verse 5: "So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me."

Look what God says: "Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." God said, "Don't be afraid. I'm going to cause him to hear a rumor. He's going to leave. He is not going to come up against this city." In Isaiah 37:33, God goes farther: "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it." He's just not going to do that. In Isaiah 37:35, God says, "For I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." Then in Isaiah 38:6, He says it again: "And I will deliver thee," that is

Hezekiah, "and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city."

If you lived by sight, Hezekiah was in deep, deep trouble. There's no way out of it. He was helpless and hopeless. But he had heard from God, and God said, "I'm going to defend this city. I'm going to defend you."

The Principle: God's Word Cannot Fail

Transcript variant (JW00495):

He's not going to cast a bank against this. No. He's not going to do it.

So here's the principle: God is God. He is sovereign. When He speaks, it's done. Psalm 33:9 says, "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." All God has to do is speak, and it's done. In Isaiah 46:9-11, God says, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth My counsel from a far country."

"Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." God said, "My counsel shall stand. I will do all My pleasure. I've spoken it; I'll do it. I've purposed it; I'll bring it to pass." This recalls Romans 4:17: "Even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." All God has to do is speak; when God speaks, it is done.

God's Word cannot fail. Psalm 138:2 says, "Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name." If the Word of God ever fails, then God ceases to be God. Hezekiah had heard from God. So let's ask ourselves the same question Rabshakeh asked Hezekiah: "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" Do you really, genuinely, truly believe in the sovereign God of heaven and earth who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ? Do you really and truly believe His Word? Are you willing to live and to die by His Word? If you were in Hezekiah's stead, looking at that vast Assyrian army, knowing they

had already conquered all the cities and countries around you, knowing you're helpless and cannot fight them or get outside help—do you think you could stand and remain steadfast, undoubting, believing that God was going to sovereignly, supernaturally save you and your city?

Application: Where Is Your Confidence?

You say, "Well, I'm not in Hezekiah's stead." I understand that. But we have today a corrupt government, an unjust judicial system, a fraudulent economic system. Crime and rebellion are on the rise, and society as a whole hates and despises Jesus Christ and His people. If you live by sight and look around you, you would tend to think, "Man, things are helpless. Things are hopeless. How in the world can we ever get out of this situation?"

So the question is, do you really believe that all nations shall serve Him? That He's the governor among the nations? That He controls every single individual? Can you trust Him now? Can you believe Him now? Can you trust Him and believe Him if all hell breaks loose? Suppose there is an EMP—electromagnetic pulse attack—and all electricity's gone, and we're back to the dark ages.

Alice and I stopped at a filling station this morning. Posted on every fuel pump and on the door: "Sorry, all of our pumps are down." This was a brand new Petro station. Thankfully we didn't stop for gas, just for a cup of coffee. But they're all down. When the electricity is off, nothing works.

Can we trust Him now? He is the only one to hold on to at such a time; His Word will encourage and sustain us. Government cannot and will not save us. Gold or wealth cannot and will not save us in and of itself. Job said in Job 31:24–28, "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; if I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above." Job was an extremely wealthy man, yet he said, "If I make gold my God, and if I trust in my wealth, I would deny God."

There is nothing wrong with silver, gold, and money as long as you are not trusting in it. But money is worthless when it comes to salvation. David said in Psalm 49:7, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Someone may say, "I can get all the money in the entire universe—all the silver, gold, diamonds, rubies—and give it to God." God made it all. He doesn't need it, and if He did, all He has to do is make more. So money is useless when it comes to salvation. Military might cannot save us either. Do you remember what God did to Pharaoh and his army? The children of Israel were absolutely helpless, pursued by the greatest power on earth at that time, whom God drowned in the Red Sea. So military might is worthless as well.

