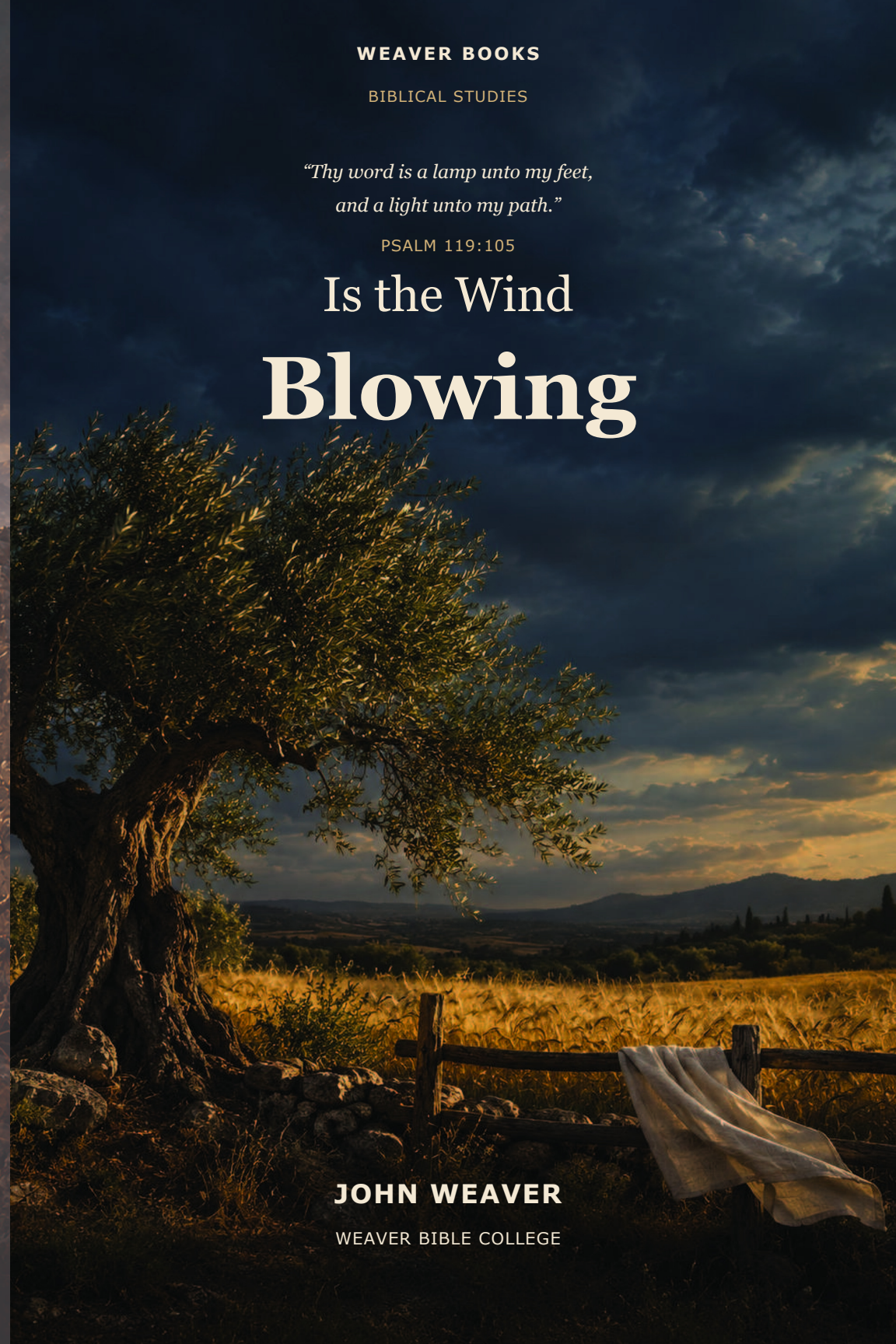
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"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105

Is the Wind Blowing



JOHN WEAVER

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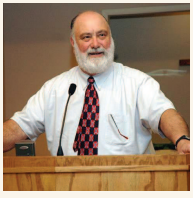
The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof.

JOHN 3:8, EXCERPT

The work of God's Spirit is known by its effects, not controlled by human effort. John Weaver considers regeneration, restoration, providence, and hope when circumstances seem beyond remedy. These sermons connect the biblical imagery of wind with confidence in God's sovereign power and the evidence of a changed life.

“Conversion is when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, He enables us to exercise that life, repent of our sins, and believe in Jesus Christ.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

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CHAPTER 1

Is The Wind Blowing

Part One

Introduction: The Wind in Scripture

The title of the series is, “Is the Wind Blowing?” It is a question. Isaiah chapter 7, the first part of a three-part series, “Is the Wind Blowing?”

“And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.”

Look at that: “and his heart”—that is, Ahaz’s heart—“was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.”

I’m going to show you, Lord willing, this week and in the next two weeks, some truths in Scripture about the wind. So I ask this

question: Is the wind blowing? The answer is, the wind is always blowing. In fact, it's usually blowing in one place if it's not blowing in another place. When it does blow, sometimes it is simply a gentle, refreshing breeze, and other times it's a gale, sometimes a storm, and sometimes an outright hurricane or tornado.

But have you ever considered the word "wind" as it's revealed in Scripture? It's a simple word, and it's a phenomenon that you and I observe all the time. In fact, we observe it so frequently that we very seldom think about it.

We have an old expression that says, "Familiarity breeds contempt." That's true, not only in relationship to people, but also in other things. Alice and I are oftentimes traveling, and we'll see the most beautiful scenery. We're stopping and gawking at it, while people are just shooting by as if it's not even there. We say to each other, "Well, they live here." They see it all the time, so it's nothing to them. Familiarity does indeed breed contempt.

The word "wind," or "winds," is used in different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it is used as a curse; sometimes it is used as a blessing. When you're talking about the wind, I suppose it would depend upon where, upon whom, and how the wind blows as to whether or not it is a blessing or a curse. Let me remind you that the wind is controlled by God Himself.

Job 37, verses 9 through 13, gives us at least two key thoughts: "Out of the south cometh the whirlwind, and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering He wearieth the thick cloud; He scattereth His bright cloud. And it is turned about by His counsels, that they may do whatsoever He commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy."

Listen carefully to what the Bible says concerning the wind: it is turned about by His counsels. God is in control of the wind. It is turned about by His counsels so that the winds may do whatsoever He commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. God is in absolute sovereign control. He causes the wind to come either for

correction, for mercy, or for His land. The wind, then, is under the sovereign control of God.

It is so controlled by God that Scripture says He rides upon the wings of the wind. In 2 Samuel 22:11, the Bible says, “And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and He was seen upon the wings of the wind.” God has the wind under absolute and sovereign control. The wind is used in different ways in the Bible.

The Wind of Trepidation in Isaiah 7

I want to share with you three ways that the word "wind" is used. Today, I am only going to cover one of them: the wind of trepidation. The word "trepidation," of course, refers to fear or horror. We have an old saying—or at least those of us who are old have an old saying: "An ill wind is blowing." That expression centers upon the fact and reality that something dreadful and awful is about to happen. When an ill wind is blowing, seemingly, it is indeed a time for fear.

When you look at Isaiah chapter 7, we could certainly say that an ill wind was blowing in Judah. It was the wind of trepidation, or the wind of fear and horror. Verse 1 says: "And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin"—now watch—"Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it."

Two countries were fighting against one country. Verse 2 says: "And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart"—that is, the heart of Ahaz the king—"was moved, and the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Fear not only gripped the royal household; it gripped the entire nation. Fear, anguish, and consternation gripped every individual.

Now, pay close attention to a fact. Samaria and Syria were confederate with each other. Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom, which was sometimes known as Ephraim. Thus Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, and Samaria could refer to the entire people of that kingdom. But Samaria, or the Northern Kingdom, had fought against Judah for years. In 2 Chronicles chapter 28, the first

nineteen verses show what Samaria, or Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, had done to Judah, especially under Ahaz. Remember, we are talking about Ahaz: "Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 28:1-19 (KJV)

> But he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.
>
> So basically he was an idolater.
>
> “Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a very great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king’s son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God? Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the

> fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, and said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the Lord already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation.

"And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria."

At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there. For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.

There had been war previously with Syria and also with Samaria. Samaria had defeated the Judahites. In one battle they slew 120,000 soldiers in one day, and then took 200,000 women, men, and children prisoners. That would have to be a mighty army to slay 120,000 men and capture 200,000 prisoners. Here Judah is.

Judah has been assailed by the Edomites, the Philistines, the Syrians, and the Israelites. Now there is not merely a rumor, but knowledge of another planned attack against Judah. This time it is not just Samaria and not just Syria; it is Samaria and Syria together.

Samaria and Syria were not simply going to attack Judah and Jerusalem. They were going to thoroughly destroy Judah and

Jerusalem and put up a puppet king. Whatever Ahaz does now has to be decided, because his reign and the house of David are about to come to an end. Isaiah 7:6 says, “They said”—that is, Pekah, the king of Samaria, and Rezin, the king of Syria—“Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeel.” They wanted to set another king in Judah.

