

THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN A HOSTILE CULTURE

Because of the host of ungodly influences, both overt and covert, in our present culture, the faithful servant of God is wise who pays attention to these and ponders how to be victorious in the midst of this hostile culture. All of these are ploys of Satan to frustrate God's ultimate desire to have a people of God, made in His image, with whom He will spend eternity.

We are wise to heed Paul's admonition to the Corinthians, *in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.* (2 Corinthians 2:11)

In order to equip one's self to be victorious in this battle between light and darkness, the wise servant of God will acquaint himself with the history of Satan's ploys in his effort to prevent God from having such a people and how the people of God overcame the Satanic challenge.

With the goal of achieving that equipping, this study will begin by identifying the enemy, then begin with the beginning - Satan's first assault upon the people of God in the Garden of Eden, then follow the story through the centuries, arriving at the challenges faced by 21st Century Christians.

In our journey through the story of mankind, we will be selective as to which episodes we pause and examine, seeking to learn from those that will be of help to us in our understanding of the battle, and thus be better equipped to achieve victory over the enemy.

As we begin our study, it is important that we not forget the truth expressed in Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

There are many things in the spiritual realm that God has not revealed to us. Many strange, and in some cases, dangerous, teachings have been born out of the desire to explain that which God has not revealed to us. It is important for us to learn to be content with that which has been revealed and not be driven by a perverted curiosity to enter into the realm of the unknown.

He has revealed to us what we need to know in order to obey Him, please Him, and to fulfill His purpose in calling us to be His people. That being true, we will restrict ourselves to that which Scripture clearly teaches and models, and we will seek to avoid speculation.

IMPORTANT WARNING

As we undertake this study, it is very important that we do not become judgmental and feel somewhat more righteous than those whom Satan deceived. We must remember the words of Jesus, spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees who brought to Him the woman taken in adultery, *Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone* (John 8:3-7). In some ways, this study has an element of darkness about it and a bit of despair could enter our emotions as we study these episodes. Let us study these episodes with grace, and seek to live in the light while examining the works of darkness. Furthermore, it is important to remember the words of Paul, *For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* (Romans 15:4). See also I Corinthians 10:11.

IDENTIFYING THE ENEMY

As we seek to find in Scripture a single, systematized and chronological presentation of our enemy, Satan, we discover that such a single presentation is not to be found. This is no surprise since the Holy Spirit inspired writers of Scripture are primarily interested in God and only secondarily interested in the powers of darkness. Even so, by reading many scattered references, we discover what Our Lord considers to be necessary for us to know concerning the nature, the history, the kingdom, and the works of Satan.

This individual is mentioned more than eighty times in Scriptural paragraphs and either the name, Satan¹ or Devil² is used in seventy of these references.^{3 4} Much about the nature of Satan is revealed in the names by which he described in the Word.

The first time that the name, *Satan*, occurs in the Bible as a personal name is I Chronicles 1:21. *Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.*⁵

The name, *Satan*, is derived from the verb meaning, *to lie in wait.*^{6 7} Various writers have defined the name as, *accuser, deceiver, etc.* These definitions are derived from other passages in which the nature and activity of this individual are described. Although not an exhaustive list, here are some of the descriptive labels given to this created, but super-human, individual:

Tempter (Matthew 5:1; I Thessalonians 3:5) Beelzebul [originally the name of a Philistine god] (Matthew 12:24) Enemy (Matthew 13:39)	Evil One (Matthew 13:19, 38; I John 2:13- 14, 3:12, 5:18) Belial [a Hebrew word meaning evil or worthless] (II Corinthians 6:15)
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¹ Hebrew: שָׂטָן (pronounced, *sahtahn*); Greek: σαταμᾶς (pronounced: *sahtahnas*).

² This name does not occur in the Old Testament. The New Testament Greek name is διάβολος

³ Occasionally, one encounters a teacher who contends that the name, *Lucifer*, in the King James Version and the New King James Version of Isaiah 14:12 refers to Satan. Let it be noted that the King James Translators took this term from Jerome's Latin Vulgate version, rather than translating the term. The Hebrew and the Greek translation of the Hebrew is correctly translated, *morning star* or *day star*. The reason that some teachers think that Isaiah 14:12 refers to Satan is because they see a similarity between the statements made in Isaiah 14:12 and Jesus' statement in Luke 10:18, *I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.* (Luke 10:18). However, a responsible exegesis of Isaiah 14:12 reveals that Isaiah is referring the King of Babylon. For a discussion of this passage, see <https://www.tulsachristianfellowship.com/doulos-press---papers.html> Exploring Isaiah.

⁴It could be argued that the term, *son of God*, is used for Satan in Job 1:6. However, the term is not applied, clearly, to Satan. The text states that, *Satan also came among them*, implying a distinction between Satan and the others to whom the term, *sons of God*, is applied.

⁵ It is possible that the Book of Job predates I Chronicles, but this is debatable. If Job is older, then Job 1:6 would be the first time that the personal name, *Satan*, first appears in Scripture.

⁶ The Hebrew verb from which the name is derived is spelled with the same three consonants, but with different vowel points.

⁷ The term is used in the general sense, *adversary*, in several Old Testament passages that do not refer to the being who is God's adversary (See Numbers 22:22,32; I Samuel 29:4; II Samuel 19:22; Psalm 109:6)

Adversary (I Peter 5:8)
 Deceiver (Revelation 12:9)
 Great Dragon (Revelation 2:13)
 Father of Lies (John 8:44)
 Murderer (John 8:44)

Sinner (I John 3:8)
 The ruler of this world (John 12:31)
 The god of this age (II Corinthians 4:4)
 Serpent (Genesis 3:1; Revelation 12:9, 14,
 15; 20:2)

Both his names and the description of his activities in Scripture present the picture of a being whose nature and will are given to evil. He has a free will, as do all of God's creatures, and his chief power is in his ability to deceive. He fundamentally is a liar and his kingdom is founded on lies and deceit. All else of his kingdom is built on this foundation.

In order to have a full understanding of Satan, his schemes, and his ultimate goal, we must ask the question, *Why did God create humans?* Both in the beginning of the Scriptural record *Let us make man in our image*, and the description of God's fellowship, initially, with these creatures made in His image,⁸ as well as the final Scriptural description of God's relationship with humans, leads us to conclude that God made creatures in His Image in order to fellowship with them for eternity.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tent of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them," (Revelation 21:2-3 NAS)⁹

It is apparent that God desires to have a race of created beings, created in His image, with whom He will spend eternity.

It is equally apparent, as we study the career of Satan, that his goal is to deprive God of having eternal fellowship with a race created in His image or, if he cannot do that, then it is his goal to reduce their number. To that end, he uses his schemes and devices to draw humans away from God. In addition to these covert schemes, he seeks to kill all who persist in being God's people, in order to remove their influence on the rest of humanity.

⁸Genesis Chapters 2-3 picture God's conversing with humans and walking in the Garden where He placed man. The picture is of familiar intercourse between God and the creatures made in His image.

⁹ We have given the literal translation of the Greek in this passage. The term often rendered, *tabernacle of God – dwelling of God, etc.* is σκηνή (*skaynay*) which literally means, *tent*. The term, *tabernacle*, is the result of the Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible, translated by Jerome in the late Fourth Century. The Vulgate became the Bible of all Christians for many generations. In translating the Greek into Latin, Jerome, quite naturally, used the Latin term for tent, i.e. *tabernaculum*. When the King James translators came to passages referring to the *tent of God*, rather than rendering the Greek term by its common literal meaning, they chose to use the Latin term, Anglicized as *tabernacle*. However, the term literally is *tent*. This becomes especially important in passages such as John 1;14, which literally reads, concerning Jesus, *he spread his tent among us*. This describes a much more intimate dwelling with humanity than does the liturgical term, *tabernacle*.

The Satanic Hierarchy

As we seek to combat a hostile culture, we must realize that we are involved in spiritual warfare and it is important that we be informed as to the nature of that warfare. Not only is the individual Satan warring against us, but he has a coterie of evil angels under his command. Within this Satanic kingdom, there is an established hierarchy of spiritual forces.

There are many portions of Scripture that give us fleeting glimpses into the hierarchy of Satan's kingdom. Paul's description in Ephesians 6:12 is more than just a glimpse.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

This verse describes a four-level hierarchy of evil forces.

- The first level consists of the *rulers*. The Greek term, here is, ἄρχαί, (*archai*) meaning literally, *the primaries*. In its usual use, the term refers to those who take orders from no one, but they have authority in themselves. These are the spiritual forces that are at the top of the chain of command in Satan's kingdom.
- The second level, most English versions render as *authorities*, or *powers*. The Greek term so rendered is, ἐξουσία, (*egzousiai*). This term means, *those to whom authority has been delegated*, and describes those to whom the primaries have delegated authority in certain spheres. When one of these *authorities* acts within his assigned sphere, it is as if the *primary* under whom he serves were acting.
- The third level is the *world forces of this darkness*. The Greek terminology is, τοὺς κοσμοκράτωρ τοῦ σκότους τούτου (*tous kosmokrator tou skotos toutou*). The literal meaning of these terms is, *the world rulers of this darkness*. This terminology would lead us to conclude that these are the spiritual forces behind the evil in nations, cities, and cultures.
- The fourth level is the πνευματικοί (*pneumatikoi*), *the spirituals*. If we continue the pattern displayed in the first three terms, we conclude that these are the demonic forces that are the footsoldiers in Satan's army.

The Godly Angelic Hierarchy

In God's angelic host, there also is an hierarchy. Although not described in the same detail as Paul's description of Satan's evil host, we glean from several scriptural episodes information about this hierarchy.

One of the most informative glimpses into the realm of angelic hierarchies is the episode recorded in Daniel 10. This account leads us to conclude that both God and Satan have *archangels*.

The event recorded in Daniel 10 took place when Daniel was almost 90 years of age; he had lived in Babylon for seventy-two years. As a result of the divine revelations that had been given to him, Daniel had gained a position of influence in each of the succeeding monarchies that had ruled Babylon, including that of Cyrus, the recent conqueror of Babylon.