Look at Psalm 27:1, one of my favorite passages, which would do you well to memorize: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

"When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." Now watch! "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." Watch! "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 inquire in His temple." It is as though, "When hosts should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." What am I going to be confident in? In God, and in God alone. Psalm 33:16 says, "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host." Psalm 33:17: "An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." So an F-15, an Abrams tank, a bazooka, or a howitzer is a vain thing for safety. None of those things matter if God is against us; military might is absolutely worthless. Government, money, military might, false gods, multiculturalism, and political correctness are not going to save us. Jeremiah 48:13: "And Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh," their false god, "as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence," which were idols. Bethel was one of the two places where the golden calves were put. Someone says, "What we need is great diversity in this country, and how all these cultures mix together. That's our strength." Are

you serious? That's our weakness and destruction. When this country was founded, basically there was one faith—the Christian faith—and one truth—the Bible. I don't care if you were a Congregationalist, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, an Episcopalian—at least you believed the Scripture and believed in God. That's why our country did great things in the beginning, and why we're falling apart at the seams today: we have left that. If you do not know the middle passage in the Bible, I will give it to you.

Psalm 118:8–9 says, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." Man will not help you; government will not help you. God and God alone. Proverbs 3:26 declares, "For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken." It is the Lord that keeps our foot from being taken. Proverbs 14:26 adds, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and His children shall have a place of refuge." And Psalm 65:5 says, "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea." So God is our confidence wherever we are.

New Testament Confidence in Christ

Now I want to show you some passages in the New Testament that should excite you and encourage you to trust in the Lord. Turn first to Ephesians chapter 3, and remember this question: "What is the confidence wherein thou trustest?" Begin reading at verse 10. I will not spend a lot of time on it, but I will point out several things. Paul is praying for these Ephesians and says, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church," that is us, "the manifold wisdom of God." So all the wisdom of God is displayed in various ways. Where was this wisdom of God found?

"According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." There is wisdom in that eternal purpose. Verse 12: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven

and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Return to verse 12. Paul is praying: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him." Notice his confidence. What did that confidence in Jesus Christ enable Paul to do? Not just to minister to these people, not just to pray for them, but verse 13: "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you." Paul was persecuted, went through great tribulations and problems, and God sustained him. Then verse 16: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." And he goes on, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love."

All this comes back not only to the eternal purpose, but confidence in that purpose. God will execute His purpose in Jesus Christ in this world. He is not going to be denied, thwarted, or hindered. God will do it, and we have confidence in that. Look in your Bibles to 1 John 2, verse 28.

Notice the Scripture: "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." What will increase your confidence? Abiding in Christ. If we abide in Him, we will have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. I usually laugh and tell people there are a lot of places that may not necessarily be bad, but I don't go into them, and I don't go into them for a reason. Not only because Alice won't let me—that's a big joke. For instance, like a Hooters restaurant. I've never been in one in my life and don't intend on going in one. But I usually say, if I went into a place like

that, probably the Lord would come back and I'd have to explain. So I'd rather just stay out. One time when I took my grandsons to Front Sight, I called Alice. We were in Bass Pro, and she said, "Well, do you have a room for the night?" I said, "Oh, yes, we have a room." She said, "Well, where are you staying?" I said, "Well, we're staying at the Hooters Hotel." And she laughed. Of course, she knew better. And I said, "No, we're staying at Motel 6." After I hung up, I looked at Daniel and Tripp, and I said, "Now, boys, you know I was teasing Granny. I would never, ever stay in a place like that, because I fear the Lord." Tripp said, "Papa, you don't have to fear the Lord. If you stayed in a place like that, you better fear Granny, because she'd kill you." I said, "Well, that's probably right." But he said, "If we abide in Him, we'll have confidence." Now look in chapter 3, verse 21: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." What will give us confidence in prayer? Abiding in Him and living a holy, godly life. If our heart condemn us not—that is, we are not aware of known sins and known rebellions in our life—then we have confidence toward God in our prayers.

Skip over to 1 John 5 and begin with verse 12: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

If I ask the Father through Jesus Christ in faith to make me more holy, is that according to His will? Of course. I have confidence that He heard me, and if He heard me, then I know He's going to answer. If I ask Him to increase my faith, to enable me to honor Him more, or to give me courage to stand for His truth, are all these things according to His will? Yes, they're revealed in the Scripture. Then I can confidently say, "I know He heard me, and I know He's going to do that." He may do it incrementally—not that day, but the next week, month, or year—but He's heard me and He's going to answer. We can have confidence because He is the one that answers our prayers and fulfills His Word.