Ahaz was indeed of the house of David. Tabeel, whom Syria and Israel wanted to set over Judah and Jerusalem, would simply be a lackey king—someone in league with them and willing to do their bidding. This is what was happening when Isaiah 7:2 says that the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people were moved like the trees of the wood when the wind blew upon them.

God's Sovereign Control Over Judgment

They had not merely heard that Israel and Syria were allied, or confederate, with each other; they were planning another invasion of Judah. Judah had already lost 120,000 soldiers and had been defeated not only by Samaria and Syria, but also by the Edomites and the Philistines. Obviously, Ahaz thought the end of the line had come for him and his reign. He was frightened. When the Bible says that the hearts of the people were moved like the trees of the wood when the wind blows upon them, it denotes that Syria and Samaria had a strong army, comparable to a strong, blustering, boisterous wind capable of moving an entire forest.

Judah had already been invaded, not only by the Israelites, but by the Syrians, the Edomites, and the Philistines. Isaiah 1:7-8 describes the position they were in: “Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. 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.” They had already been devastated. They had already been nearly wiped out. Now they heard there was going to be another invasion, and their hearts were fearful.

Ahaz was undoubtedly corrupt, degenerate, and rebellious. He was an idolater. That is all there is to it. But he was of the house of David. What does the Scripture emphasize when it says in Isaiah 7,

“And it was told the house of David, saying…” Ahaz understood that he was of the house of David. Although he was a pervert and an adulterer, everything was suddenly going to come to an end if Samaria and Syria had their way, because they were going to set up another king.

This is what was transpiring. Psalm 89 states what God told David as part of the Davidic covenant, concerning his children and descendants. Beginning with verse 30, He says: “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” God said, “I’ll chastise you. I’ll whip you.” What had Ahaz and the people done? They had forsaken God. Therefore God sent the Israelites, the Syrians, the Edomites, and the Philistines. He was using the rod against them.

Go back, if you would, to Isaiah chapter 7. It is true that Judah and Jerusalem are going to be whipped again, but it will not be by Rezin and Pekah. It will not be by Samaria or Syria this time.

Isaiah is sent to Ahaz, and he says, “Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeel.”

“Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.” Notice what God says: all of their plans and schemes are not going to stand.

This has several obvious implications. First of all, it is the Father—and the Father as Father and Judge—that determines the judgment and chastisement of His people.

God had sent Samaria earlier. He had sent Syria earlier. He had also sent the Edomites and Philistines. But He says, “They are planning right now on destroying you and wiping you out. It is not going to happen. I am the one that determines who chastens you and how you are chastened.” Nothing comes to pass without divine

approval. When God's people need chastening, He determines when they are chastened, how much they are chastened, and by whom they are chastened. I am thankful that God is much more patient than man. They needed chastening, but God said it would not be by these individuals. We must acknowledge this when God does chasten.

Man's Devices Under God's Control

He does a very good job. You'd never want to call 911 again after the Father gets through with you, do you, son? But I got news for you. The Father, the Heavenly Father, does that the same exact way. We cannot dictate to our Heavenly Father how to chasten or how to judge. All of us in here have had children. You would be absolutely incensed if I came to you as the head of your house and said, "Don't whip that child," or, "Your child needs whipping." You would probably look at me and say, "Wait a minute. I'm the head of this house. This is my child. I'm the father. I determine when that child needs chastening, and I determine how that child is chastened, not you." It is the same thing with God. We can say, "Lord, take care of the situation," but we cannot dictate to the Father how He is to whip someone or when He is to do it. So obviously, chastisement resides with the prerogative of the Father.

The second implication is this: man may devise, scheme, and plan and seek to initiate his devices. Yet both men and their devices are under the sovereign control of God. Have you ever stopped to think about this? Nothing comes to pass except that which God allows. God is in absolute sovereign control. Even as bad as things are in our country today, it should be to you a source of joy, consolation, and praise that the wicked cannot do all that they determine and desire. They cannot do everything that they determine and desire. Just stop and think about that.

Rezin was king of Syria, and Pekah was king of Israel. They determined that they were going to invade Judah and replace Ahaz with a puppet king. God said, "No, you're not. I'm not going to allow that. You're not going to do that." The plans and schemes of men—even the plans and schemes of wicked men—are under the sovereign control of God. Hold Isaiah 7 and go back to Job chapter 5. I want to show you several verses that I hope will elucidate this in

your mind. Look at verse 12, right before the book of Psalms. Job 5, verse 12. Look what God does.

"He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise." He disappointeth them; they cannot do it. Psalm 33:10 says, "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect." Remember, God is sovereign even over the heathen. God can cancel the wicked's plans and desires. He can cancel the plan of the new world order and the one-world government crowd, and He will. God is the one who determines that which comes to pass.

Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass." God says, Do not worry about it. Why would God say not to worry about it? Because God is going to take care of it. It is under His control.

Proverbs 19:21 says, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." This is a good verse to memorize: many devices are in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord shall stand.

We must understand this one truth: God will only allow that to come to pass which ultimately will redound to His honor and His glory. If it will not redound to His honor and His glory, it will not come to pass. Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain."

God will allow just enough wrath, sin, and wickedness to ultimately redound to His honor and His glory. You say, "How can sin and wickedness redound to God's honor and glory?" Because it will be an excellent opportunity for God to demonstrate His holiness, righteousness, and justice. That which will not redound to God's honor and glory, God will restrain. Even the devices, plans, and schemes of the wicked are under the sovereign control of God Himself. It is God who determines that which will come to pass, not man. Here is the third implication: there is a time to fear.

Biblical vs. Unbiblical Fear

There is a time not to fear. This is probably one of the most difficult truths not only to absorb, but also to apply. When, then, is it biblical to fear, and when is it unbiblical to fear? Or, to ask the question another way: Why do we usually fear with an unbiblical fear? The obvious answer is that our unbiblical fear is a manifestation of our lack of faith and our lack of love.

First John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." Perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment. If we are truly loving our Lord and exercising faith in Him, we will not have an unbiblical fear.

When we look at Isaiah 7, we find that Ahaz, the king of Judah, and all the people had hearts moved like the trees of the wood when the wind blew upon them. Their hearts were moved in fear because they believed that the king of Samaria and the king of Syria would come, wipe them out, and finish them off. Yet, according to the rest of Isaiah 7, there was no need to panic or fear, for God said that the counsel of Pekah and Rezin would not come to pass: He would not allow it.

Why, then, did they fear and panic? The answer is that they were wicked and had rebelled against God. Sin produces fear, especially fear of judgment and retribution.

Causes of Incessant Fear

One of the simplest verses to memorize is Proverbs 28:1: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." The wicked flee—they run—when no one is pursuing them. There are two things that will make us fear incessantly. The first is a guilty conscience over past sins. A guilty conscience is fueled by sin and disobedience; it places us in a state of fear and a willingness to flee even when no one is pursuing us.

Let me give you an illustration. When I was a teenager, I went with another friend to visit a third friend because he had called and was in a great deal of trouble. We found him hiding in the loft of a

barn, so scared that he was shaking. What he had done was simple: he had stolen some hubcaps.

His conscience smote him so much that he was afraid to come out of the barn. Every car he heard go by, he just knew was the cops coming to arrest him. He believed that everyone knew he had stolen those hubcaps. I do not remember how long it took us to get him out, but that incident ended his career as a thief. As far as I know, he never stole another thing until the day he died, because his conscience was eating him alive.

He knew he had done wrong, and he was fearful. Nobody had probably known what he had done, but he did not know that; he believed everybody knew. A guilty conscience will do that.

The second thing that will make us fear incessantly is continuous sin, or continuous disobedience. When we live a life of disobedience, we must always be looking over our shoulder, so to speak. Why do we act that way? Because we know that we deserve punishment and judgment, and sooner or later it is going to catch up with us. We are always looking over our shoulder to see when and where.

Psalm 53 in verse 5 describes such an individual perfectly: "There were they in great fear, where no fear was."

So it really does not matter whether someone is pursuing you or not, or whether someone is after you. If you are continually sinning and disobeying, sooner or later it is going to catch up with you. You cannot violate God's law and escape His judgment. If you have a guilty conscience over past sins or continual disobedience to God, you will be in a state of fear.

But if we are not violating God's law, if we are obedient and honoring Him, there is absolutely nothing to fear. I would challenge you to go through the Bible and look at all the “fear nots.” Look at how many times God says, “Fear not”—use a concordance if you have to. It is absolutely amazing how many times God's people are admonished to fear not. And, by the way, we are expressly forbidden to fear man. Did you know that? We are expressly forbidden to fear man.

The Command Not to Fear Man

And yet we fear thieves, muggers, murderers, and a host of other vermin. We fear them whether they are legal intruders or illegal intruders. To quote past President Ronald Reagan: “We live in a day when the most fearful words are, ‘I'm from the government and I'm here to help you.’” That would be a legal intruder, versus someone who just kicks the door in—that would be an illegal intruder.