As a result of Cyrus' victory, Babylon had become a part of the Persian Empire. Shortly after conquering Babylon, Cyrus ordered the Hebrew captives to return to their homeland and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Because of his position, and possibly because of his age, Daniel was not free to leave his post and join the pilgrims who were returning to Palestine. Furthermore, Daniel's life displays a desire to be careful in his obedience to God and he had not received a divine injunction to join the pilgrims.

As he watched the last Jerusalem-bound caravan leave the western gate of the city, Daniel experienced anxiety about the fate of his people. Reports describing problems experienced by the Jews began to filter back to Babylon. The Samaritans living in and around Jerusalem resented the Jewish settlers. After about two years, a delegation of Samaritans arrived at Cyrus' court, bring accusations against the Jews. They were determined to undermine the efforts to rebuild Jerusalem. Daniel began to mourn for his people.

God had given Daniel several visions concerning the future (beginning in Daniel 8). After each vision, even after some enlightenment from angelic interpreters (Daniel 8:16-27; 9:20-10:1), Daniel experienced anxiety about what was going to happen to his people. On the occasion before us, Daniel entered into a three-week selective fast, eating only common food, and praying for understanding. All of Daniel 10 should be read to understand this episode.¹⁰ The words of the heavenly messenger, recorded in verses 12-13 & 20, are of special significance to our study:

Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.

...Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come.

A key player in this drama is Michael, an angel whose name means, *who is as God*.¹¹ It should be noted that Michael is described in Daniel 12:1 as the angel-prince who stands guard over the people of Israel:

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued (Note that in Daniel 10:21 Michael also is described as, your prince).

¹⁰ Note that the theophany of Daniel 10:4-6 corresponds to the theophany of Ezekiel 1:26ff and elsewhere in Ezekiel. This theophany preceded the angelic messenger sent to enlighten Daniel.

¹¹ A strong case could be made that Michael is the *angel of Jehovah* who is a key player in many episodes of the Old Testament.

In the vision of Daniel 10 (v13) Michael is described as *one of the chief princes*. This agrees with the New Testament terminology in Jude 9 where Michael is described as an *archangel* (ἀρχάγγελος):

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "Jehovah rebuke you."

The term, *archangel*, means *primary angel*, or *first-rank angel* or, *ruling angel*. The term is formed from two Greek terms:

- *arche* (ἀρχή), meaning, *first*, or, when applied to human hierarchies, *ruler* (the same term used in Ephesians 6:12 to describe the primaries in the Satanic kingdom);
- *angelos*, (ἄγγελος), meaning, *messenger*¹² (the Greek term used in Scripture for the heavenly messengers that God dispatches to earth).

Revelation 12:7 pictures Michael in his archangel role as leading the angelic army of God against the dragon and his angels:

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war,

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, that an archangel would put forth a loud shout, as Jesus and his host descend from heaven in the second coming:

*For Jehovah Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)*¹³

Since Daniel 10:13 describes Michael as *one of the chief princes*, we would assume that there are other archangels, although none are named in Scripture.

Another angel, Gabriel, was involved with Daniel. This angel is mentioned four times in Scripture. He was sent to Daniel on two occasions:

And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision." (Daniel 8:16)

¹² Etymology is an uncertain means of precisely defining words. Care must be exercised in using this means of determining the definition of a term. In this case, it is justified, since there is no inductive means of defining the term, *archangel*.

¹³ Since the archangel of I Thessalonians 4:16 is called "the" archangel, and since Michael is the only archangel named in Scripture, some exegetes consider Michael to be the archangel mentioned in this passage. However, the evidence is inconclusive since Michael is described in Daniel 10: 13 as, "one" of the chief princes. Michael clearly is a member of the first rank of heavenly beings in God's service. He may be the only one of that rank.

...while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. (Daniel 9:21)

In Luke 1:19 we learn that Gabriel is the angel who was sent to Zechariah, to tell him that he and his wife would have a son (John the Baptist).

And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.

Six months later, Gabriel was sent to Mary to announce that she will be impregnated by the Holy Spirit and that she would bring forth a son, who is to be named, Jesus.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, favored one! Jehovah is with you." And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and Jehovah God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-28, 30-33, 35-37, 38b)

Thus, we conclude that Gabriel is a special messenger from God, sent to bring important revelation in special circumstances.

Since Gabriel is the messenger sent to Daniel on two earlier occasions, Gabriel probably was the unnamed messenger in Daniel 10.

In this glimpse into the unseen Kingdom of God, there is a clear picture of a hierarchy of angels. Those on the higher levels of this hierarchy have more authority than those on the lower levels.

The Daniel 10 episode fits into the framework described by Paul. The Satanic representative in the Persian Empire (through Cyrus's victory over Babylon, which made it a part of the Persian Empire) is called, *the Prince of Persia*. He was Satan's commandant who oversaw the demons (δαίμόνιον), who were represented by the idols of Persia (Paul wrote to the Corinthians [I Corinthians 10:20ff] that those who sacrifice to idols sacrifice to demons). He was the *Satanic ruler* or *authority* that influenced the kings of Persia, in an effort to turn them against the Jews.

The Prince of Persia was a powerful angelic majesty (Jude 8) and he probably was a level or two higher in the spiritual hierarchy than the messenger sent to Daniel (as if a Captain in one army's trying to have authority over a General in another army; more will be said on this topic later). Because of this hierarchical difference, the angel sent with a message to Daniel could not get past the Satanic Prince of Persia angel.

Therefore, the archangel Michael (*who is as God*), was sent to unseat the Satanic angelic majesty. He dislodged Satan's Prince of Persia, thus enabling God's messenger to complete his mission to Daniel.

The messenger told Daniel that he was going to return to the ongoing conflict and that his next challenger would be Satan's agent assigned to the Greeks.¹⁴ Michael, Israel's guardian angel, was the only one who was standing with this angel him in this continuing conflict. Earlier, this messenger had helped Michael in a battle with the evil spiritual forces related to Darius the Mede (10:21-11:1)

However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince. And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him.

The Baalim

The ancients understood that there are spiritual dominions over various people and geographical areas. They called these spiritual entities, the *baalim* (בַּעַלִּים).

The term, *baalim* (rendered in most English versions as, *baals*) means, *Lords*. The ancients believed that there was a *baal* over every plot of ground, plus an hierarchy of *baalim* over enlarged sections of real estate. For this reason, each peasant had an idol to which he sacrificed, representing the *baal* over his garden plot. This was one of the problems that Jehovah had with the Israelites when they came into the Promised Land. The Israelites tried to "copper the bet." Not only did they worship Jehovah, but they also offered sacrifices to the *baalim*, just in case Jehovah was not strong enough or not disposed toward the provision of a good crop. Gideon's destruction of his father's *baalim* is a case in point.¹⁵ Another interesting illustration of this truth is the manner in which the Arameans explained their defeat by Israel:

Now the servants of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the mountains, therefore they were stronger than we; but rather let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. (I Kings 20:23)

Every glimpse that the Bible gives us into these realms confirms that there are Satanic hierarchies over nations, people, and cities, regardless of what name they may go by.

The Footsoldiers

On a totally different level than these Satanic super-powers are the foot-soldiers of the Satanic host. These probably are the demons. During the ministry of Jesus and the life of the early Church, demons were in direct conflict with the messengers of the Gospel. Abundant testimony from around the world makes it clear that demonic activity has not ceased. Jesus has given His Church authority over demons. He first gave this authority to the Twelve and then to the Seventy, when he sent them out on evangelistic missions.

And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; (Mark 6:7; see also Matt. 10:5ff; Luke 9:1ff)

Now after this Jehovah appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come....And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." (Luke 10:1, 17)

¹⁴ The Greeks, led by Phillip of Macedonia, began a conquest of Persia in 336 BC. After Phillip was assassinated, his son, Alexander renewed the conquest in 334 BC, finally completing the conquest in 331 BC, thus making Persia a part of his Greek empire.

¹⁵ Judges 6:25

The traditional concluding verses of Mark's Gospel¹⁶ contain Jesus' promise that the early church would cast out demons:

And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; (Mark 16:17)

After the ascension of Jesus, the preachers that went forth fulfilled this prophecy. For example, in Philippi, Paul encountered a demon possessed maiden:

And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. (Acts 16:16-18)

The Relationship Between Different Levels Of The Hierarchies

As we have seen, there are hierarchies and levels of authority, both in God's spiritual kingdom and in Satan's spiritual army. There is an absolute quality in these hierarchies. Unless an agent in one kingdom is equal or superior to an agent in the opposing hierarchy, he does not rebuke him, and is seemingly unable to defeat him.

Jude speaks to this issue:

Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "Yahweh rebuke you." But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (Jude 8-11)

¹⁶ Four different endings for the Gospel of Mark are found in the manuscripts known at this time. Verses 9-20 are absent from the two oldest Greek manuscripts, from the Old Latin codex Bobiensis, the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript, about one hundred Armenian manuscripts and the two oldest Georgian manuscripts. Clement of Alexandria and Origin show no knowledge of the existence of these verses. Eusebius and Jerome attest to the fact that the passage was absent from almost all copies of the Greek known to them. The original form of the Eusebian sections makes no provision for numbering the text after 16:8. Several manuscripts that do contain these verses contain scribal notes stating that the older Greek versions do not contain these verses. For full information, see, Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Third Edition (United Bible Societies) 1971, pages 122-128. It seems that these verses were added after the apostolic age, but the fact that they were added indicates that the early church did experience what is described in these verses, and held to the doctrines proclaimed in them. Otherwise these verses would not have been added.

Note that Jude refers to those in the Church who have *crept in unnoticed*, people who would pervert the Church. The reference to the *rebellion of Korah* indicates that they do not respect spiritual authority (see Numbers 16). One of their characteristics is that they *revile angelic majesties*. The angelic majesties include both the hierarchy of God and the hierarchy of Satan.

Jude states that even the archangel Michael (the archangel *who is as God*) did not dare pronounce a railing judgment against Satan, but said, *Yahweh rebuke you*. Jude describes, in a negative way, the proper behavior toward someone who is higher in the spiritual hierarchy. The archangel Michael's behavior is contrasted with those in the church who *revile angelic majesties*. They revile things that they do not understand.

Peter's Second Epistle, presents the same picture of those who *revile angelic majesties*.