Now there's one last passage before I make my applications. Look back to Philippians chapter 1, verse 6. This should excite and encourage you: "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." If God has started a work in you, He will finish it and perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Know Your Confidence

None of His people are going to be lost. None of His sheep are going to die without Him. Whatever God starts, He finishes. That's why in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2, He's called the author and the finisher of our faith. "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." So Rabshakeh says, "Hezekiah, what confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" And Hezekiah could answer, "I've heard from God. I have His Word. I trust in Him." He said, "You won't shoot an arrow here. You won't bring a shield here. You won't embank us. You won't cast a bank around us. I believe Him. I may be helpless in myself. The situation may be hopeless looking by sight, but I trust Him. My confidence is in Him." Now, two quick applications. The first one is this: Like Hezekiah, we may be performing our duties and getting on with our lives and yet face trouble and distress.

None of us are immune. I do not care how godly you are; you are not immune to problems. The Apostle Paul said, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." So the more godly you are, the more persecution you will face. God may not test us as thoroughly as He tested Job, Abraham, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but He will test us sooner or later. Not that He needs to know—He already knows everything—but He will show us and others what metal we are made of. He will find out whether we can believe Him and His Word in the most trying circumstances and difficult situations. He will test us to see if we understand 1 Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." First, God will never put more on us than we are able to bear. Second, there is

always a way of escape, usually by submission to God and obedience to Him.

You don't have to look for trouble; it'll come. You don't have to look for distress; it'll happen. Make sure He's your confidence in the time of trouble and distress. The second application: we must know who is our confidence, in whom we trust, and always be ready to give an answer for the hope within us. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Why do we not give in like other people? Why do we not give up? Why are we not discouraged, distressed, and depressed? Because of God and His Word. We know Him and the outcome, and He is victorious as the sovereign God of heaven and earth. What is your confidence in which you trust? It must be the sovereign God and His Word. Truth from a heathen. We must know who we trust. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, for Your truth, for Your graciousness and kindness to us. We do pray for Brother Pat, Lord, that You would help him, help Effie and the family. Pray for Norma, Lord, and each one on the prayer list. We give them into Your hands and ask Your blessings. In Christ's name, amen.

CHAPTER 2

Truths From A Heathen

Part Two of Two

July 17, 2016

Introduction and Review

This is still the second part of the message, “Truths from a Heathen.” Last week I brought a message from this same passage and pointed out how God oftentimes uses even the heathen to speak truth. They may not know the truth, believe the truth, or understand the significance of their words. And yet sometimes they speak truth, or at least something with great spiritual impact. Even Balaam the false prophet was used by God to give a wonderful prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, Caiaphas the high priest also prophesied concerning Christ. He had no idea what he was saying, but he did so.

Even Rabshakeh, who was a heathen along with Sennacherib his king, gave some very strenuous and godly advice in one sense of the word, although they were heathen. Last week they asked Hezekiah, “What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” That question remains important because it challenged the very foundation of

Hezekiah's confidence. As I studied this passage, something jumped out at me that I had never seen before. That is how you get to studying; that is exactly what happened to me when I found this passage.

The Context of Hezekiah's Crisis

In Isaiah 37, our main text today, they said, "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given unto the hand of the king of Assyria." You have to remember exactly where Hezekiah was. The defense cities all around Judah, and Judah, had already been captured by Sennacherib. Hezekiah did not have a military sufficient to fight against Sennacherib. In fact, Rabshakeh offered him 2,000 horses if he was able on his part to set riders on them. He was obviously incapable of defending himself and Jerusalem, and help from Egypt was not coming. So they asked, "What in the world is the confidence wherein you trust?" Then they said, "Let not the God in whom you trust deceive you."

The word "deceive" literally means to deceive or to beguile. Here are the implications of these words to Hezekiah: Rabshakeh is implying that God could not and would not protect either Hezekiah or Jerusalem. If Hezekiah was convincing himself by any stretch of the imagination that he would escape and that Jerusalem would not be captured, then the only God in whom he was trusting was deceiving him, because that was his only hope at that particular time. There was no help for him; he was going to fall into their hands, and Jerusalem was going to be captured, as was he.