But you know what the Bible says in Proverbs 29 and verse 25? “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” We’re not to fear man, period. Fear is one of the greatest tools of control that there is. If I can make you afraid of me, I can control you. Why in the world do you think that the government today is always trying to make people fearful? “If we don't surrender our liberties, why, we're going to be destroyed by the terrorists!” Fear is a means of control. If you're fearful, you can be very easily controlled. If I can make you fearful, I can make you obey me and follow my every whim and my every desire.

The biblical position is that we are not to fear man. Period. Let me show you. I want you to hold Isaiah 7, but turn in your Bibles to Psalm 27. Look at verse 1. David said, “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. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. 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.”

What is he saying? I’m not going to fear what man can do unto me. I’m not even going to be afraid if an entire army rises against me. No, he said, “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?” As long as you fear God, you have no need to fear man. Look in Psalm 46, beginning there with verse 1.

This is the passage from whence Martin Luther took the words, “A mighty fortress is our God.” Notice he says in Psalm 46, verse 1:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

If there’s a giant earthquake, if the entire mountain system moved, we’re not going to be afraid. Why? God is our refuge and our strength. God is a very present help in trouble. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 56, verse 4. David says, “In God I will praise His word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.” I’m not going to be fearful of man.

Notice Psalm 118, verse 6. David says it very clearly: “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” He can’t do anything apart from God. As long as we fear Him, we have no need to fear man. Look in your Bibles to Proverbs 3, verse 25: “Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh.” Be not afraid of sudden fear. Then I want you to go to Isaiah 51.

Something just pops up and pops out, and most people simply go to pieces. God says, "No, don't be afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken." When we trust in the Lord, we have no need to fear man.

Look in your Bible to Isaiah 51, beginning with verse 12. This is a very powerful passage, and I want you to note one question. God says, "I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;"

Now, just stop right there and think about that. God says, "I'm the one that comforts you. And why should you be afraid of a man that shall die?" Now, watch. "Why should you fear a man that shall die, and the son of man which shall be made as grass;"—watch verse 13—"and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?"

God says, "Why in the world are you going to fear man and forget Me?" If you trust in God, you're not going to fear man. God says, "...and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor..." And look at this next question: "...and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Where is it? It's in God's hand. The oppressor can do nothing apart from God. Rezin and Pekah thought they were going to take over Judah, but God says, "You're not. I'm not going to allow that to happen. It will not happen."

You know what the Bible says in 2 Timothy 1 and verse 7? "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." If you fear, it didn't come from God, because God does not give us a spirit of fear.

The Fear of God and Its Effects

When the wind of judgment, death, and punishment blows upon the wicked, they fear. If you read through your Bible, you will discover that many judgments were brought upon the nations by the wind. It was the wind that brought the locusts into Egypt, produced the famine in Joseph's time, brought the quails into the camp of Israel, and drowned Pharaoh and his host in the sea.

God oftentimes sends His wind of fear, His wind of trepidation, into the hearts of the wicked. When He does so, their hearts melt, just like the hearts of Ahaz and the people. That is why the Bible says in Luke 21 and verse 26, “Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” When God sends His wind of fear, they melt.

There is a time to fear and a person to fear. The person to fear, of course, is the Lord of Glory. There is a biblical fear, and that biblical fear is a fear of God. God is the object of that biblical fear. The Bible says in Proverbs 28 and verse 14, “Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.”

There are two types of fear. There is a fear that is a reverent worship of God. I could say that I fear God, meaning that I respect and honor God. I walk reverently toward Him because He is my Lord, my God, my Savior, and my Master. I reverence Him; I fear

Him. There is another fear, the fear of punishment. That is not an unbiblical fear in that sense of the word. If I told Casey, when he was a young boy, not to do something and he did it, he should fear because I was going to whip him. I would chasten him for his disobedience.

In other words, I understand that God chastens His own. That is what Hebrews chapter 12 tells us. Our Lord said in Revelation chapter 3, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” So we fear God in that sense of the word.

First of all, we reverence Him. Secondly, we know that as a Father, He is not going to allow us to get away with that which is wicked and evil. In fact, an aspect of the new covenant is found in Jeremiah 32 and verse 40, where God said, “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” So God puts His fear in our hearts. Have you ever stopped to think about that? It is the fear of God that leads us to obedience.

Why do we obey? Because we fear God, we respect Him, and we do not want Him to chasten us. We have respect for Him, and we also have respect for His chastening abilities. We do not wish to dishonor Him. One of the most famous men in the Bible was Noah. But you know what the Bible says in Hebrews 11, verse 7? “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” What made Noah build that ark? You say God commanded him. Yes, that is true, but he was moved with fear.

He knew that God’s judgment was coming, and he feared the righteous wrath of a holy God. When we fear God rightly, we will not fear man or anything else. Psalm 112 tells us about a good man. When it says a good man, it is talking about a godly man, a saved man: “A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.” Here is this good man, this godly man: “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be

afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies." So the man who trusts in God is not going to be afraid.

Applications and Conclusion

There is something we can learn from Ahaz and the inhabitants of Judah. It is very simple: impiety, ungodliness, and unrighteousness triumph in prosperity, but tremble in adversity. When you are prosperous, wicked, and wrong, you can have a good old time. But when adversity and judgment strike, it is no longer fun and games. In Isaiah 7, adversity stunned the Judahites. They were so overpowered by terror and fear that they were almost bereft of any ability. The Bible says the heart of Ahaz was moved, and the hearts of the people were moved. What were they moved with? They were moved with fear. It was fear that led to their confusion.

Have you ever stopped to think about this? A fearful person is an unstable person. A fearful person is much like that squirrel in the road. He cannot make up his mind. He runs out of the way of the vehicle, then turns and runs back in its way, runs out and then runs back in one last time, and gets squashed. That is the way a fearful man is: unstable and indecisive.

They had made God their enemy and knew not how to make Him their friend. Their fears reigned over them. They knew—yes, they knew—that they deserved what they were going to get.

Here is the second application. If we want to be free from fear, we must trust in the Lord with all our hearts, but we must also be obedient. Paul said in Acts 24:16, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Paul said, "I am going to do what is right." If you want a conscience free from fear, you have to be obedient and do that which is right. Our Lord said in Luke 12, "You want to know who to fear? I will tell you who to fear. Do not fear man, nor him that is able to kill the body. Fear Him who, after He has killed the body, has power to cast the body and the soul into hell. You fear Him."

That's who you fear. I want you to turn to one last passage. Actually, turn to Jeremiah 30 and then Isaiah 33. We'll go to Jeremiah 30 first, then Isaiah 33.

I want you to listen to this. Here's the third application. I don't know if you thought about this, but one of the prayers that we may pray against the wicked and for the wicked is that we may pray that God would sovereignly blow His wind of trepidation and fear upon their hearts. David believed that men needed a good dose of fear. I'll quote this one in Psalm 9, verse 20. Here's what David prayed: "Put them in fear, O Lord: that the nations may know themselves to be but men." What did he say? "Put them in fear." God can blow fear in the hearts of the wicked.

Look in Jeremiah, chapter 30, if you would please, Jeremiah 30 and verse 23: "Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked." The wind is blowing. There is the wind of trepidation. There is the wind of fear. If you look in Isaiah 33 and verse 14, watch what Isaiah says: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

We can pray, and rightly so, that God would send His wind of fear and trepidation upon the wicked. He can melt their hearts. He can bring them to the end of themselves and the end of their power. We as God's people are not to fear, except that we are to fear the Lord in reverential obedience. But we are not to fear man. He that trusts in the Lord has no reason to fear.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. We ask You, Lord, to help us not to fear man, not to fear circumstances and situations, but to trust in Thee. And Lord, we do pray, in Your sovereign power, that You would indeed blow the wind of trepidation upon the wicked. As David said, "Put them in fear, O Lord, that they may know themselves to be but men." In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Is The Wind Blowing

Part Two

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 37:1-14 (KJV)

Introduction and Review

Ezekiel chapter 37, beginning with verse 1:

"The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about, and behold, there were very many in the open valley, and lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said, and he prophesied unto these bones, and he said unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cover and bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

> “So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above, but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say unto the wind, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost, and we are cut off from our parts. Therefore, prophesy and say to them, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel.
>
> “And you shall know that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land. Then shall you know that I am the Lord, have spoken it and performed it, saith the Lord.”
>
> So the title of the message is, “Is the Wind Blowing?” I answered that question last week, and I pointed out that the wind is always blowing. However, it blows differently.

Sometimes it is a gentle, refreshing breeze. Sometimes it is a gust. Sometimes it is a howling storm or a horrible tempest. Yet it is always blowing. As I pointed out last week, I want to reemphasize that the wind is under the sovereign control of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate. Scripture teaches us that He rides upon the wings of the wind; therefore, He controls it. In 2 Samuel chapter 22 and verse 11, the Bible says, "And he rode upon a cherub and did fly, and he was seen upon the wings of the wind." The wind, then, is under His absolute, total control.