...then Yahweh knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before Yahweh. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed...(II Peter 2:9-12)

Important conclusions concerning the spiritual realm and spiritual warfare

- Both God and Satan have heavenly hierarchies.
- Satan assigns powerful warlords over certain geographical areas and certain people groups.
- God assigns powerful angels as "guardians" of people groups and individuals.
- Those who are on one level of an hierarchy, do not succeed in opposing an enemy agent who is at a higher level in the hierarchy.
- Out of reverence for spiritual authority, an agent of one kingdom does not rebuke an agent of another kingdom who is on a higher plane of authority.
- The "foot-soldiers" of Satan's kingdom are the demons, who seek to inhabit people and use people.

We now turn to the study of episodes relevant to the topic before us, The People of God in a Hostile Culture.

WHY, AMONG THE TREES IN THE GARDEN GIVEN AS FOOD FOR MAN, DID GOD PLACE ONE TREE WHOSE FRUIT WAS FORBIDDEN TO MAN?

Then Yahweh God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

The Genesis account does not give an explanation, but other portions of Scripture indicate that God did not intend to create robots. He created a race of beings with free will, who would choose to honor Him as God and to love Him and to demonstrate that honor and love by obedience.

Jesus demonstrated this truth in his conversation with His disciples and John echoed that theme in his epistles.

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15)

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. (John 14:21-23)

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. (John 15:10)

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)

And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (2 John 1:6)

Let it be noted that in all of these and other similar passages the Greek term rendered as *love* is, ἀγάπη (*agapay*). This is a term that is not based on emotion, but rather is a volitional word – it is something that one chooses. Emotion may accompany ἀγάπη, but not necessarily so. Choice is required.¹⁷

Echoes of this idea are seen in Joshua's charge to the Israelites as they entered the Promise Land. After reciting the words of Yahweh, rehearsing all that He had done to bring the Israelites to this blessed place, Joshua then added his own charge,

"And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve Yahweh, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh." (Joshua 24:15)

Thus, throughout Scripture, the charge is, *choose*. God wants eternal fellowship with those who choose Him, rather than those who have no other choice.

¹⁷ Among the other Greek terms that are rendered in English as *love*, are: ἔρος, referring to desire and sensual love; στοργή, referring to familial love, especially the love between parents and children; φίλος (φίλη, φίλημα) referring to affection and the love between friends.

SATAN'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO THWART GOD'S PURPOSE FOR CREATING MANKIND IN HIS IMAGE

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which Yahweh God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden '?"

"And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 3:1-7)¹⁸

Paul's statement to the Corinthians, as well as others in the New Testament,¹⁹ indicate that the account of Genesis Chapter 3 is to be taken literally, and not as an allegory or myth, as some have contended.

But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Even before the New Testament was written, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apocryphal Book of Wisdom described the entrance of sin into the world as the result of Satan's envy (Wisdom 2:23).²⁰

One thing that is displayed in this scene is Satan's frequent practice of using various creatures, including humans, as his vehicle or instrument in carrying out his schemes. For example, Luke 22:3

And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve.²¹

That the serpent was not just any serpent is made apparent elsewhere in Scripture. Especially in two verses in the Revelation.

¹⁸ It is of interest to note that Satan did not use the name, *Yahweh*, when referring to God, but used the general name for God, *Elohim*. As Eve conversed with Satan, she used the terms that Satan used.

¹⁹ Examples of New Testament Scriptures that reflect the truth of Genesis 3: John 8:44; II Corinthians 11:3, 14; Romans 16:20; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:2

²⁰ The Book of Wisdom is an apocryphal Jewish book written in Greek. The book probably was written in the Alexandrian Jewish community in the mid-First Century B.C.

²¹ The same truth is recorded in John 13:2, 27

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:9 NAS)

And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, (Revelation 20:2 NAS)

The descriptive term, *serpent of old*, clearly reflects back to the Genesis account.

As we explore this episode, a few questions come to mind. The first question that comes to mind is, *Why did Satan, in the form of a serpent, approach Eve, rather than tempting Adam?*

Most of the classic commentators write something similar to Lutheran scholar Leupold's statement, "*The woman*" is singled out to be tempted, because she is not naturally as strong as man.²²

It could be debated that one of the reasons Satan approached Eve was because woman is not naturally as strong as man. Furthermore, whether or not women are not as strong as men – temperamentally, or perhaps more prone to be “sold a bill of goods” by a clever salesman- is a matter of debate.

A more plausible reason, one that every orthodox commenter, including Leupold, cites is that Eve had not heard God give the command concerning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The giving of the command concerning the trees in the garden was given before woman was created (Genesis 2:16-18). Therefore, she would have received through Adam the prohibition concerning the forbidden tree. For that matter, at this point in the Genesis narrative, Eve had not had a conversation with Yahweh, as had Adam. Consequently, she would not have felt the weight and gravity of the command to the degree that Adam would have given to the prohibition.

Satan immediately began to display his deceptive character in misquoting God, "*Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?*"

Satan knew that God had not forbidden the couple to abstain from eating from every tree in the garden. He displayed the guise that often is seen in a manipulative salesman.

Eve, responded with a rather legalistic and fearful attitude, "*From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'*"

God had not given any restriction concerning the tree, other than that they should not eat of it. Eve displayed a trait that some First Century Christians displayed - adding rules and regulations to Christ's clear commands which the apostles had to correct.²³ Such additions always give Satan an opportunity, as will be seen in other instances as we move through the history of God's people.

Scheming Satan then proceeded to attempt to destroy Eve's trust in God. He did this by asserting that God had hidden motives in the prohibition.

²² H. C. Leupold, (Columbus, Ohio, The Wartburg Press) 1942, page 143

²³ Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, I Timothy 4:1-4; etc.

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die!"⁵ "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

One of Satan's consistent and most effective ploys is to cause those made in God's image to have a distrust of God. A clear example of this is the story of Job, which we will consider later in this study.

Note that the serpent's subtlety is further demonstrated in that he never told the woman to eat of the fruit of the tree. He simply insinuated, implied, hinted, or suggested that it would be to the woman's advantage for her to eat of this forbidden fruit.

Eve, not having heard God's voice, did hear the voice of the tempter, and she began to feel free to look at the tree through a new set of eyes, so to speak.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:6)

Genesis, Chapter 3, has appropriately been labeled, "The Darkest Chapter in the Bible." Equally true would be the statement, Genesis 3:6 is the darkest verse in the Bible, for that is the record of the entrance of sin into the human race, and all of the troubles that have resulted therefrom.

Note that the woman's new view of the tree is consistent with John's description of worldly allurements.

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (I John 2:15-16)

It is important to remember that our human appetites have been given to us by God. God has given to mankind many pleasures which we are to enjoy with a sense of thanksgiving.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

God has given to mankind the pleasure of taste, the pleasure of sex within marriage, etc. and, as noted above, asceticism is a doctrine of the enemy.

Even so, the flesh comes into the picture and sin results when someone does not control the appetites, but rather, allows the appetites to be in control.

So we see in this event, a pattern often repeated in sacred history – Satan seeks to cause someone to doubt God, or at least to not reverence Him – then the allurements of the flesh begin to draw the one being tempted to surrender to the temptation and disobey God's clear Word.

We immediately note Adam's behavior. Some have argued that Adam was not around when the serpent tempted Eve. Scripture would indicate otherwise, *and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate*. Eve did not go looking for Adam to give him fruit, he was right there with her, but he kept silent.

The next verse also is revealing,

she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 3:6b-7)

The consequence of the sin did not occur until after Adam ate. Adam clearly abrogated his responsibility. Here we see an example of two things of which Adam was guilty:

- He did not provide leadership, but Adam looked on as his wife disobeyed God;
- Apparently, his relationship with his wife was more important to him than obeying God.

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. (Genesis 3:17)

Concerning the priority of the relationship with God over that of human relationships, Jesus said, *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)^{24 25}*

Clearly, Adam failed in his responsibility and the entire human race has suffered the consequence.

Another lesson is given to us in this episode: the consequence of sin often is not immediate, yet it is certain. When Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, she did not drop dead. Perhaps that caused Adam to begin to question God. Even though neither Eve nor Adam dropped dead, from that moment on, death became a part of the human experience. As Hebrews 9:27 states,

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

The only exceptions to this universal rule have been Enoch, and Elijah.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. (Hebrews 11:5)

Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. (2 Kings 2:11)

²⁴ The exhortation to *hate* can easily be misunderstood. Freiberg's Lexicon is helpful here, in defining the sense of the term, *hate* (μισέω) in this passage, "Hebraistically, requiring single-minded loyalty in discipleship, *prefer less, love less.*" Timothy and Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Vancouver, BC, Trafford Publishing) 2005 entry 18563. Other lexicons (Thayer, for example) give illustrations of the word's being used to mean, *love less.*

²⁵ Matthew 10:34-39 records another statement that Jesus made on this subject. It is equally strong, even though it does not contain the term, *hate.*

SATAN'S NEW ALLY IN HIS EFFORT TO PREVENT GOD FROM OBTAINING HIS GOAL

From the time of the expulsion from the Garden, mankind's fallen nature has been Satan's ally.

The 1549 Book of Common prayer introduced the phrase, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* ("From al the deceytes of the worlde, the fleshe, and the deuill: Good lorde deliuer us.").

Indeed, these three entities are persistent enemies of a godly life and thus, enemies of God. We need to remember the words of I John, quoted earlier,

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.⁷ And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Another affirmation of this point is Yahweh's statement, made following the flood, concerning the consistent of fallen humanity's depravity.

and Yahweh said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. (Genesis 8:21)

Thus, sometimes it is clear that Satan himself is the one who is bringing the temptation. At other times, his presence is very covert, perhaps not even obvious, but the ungodly culture and the flesh (fallen human nature) will be tools that he consistently will use in his efforts to rob God of having a company of those made in His Image with whom He will spend eternity.

More often than not, Satan doesn't have to do anything, other than stand and watch, as fallen human nature takes its evil course. This especially is true in ungodly cultures.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Among the many lessons that come to us from the account of the Satanic encounter in the Garden of Eden, the most important is, *Obey God.*

Adam and Eve had never experienced anything like this before. The idea of doubting God or the thought of disobedience had never occurred to them. Furthermore, they had no experience in dealing with Satan. Whatever else one may learn from this account, the bottom line for us is, ***Even if we have never encountered a situation before, we must be careful to obey God in all circumstances.***

This lesson is very important for Christians of the 21st Century. Beginning with the 20th Century, through telephones, movies, radio broadcasts, and television, Satan had more means of having an influence on individuals than had been available to him in previous generations. In the 21st Century, with the birth of social media, etc., Satan has a whole new array of instruments that he can use to program humans, even when they are not aware that it is happening.