When Rabshakeh spoke these words to Hezekiah—"Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee"—it was not simply psychological warfare, or what we would call psyops. Surely they wished to make Hezekiah doubt his God. They wanted to leave him absolutely hopeless and absolutely helpless. But Rabshakeh and Sennacherib were absolutely sure, absolutely positive, that Jerusalem was going to fall into their hands.

The Heathen's Ignorance of God

They had conquered all the other cities, towns, and nearby villages. You can see the pride and arrogance of Rabshakeh and Sennacherib. Here was the big problem: they did not know the God in whom Hezekiah trusted.

A major dividing line between the child of God and the heathen is simply this: the children of God know their heavenly Father, while the heathen and the pagans do not know Him. They may have heard about Him; they may have read about Him. But they do not know Him personally or intimately. They are totally and completely ignorant of Him, of His attributes, of His person, and of His power.

And then they callously liken Him to their gods. In other words, the only thing that they would know about the One True and the Living God is what they know about their own false gods. So let me show you. I want you to look in your Bibles—hold Isaiah 37, but look in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 20. Here are some words that we need to look at, a situation that we need to consider.

In 1 Kings chapter 20, Ben-Hadad, who is the king of Syria, has 32 kings join him, and he is going to do battle with Ahab king of Israel. Ben-Hadad is absolutely confident that he is going to whip Ahab because Ahab has so few men and is so weak militarily. Can you imagine for one moment the size of the army that Ben-Hadad must have had with 32 kings? They are in his pavilion, the kings drinking themselves drunk. Look in verse 16; in fact, go back to verse 16: "And they went out at noon. But Ben-Hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the 32 kings that helped him."

Biblical Examples of Heathen Misunderstanding

"And the young men of the princes of the province went out first," that is, these young Israelites. "Ben-Hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria." Now watch this: "And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they come out for war, take them alive." It did not matter why they were coming out. If they wanted peace, wonderful, capture them; if they wanted war, wonderful, capture them. It did not matter. Just take them alive.

So he is sitting there giving this order, and his men go out. In verse 19, "So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they," that is, the Israelites, "slew every one his man." That was all the Syrians. "And the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued after them. And Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the horsemen." Now watch: "And the king of Israel went out and smote the horses and the chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter." So here is the situation.

Ben-Hadad with thirty-two kings was soundly defeated by Ahab with just a few men. They were absolutely trounced. So here is the question: How did the Syrians explain their loss? They explained it with a theological concept, based upon the theology they held concerning their god. In verse 23, they said to Ben-Hadad, “And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are the gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they.”

They did not understand the absolute sovereignty of God. Moreover, they did not understand that the one true and living God controlled all aspects of life, and that He was and is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. Consequently, they were setting themselves up for another loss.

Notice verse 28: “And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is the God of the hills, but He is not the God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

The prophet had already come to Ahab and said that, one year later, they were going to come back. They explained their devastating loss by saying that the Hebrews trusted in a God who happened to be the God of the hills. They would fight Him in the plains and valleys; He was not God there. He was not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. He was not sovereign, and surely their gods would enable them to overcome His people there.

The heathen, although they may know something about gods, do not know their gods. They know nothing about the one true and

living God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. The fatal error of fallen man is not only that he does not fear God; he does not know God. How can you fear someone you do not know? It is impossible.

I could introduce someone in this room who looks weak and insignificant, yet is a master martial artist capable of taking on everybody here. If you do not know him, his abilities, or what he can do, you would say, “Well, he’s a pushover.” It is the same thing with God. Fallen man has no idea who God is or what He can do.

Idolatry Begins in the Imagination

Consequently, fallen man has erected false gods for himself. In his ignorance, rejection, and denial of the one true living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, he has made a god of his own. He is deceived by the god of his own making.

Isaiah 44 shows what God says about idols and reveals the thinking of fallen man. God says, “Fear ye not, neither be afraid. Have I not told thee from that time, and have declared it? You are even my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any.” God is saying, “I’m the sovereign, I’m the only one.”

Then He says, “They that make a graven image are all of them vanity, and their delectable things shall not profit. And they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed, and the workmen thereof men. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up, yea, they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together.”

“The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms. Yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth. He drinketh water, and is faint.” In other words, he is human; he is a man. “The carpenter stretches out his line, or his rule, he marketh it out with a line, he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with a compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in his house.”