Luke chapter 8 gives us a wonderful illustration of our Lord's sovereign control of the wind. The Bible says, "Now, it came to pass on a certain day that he went into a ship and with his disciples and he said unto them, Let us go over to the other side of the lake. And

they launched forth. But as they sailed, he fell asleep. There came down a storm of wind on the lake, and they were filled with water and were in jeopardy. And they came to him and awoke him, saying, Master, Master, we perish. Then he arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and they ceased, and there was a great calm."

"And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they, being afraid, wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this? For he commandeth even the winds and the water, and they obey him." Of course, because He is the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

Last week, we looked at the wind of trepidation. We saw in Isaiah chapter 7 where the heart of King Ahaz and the hearts of the people were moved like the trees are moved by the wind. The whole point is that we are not to fear man, but we are to fear God. Certainly, there is a healthy fear of God's righteous judgment, and anyone with the least amount of biblical knowledge understands the wisdom of fearing God. There are many benefits and blessings in fearing the Lord.

Let me mention two. On the one hand, it is the fear of the Lord that enables us to depart from evil. The Bible says in Proverbs 16 and verse 6, "By mercy and truth, iniquity is purged, and by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil." If you do not fear God, you will not depart from evil. But if you fear God, you will cease doing that which He commands you to cease doing.

The Wind of Domination

In other words, you will not disobey Him. It is by the fear of the Lord that men depart from evil. On the other hand, a biblical fear pleases our Heavenly Father because it enables us to live according to His Word. The Bible says in Psalm 147 and verse 11, "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy." If you really want to please the Lord and give Him pleasure, then fear Him and obey Him.

The Wind of Domination Defined

The second truth is the wind of domination. The wind of domination is a demonstration of God's omnipotence: His absolute power and total control over everyone and everything. Stephen Charnock, an old Puritan, defined the power of God in this way:

"The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve. As holiness is the beauty of all God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels if power did not step in to execute them. Without power, His mercy would be but a feeble pity. His promise is an empty sound. His threatening is a mere scarecrow. God's power is like Himself, infinite, eternal, incomprehensible. It can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature."

The power of God is simply God's omnipotence. He is all powerful, and when it comes to restoring and reclaiming His people, it will indeed take the mighty power of God.

We just read Ezekiel 37, verses 1 through 14. Let me point out verse 9, where we will start: "Then said he to me, Prophesy unto the wind. Prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." The life-giving and life-restoring wind is absolutely essential to what is needed in our day and time.

To understand this message, we must consider its remote context and its immediate context. Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet.

Background: The Devastation of Israel and Judah

He was one of the captives taken into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar during the reign of Zedekiah. We know that Ezekiel had been in Babylonian captivity for a minimum of eleven years before Jerusalem fell. In Ezekiel 33:21, the Bible says, “And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, This city is smitten.” He learned about it in the twelfth

year, which means he had already been there eleven years previously. This was the twelfth year in which Jerusalem was sacked.

Judah and Jerusalem had been sacked, looted, burned with fire, and destroyed. The palace, the expensive homes, and the temple had been destroyed. Many had been slain, and many had been captured and taken into captivity; only a few of the poor had been left in the land.

Basically speaking, everything was gone. Israel, the northern kingdom, had been sent into captivity into Assyria. Now the southern kingdom was devastated, and the few who remained alive were taken into captivity in Babylon, except for the few poor left in the land. Where are the covenant people of God? The answer is scattered, battered, defeated, devastated, and dead. The few who remained alive were in the hands of their enemies, or they were left in the land to serve their masters, so to speak.

The language of Scripture describes the reality of what happened to Judah and Jerusalem. In Ezekiel 36:1, God says, “Thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God, because the enemy hath said against you.” Now, here is what the enemy says.

"Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession." They had captured almost everything. "Therefore, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God, because they have made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, that you might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and you were taken up in the lips of the talkers, and are an infamy of the people." In other words, they had been devastated and captured. "Therefore, you mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God. Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, to the cities that are forsaken, which become a prey and a derision to the residue of the heathen that are round about."

God says everything is desolated and destroyed. Why, then, did God deal so seriously and devastatingly with Judah and Jerusalem? The answer is found in Ezekiel 36:16: "Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel

dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings. Their way was before me as an uncleanness of a removed woman. Wherefore, I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it."

"And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries. According to their way and according to their doings, I judged them. And when they entered into the heathen, whether they went, they profaned my holy name. When they said to them, These are the people of the Lord and are going forth out of his land."

God said this was why He judged them: they were wicked and idolatrous, had forsaken Him and His laws, and even in the lands of the heathen they polluted His holy name. God dealt very devastatingly with them. Judah followed exactly in the footsteps of Israel. Both Israel and Judah dealt deceitfully and wickedly with God; therefore, in His righteous judgment, God turned them over to their heathen enemies.

Ezekiel 23 provides the remote context. There God speaks against both the northern and southern kingdoms and tells us their wickedness.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 23:1-19 (KJV)

> The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother, and they committed whoredoms in Egypt. They committed whoredoms in their youth. There were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity. And the names of them were Aholah, the elder, and Aholibah, her sister. And they were mine, and they bear sons and daughters. Thus were their names. Samaria is Aholah, that's the capital of the northern kingdom, and Jerusalem, Aholibah, that's the capital of the southern kingdom. And Aholah, that is Samaria, played the harlot when she was mine.

SCRIPTURE READING - Ezekiel 23:1-19 (KJV)

> "And she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians, her neighbors, which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them

desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them that were the chosen men of Assyria, with all on whom she doted, with all their idols she defiled herself. Neither left she her whoredoms brought from Egypt, for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised the breasts of her virginity, and poured their whoredoms upon her. Wherefore, I delivered her into the hand of her lovers, and into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted."

"These discovered her nakedness, and took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword. And she became famous among women, for they had executed judgment upon her." That is the Northern Kingdom. Now we are getting to the Southern Kingdom. "And when her sister, Aholibah, that is Jerusalem, saw this, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms."

"She doted upon the Assyrians, her neighbors, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men. Then I saw that she was defiled, that they took both one way, and that she increased her whoredoms. For when she saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity. And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea. And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them. So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness. Then my mind," that is God's mind, "was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister. Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt."

God is saying, here is the reason I have judged not only the northern kingdom, but the southern kingdom: because of their perversity, their constant and consistent idolatry, and because they constantly and consistently forsook God and His law. So God destroyed them, left their cities desolate, and wiped them out. How could such a people have any hope of restoration? What nation that has sinned against God so blatantly, openly, and wickedly could ever expect any mercy from God? What will it take to restore such a people? It will take the grace, mercy, and power of God.

In Ezekiel 37:6, God says, “And I will lay sinews upon you and will bring up flesh upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you and you shall live.” What does this mean? “And you shall know that I am the Lord.” This phrase occurs at least seventy times in the book of Ezekiel: twenty-nine times referring to God’s punishment of Jerusalem; twenty-four times to God’s governmental judgment upon the nations; and seventeen times to the restoration of the people of God. It refers not only to God’s judgment of His people and the nations, but also to the restoration of God’s people.

God is absolutely sovereign over everyone and everything. God has all power. He is the omnipotent God, and He rules and reigns even over the heathen. They may not know Him, acknowledge Him, or confess Him, but that is beside the point. He is still their ruler.

In 2 Chronicles 20:6, Scripture says, “And said, O Lord, God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?” Scripture specifically says that God rules over all the nations of the heathen. God is in control of Russia, China—it does not matter what nation. Psalm 47:8 says, “God reigneth over the heathen. God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness.” So God is sovereign.

God's sovereign power in the book of Ezekiel is displayed first in the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem, exactly the way God foretold that they would be punished. Secondly, His sovereign power is displayed by the judgments that He placed upon the heathen nations around in Ezekiel's time. Third, God's sovereign power is displayed in the preservation of a remnant of His people, which brings us to Ezekiel chapter 37.

God sent Israel into captivity, both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, because of their idolatry and wickedness. We could spend all day talking about some of the horrible things that they did. But why would God want to restore such a wicked and rebellious people? Think about this in light of our land, our day, and our time.

God's Purpose in Restoration: For His Name's Sake

Look at what America has done. We claim to be God's people. You've seen those signs: "God bless America." Why would God bless America? Look at the children that we murder. Look at sodomy, how it's legalized in our land. Look at the fraud. Look at all the sins that are not only prevalent; they're governmental, subsidized, and promoted. Why in the world should God bless America when America would not bless God? So why would God even consider restoring Israel? Why would He consider restoring us today?

Look in Ezekiel 36, beginning there, verse 21. Here's the only reason God would do anything for us. God says, "But I had pity for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whether they went. Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the heathen, whether you went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which you have profaned in the midst of them, and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take of you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from your idols will I cleanse you."

“A new heart also will I give you. And a new spirit will I put within you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh. And I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes. And you shall keep my judgments and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.”