In the midst of such times, regardless of the newness or the oldness of the experience, Christians must be careful to be aware of the schemes of the enemy, especially those subtle messages that he packages in seemingly innocent entertainment venues. The People of God must always be careful to obey God.

Another lesson for 21st Century Christians is to remember that which is stated earlier: from this point onward, fallen humanity in a fallen world would present a challenge to anyone who sought to live a godly life.

A third important lesson is that the consequence of sin is not always immediate, but it is certain. The only remedy is to repent and receive forgiveness from God. Yet, even though repentance and God's forgiveness will remove this from one's personal record in heaven, this does not always remove the consequence in this life. One may receive forgiveness from God for being unfaithful in a marriage, but that does not guarantee that the broken marriage will be restored. One who damages his health through the abuse of alcohol and drugs can come to God with a repentant heart and a changed life, but the damage done to the body and mind through this abuse may continue for the rest of one's earthly life.

THE SECOND ACCOUNT OF SIN IN SCRIPTURE: CAIN AND ABEL

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of Yahweh."

And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to Yahweh of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.

And Yahweh had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.

So, Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

Then Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (Genesis 4:1-8 NAS)

Satan is not mentioned by name in this account, but mankind's fallen nature is displayed, as pictured in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,²⁶ in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath,²⁶ even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

²⁶ The Greek in this expression clearly says, *formerly children of wrath* (τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς). Some English versions have interpreted this to mean *objects of wrath* (NIV), *subjects to God's anger* (NLT). An alternative understanding is that before conversion the Ephesians inherited the tendency toward anger, which is a consistent negative trait of human nature.

One cannot miss the fact that at this time, Yahweh still spoke to humans, even warning Cain about the consequences of his attitude. The important caution, *sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you...* implies the presence of Satan, in that he is the instigator of sin.

Why was Abel's offering accepted and Cain's rejected? Some have argued that Cain brought a vegetable offering and Abel brought a blood sacrifice, and this is why one was rejected and the other accepted. There really is no basis for this conclusion.

First, we must recognize that there is no record of any command, at this point, to bring sacrifices to God. Why they did this, requires speculation. Neither is there any command to bring a certain type of sacrifice to God. Later, when Yahweh gave the Law to Moses, blood sacrifices, plus vegetable, and meal offerings were the natural offering of a grateful people.²⁷

The only Biblical answer to why Abel's offering was accepted is found in the New Testament.

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4)

Of significance is the wording of Genesis 4:4a-5, *Yahweh had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.* Note that the individuals – Abel, Cain – are mentioned first in each case, with the offering being mentioned secondarily.

Since Hebrews 11:4 is the only biblical clue related to the episode, we have to conclude it was a matter of the heart. Abel had the right motivation for bringing an offering – evidently, Cain did not. As vague as this might be, this is where any honest exegete must leave the matter.

Of great importance is the fact that Yahweh did not bring any hardship on Cain, because of his failure, whatever that failure might have been. Instead, Yahweh, noting Cain's response, warned him of the danger of not mastering sin – in this case, anger.

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.

Regardless of his mood or his sense of rejection, Cain had the responsibility to master his feelings, instead of allowing them to control him.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Anger and wrath are strongly in evidence in this present decade. Emotions and the emotionalism that owns groups of people result in horrible deeds. Satan uses these traits of humanity's fallen nature to achieve his ends. Even the believer has to be aware of these tendencies in himself/herself and the groups with which he/she associates. Just as Yahweh told Cain to master his feelings and not allow them to master him, the New Testament gives that same exhortation.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

²⁷ Examples of non-bloody sacrifices: Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Leviticus 2:11-12; 23:10, etc.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:19-24)

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, (Ephesians 4:26)

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31)

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. (Colossians 3:8)

for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (James 1:20)

for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

All of these exhortations place a responsibility on the Christian to master his feelings and, at least, to not act on those that do not reflect the character of God.

One might ask, "What about righteous anger – even God is described as being angry?" Many, many times, God states that He will execute His anger upon those who defy Him. For example, Jeremiah wrote,

The fierce anger of Yahweh will not turn back, Until He has performed, and until He has accomplished The intent of His heart; (Jeremiah 30:24)

The writer of Hebrews reminds us,

For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "Yahweh will judge His people."³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30-31)

This brings to mind Paul's statement in Romans,

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says Yahweh.²⁰ "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:18-21)

Indeed, we may experience righteous anger, and use just, legal, and, hopefully, peaceful means to put an end to an evil we see being done to someone for whom we care, but we must leave in the hands of our Heavenly Father any sort of vengeance or retaliation – *be ye angry, and sin not.*

THE FIRST SOCIETY/CULTURE CONTROLLED BY SATAN

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

Then Yahweh said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless, his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

Then Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:1-5)

Genesis 6:5 describes a time in the history of humanity in which society was totally depraved. How did this evil age come to be? To understand this, we must look at the preceding context. Before doing this, however, we must take the time to note one common presentation of this section, as we ponder the question, “Who were the sons of God?” The term is used in Scripture to describe two groups: godly humans²⁸ and angels.²⁹

EXCURSUS

Reasons to reject the contention that the *sons of God* in 6:2 refers to angels

The basis for the contention that the term, *sons of God*, describes angels comes from two sources:

- (1) The apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, Chapters VI-XI³⁰
- (2) Mythological racy escapades between old pagan gods and human women. This is the view of some who consider the Bible to be a document created by humans.

Thus far, angels have not been introduced into the Biblical narrative. To suddenly introduce angels into the narrative with such obscure language that causes confusion is not consistent with the very forthright approach that this narrative employs.

Some Bible teachers seek to identify II Peter 2:4 with this pre-flood account. *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; (2 Peter 2:4 NAS)*

Those who try to make II Peter 2:4 refer to this episode fail to pay attention to the point that Peter is making, which is, God’s certain judgment on false teachers, and God’s ability to deliver the righteous. In doing so, he uses three illustrations, each of them separate events:

Verse 4 – the angels who sinned. No information is given as to what or when that sin occurred, but what makes the most sense is that it refers to the rebellion in heaven led by Satan (Matthew 4:18; Jude 6; Revelation 12:7-9).

Verse 5 – the flood and Noah and his family’s being delivered

²⁸ Psalm 73:15 uses the same word, *sons* (בְּנֵי, *bene*) describing God’s people. Deuteronomy 32:5 uses the same term in referring to Israel. Hosea 1:10 uses the term in even stronger language. Psalm 80:17 also uses this language.

²⁹ The same terminology, referring to angels, is seen three times in Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7), Daniel 3:25. Psalms 29:1 and 89:7 refer to angels as *sons of the almighty*.

³⁰ This book was written over several centuries by a variety of authors. The section dealing with the fallen angels contains a very fanciful and imaginative story of angels warring against humans, birds, and all creatures, finally, fighting and devouring one another. *The Book of Enoch*, translated by R. H. Charles (Mineola, NY, Dover Publications Inc) 2007, pages 34-39

Verses 6-7 – Sodom and Gomorrah and the deliverance of Lot.

In these verses, there is nothing to connect the imprisonment of the sinning angels with the flood of Noah.

Matthew 22:30 stands against the idea that angels married human women. *For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.* The description in Genesis 6 is not a picture of some adulterous irregularity, but rather, to a martial union.

CONCLUSION: II Peter 2:4 refers to angels who rebelled as a part of Satan's rebellion and were cast into Tartarus where they are awaiting judgment, rather than referring to the sons of God described in Genesis 6:2

As in all scriptural exegesis, the issue here is one of context. The context is the description of two clans:

- The descendants of Cain, described in 4:16-24, constituted a clan that was known for achievements and pride. Members of this clan built a city (4:17). Members of this clan became successful herders and animal breeders (4:20). Members of this clan became gifted musicians, probably inventing musical instruments (4:21). Members of this clan became skilled metal workers (4:22). A notable member of this clan displayed braggadocio and pride (4:23-24). All that is said about this clan refers to its human achievements.
- The description of the clan that descended from Seth contains no mention of human achievements, but what description is given mentions godly character. After Seth's first son, Enosh, was born, the Hebrew text says, *At that time a beginning was made of calling upon the name of Yahweh* (4:46). A member of this clan, Enoch, walked with God and was translated, rather than dying (5:22-24). Noah, who seemingly was the only righteous man living in the evil generation was a member of this clan (5:30-32; 6:8).

Since Chapter 5, is the immediate context of Chapter 6, and since Chapter 5 is devoted to describing the godly clan of Seth, we conclude that the *Sons of God*, mentioned in Chapter 6:2 must refer to the Sethites.

Thus, the context of Genesis 6:1-2 presents a picture of Sethite men's marrying women who were of beauty of face and figure. We cannot argue that the women that the Sethites married were entirely those descended from Cain. That the daughters were born to men would indicate that the daughters were of both clans. However, the picture is of the two clans co-mingling. Without any sense of the moral distinctions of the two clans, the Sethites *took wives for themselves, whomever they chose*. The result was the absence of a godly clan.

EXCURSUS

Who were the Nephilim?

Occasionally one hears a Bible teacher state that the Nephilim were giants and that they were the offspring of the Sons of God marrying the Daughters of Men.

This contention does not fit the narrative. *The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.*

Note that the Nephilim already were on the earth when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men.

The only other occurrence of this term in Scripture is in Numbers 13:33, recording the report of the Hebrew spies who were sent to spy out the land of the Canaanites.

"The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. "There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." (Num 13:32-33)

Note that the comment is that the inhabitants of Canaan were men of great size, and the Nephilim also were in the land – a distinction made between the men of great size in Canaan and the Nephilim.

The root of the Hebrew term from which Nephilim is derived is, *naphal*, which carries the idea of “fall upon = attack” (see Jeremiah 48:32, *destroyer*; Joshua 11:7, *attacked*; Job 1:15, *attacked*, where this root word is used).