"He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest. He

planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn, and he will take thereof, and warm himself, yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread, yea, he maketh a god, and worshipeth it, he maketh a graven image, and falleth down thereunto. He burneth part thereof in the fire, with part thereof he eateth flesh, he roasteth roast, and is satisfied, and he warmeth himself, and says, Aha! I'm warm. I've seen the fire. And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image. He falls down unto it and worshipeth it and prayeth unto it and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god."

"They have not known nor understood, for He has shut their eyes that they cannot see, and their hearts that they cannot understand. And none considers in his heart, neither is there any knowledge nor understanding, to say, I have burned part of it in the fire. Yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof, I have roasted flesh and eaten it. And shall I make the residue thereof an abomination and idol?"

"Shall I fall down to the stalk of a tree?" Now watch verse 20: "He feedeth on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

So God is saying, here is the absolute stupidity of idolaters. Either a man has to make his own idol, or another man makes the idol. I do not care how many images of Buddha you see, or any of the other false gods; they are all man-made. Here is a man who takes a tree, burns part of it, warms himself, and cooks on it. Then he turns around, makes a god out of the residue, and says, "You are my god; you have to deliver me."

You and I think and say, Well, that is absolute stupidity. But men may call a stalk or a stone their father. God says they are absolutely, totally deceived, and their god has deceived them.

Jeremiah 2 speaks to Israel. “As a thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face.”

“But in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise and save us.” God says, look at this people. They are so stupid, so perverse, and so

rebellious that they fall down to a stone and say, “You have begotten me,” and to a stalk, “You are my father.” But He says, let them get in trouble. Now, of course, they are going to cry to Him.

Jeremiah 10:8 says exactly what idols are: “But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities.” Many times in the Bible, when Israel is said to have turned to the vanities of the heathen, it is talking about the idols of the heathen.

Now consider what is one of the most humorous incidents in the Bible concerning an idol. In order to appreciate it, remember that Israel had been defeated by the Philistines, and the ark of God had been taken. In 1 Samuel 5, the Philistines took the ark and put it in the house of their god, Dagon, who was an idol. See what happened when they put the ark in Dagon’s house.

“And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord.” They took Dagon and set him up in his place again.

The next morning Dagon had fallen upon his face before the ark of the Lord again. His head and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. Therefore neither the priest of Dagon, nor anyone who came into Dagon’s house, tread upon the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

Stop and think about that. Here are the Philistines worshiping Dagon. The Ark of the Covenant is brought in, and Dagon falls in front of it. They go back in and help him up. The next morning, they find that he has fallen down again; his head is cut off, the palms of his hands are gone, and there is nothing but a stump left. You would think the Philistines knew, in one sense, the power of God. The Hebrews had already come in and conquered the land. Even when the Hebrews were being defeated in 1 Samuel chapter 4, they said, “Let us send for the ark, it may save us”—not the God of the ark, but the ark. They were trusting the ark instead of the God of the ark. When the ark came into the camp, the Hebrews shouted a great

shout, and the Philistines said, “Oh, what in the world is this? This is nothing but horror and terror for us. The God of the Hebrews has come into the camp.”

They knew the power of God because they had been defeated by that same One True and Living God. And now their god had fallen down broken. You would think that anybody with one eye and half sense would put two and two together and say, “Hmm, our god must not be too much of a god. We have to help him back up; he cannot even help himself. He loses his head, and he loses his hands at the feet of the God of Israel.” You would tend to think that people would say, “Hey, wait a minute, we are serving the wrong god.”

But the truth of the matter is, no. They continued to believe in Dagon, and their god, in whom they trusted, deceived them. So you have to ask yourself this question: Why would anyone trust in a god who could not help him or deliver him?

Look in 1 Chronicles chapter 14. I preached a message from this passage several years back, and I think the title was “It’s Time to Leave Our False Gods.” I took it from this passage. Let us begin with verse 9: “And the Philistines came and spread themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines, and wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up, for I will deliver them into thine hand. So they came up to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters.”