“And you shall be my people and I'll be your God.” Why would God restore such a wicked, ungodly, reprobate people? The answer is for His own name’s sake. God will do it for His great name’s sake. That brings us to chapter 37, where God brings Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones. “The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones and caused me to pass by them round about. Behold, they were very many in the open valley and lo, they were very dry.” There was no life or hope of life in the bones, because they were very dry.

The Valley of Dry Bones: Preaching and the Breath of God

They had no marrow or moisture and were incapable of life in and of themselves. God asked Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” Ezekiel answered, “O Lord God, thou knowest.” He had to defer to God’s omniscience, for from all appearances it was impossible for those bones to live.

Look at the mess we’re in in America and throughout the world. Consider how God’s people are persecuted, hated, mocked, despised, ridiculed, scattered, devastated, imprisoned, and killed. The truth is that we have not changed, and things have not really changed. As in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we have thrown preachers and prophets in prison. Look at Ken Hovind. I could name at least a half a dozen preachers who have been in prison or are in prison now, having done nothing wrong other than to stand against wickedness and godliness.

Can these bones live? Ezekiel said, "Oh, Lord, thou knowest." It did not look to him as though they could, but the Lord is omniscient and knows everything. In verse 4, the Lord said, "Again, he said to me, Prophesy unto these bones and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." I understand Ezekiel's hesitancy to preach to dry bones. At times I have felt I was preaching to bones incapable of hearing or learning and absolutely devoid of life. Yet it is ours to preach, and God's portion to give life.

Ezekiel did as he was commanded. He preached, and God began to move upon the lifeless bones. "Thus saith the Lord God unto these

bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them."

As he preaches, bone comes to bone, sinew comes upon flesh, and skin covers them, but there is no breath in them, no life. We must understand that all our planning, preaching, and praying are absolutely worthless without the breath of God, the Spirit of God, and the power of God. Most preachers never think about this, and most Christians never think about it. I do not care how good, plain, or well illustrated a message is, nor how great the oratory is: if God the Holy Spirit does not breathe, there is nothing. We may have a semblance of life, but without God we cannot have life. He is life.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit: the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." Without the life, wind, or breath of God, there is nothing but death. There is a hymn we used to sing, and I still love it.

“Brethren, we have met to worship.” “Brethren, we have met to worship and adore the Lord, our God. Will you pray with all your power while we try to preach the Word? All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Brethren, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.” And that is true. Unless God the Holy Spirit blesses, all is vain.

Ezekiel did as God commanded him. He obeyed God. As he preached the word, not only did bone come to bone, and sinew, and skin, and flesh. In verses 9 and 10: “Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind. Prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these that are slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet an exceeding great army.”

Three Truths from Ezekiel 37

I want to stop here and give you three very important truths. First, note that it was a sovereign act of God that brought life into these bones. Man cannot produce life; only God gives life. Only God can give restoration, revival, and renewal. I get tickled at the signs on most modern-day church buildings: “Revival next week, April 5th through the 10th.” Really? If they were honest, they would say, “There’s a meeting next week.” Usually, that is what it turns out to be.

Only God can give revival. In Psalm 85, David prayed, “Will thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?” Revival comes from God. Only God can give revival, life, an awakening, a restoration, a renewal, and a reformation. Three times in Psalm 80, David prays the same verse; I will quote verse 19: “Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved.” If God does not turn us, cause His face to shine upon us, and breathe upon us, we will not be saved. Giving life is an act of God alone.

I can preach to people, witness to people, and tell them what God demands of them, but I cannot save them, give them life, make them do right, or make them obey God. I have often said, “I wish I could,” but I cannot. Only God can give life, open eyes, and open ears. The first truth you must recognize is that these bones—these dead, dry bones—came together only because God commanded them to. Then God breathed into them and gave them life.

Here is the second truth. In verse 10, he said, “So I prophesied as he commanded me and the breath came into them and they lived and stood up upon their feet an exceeding great army.” When God gives life and raises His people up, it will be an exceeding great army. One of the titles given to God repeatedly in Scripture is the Lord God of hosts. The word host means armies. He is the Lord God of the armies.

So when God raises up His people, when God revives and awakens His people, He's going to empower them to throw off their enemies. That's the whole context of Ezekiel 37. They're not only going to throw off their enemies; they're going to come back to the land that

He promised them there. He's going to give them victory through His power, by His grace, for His honor and glory.

Hold Ezekiel 37, and turn to Psalm 149. Here's a passage that most people have overlooked. Very few preachers have ever preached from this passage, but I want you to see how plain it is. Let's begin reading with verse 5:

"Let the saints be joyful in glory. Let them sing aloud upon their beds." What are we to be singing upon our beds? Look carefully. "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth. And a two-edged sword in their hand." Why does God give us a sword? Why does God raise up an exceeding great army? Look in verse 7: "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."

I don't know about you, but to me, that sounds almost like victory. That sounds like God's going to raise up a great army, and we're going to fulfill His Word and fulfill His will. So when God then breathes His breath into us, it is also a fighting breath. It's a breath that enables us to fight against sin and wickedness and rebellion and anything that is contrary to God and His glory. In Ezekiel 37, when He raises these people up, He raises them to an exceeding great army.

You remember that hymn we used to sing? "Onward, Christian soldiers marching as to war." We've lost our martial spirit. We've lost the fighting spirit. And we need it.

Thirdly, look at verse 11 in Ezekiel 37. Here's the third principle: "Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say our bones are dried and our hope is lost. We're cut off from our parts." This is what God allows us to think: that everything is lost, and we're absolutely hopeless and helpless before He acts.

Look around at America today. Look at our ruling class, our ruling elite, as they like to refer to themselves. What do you see? We see wickedness and perversion and corruption reigning on every hand. Those who are in power believe that they are so entrenched in power

that nothing will ever bring them down. We tend to think that, as God's people, we are hopeless and helpless and powerless. We think all of our parts are missing, that we are dried up, and that there is no hope.

God's Power to Raise the Dead

With our sins, helplessness, and powerlessness, if we look within ourselves, we have to admit and confess that there is no hope. But when you look beyond yourself and look to the sovereign power of God, you have to say with our Lord Jesus Christ, “With God, all things are possible.” God will keep His word and keep His promise, even if He has to open our graves and raise us from the dead. He will keep His word.

Look in your Bibles, verses 12 through 14. He said, “Therefore, prophesy and say to them, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord when I've opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves and shall put my spirit in you and you shall live. And I shall place you in your own land, then shall you know that I am the Lord have spoken it and performed it, saith the Lord.” Do you realize that our God, if He pleases, according to our Bible, is able to raise up children unto Abraham out of stones? That is what John the Baptist said: “Say not to yourselves, We have Abraham our father, for God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”

God can do whatever He wants to do. He is not helpless. He is the omnipotent sovereign of the universe. Psalm 79 gives us a picture of devastation. Asaph wrote, “O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance. Thy holy temple have they defiled. They have laid Jerusalem on heaps.”

“The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven and the flesh of the saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them. We are becoming a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry forever? Shall

thy jealousy burn like fire?" Then he says, "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name."

If you have to be honest, you look around today and say, Christianity is just about like that. We, the people of God, are defeated, devastated, and lost. Where is our power? Where is our position? Where is our prominence? We have to cry and sigh when they snap and say, "Yes, that is it." That is our condition. That is what happened to Israel in the Old Testament, and it is what is happening to God's people today.

But look in your Bibles to Isaiah 26. Just as you have to confess with Asaph, you also have to confess with Isaiah. Notice verse 19: "Thy dead body shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of the herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Thy dead men shall live. If we are a people of faith, we have to cry out and say, Yes, the dead shall live.

Just as God can make living men dead, He can also make dead men live. John 5:21 says, "For as the Father quickeneth the dead, or raises up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." Our Lord has power to quicken. In John 5:25 He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." So what did God do? In Ezekiel 37, when they were at the end of their ropes—dead, dry, hopeless, and helpless—God simply said...

"You don't understand what I can do. I can raise the dead. I can raise up an exceeding great army." So what does that teach us? It teaches us this: when we get to the end of our ropes, we're to tie a knot then and hang on. You know, we have a saying I don't necessarily agree with, but it does prove a point. The old saying is, "It's not over till the fat lady sings." I guess that was based upon operas, I don't know, but I'll tell you this: it's not over until God's final act.

And the wicked ain't seen nothing yet. I want you to go in your Bibles very quickly to Exodus chapter 5. This is such a wonderful

passage. I've used it before, but yet it so illustrates exactly what I'm trying to share with you right now. Look, if you would, in Exodus chapter 5. You know the story. God has sent Moses into Egypt to deliver the children of Israel.

And of course, Pharaoh refuses to let them go. He refuses to obey God. Doesn't matter. And so the elders have gone in after Pharaoh has said, "Now you're going to make the same amount of brick, but you're going to make them without the straw. You have to get the straw yourself." Watch it. Exodus 5, verse 14. "And the officers," now we're not talking about just anybody, but here's the officers, here's the elders and the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and demanded, "Wherefore, have you not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as heretofore?" Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, "Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There was no straw given to thy servants, and they say, Thus make brick, and behold, thy servants are beaten, but the fault is in thine own people."