Thus, the conclusion concerning the Nephilim is that there were violent robbers and attackers in the land in those days.³¹ The text then adds that these Nephilim were the “heroes” of antiquity, the men of renown who attained a reputation, the world over, for their violence. It seems that the world had come to the point where they esteemed these wicked men, rather than godly men.

With the absence of a godly clan, and with violent men’s being heroes, Yahweh observed that *wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Note that this was the result of men of the godly clan’s choosing physically pleasing women to be their wives, without any discernment as to the character of the women. Thus, when the two clans comingled, there no longer was a godly influence upon the earth.

³¹ Interestingly, Luther, in his translation of Scripture, uses the German term, *Tyrannen*, i.e., *tyrants*, to describe the Nephilim.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

This episode calls to mind James 1:13-15, which is an affirmation of the state of fallen humanity.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Often, we have illustrated the truth of this passage with the following illustration.

Picture a man at the check-out line in a store. The clerk opens the cash drawer and suddenly is distracted, walking away, briefly, leaving the cash drawer open. The man looks at the cash and he just can't resist reaching into the cash drawer and hurriedly taking some money. The clerk returns, completes the transaction, and the man leaves the store. He turns left, walks one block and passes a movie theatre, featuring a pornographic movie. A scantily-clad woman is outside of the theatre inviting customers to buy a ticket and enter the theatre. The man looks at her, but passes by without the slightest inclination to enter the theatre.

Picture a second man in that same scenario. When this man sees the unattended open cash drawer, he is not tempted one bit. He patiently waits for the clerk to return then completes his transaction and leaves the store. He turns left and after one block passes the theatre showing the pornographic film and the scantily-clad woman inviting him in. He cannot resist. He buys a ticket and enters the theatre and commits the sin of sexual lust.

What is the difference between these two men? James gives this picture: each of us has within our souls, certain lustful ova. Some have one and some have another. Satan studies us and discerns what our particular collection of ova might be, and then he creates situations that will fertilize a particular ovum and, as a result, sin is born.

This is what happened to the sons of God. The lustful ova that dwelt within the Sethite men was fertilized by the face and figure of the young women, and a righteous clan ceased to exist.

It is important for each of us to be honest about ourselves and recognize the collection of ova that exists in our fleshly nature. In order to avoid having an ovum giving birth to sin, we must do all that we can to avoid those situations in which fertilization could occur.

Also, being an active member of the Body of Christ strengthens our ability to overcome our sinful tendencies. That's the point that the writer of Hebrews makes in Hebrews 10:25-27

not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. (Hebrews 10:25-27)

A believer's faithfully gathering together with other believers is one way to avoid willful sin.

In this present age, those who are contending that they can follow Jesus without needing to be a part of a local church are needlessly opening themselves up to Satanic harassment from which they may not recover.

SIN'S PRESISTENT PRESENCE, FOLLOWING THE FLOOD

Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was populated.

Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.

And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.²⁵ So he said, "Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers."

He also said, "Blessed be Yahweh, The God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant.²⁷ "May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant." (Genesis 9:18-27)

When one reads various commentaries and articles concerning this episode, he encounters a plethora of speculation and assumption. We will take passing note of these, but we will restrict our conclusions to what can be discerned from the scanty information given in the text.

This episode would have occurred some years after the flood. None of Noah's grandsons were born until after the flood (Genesis 10:1). Canaan was the youngest of Ham's four sons and so there would have to have been sufficient time for four births to occur and for these sons to begin entering manhood.

Other evidence that this event occurred some years after the flood is the fact that sufficient time had passed for agricultural cycles to begin. Sufficient time would have passed for vines to produce grapes and time for the fermentation of the grape juice.

Some commentators give the number of years that passed between the flood and this episode, but their assertions are based on assumptions. We must be satisfied with the fact that some years had passed since the flood.

This is the first time that Scripture records anyone's being drunk. Because of this, some commentators speculate that Noah did not know that fermented grape juice would make him drunk. Again, that is speculation.

One commentator contends that in the ancient East Mediterranean world wine was connected with sexual potency. This commentator points to the place of wine in the sexual overtones in the

Song of Solomon (1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:2, 9; 8:2), and argues that Noah drank wine in order to be able to fulfill God's mandate, *be fruitful and multiply* (Genesis 9:1).³²

These and other explanations we must leave to the realm of speculation – i.e., a need to explain everything that the Bible does not explain.

What is clear is that Noah would have consumed more than just a few drinks. Grape juice that ferments into wine on its own, never exceeds 13% alcohol content (by volume). At around 8%, the enzymes and bacteria begin consuming one another and so the maximum alcohol of unfortified wine never exceeds 13%, and many are of lower alcohol content by volume.³³

The average man can consume two glasses of wine (total of 10 ounces) without experiencing any ill effects. The average woman can consume one glass of wine (total of 5 ounces) without ill effects. So, we assume that Noah drank more than 10 ounces of wine to become so intoxicated that he took off his clothes, lay down, and was not aware of what was going on around him.

What, specifically, did Ham do to receive Noah's displeasure? How did Noah, after he awoke, know what Ham had done? Here again, much speculation abounds, even among respected scholars. The highly respected Jewish scholar, Rashi, contends that, *saw his father's nakedness*, means that Ham either sodomized (homosexual rape) or castrated Noah.³⁴ The argument Rashi presents for castration is that Ham was attempting to prevent Noah from having any more sons – which would have an impact on the inheritance he hoped to receive.

Another writer argues that since Leviticus 18:7 states, *You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother*, and Deuteronomy 27:20 states, *Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's skirt.*³⁵ then Ham must have engaged in incest with his mother.³⁶

The only clear thing in the account is that Ham did not respect his father, whereas, Shem and Japheth did respect him. Shem and Japheth sought to cover their father's nakedness and not expose him to shame.

There also is much speculation as to why the curse was pronounced on Ham's son, Canaan, rather than on Ham, himself. Some of these are:

- He was cursed because he was the one who initially informed his father, Ham, of the situation. Canaan said something akin to, "Dad, you gotta check out what I just saw! You're gonna love this...."
- Because Ham tried to prevent Noah from having a fourth son (castration), Noah cursed Ham's fourth son.

³² Saint Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Picayune, Mississippi (<http://www.scborromeo.org>)

³³ Port and Sherry, for example, are fortified wines, to which alcohol has been added. Some of them have an alcohol content of 19% by volume.

³⁴ Rabbi Shomo Yitzhaki, popularly known as Rashi, was a medieval French rabbi (1040-1105) whose work was the first Hebrew book to be printed (1475). His writings continue to have great influence in Jewish scholarship. This comment is *Talmud Sanhedrin 70a*, on Genesis 9:25.

³⁵ See also Deuteronomy 22:30

³⁶ <https://www.massbible.org/exploring-the-bible/ask-a-prof/answers>

- Noah did not think that it was appropriate to curse his son after God Himself had blessed his children, following the flood.
- Ham had learned his perverse ways from his son, Canaan.³⁷

Again, regardless of how respected a scholar might put forth these ideas, they are pure speculation and frankly, somewhat farfetched.

EXCURSUS

Supposed Scriptural basis for enslaving blacks

In the 19th Century, some American Christians (especially in the South) taught that because of the curse on Ham, that all Hamites should be enslaved. This was their horribly flawed biblical argument for enslaving people from Africa. The flaw in this argument is the fact that only the descendants of Canaan were the one's who received the curse, not the descendants of Ham's other sons. The black races are not descendants of Canaan, they are descendants of Mizriam, the Hebrew name for Egypt, from whence descended the blacks of Africa. Thus, the curse pronounced only on Canaan is no justification for claiming that the Bible teaches that black races should be enslaved.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

In the light of scant biblical comment on this account, is there anything that contemporary Christians can learn from this episode?

I Corinthians 10:12 is a fitting response to this scene, *Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*

When Yahweh looked at mankind and saw that every intent and thought of man's heart was unto evil (Genesis 6:5), He was so grieved that He considered obliterating mankind. However, there was one man, Noah, who found favor in the eyes of Yahweh. Noah, alone, had characteristics that made him a candidate for the role of reconstituting the human race. In every way, throughout the decades of his building the ark, Noah obeyed Yahweh, even in the face of ridicule.³⁸

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Heb 11:7)

II Peter 2:5 describes Noah as, *a preacher of righteousness.*

Noah was a very special man, who, in the midst of sin and corruption, lived a life of obedience and faith. After all of the stress and labor of building the ark and all of the stress that must have been involved in caring for the animals on the ark, Noah found himself in a peaceful and productive world. His work was over, and he could relax and live the placid life of a farmer. Then, one day, enjoying the fruits of his labor, he over-indulged and became drunk.

³⁷https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3475426/jewish/Why-Noah-Planted-a-Vineyard-and-Got-Drunk.htm

³⁸ Jewish tradition says that it took 120 years to build the ark

This is a pattern that often has been repeated. When the battle seemingly has ended, or when one steps away from the world of responsibility to take a vacation, it is not unusual for one's spiritual guard to be down. Sometimes, when this relaxed moment is achieved, the usually God-honoring person fails to be spiritually alert, and, without realizing it, displays a behavior that, at the least, is not God-honoring. In these relaxed times, when there is an interlude in the stress of life, the exhortation, *Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*, should be a constant caution.

The 21st Century Christian must never forget, that in this age to a greater degree than it has been in previous generations, *sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you*, (Gen 4:7)

Another lesson that is applicable in every generation is the principle presented in 1 Peter 4:8 *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*

Concerning this beautiful verse, Harold L. Fickett Jr., has written,

“‘Above all,’ means, ‘first in order of importance.’ Peter is saying that we should give top priority to being fervent in our love for one another, recognizing that love does not publicize the sins of others; instead, it forgives and forgets them.”³⁹

One of Satan's consistent schemes, through the ages, has been to sully the reputation of those who are seeking to serve God. Rather than broadcasting Noah's embarrassing situation, as did Ham, how much better was the behavior of Shem and Japheth – seeking to cover Noah's situation, which would have been an embarrassment to Noah when he sobered up.

Indeed, when we see a brother or sister in a sin, or in a vulnerable situation, Paul's exhortation in II Timothy 4:2b should guide our behavior,

be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience should be our first response when we see a fellow believer in sin or in a dangerous spiritual place. To gossip about that person or to gloat, or to feel superior to that person, is not the act of a godly disciple of Jesus Christ.