“Therefore they called the name of that place Baal-perazim. And when they had left their gods there,” that is, the Philistines, “when they had left their gods there, David gave a commandment and they were burned with fire.” They brought their gods to protect them and give them victory, but the gods did neither. So they left them there. It is time to leave them when they are absolutely worthless.

Now I want you to turn back to 2 Kings chapter 16. I want you to understand the depravity and rebellion of fallen man. Ahaz was the king of Israel at this particular time. The king of Syria had attacked him, and he was unable militarily to fight him off. So he sent to Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, gave him all kinds of wealth, and

said, “Come and help me.” Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, came and conquered Syria, whose capital was Damascus.

Ahaz, the king of Israel, went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser. Watch what happens. In 2 Kings chapter 16 and verse 10: “And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus. And king Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest the fashion of the altar and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof.” This was an altar in Syria. Uriah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, and made it before King Ahaz came from Damascus. When the king arrived, he saw the altar, approached it, and offered thereon. Please understand: this was not God’s altar, but an altar from Damascus, from the Syrians. “And he burned his burnt offering, and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar.”

Ahaz brought the brazen altar, which had been before the Lord, from the forefront of the house and placed it on the north side of his own altar. Then King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying, “Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king’s burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings, and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire by.” It was his special altar. “Thus did Uriah the priest according to all that king Ahaz commanded him.” As you continue, you see how King Ahaz perverted and destroyed the house of God, the temple that had been built.

Syria had been defeated; Tiglath-Pileser had wiped them out. Ahaz saw this altar and thought, “Wow, this is beautiful. I need one just like this to worship by.” Have you ever stopped to think that just because someone thinks something is beautiful does not make it scriptural and right? Some pagan temples are exquisite and beautiful, but they are not biblical; they are not right.

Do you think Ahaz was stupid? I can show you a man in the Bible who was even more stupid than Ahaz: Amaziah, another king. In fact, God called him on his stupidity. Look in 2 Chronicles 25. God

challenged him on it. The very fact that Amaziah refused to listen to God indicated that God was going to destroy him.

Amaziah had just defeated the Edomites and won the victory. Yet Scripture says, “And it came to pass after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense to them.”

“Wherefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand?” When the prophet spoke, the king answered, “Art thou made of the king’s counsel? Forbear! Why shouldst thou be smitten?”

In other words, if you do not shut up, I will kill you. The prophet then forbare and said, “I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.” Isn’t that amazing? Here is a king who defeated the Edomites, saw their false gods, and took them to be his gods.

Now stop and think with me. Rabshakeh said, “Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee.” There may be a few in America who would actually bow down to idols. Some cults and sects have their idols. But most Americans, by and large, would never bow down to an idol. It does not matter whether it is made of gold, silver, wood, or stone. Most would consider bowing down to an idol not only idolatry, but gross, uncouth, and heathenistic. We would never do anything like that.

However, we do not object to worshiping a god of our imagination. What we do not understand is that the word “image” comes from the word “imagination.” You cannot make an image without first imagining that image.

Everything begins in the mind. Cars do not begin in a factory; they begin in an engineer’s mind. He draws everything on paper, and after the process is completed and approved, the image he imagined and drew goes into the factory, where the car is produced. Everything basically starts with our mind.

When you and I think wrongly, unbiblically, and unscripturally concerning the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Scripture, to that extent we are idolaters. The only true God who exists is the God who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, and He is exactly as He has revealed Himself. He is not as we wish, hope, think, or desire Him to be. He is what He is revealed to be in Holy Scripture. Therefore, most people are idolaters in the sense that they worship a God of their own imagination.

We need to consider what the New Testament says about imaginations. Our Lord warned us. Romans chapter 1 shows where all this actually began. Verse 21 says, “Because that when they knew God,” that is, they had knowledge of Him at one point, “because that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God,” that is, they did not believe Him; they would not worship Him. They had knowledge of God at one point, yet refused to believe Him and would not worship Him. This is where it all began. When they did not believe God and would not worship Him as God, what happened? “Neither were they thankful,” here is what happened, “but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened.”