But he said, "Ye are idle, ye are idle. Therefore you say, Let us go and do sacrifice unto the Lord. Go therefore now and work, for there shall no straw be given unto you, yet shall you deliver the tale of bricks." And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in an evil case, as it was said to them, "You shall not minish ought from your bricks from your daily task." Now watch.

"And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way as they came forth from Pharaoh. And they said unto them, The Lord look upon you and judge, because you have made our savor to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us." All the elders are helpless. They cannot deliver themselves or their people. Verse 22 says, "And 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 has Moses and Aaron helpless. Then the Lord said to 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 will he drive them out of the land."

Application: Trusting in God's Dominion

God said, "You ain't seen nothing yet. When I get through, he's going to let everybody go." And when God gets through with the wicked, they're just not going to be around anymore. There's the wind of domination. God has absolute, total dominion.

In God's time, in God's way, and in His pleasure, we will have absolute victory and total dominion through our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is Lord of Lords and God of Gods. He is the Great I Am, the Eternal, the Almighty Lord of Heaven and Earth. It is absolutely impossible for Him to fail, for He is God. He has dominion, and He shall continue to have dominion.

Job 25:2 says, "Dominion and fear are with him." Psalm 72:8 says, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth." Psalm 103:22 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, all his works and all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul." Psalm 145:13 declares, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." Daniel 4:3 says, "How great are his signs and how mighty his wonders. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation."

When Ezekiel prophesied, "Come thou wind, and blow upon these slain, and give life unto them," it was the wind of domination. Should we pray for domination? Oh, yes. Our Lord taught us to pray that way: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." What is that? Dominion. Dominion. Dominion. I think I told you earlier that God will have dominion.

Even if He has not raised the dead, He did raise the dead. The Lord Jesus Christ is the firstfruits, and what follows is our resurrection. Yes, He is quite capable of raising the dead. He raised His only begotten Son from the dead, and likewise He raised us from the dead.

It does not matter how desperate our situation is or how difficult the circumstances. It does not matter how we look with the sight of our eyes when God blows with His wind of domination. He will raise up His people, restore them, renew them, plant them, and enable them to exercise dominion through His word and by His Spirit.

Yes, we need to learn to pray, "Lord, let Thy wind of domination blow upon my people and even upon the wicked, that they may fear and see and know that Thou art God alone."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We thank You, Father, that the wind does indeed blow—not only the wind of trepidation, but the wind of domination. Help us, Heavenly Father, to trust in Thee, look to Thee, and lean upon Thee, not looking by sight, but looking by faith. For Thou art God, and with Thee all things are possible, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Is The Wind Blowing

Part Three

Introduction and Review

John 3, verse 1: "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 said 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 flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth whither it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus

answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"

In this short series titled, "Is the Wind Blowing?" I will briefly review the last two messages. I do not have time to expound all of John chapter 3 today. Verse 8 is the verse on which I will concentrate because it is in the theme of these three messages. The question is, is the wind blowing?

Our Lord says, "The wind bloweth whither it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." The title of the message is "The Wind Blowing." We have looked at the wind of trepidation, the wind of domination, and today we are looking at the wind of regeneration.

In the last two messages, I answered the question, "Is the wind blowing?" with, "Yes, the wind is blowing. It's blowing somewhere all the time, and it may come as a refreshing breeze, a gale, storm, or tornado." In each message, I pointed out that God is absolutely sovereign and that the wind is under His control. I quoted 2 Samuel 22, verse 11, where the Bible says of God, "He rode upon a cherub and did fly and He was seen upon the wings of the wind."

In the first message, we discussed the wind of trepidation, the wind of fear and horror. We looked at Isaiah chapter 7 and saw that the heart of King Ahaz and the hearts of the people of Judah and Jerusalem were moved as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind. This was because of the invasion, or planned invasion, by Israel and Syria. They were planning to totally overthrow the line of David and establish a puppet king.

There is a time to fear and a time not to fear. We are to fear God and not man. Interestingly, in Isaiah 51 and verse 1, God is talking about Babylon and its inhabitants and speaks of bringing upon them the wind of destruction. When God sends that wind of fear and destruction, it is certainly time to be afraid. So there is the wind of trepidation.

Secondly, I spoke about the wind of domination in Ezekiel chapter 37. Our Lord is going to be absolutely victorious in every way; therefore, we His people shall be victorious in Him. The Apostle Paul said it plainly in 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 57: "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Our Lord does indeed give us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We look for our Lord to make us victorious in time and history as well as eternity. In Proverbs 11 and verse 31, the Word of God says, "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." If God is going to pay back the wicked and the sinner in time and history, obviously He is going to give victory in time and history to His people as well.

The whole gist of the message last week was this: our God is going to raise a mighty army and give us victory, even if He has to raise the dead. Of course, He did raise the dead in the Lord Jesus Christ. Although I did not mention these verses last week, I would hope that your mind went to the book of Revelation and remembered several passages concerning the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, in Revelation 17 and verse 14, the Bible says, "And these, that is His enemies, these shall make war with the Lamb. And the Lamb shall overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and they that are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

When you get to Revelation 19, verses 11-16, the Apostle John writes: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth he 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, and 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 of the wrath of Almighty God, and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Obviously, Jesus Christ is indeed the victor. To Him will go all honor, praise, and glory.

Now today I want to come to the third point in our message. What I ask is, "Is the wind blowing?" Of course it is blowing. Today we are going to look at the wind of regeneration and see that regeneration is an act of the sovereign God. I call your attention again to verse 8.

Our Lord said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth whither it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." Initially, in verse 3, our Lord had said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was a ruler in Israel and supposedly a very learned, erudite, and educated man, but he did not understand what our Lord was saying. In verse 4 he asked, "How can this be? Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Our Lord then repeats in verses 5 through 7 what He had already said: "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." Then He makes a distinction: "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, You must be born again."

To grasp the difficulty Nicodemus perceived, we must understand the Greek word anothen. When our Lord said in verse 3, "You must be born again," and in verse 7, "You must be born again," anothen literally means "from above." You must be born from above. Nicodemus was confused, equating a second birth with a physical birth, but those are not the same thing. Our Lord had already said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Most people confuse regeneration and conversion. They are not the same thing. Conversion is the fruit of regeneration; regeneration is the cause and conversion is the effect. Regeneration is the root and conversion is the fruit. This confusion is the problem most people have in understanding the doctrine of regeneration.

Seven Distinctions Between Regeneration and Conversion

Distinctions Between Regeneration and Conversion

I want to give you seven distinctions between regeneration and conversion. Several years ago, I preached a message titled "Salvation Illustrated and Explained," in which I believe I gave these distinctions. I am not going to preach that message again, but I will give them again to clear your thinking. If this message is not sufficient, I encourage you to go back and listen to "Salvation Illustrated and Explained."

First, regeneration is an immediate act of God in imparting the principle of life. Conversion is the act of man, by the power of the indwelling Spirit, in repenting and believing. Regeneration is the immediate act of God; conversion is the act of man only in the power of the Holy Spirit, in repenting and believing.

Second, regeneration is a single act of God and is never repeated in the life. Conversion is the beginning of a holy life, and there are many conversion experiences throughout one's earthly pilgrimage. The position of the believer in Jesus Christ, by virtue of regeneration, cannot be increased or decreased. However, the condition of the Christian life will always vary according to one's conversions.

Our Lord said to Peter, who was already saved and already an apostle, in Luke 22, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat, but I prayed for thee, and when thou art converted..." Thus there is another conversion experience. Simon was already saved and already an apostle. There are many conversion experiences, but regeneration is a one-time act.

Third, regeneration is not in itself an experience. Conversion is a series of Christian experiences. In John chapter 3, our Lord is comparing a spiritual birth with a physical birth. As there is no consciousness at the time of conception in the womb, regeneration is not a matter of consciousness in its recipient. You are not conscious that you are regenerated any more than you were conscious that you were conceived. A person knows nothing of his original life or

original regeneration, just as he knows nothing of his original conception.

Conversion, however, is an awareness of what is taking place. Therefore, it is experiential repentance and faith, or experiences known to the regenerated individual. Fourthly, regeneration is the cause of an individual turning to the Lord. Conversion is the regenerate person actually turning to the Lord.

God does not repent for man, but He enables man to repent and to believe.

Regeneration is the Lord opening the heart. Conversion is that person whose heart has been opened, turning to Jesus Christ in faith and obedience. Regeneration is a once-for-all cleansing, while conversion is a continuation of renewal which was begun at regeneration. In regeneration, we have God's power, that is, the power of the indwelling Spirit. In conversion, the power is not of us, but in us by God's sovereign choice.

An understanding of this fact will erase all pride and all boasting from preachers and other Christians regarding their successes in winning people to Christ. What did the Apostle Paul say in 1 Corinthians 3, verses 6 and 7? He said, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth anything, or he that watereth, but God who giveth the increase."