It seems that one of the main characteristics of our present age, is pointing out the flaws in others and not doing anything to help remedy the situation. Rather than the behavior of Ham, let us demonstrate the attitude and behavior of Shem and Japheth – and realize that behind all evil and sin is our enemy, Satan – including the perverse need to gossip and slander.

YAHWEH'S THIRD INTERVENTION IN THE HUMAN STORY

God's first intervention was His expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

The second intervention was the universal flood, accompanied by the building of the ark, and God's beginning anew the human race, through the descendants of Noah.

³⁹ Harold L. Fickett, Jr. *Peter's Principles* (Glendale, California, G/L Regal Books) 1974, page 124

Genesis 11 records the third intervention – the confusion of languages and the dispersion of the families throughout the earth.

As with the previous accounts, there are many questions and speculations related to this incident. As with the previous accounts, we will seek to confine our discussion to the facts, as stated.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.

And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

And Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And Yahweh said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

So, Yahweh scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

Therefore, its name was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth; and from there Yahweh scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:1-9 NAS)

Following the flood, Yahweh gave a commission to the family of Noah,

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

The only way that the family, in future generations, could fill the earth was to multiply and disperse. C. F. Kiel, in an interesting article concludes that, based on each family's having eight children (which would have been common at that time), and an approximately 150 years having passed since the flood (six generations), the human race would have totaled 30,000 people in the world at this time.⁴⁰ As Leupold states, "...a reasonable assumption..."⁴¹

It is clear from the reasoning of those planning to build the tower, that the motivation was to frustrate the fulfillment of Yahweh's commission to *multiply and fill the whole earth*.

And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:4)

⁴⁰ Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume I (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson Publishers) 1989, page 176 Keil arrives at these figures by noting the length of life of each person given in Genesis Chapter 10.

⁴¹ Leupold, page 382

The region of Mount Ararat (8:4) was the center from which the human race began to migrate. They migrated east and from the description of where they settled (Shinar) they would have traveled southeast. This area is a very fertile land which the ancients highly praised. It is the location of what would become Babylon.

Of interest is the fact that this area is rocky with many stones. In writing the account, before proceeding with the story, Moses interjects the interesting fact that, rather than using the natural stones of the area, they made burnt brick for their construction and used tar for mortar.⁴² These humans were going to construct something that was a total human product, without any dependency on God and his natural provision.

Not only were they planning to build a city, but a tower. The Hebrew, concerning building the tower is the so-called, *waw speciale*,⁴³ which conveys the idea, *and especially a tower*.

Not only did these builders desire to keep everyone together, they had another motive, *let us make for ourselves a name*. The Hebrew term used⁴⁴ here, rendered as, *make for ourselves a name*, means to set up a memorial for oneself.⁴⁵ So, there seems to be a desire for renown, perhaps even to give themselves the reputation of having an autonomy that exceeded the authority of God.

This was an effort to elevate mankind, to put mankind in control, rather God's being in control.

Yahweh intervened by confusing their languages, resulting in the formation of groups based on language. In time, each group migrated to a particular region, thus, fulfilling Yahweh's desire for them to multiply and fill the earth.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

The ancient Greek philosopher, Protagoras,⁴⁶ declared, "Man is the measure of all things."⁴⁷ The existential relativism writers of the early 20th Century, such as Luigi Pirandello, subtly presented this point of view in novels, movies, and other literary venues. Today, the view that man, rather than God, should be the controlling authority in society has become a dominant view in many influential institutions, as well as certain segments of the general public.

Those who hold to traditional biblical values often are ostracized, and in some situations, even seen as a danger to the progress of man.

This especially is the philosophy of Marxist Communists. Christianity is seen as a threat to those who demand absolute loyalty to their anti-theistic politics.

⁴² In succeeding generations, ordinary buildings were constructed of bricks made of clay, simply dried in the sun.

⁴³ See discussion at Leupold, page 386 וּמִגְדָּל

⁴⁴ עָשָׂה-לָנוּ שֵׁם.

⁴⁵ The same Hebrew language used in Isaiah 63:12, 14; Jeremiah 32:20, etc.

⁴⁶ c. 490 BC – c. 420 BC

⁴⁷ Literal quote: "Of all things, the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not." (Sextus Impericus [DK 80B1])

Democracy also poses a threat to theism, in that the populace can make decisions, without any consideration of Divine prerogatives. Currently, this attitude and behavior is being displayed in some non-organized groups as well as some organized political groups in America.

How long God will allow this direction of the human race to continue, only He knows. In time, He will intervene as He did at Babel.

In the meantime, it is important that the people of God not feel intimidated or allow themselves to be silenced by these mis-directed humanists. There may be a price to pay for taking a theistic stand, but a heavenly reward awaits those who remain faithful to God and His authority.⁴⁸ Peter spoke to this issue twice in his First Epistle,

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. (1 Peter 4:12-13)

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

Yahweh chose the descendants of Shem to be the family through which the Redeemer would come into the world. In the eighth generation after Shem, Abram was born. When Abram was 90 years old, Yahweh changed his name to, Abraham.⁴⁹

Even though Abram/Abraham is often cited as the *Father of the Faithful*, and is lauded for his faith in Hebrews 11:8-12, as well as being described as an example of faith in Romans 4:9, 12, he had a tendency to take things into his own hands rather than fully trusting and waiting upon God. The Bible records three episodes in which this tendency is displayed.

The First Time Abram Took Matters Into His Own Hands

The first such incident recorded in which Abram took things into his own hands instead of trusting in Yahweh, took place when a famine caused Abram and his wife, along with Abram's nephew Lot, to migrate to Egypt.⁵⁰ Prior to this episode, Yahweh had pronounced a blessing upon and a promise to Abram.

*Now Yahweh said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,*

*And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth shall
be blessed."
(Genesis 12:1-3 NAS)*

⁴⁸ Hebrews 11:35ff cites those who faced grievous tortures and ridicule and the reward they anticipated as a result of their faithfulness, in spite of their trials.

⁴⁹ Genesis 17:5 The name, Abram, means, *exalted father*. Abraham means, *father of a multitude*.

⁵⁰ Genesis 12:10ff

It is significant that Yahweh spoke these promises to Abram – they did not come from a prophet or through some human agency. How Yahweh spoke, we do not know, but He was the speaker and Abram was the recipient of the blessings and the promise.

If these promises of Yahweh were to come true, then Abram would have to continue living. Yet, even having heard these words directly from Yahweh, Abram displayed a tendency that was repeated more than once in his lifetime – a tendency to take things into his human hands, rather than fully trusting God.

When Abram and his entourage reached Egypt, Abram feared for his life. He said to Sarai,

"See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you." (Genesis 12:11-13)

Rather than trusting God to fulfill his promise, Abram took matters into his own hands and practiced deceit – note that Sarai, as an obedient wife, went along with the ploy.

As Abram had predicted, Sarai's beauty caused Pharaoh to take her into his harem. Since Abram was her supposed brother, Pharaoh gave Abram sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and male and female servants. Because of Sarai's beauty, Pharaoh made Abram a wealthy man.

Even though Abram had displayed lack of faith and had employed deceit, Yahweh was not asleep, and He brought great plagues on Pharaoh and his house.

How Pharaoh knew that the cause of the plagues was his having made Sarai one of his wives is not revealed in Scripture. However, when he did know the cause of the problem, he had his men escort Abram, Sarai, and their entourage out of the country.

To an amazing degree, God's grace was extended to Abram, even using the situation to enhance Abram's earthly wealth. He entered Egypt as a nomad, but he left Egypt as a man of significant possessions.⁵¹

EXCURSUS

The origin of the name, *Hebrew*

In the Genesis 14 account of Abram's delivering Lot, as well as the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah from Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, we encounter the term, *Hebrew*, for the first time in Scripture (Genesis 14:13). The term means, *the man from across the river* (i.e. Euphrates), obviously referring to his origin, as contrasted with Mamre and his brothers who were Amorites.

The Second Time Abram Took Things Into His Own Hands

Yahweh gave a clear promise to Abram that he would have descendants beyond number and that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan

After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."

⁵¹ Genesis 12:14-20; 13:2

And Abram said, "O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."

Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."⁵ And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Then he believed in Yahweh; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

And He said to him, "I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." (Genesis 15:1-7)

As the years passed by, and Abram and Sarai became older and older, and still no child had been born to them. Yet the promise of God, concerning Abram's producing offspring loomed continually before them.

Sarai put forth an idea as to how they might help God's promise come true. Instead of waiting on God, they chose a human method of giving Abram an heir. By this time, Abram was approximately eighty-five years old and Sarai was ten years younger.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.

So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, Yahweh has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.

And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. (Genesis 16:1-4)

This action caused problems in the marriage, hardship, and sorrow for Hagar. It also resulted in a race of people who in coming generations became enemies of those through whom Yahweh was going to bring a Redeemer into the world.⁵²

Then Yahweh made it clear that Abram's wife, Sarai, would be the one to bear Abram's promised offspring.

Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah⁵³ shall be her name. "And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." (Genesis 17:15-16; also in Genesis 18)

Indeed, this promised birth happened when Abraham was one-hundred years old and Sarah was ninety.

⁵² Psalm 83:1ff

⁵³ Sarah means, *princess*

The Third Time Abraham Took Things Into His Own Hands

After many years had passed, and the Sodom and Gomorrah incident had occurred, prior to the birth of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah continued to migrate throughout the promised land. When they approached Gerar, Abraham and Sarah repeated the same guise that they had used many years before in Egypt.

Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar.

And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. (Genesis 20:1-2)

Yahweh showed mercy on Abimelech, rather than bringing a plague on his household, as He had done to Pharaoh (He did cause all in Abimelech's household to become barren).⁵⁴ Yahweh spoke to Abimelech in a dream.

God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married." (Genesis 20:3)

Abimelech had not had sexual relations with Sarah, and he pled with God that he had been duped and was innocent of any wrong-doing. God then acknowledged that such was true and that He had kept Abimelech from sinning by having relations with Sarah.

Abimelech quickly rebuked Abraham and Abraham tried to equivocate by pointing out that Sarah really was his half-sister – they had the same father but not the same mother.

Even so, it had been an act of deceit, taking into one's own hands what should have been left in the hands of God.