“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” Now, here is my question: where did all the idolatry, or all the idols, begin? The answer is in the imagination. They became vain in their imaginations, and they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

It all starts in the mind. Romans 1:25 says, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." All of our idolatry begins in the mind. That is why most professing Christians are content with the God they have in their minds. I have heard professing Christians say, "But I know God is not like that," or, "My God would never do something like that." Really? Your God probably would not, but the God of Scripture would. The only God they have is the God of their own imagination, not the God of the Bible.

The Stronghold of Imaginations

Look in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 10, verses 4 and 5. Paul says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

The Apostle Paul is talking about warfare, but not carnal, or fleshly, warfare. He is talking about spiritual warfare. Notice that he says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

Stop and think about a stronghold. What is your stronghold? It is your place of defense, where you hold out. If someone came through that door firing a pistol, I would jump behind that cabinet. That cabinet would become my stronghold, my place of defense. Now watch what he says: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Do you want to know where man's stronghold is? Here it is: "Casting down imaginations."

"And every high thing," or literally every high thought, "that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." What must we cast down? Our imaginations. We cannot imagine God to be as He is not. When we do, we are guilty of idolatry. The God we manufacture in our minds is the God that deceives us because He is not real. He is no more real than an idol.

God is talking about Israel, particularly Judah and Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 13, after commanding Jeremiah to take a new girdle and bear it by the river Euphrates, He says, “Thus saith the Lord, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart and walk after other gods to serve them and to worship them shall even be as this girdle which is good for nothing.”

Notice what He said: this evil people, first, refuse to hear His words; second, walk after the imagination of their heart; and third, the imagination of their heart causes them to walk after other gods, to serve them and to worship them.

Isn't that amazing? God is telling us that oftentimes the god in whom we trust does deceive us, because the god in whom we trust is not necessarily the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Moreover, we are equally deceived when we think that we can sin against God and escape His judgment. Some individuals think that somehow God is never going to judge them, that God is never going to destroy them.

What is true individually is also true familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally. Alice and I passed a church building this morning, and all across the churchyard were signs that said, "God bless America, God bless America, God bless America." I looked at Alice and said, "Why should God bless America? America does not bless God. We've turned our backs upon God. We've despised Him."

The problem is this: we have manufactured a God of our own imagination. When we violate the Law of God—and basically, what we have done in this country is forsaken God's Law—we are idolaters. The very first commandment is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." You cannot violate any of God's law or transgress against God without first violating that commandment. I do not care what you do when you sin against God; you have already violated the first commandment, because you have dethroned God and enthroned yourself. You have said, basically, "I do not care what God says. I want what I want, and I am going to do what I want to do."

A good example is found in the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet." God tells us that we are not to covet our neighbor's wife, his maidservants, his manservants, his oxen, his asses, or anything that is our neighbor's. But the principle is very simple: "Thou shalt not covet."

I do not know whether you have ever thought about the extent of covetousness. If Steve had a brand-new four-wheel-drive truck, and I looked at it and said, "Oh man, I like that. I would really like to have that. I wish he would give it to me. He will not give it to me. Maybe I can steal it," you see where I am going with this?

The Bible says in Colossians 3 and verse 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

When I covet that truck, I have already committed idolatry. Why? Because I have denied God, who said, "Thou shalt not covet." You cannot sin against God without violating the very first commandment.

The Worthlessness of Idols and Imagined Gods

Now I want to show you what God says about idols, and then make some applications. Turn first to Psalm 115. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?" Notice the sovereignty of our God: "But our God is in the heavens."

"He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." This is our God. He's sovereign. He does as He pleases. Psalm 115:4 says, "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 likened to them."

"So is everyone that trusteth in them." What is an idol? He's dead and dumb. God said, if you make one, you're dead and dumb. If you trust in one, you're dead and dumb.

Psalm 135:15 says, "The idols of the heathen 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; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are likened to them. So is everyone that trusteth in them."

It really gets worse than being dead and dumb. One of the words for an idol in the Bible is the Hebrew word "Gelulam." You look up the Hebrew word in the lexicon and you will find that the word actually means "dung balls." That's what an idol is. That's what God refers to an idol as: a ball of dung.