Regeneration is the implantation of divine life into the soul by an immediate act of God. God is the only one who can give life. Conversion is the evidence and the exercise of that life being implanted in us by God. So regeneration and conversion are not the same thing. So here's a question.

The Wind of Regeneration

How do we explain these things? I have told you in times past that there are only three main illustrations of salvation in the Bible—only three in the New Testament. The first is birth, which we find in John chapter 3: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, you must be born from above.” The second illustration of salvation is creation, in 2 Corinthians 4:6 and 5:17. The third illustration is resurrection, in

Ephesians 2:1: “And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

Each of these three illustrations demonstrates the absolute necessity of divine intervention. There can be no birth apart from the begetting of the Father. There can be no creation unless God speaks the word. In fact, that is what the Bible says in Psalm 33: He spoke, and it came into being. Certainly, there can be no resurrection apart from the supernatural power of God, which is outside of man. There is no man, no man, that has ever conceived himself, created himself, or raised himself from the dead. Each of these illustrations demonstrates that there must be an outside supernatural power.

I want you to look in John 3, verse 8. That is the verse I want to deal with today.

Regeneration is at the Sovereign Pleasure of God

Our Lord says, talking about regeneration, “The wind bloweth whither it listeth. And thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” Now I want to give you three thoughts on the wind of regeneration. First of all, regeneration is at the sovereign pleasure of God. Regeneration is at the sovereign pleasure of God. The Bible says, “the wind bloweth whither it listeth.” The word for wind is the Greek word pneuma. That is the same word used of spirit: Hagios pneumatos, the Holy Spirit. Pneuma is where we get our words pneumatic and pneumonia. It deals with air, wind, and spirit. The Greek word for wind, pneuma, is exactly the same word for spirit. It is a word used in relation to the Holy Spirit.

To understand the significance of this truth, we must understand the difference between the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. Ontological comes from the Greek word ontos, which simply means “being.” When we speak of the ontological Trinity, we are speaking of the logical order of being: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Father divinely begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. That is the ontological Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The economical Trinity concerns how God moves and how God works. When you read your Bible, you find that everything is out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. Everything is out of the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. That is the economical Trinity; that is how God moves and works.

We also see the reverse of this. Ephesians 2:18 says, "For through Him," that is, Jesus Christ, "we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." Everything comes to us from the Father through the Son in the Spirit; now we go back to the Father in the Spirit through the Son. That is the economical Trinity.

In regard to the doctrine of soteriology, which is the doctrine of salvation, we see the economical Trinity very clearly. Salvation originated with the Father, was accomplished by the Son, and is applied by the Holy Spirit. All you have to do is read Ephesians chapter 1, verses 1 through 14. Sometime in the not-too-distant future, I am going to be preaching on that passage, and you will see there the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit. That passage illustrates this truth very clearly.

One reason our Lord uses the metaphor of wind is to demonstrate His sovereign pleasure in regeneration. The wind is not only inexplicable; it is also uncontrollable. There is not one individual alive on earth today who can cause the wind to start or cause it to cease. No one except the sovereign God of heaven and earth. The wind blows, or it does not blow, at His pleasure. I read Job 37:9-13 in the first message, but I want to read it again. Listen to what it says.

"Out of the south cometh a whirlwind, and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering He, God, wearieth the thick cloud, He scattereth the bright cloud. It is turned about by His counsels that they may do whatsoever He commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth." So the whirlwind, all weather, is controlled by the counsels of God.

It comes at His pleasure. So as the wind then blows where it pleases and how it pleases, likewise, God regenerates whomever He pleases. Do you understand that no one can demand to be regenerated? One may seek it, one may cry for it, one may ask for it,

but it is still within the prerogative of the sovereign to grant it at His pleasure. You know what we were told in James 1 in verse 18? Now listen to this: “Of His own will begat He us.” Of His own will begat He us.

Now, since we're in the book of John, I want you to turn to John chapter 5. Look very quickly at verses 21 and 23. I want to show you the importance of this in just a moment. Look at John 5, verse 21. Here's what the Scripture says: “For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them.” Did you hear that? “For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.” Why? “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” Why? Here's why: “that all men should honour the Son even as,” or equally as, “they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”

Now, go back if you would please to verse 21. “For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.” Really? Do you understand what has just happened prior to these verses? If you were to read John chapter 5, verse 1, right on down through verse 19, you will find that our Lord walked into the porch of Bethesda, Solomon's porch there at Bethesda, wherein a great multitude of impotent and lame folks lay, waiting for the moving of the water.

Our Lord walked through all of these sick people and came to one lame man who had lain there for thirty-eight years. He asked him, “Wilt thou be made whole?” The man said, “I have no man to help me when the waters trouble to put me in, but while I’m coming, someone else steps in and is healed.” Our Lord said, “Rise and walk.”

Did not all of those sick people need healing? Could our Lord not have healed every one of them instantaneously? Yes. Why did He single out one man and heal only him out of all those who needed it? Here is why. Verse 21 says, “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.” In other words, it is His sovereign pleasure that proves He is God. Only God does as He pleases.

If you understand the economical Trinity, then you will understand that the Holy Spirit is the agent in regeneration. Salvation originated with the Father, was accomplished by the Son, and is applied by the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5 says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Romans 5:5 says, “And hope maketh not ashamed, for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Romans 14:17 says, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonian Christians, in 1 Thessalonians 1:5–6, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

"And you know what manner of men we were among you for your sakes, and ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost." Note that it came with the Holy Ghost. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 3, "Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed, and that no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord but by the Holy Ghost." The Holy Spirit regenerates, authenticates, and enables us to say that Jesus Christ is Lord. In Ephesians 1 and verse 13, he said, "In whom also ye trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise."

No one has ever been, no one can be, and no one will ever be regenerated apart from the sovereign work of God, the Holy Spirit. In fact, if you do not possess the Holy Spirit, if He does not indwell you, you are not saved. Paul states this truth very bluntly in Romans 8 and verse 9: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

If you are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, have you not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit? If you have not been sealed by the

Holy Spirit, you do not belong to Jesus Christ. Why did God create the world? Why did God create you?

Why did God save you? You have family members and friends who are lost. Why did God create the world, why did He create you, and why did He save you? The answer is found in Scripture: the world was created, you were created, and you were saved only because of the sovereign pleasure of God. Revelation 4:11 says, "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." Isn't that amazing? "For Thy pleasure they are and were created."

You know what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, and I love this verse. Paul asked the Corinthians, "For who maketh thee to differ one from another?" Who makes you to differ? Why is it that you want to hear the Word of God when multitudes do not want to hear the Word of God? Why is it that you will read and study when nobody else will read and study? "Who maketh thee to differ one from another?" Listen to what else he said: "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? And if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory or boast as thou hadst not received it?" What is he saying? Everything that you are and everything that you have, God gave you. Regeneration is by the sovereign pleasure of God.

Regeneration is by the Sovereign Purpose of God

Secondly, regeneration is by the sovereign purpose of God. When you go back to John 3:8, where He says, "The wind bloweth whither it listeth," the word "listeth" literally means "pleases." There is the sovereign pleasure of God: the wind blows wherever it pleases. Now here is the sovereign purpose of God. He says, "And thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth."

We often think there is no purpose for the wind. In fact, I have, and so has Alice. We have raked leaves into neat little piles for burning, and then the wind comes along and unrakes them. That may not be a word, but that is exactly what the wind does: it scatters them everywhere. Why does the wind blow wherever it desires and whenever it desires? Stop and think about it. In July and August, we

appreciate the wind on these dry, hot days. But in winter, when it is cold and wet, we complain about the wind blowing. I have often said it would not be cold if the wind were not blowing. Have you ever wondered why the wind blows the way it does?

Seemingly, there is no purpose in it, but in reality there is. We do not understand why God saves who He saves. Stop and think about that. We do not understand why God saves whom He saves. Why did God save you? Why did God have mercy upon you? Do you know if there was a poll taken in the first century of the man most likely to be damned, Saul of Tarsus would have won that poll hands down?

In fact, Paul himself said in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 13 that, before his conversion, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. He hailed and hauled men and women off to prison. Christians were thrown into dungeons simply because they were Christians.

Let me ask you a question. Why is Asia in darkness today? Did you know God sovereignly purposed not to allow the gospel to be preached in Asia? You want to know why there are very few Christians in Asia. There are some, yes, but very few. You have all these various religions and sects and cults and all these things over in Asia today. Look in Acts chapter 16, beginning with verse 6. The Bible is speaking about Paul and his company there: "Now, when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia," the Holy Spirit said, "Don't go to Asia."

"And when they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not. And they, passing by Mysia, came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

Do you know the gospel came west and not east? Why?

That is the way God pleased it. God not only pleased it; God purposed it like that. Stop and think of the great revivals under

Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. Have you ever read of the great revival in Wales? Why has God not sent such revivals in this century and in our country? Many have sought them, asked for them, and prayed for God's mercies and miracles, yet they have not happened on the scale that they happened in the previous century or in other countries. Many have claimed that such revivals were happening in the present, but where are the effects and results of those revivals?