It was after this incident, that Sarah did conceive and at the time predicted by the angels (Genesis 18:9-15) give birth to Isaac, the promised son.

NOTE: The promised son, Isaac, committed the same deed – saying that his wife was his sister in order to avoid being killed by those who desired his beautiful wife. (Genesis 26:1-11) Is the axiom, "Like father, like son," applicable here?

⁵⁴ Genesis 20:17-18

EXCURSUS

Abraham's Example Of Obeying God In Spite Of The Extremity Of What Was Asked

We would be amiss if we did not point to the final test of Abraham's trust in God, a test that he passed with flying colors.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. (Genesis 22:1-3)

After other episodes in which Abraham took things into his own hands, in an effort to achieve the fulfillment of God's promises, here is the supreme test and Abraham passed the test.

Isaac was the one through all of the promises were to be fulfilled. Yet, God told Abraham to take him up on a mountain and to sacrifice him – a living human sacrifice. This made no sense, but Abraham obeyed.

God honored that obedience by providing a ram and then this affirming word from the angel of Yahweh,⁵⁵

But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."¹² And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:11-12)

Abraham finally had an opportunity to demonstrate that he had conquered the tendency to take things into his own hands.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

The three incidents in which Abram took things into his own hands, rather than leaving the matter in the hands of God, highlight an on-going tendency seen in of people of faith – rather than waiting on God and allowing Him to do things His way and in His timing, it always is tempting to help things along by using human means as a substitute for God's way.

One area in which this is very evident in American churches is the obsession with success and how that is to be measured.

Church growth has become an industry. American pastors and other leaders are expected to build numbers in a congregation, and if they do not, they are failures, and sometimes, fired. It must be remembered that God never has told anyone to build a church or to build a congregation. Jesus said, *I will build My church* (Matthew 16:18)

The commission is to preach the Gospel, immerse believers, and disciple them (Matt.-28:18-20).

⁵⁵ The term, *angel*, literally means, *messenger*

Paul chastised the Corinthian Church, that was dividing into parties that elevated those who had proclaimed the Gospel among them.

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as Yahweh gave opportunity to each one.

*I planted, Apollos watered, **but God was causing the growth.***

*So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but **God who causes the growth.*** (1 Corinthians 3:5-7)

It is the responsibility of Christians to proclaim the Gospel, and to leave the results to God. A Christian is successful, when he has been obedient in this, even if there are no results. The godly measure of success is not results but, obedience.

On a personal note (JWG) I have been grieved to see how, in a city like Tulsa, there often is competition for numbers between churches in a neighborhood. I could cite many examples of human merchandising methods employed in trying to get those who already are Christians to attend one church, rather attending another – the motivation for doing so has not been to disciple believers, but to build the size of a congregation. I know of situations in which there has been gloating when a church of one denomination gets members from a church of another denomination – “We win, you lose!”

Often these things are done instead of evangelizing and allowing God to bring converts.

If one evangelizes and there are no converts, that does not mean that one should stop evangelizing, but it is important to work hard at evangelism and leave the results to God.

On another topic – when a person lies and deceives, he is taking into his own hands the responsibility for the outcome. One should be honest and practice flawless integrity and then peacefully accept the results, even if they are painful.

Also, it is appropriate that we repeat Paul’s warning here, *Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (1 Corinthians 10:12). I have heard people say, concerning what they had seen someone else do, “I would never do that.” However, the situation is not one that this person had faced, and later, I saw that individual in that situation, and he/she did the very thing that he/she had said that he/she would not do – compromised and took things into his/her own hands. The temptation to take things into our own hands is a persistent human tendency that we need to recognize and of which we need to beware.

AN IMPORTANT BATTLE THAT SATAN LOST

The chapters of Genesis that recount the events of the descendants of Shem, following the Noahic flood, are a litany of human’s taking things into their own hands. These accounts record deceit, jealousy, hatred, greed, etc., displaying the fallen nature of humanity. The story of Joseph includes these elements, but the story also recounts one of Satan’s major defeats. This story is well-known to all bible readers and so we will summarize it.

Of all of the stories in the Bible that illustrate the figure of Yahweh’s being the Great Chess Master, this account must be at the top of the list.

Joseph was the son of Jacob and Rachel (Jacob's favorite wife).⁵⁶ It was not until Joseph was a teenager that Rachel gave birth to another son, Benjamin. Rachel died in childbirth after giving birth to Benjamin. Prior to the birth of Benjamin, Joseph was the youngest of Jacob's sons. Jacob had a special love for Joseph, the firstborn of his favorite wife, Rachel. This preference for Joseph was obvious to his older brothers and caused them to have jealousy toward Joseph. One evidence of that special love was a beautiful varicolored robe that Jacob made for Joseph.

Joseph was quite immature in his dealing with his family. He had two successive dreams. The first dream was of his brothers bowing before him. Unwisely, he told his brothers about this dream, which caused them to hate him for his seemingly sense of superiority over them.

In the second dream, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to him. Unwisely, he told this dream to his father and his eleven brothers who understood him to be saying that his father, mother, and all of his brothers would bow down to him. As could be expected, the brothers' jealousy and hatred increased.

One day, his father sent him into the field to see how his brothers were faring. When they saw him coming, they plotted to kill him and throw him into a pit. The eldest brother, Reuben, hoping to save him later, urged them to not kill him, but to just throw him into pit. When Joseph finally reached his brothers, they followed Reuben's plan – they stripped him of the varicolored robe and threw him into a deep dry pit – thinking that if they left him there, he would die of natural causes.

Reuben left the group to attend to the flock, and the rest of the brothers sat down for a meal. While they were eating, a caravan of Ishmaelites passed by on their way to Egypt. The brothers saw an opportunity to get rid of Joseph and to make a bit of money. So, they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. Upon their arrival in Egypt, they sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard.

When Reuben returned and found his brother missing, he tore his robe in anguish. The brothers killed a goat and soaked Joseph's robe in blood and took it to their father, with the assumption that he would think a wild beast had killed Joseph. Their ruse worked and Jacob mourned and grieved over the death of his favorite son.

In Egypt, as Potiphar's slave, Joseph was endowed by Yahweh with impressive ability and responsibility. Potiphar was so impressed that he put Joseph in charge of his entire household.

So he [Potiphar] left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. (Genesis 39:6)

Joseph spent a lot of time in his master's home, fulfilling his assigned duties. Potiphar's wife became obsessed with the handsome Hebrew slave and sought to seduce him. Joseph refused her advances stating,

Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has

⁵⁶ Genesis 35:17-18, 24

withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8-9)

The callow young man who had been the object of his brothers' hatred had matured into a man of exceptional character.

Day after day, she sought to seduce Joseph, but he did not yield to her enticement. One day, when only she and Joseph were in the house, she grabbed Joseph and tried to compel him to lie with her. Joseph broke loose and fled, leaving his garment in her hand. Later, when the men of the house returned, she showed them Joseph's garment and said that he tried to rape her, but that when she screamed, he fled, leaving his robe behind.

She told the same lie to her husband. The irate Potiphar had Joseph jailed in the special jail that was reserved for Pharaoh's prisoners.

The Great Chess Master had just made another move.

As was true in Potiphar's house, Joseph excelled in everything and the chief jailor put Joseph in charge of all jail operations.

By being put into this special jail, Joseph encountered prisoners who had been personal servants of the Pharaoh. Two of these prisoners were Pharaoh's personal baker and Pharaoh's cupbearer. One night, each of these men had a troubling dream. They recounted their dreams to Joseph, and, by God's revelation, Joseph interpreted their dreams.

The cupbearer's dream indicated that in three days he would be restored to his role as Pharaoh's personal cup bearer. Joseph urged the cupbearer to remember him when he was restored to his role.

The baker's dream was just the opposite. His dream indicated that in three days the baker would be decapitated, and his body would be hung on a tree where the birds would eat his flesh.

The interpretations were accurate. Everything transpired exactly as Joseph had interpreted the dreams.

The cupbearer, occupied with his important role, completely forgot Joseph, until, after two years, the Great Chess Master, made his next move.

Pharaoh had a dream of seven fat cows and then seven lean cows came on the scene and the lean cows ate the fat cows.

He then had a second dream. In this dream, there appeared seven ears of grain, plump and good. Then, there appeared seven ears, thin and scorched by the wind. The thin ears then ate the plump ears.

When Pharaoh awoke these dreams so disturbed him that he believed that they must have some significance. He called all of the Egyptian magicians and all of the Egyptian wise men to the palace and he told them of his dream. No one could interpret the dreams.

Then, the cupbearer remembered Joseph and recounted to Pharaoh how accurately Joseph had interpreted his dream and that of the baker.

Hurriedly, Joseph was pulled out of the dungeon, cleaned up, given new clothes, and ushered into the presence of Pharaoh. Pharaoh told Joseph that he had heard that Joseph could interpret

dreams. Joseph honestly replied, *It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.* (Genesis 41:16).

The interpretation of the dream revealed that there would be seven years of great abundance, followed by seven years of extreme famine. Because the dream was repeated twice, first the cows and then the grain, meant that the matter had been determined by God and surely was going to happen.

Joseph then urged Pharaoh to find a wise man to oversee these years, with district overseers working under the direction of this wise men. This team was to collect and store the surplus produce during the seven years of plenty, and then use these stores to feed the populace during the famine.

Joseph's suggestion pleased Pharaoh and his counselors. As they consulted among themselves, the Egyptian officials reasoned that the spirit of God in Joseph made him just the man for the job. Everyone and everything in Egypt would be under Joseph's control. Pharaoh stated,

You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you. (Genesis 41:40)

Joseph succeeded in this role to the degree that even those of surrounding nations came to Egypt for supplies, including Joseph's family – even though his brothers did not realize his identity when they first came to Egypt.

The succeeding story contains many turns and twists but Joseph's family ultimately migrated to Egypt. Because they were shepherds, they were given the Land of Goshen in which live and rear their flocks.

Once again, the Great Chess Master had made a clever move.

Prior to this era, the Hyksos had invaded Egypt. The Hyksos were shepherds and so when the Egyptians were able to regain control of their country, they had disdain for shepherds. By putting the Israelite shepherds in Goshen, the family was able to develop into a nation, without interference from Egyptians.