You remember the Valley of Gehenna around Jerusalem? That's where all the trash was, all the dead bodies, all the scum, all the filth. It was a picture of hell which our Lord used. And that basically is what hell is. Hell is nothing more than the outhouse for the dung

balls of this life, those that worship idols. That's what He said: "They that make them are likened to them; so is everyone that trusteth in them." So, when Rabshakeh says, "Let not the God whom you trust deceive you,"

He was speaking a truth that we need to consider: an idol is a useless, worthless, man-made piece of garbage, regardless of who made it or what it was made from. The only value it possesses is its workmanship and the materials in it. That is all. It does not possess life. It cannot give life, protect, or provide. It is dumb. It is dead. And so is everyone who makes them and everyone who trusts them. A God of your imagination is of no more use than an idol because it is not God. The only God that is is the God who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture.

Applications: Sennacherib's Fate and the Principle of Deception

Now consider some applications. The first is this, and I think most of you would agree: it is often easy to give counsel and advice, but sometimes difficult to follow your own counsel and advice. What did Sennacherib send Rabshakeh to Hezekiah to say? He sent him to say, “Let not the God in whom you trust deceive you.”

Guess what? The god in whom Sennacherib trusted deceived him. His god was Nisroch. Isaiah 37:37 says, “So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.” Then verse 38 says, “And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword. And they escaped into the land of Armenia, and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.”

Do you realize that he ended up trusting in a false god? His false god deceived him, and he died at the hands of his own sons in the house of his false god. He sent word to Hezekiah, “Don’t let the God in whom you trust deceive you,” but he never followed his own counsel or advice; he died in idolatry.

Consider this second application: when one refuses to bow to the sovereign God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, deception is absolute and unavoidable. When you reject truth, you are only

open to error. When one denies truth, the only thing left is deception. Have you ever stopped to ask, What is the source of deception?

How can a man be deceived? There are plenty of answers, I'm sure, but I'm going to give you two. First of all, a man can be deceived by his own wicked heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Our hearts can deceive us. In fact, in the book of Obadiah, chapter 1 and verse 3, God said to those people, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee."

In other words, you have got yourself up here in the cleft of the rock. You think you cannot be brought down? Oh, I have got news for you, said God. I can bring you down. The pride of your heart has deceived you. So, you can be deceived by your own wicked heart.

But secondly, you can be deceived by the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth, according to the principle of the Law of Retribution. God sends you that deception. It is called the Lex Talionis, the Law of Retribution, where God makes the punishment fit the crime.

So, if you do not want His truth, He will see that you believe a lie. If you do not want His Word, He will see that you believe error. In Isaiah 66, God is talking about people who will not listen. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest?" In other words, you try to build something just for Me, and you are going to run out of materials. I made it all. "For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man."

"He that sacrificeth a lamb is as if he cut off a dog's neck. He that offereth an oblation is as if he offered swine's blood." That's because they do it in rebellion. "He that burneth incense is as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways." They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations, not in God. Look what God says: "I also will choose their delusions, and

will bring their fears upon them, because when I called, none did answer. When I spake, they did not hear, but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not."

Isn't that amazing? God said, "You don't want to believe me? Fine, I'll choose your delusions. I'll bring upon you your own fears." In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, beginning with verse 10, the Bible 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." In other words, they didn't want the truth. "And for this cause," because they did not want truth, "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."

Why did God send them a strong delusion? Because they hated His truth. They refused Him. So listen to me very carefully. When God says, through Rabshakeh, "Let not the God in whom you trust deceive you," it's a principle. We better determine who is the God that we trust. We better determine that He is the one true and living God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, because there is no other God. God Himself said, "I know not any." And if God doesn't know any other God, very obviously we don't know any other God. This also should tell you where most of the people are at in America today. They're trusting in a God of their imagination, and they're deceived by their own God.

And like Sennacherib, unless God opens their eyes and gives them repentance and faith, they will die in their deceit. "Let not the God in whom you trust deceive you." I'm so thankful that I trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and in Him alone.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word, for your truth, for your admonition. Give us grace that we may serve thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In thy name we pray, amen.

Source Notes

Chapter 1: Truths From A Heathen - Part 1 of 2
JW01436 | 2016-06-19 | YouTube

Chapter 2: Truths From A Heathen - Part 2 of 2
JW01437 | 2016-07-17 | YouTube

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