I may not know where the wind of God originates, and I may not know where it terminates. However, I can see God's wind and its effects upon flowers, herbs, trees, men, and even buildings. I do not have to know the origination or termination of the wind, but I can see its effects. God's workings are just as mysterious in their operations as they are sovereign in their originations.

Just as we can see the effects of the wind on the trees and flowers, we can also see the effects of God's regenerating wind in the lives of men and women and upon societies, states, and even nations. Regeneration is by God's sovereign pleasure. Now I am telling you that regeneration is by God's sovereign purpose.

God does not save anybody by accident. He saves them on purpose. God does not send revivals by accident. He sends them on purpose. Everything that God does, He does on purpose. What is God's purpose? Ephesians 3 and verse 11 says, "According to His eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Whatever God purposed in eternity past, before the world came into existence, before you were born or I was born, whatever He purposed in Jesus Christ, that is His purpose. It is an eternal purpose. God does things not only by His divine pleasure, but by His divine purpose as well. Thirdly, regeneration is by the sovereign power of God. Look at verse 8 again in John chapter 3: "The wind bloweth whither it listeth," or whither it pleases. There is a sovereign pleasure of God.

Regeneration is by the Sovereign Power of God

And now here is “the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.” There is a sovereign purpose of God. Here is the sovereign power of God: “So is everyone that is born of

the Spirit." Just as the wind blows at God's pleasure and purpose, it also blows according to His power. The comparison is pointed out in the word "so," S-O. The first point of analogy is found in the word "where it listeth," or "pleaseth." The second is found in the words "canst not tell." The wind bloweth whither it pleaseth. Then He said, "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Arthur W. Pink comments on verse 8:

"God has thrown an impenetrable veil over the beginnings and processes of life. That we live, we know, and how we live, we cannot tell. Life is evident to the consciousness and manifest to the senses, but it is profoundly mysterious in its operations. It is so with the new life born of the Spirit. To sum up the teaching of this verse, the wind bloweth—there is the fact. Thou hearest the sound thereof—there is the evidence of the fact. But knowest not whence—there is the mystery behind the fact. The one born again knows that he has a new life and enjoys the evidences of it, but how the Holy Spirit operates upon the soul, subdues his will, creates the new life within us, belongs to the deep things of God."

In other words, we just do not know those things. The one thing we do know is that the one who is regenerated is regenerated by the power of God alone. Just as physical life and physical birth are accomplished by the power of God, so are spiritual life and spiritual birth.

David said to God, "For Thou hast possessed my reins, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, marvellous are Thy works that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth." David said, when he was conceived and as he grew, he was not hidden from God.

"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." David said, in effect, "I don't understand how I was conceived. I don't understand how I grew in the womb. And yet, Lord, You knew everything. You are the one that has done this."

When were you born physically? I know you can give me a date, a day, and a time. But how do you really know you were born then? You don't. My mother told me I was born September the 3rd. Interestingly, my birth certificate says September the 2nd. I would think my mother would know more than the doctor, but I am simply pointing out that you do not really know when you were born physically. You know when you were told that you were born. You do not remember, even though you were a full-term baby. You do not remember when you were born, when you were conceived, or life in the womb. Yet I can tell you exactly when you were born physically, and I can tell you exactly when you were born spiritually. How can I tell you that?

By quoting what the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 1, verses 15 and 16: "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. Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." When was Paul separated from his mother's womb? When it pleased God. When did God call him by His grace? When it pleased God.

Alice and I had dear friends whom we called Papa and Mama Marsh. We were not related, and both are now dead. Before his conversion, Papa was a drunk; he drank more alcohol than you can shake a stick at. God saved him probably in his fifties. He died around seventy-five or seventy-six. He played the saxophone beautifully, and some of you may have heard him. He would say, "Oh, I wish I had heard the gospel as a young man. I wish I had been saved earlier." One of his favorite songs was "Wasted Years, Wasted Years. Oh, how foolish."

He just regretted throwing away his life. I looked at him one day and said, "Papa, if you had heard the gospel when you were a teenager, you wouldn't have listened. If you had heard the truth when you were twenty, thirty, and forty, you wouldn't have listened. I'll tell you when you were saved: when it pleased God to call you by His grace. That's when you were saved. That's when I was saved."

Illustration of Lazarus

Let me give you one illustration that I hope will forever distinguish in your mind the difference between regeneration and conversion. If you can remember this illustration, you will never confuse regeneration and conversion again. John chapter 11: Lazarus died, and Mary and Martha sent for Jesus. Our Lord tarried and did not come immediately. Four days later, He appeared. Both Mary and Martha said, "Lord, had You been here, my brother would not have died." Our Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

"He that believeth in Me, yet shall he live." Lester Roloff used to say, "The resurrection just walked into town." And that's true. Our Lord said, "Take Me to him." Martha said, "Lord, by this time, he stinketh, for he's been dead four days." Jesus had said, "Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe, thou wouldest see the power of God?" Then our Lord said, "Lazarus, come forth." The Scripture says, "He that was bound with grave clothes came forth."

Did God give Lazarus life inside that tomb, which enabled him to get up and walk out? Or did God only give him life after he got up and walked out? If God had not given him life inside that tomb, he would never have gotten up and walked out.

What is regeneration? Regeneration is the implantation of life into man by God. What is conversion? Conversion is the fruit and evidence of that life coming into fruition. God regenerated and restored Lazarus in that tomb, and when he got up and walked out, that was pictorial of conversion. God had given him life in that tomb, and his walking out was evidence that God had given him that life.

When an individual repents of his sin and turns by faith to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that is not regeneration. It is the evidence of regeneration. Had not God given him life, he would never have turned to God to begin with. You may know when you were converted, but you do not know when you were regenerated. It is impossible. Regeneration is the immediate act of God whereby He plants life in the soul. Conversion is when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, He enables us to exercise that life, repent of our sins, and believe in Jesus Christ.

Applications

Is there anything in your life that is only there because of the absolute power of God? In other words, are you different? That is what Paul asked: "Who made thee to differ one from another?" If you are different, why are you different? The proper evidence of regeneration is conversion. It is a breaking forth from death unto life, and a life that is going to be lived for God's honor and God's glory.

God has power over the most hardened sinner to change him, just as He has power over the loftiest oak to bring it down with a sweeping blast. Years ago, there were some huge oak trees on the edge of a field, and I used to sit in those trees as I hunted deer. Some of those trees were, I would say, six, eight feet in diameter—huge oak trees. A tornado came through. The field was planted in soybeans, and the soybean plants were just about this high.

Two of those humongous oaks were laid over, their roots sticking up, while all those little, tender, flexible soybean plants were still standing. God broke down the giant oak and left the little, measly soybeans standing in the field. Let me tell you, the Sauls of Tarsus of this world will fall easily by the power of God. There is no sinner too big, too mean, or too bad that God cannot save. God can save anybody. God is omnipotent. God is all-powerful.

One man I knew, now dead, was a Mafia member. God not only saved him; He called him to preach. There were contracts out on his life, even as he was preaching, because he left the Mafia. He was a tremendous, powerful preacher. All I am trying to say is this: God is all-powerful. I do not care how bad we think our children, neighbors, or friends are, or how mean, wicked, or vile we think someone is; God is still able to save.

Here is the third application: God determines the kind of wind, or the operations of the Spirit, upon a sinner. I have seen men and women tremble and fall under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. One man cried out in the middle of the church, “I’m lost, I’m lost,” then ran forward, threw his arms around my feet, fell at my feet, and begged God for mercy. I have seen others gently, easily, and sweetly brought to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone has the same conversion experience: everyone has to repent and believe. But not everyone has the same degree of experience. How many of you were knocked down on the road like the Apostle Paul? Not one. It is not the degree of the experience that saves; it is Jesus Christ who saves.

Our great grandbaby, my grandson's wife, was in labor thirty hours before she delivered that grandbaby. The longest Alice had ever been in labor was eight hours. What if Virginia looked at Alice and said, "You've never had a baby; you've never been in labor thirty hours"? Really? She has had four, and Virginia has only had one. It is not the degree of the experience that counts. What counts is this: Is there a real baby born? Is there real life there? You may not get knocked down and tremble and shake like some sinners do.

But you will certainly repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ like every sinner does if you're converted by the grace of God. I cannot stand here and say you have to have exactly my same experience or you're not saved. No, I can't do that. It's God who sovereignly determines the kind of wind and the power of that wind that blows upon us. That which you must see and that which you must know is this: Is there new life in your life? Is there life there that only God could give and only God can bring? And are you living obediently now and bringing your life into conformity to His Word?

The wind is blowing. God has a people. God has a remnant. God has an elect. And yes, the wind will blow upon them, and God will save them. There is the wind of regeneration and restoration.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You that You have indeed regenerated us by Your grace, and You convicted us and converted us. And You deserve all honor, all praise, and all glory. Everything we are now, everything we ever will be, is only by Your grace and Your mercy. Give us grace, Lord, to give Thee the honor and the praise and to live for Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask, Amen.

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