Looking back over the years and all that had transpired, Joseph commented to his repentant brothers,

And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. (Genesis 50:20)

Satan had begun moves on the chessboard, that he thought would throw God's plan off the rails. Through Joseph's immaturity, and his brother's hatred, Satan must have rejoiced and thought that he truly had corrupted the family through which the Redeemer was to come. Certainly, Satan was rejoicing when Potiphar's wife became enamored with Joseph, but God knew the character of the piece that He had on the chessboard – a matured Joseph.

The entire victory would either go to Satan or Yahweh, and it all hinged on Joseph. In this battle, Satan ended up in the dust, while God and His people were victorious.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Joseph not only faced the temptation of a sexual liaison with a woman who was obsessed with him, but this was a woman who occupied a powerful position. Joseph certainly did not want her to turn against him. Even so, he refused her advances.

The callow youth had become a man of matured ethical character. Exactly when and how that developed we do not know, but this we do know – when we are faced with a temptation or a threat, God is not absent. Satan may be making a move, but the Great Chess Master is not looking the other way. In such situations, each of us must ask ourselves, “Will I be Satan’s pawn, or will I be God’s knight?”

To refuse to be Satan’s pawn and be God’s knight sometimes comes at a cost. It cost Joseph a few years in prison. Even so, in this century with so many things coming at the believer, from so many sides, it is important that in every circumstance godly character be demonstrated, at all cost.

SATAN’S FIRST EFFORT TO DESTROY GOD’S CHOSEN NATION

The family of Jacob consisted of seventy people, when he and his entourage reached Egypt.⁵⁷ Yahweh had told Abram that his descendants would be strangers in a land that was not theirs and that they would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.⁵⁸ Since the total years that the family lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years,⁵⁹ we assume that the oppression began about thirty years after their arrival.

Exodus informs us that the oppression began when a Pharaoh occupied the throne, *who did not know Joseph*.⁶⁰ The Israelites had become so numerous that this Pharaoh was afraid that if Egypt ended up in a war, that the Israelites might join the enemy, rather than fighting on the side of Egypt. As a result of his fears, he enslaved the Israelites and subjected them to hard and difficult labor. This did not diminish the number of Israelites being born and so he decided to practice genocide. Here is an example of Satan’s overt effort to derail God’s plan. There is no subtlety in this episode. Satan’s use of wicked Pharaoh is loud and clear.

The two Hebrew midwives who probably were supervisors of all of the Hebrew midwives, were told that when they were assisting a Hebrew woman in childbirth, that if they detected that the baby was a boy⁶¹, they were to kill the infant.

The midwives feared God more than they feared Pharaoh and they disobeyed Pharaoh and let the baby boys live. When questioned by Pharaoh why they had disobeyed him, they replied,

And the midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous, and they give birth before the midwife can get to them." (Exodus 1:19)

⁵⁷ The language of Exodus 1:5 would indicate that although Joseph was already in Egypt, the total family of Jacob, including Joseph, was seventy.

⁵⁸ Genesis 15:13

⁵⁹ Exodus 12:40-41

⁶⁰ Exodus 1:8

⁶¹ Exodus 1:16 The term rendered in most English versions as *see them on the birth stool*, literally says, *when you see the stones*, evidently referring to two testicles.

There has been much discussion over the centuries as to whether or not the midwives lied to Pharaoh. Some argue that God rescued the midwives and indeed the Hebrew women did deliver quickly.⁶² Others argue that they did deceive the Pharaoh, but that the reward that they received from Yahweh was not for their deception. Augustine wrote that Yahweh rewarded them,

“not, however, because they lied, but because they were merciful to the people of God; it was not their falsehood therefore that was rewarded, but their kindness (more correctly, their fear of God), their benignity of mind, not the wickedness of their lying; and for the sake of what was good, God forgave what was evil.”⁶³

Some would see the principle of situation ethics at play here, i.e., the situation determines the ethic and it may be more ethical to lie than to tell the truth. This indeed is a slippery slope, because it is the excuse that is given for all sorts of improper behavior.

Regardless of which understanding of the midwives reply is correct, these women refused to obey the ruling authority, because they feared God. Satan suffered another defeat and Yahweh rewarded the midwives for their obedience to Him.

IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

After contemplating all of the possible means of finding satisfaction and purpose in life, the Book of Ecclesiastes concludes,

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Scripture abounds with exhortations to fear God. Paul, in his Roman Epistle’s treatise on a deteriorating a culture, states that the deterioration is the result of a cultures not honoring God as God (Romans 1:18ff). In Romans 3:10ff that truth is further emphasized.

We will return to this passage in Romans later, but it is important for 21st Century Christians to note the model of the Hebrew midwives. They feared God more than they feared Pharaoh. Times are coming, indeed, are already upon us, when we cannot follow the wishes of those in power who would oppose the will of God. The Hebrew midwives were rewarded for what they did, but sometimes there is a price to pay, such as the apostles paid when they refused to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, *they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. (Act 5:39)*⁶⁴

THE MISCONDUCT OF DEDICATED LEADERS AT MERIBAH

Thirty seven and a half years after Yahweh had declared that the Israelites would wander in the desert/wilderness for forty years, until the rebellious generation had passed,⁶⁵ they found themselves back in the very place that the pronouncement had been given – the wilderness of Zin.

⁶² *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Exodus 1:16, “They gave reason for it, which it seems God’s gracious promise furnished them with – that they came too late to do it, for generally the children were born before they came.”

⁶³ Augustine, *contra mendacium*. C. 19

⁶⁴ In future sessions, we will give more attention to this episode in Acts.

⁶⁵ Numbers 14:32-35

Once again, the people began to complain because of the lack of water, even indicating that it would have been better to have died, rather than experience what they were going through.⁶⁶

Moses and Aaron no doubt, were weary from all that they had been through. Even when they did their best to be faithful to God and lead the people, they were the brunt of every complaint. They just could not please the people.

When the people began to gripe and complain about the lack of water, Moses and Aaron, seemingly almost in despair, went to the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Suddenly, the glory of Yahweh appeared to them and Yahweh spoke to Moses,

"Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." (Numbers 20:8)

The rod was the one that Yahweh had given to Moses in Egypt that was used in a number of miracles in that land.⁶⁷

So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh, just as He had commanded him;

and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?"

Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. (Numbers 20:9-11)

Not only did water come forth from the rock, but a rebuke from Yahweh immediately was spoken to Moses and Aaron.

But Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Numbers 20:12)

What had Moses and Aaron done that caused such a rebuke and Yahweh's refusing to allow them to lead the people into the promised land?

Scriptural comments on this episode give us some understanding of their sin.

for in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) (Numbers 27:14)

They also provoked Him to wrath at the waters of Meribah, So that it went hard with Moses on their account; Because they were rebellious against His Spirit, he spoke rashly with his lips. (Psalm 106:32-33)

⁶⁶ Numbers 20:1-5

⁶⁷ Exodus 4:2-4, 17, 20; 7:20; 8:5, 16-17; 9:23; 10:13; 12:11; 14:16; 17:5, 9

Two things were done that caused Yahweh's rebuke:

- Yahweh told Moses to speak to the rock, whereas Moses struck the rock twice, rather than speaking to the rock. God expects explicit obedience.
- The language used - *shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock*, implied that this was something that Moses and Aaron were doing.

Even as Adam was involved in Eve's sin, by merely standing by while she disobeyed God, so Aaron was guilty of complicity in Moses' sin, by watching while the deed was done, without attempting to restrain or bring any sort of correction.

Let it be noted that evidence of Yahweh's gracious character is seen in that, in spite of Moses' and Aaron's failure, He still provided water for the people. Only the leaders were held accountable for their failure and suffered the consequences for their failure.

The people's shortcoming had been to gripe and complain. God chose to meet their need, in spite of that shortcoming. God is gracious.

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Sadly, in our present era, many church leaders feel free to substitute something for, or to adjust, practices that God has commanded. What is culturally popular often determines practice. The argument often is, "The important thing is the heart, not the outward observance." This is seen in such things as substituting sprinkling and pouring for immersion; no longer observing Yahweh's Supper in Sunday meetings, etc. As was true in the case of Moses and Aaron, the leaders are the ones who are responsible, the flock merely follows.

It is a very serious thing to be a leader of God's people, because the leader is responsible for communicating the person of God to God's people. Leaders must exercise great care in doing God's things God's way.

In our era so much is done that gives glory to men/women. When some great achievement takes place in a church, so often the instrument that God used to bring about the achievement is praised, rather than the God who brought it about. It is important that those who receive such praise do all that they can to deflect that praise, that it might be directed toward God.

So much of contemporary Christianity is focused on celebrity leaders and sadly, some of these leaders seem to foster that status.

Recalling a verse cited earlier, *So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.* (1 Corinthians 3:7)

Similar thoughts are displayed in many Scriptures. Here are three more examples.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of Yahweh Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)

Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

Human nature, being what it is – fallen – makes it easy to fail in this regard, without being conscious of doing so, or even thinking about the consequences.

SATAN USES THE ALLUREMENTS OF CULTURE TO DEFILE THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Israel had arrived at Shittim, in the plains of Moab.⁶⁸ They were nearing the time to enter the promised land of Canaan. Satan was not just sitting by as a spectator. He had a card to play in the game – it was the alluring pagan culture of Shittim that surrounded the people of God.

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and Yahweh was angry against Israel. (Numbers 25:1-3)

After the fact, Yahweh described the incident as being the result of tricks whereby the people of God were deceived.

for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor, and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor." (Numbers 25:18)

Yahweh's response to this horrible failure was to execute immediate judgment. A plague, the manifestation of which is not described, fell upon the people.⁶⁹ Then Yahweh gave instructions concerning what must be done to rid Israel of the sin and the resulting plague.

And Yahweh said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before Yahweh, so that the fierce anger of Yahweh may turn away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor." (Numbers 25:4-5)

In the midst of this episode, a scion of a prominent family⁷⁰ named, Zimri, brought a Midianite woman into the camp, presenting her to his family. This took place in full view of the congregation, while the people were weeping before the tent of meeting.

One of the leaders of the people, Phineas, who was the heir-apparent to the High Priesthood, and thus, one of those whom Moses had charged with ridding the camp of those who had succumbed to the culture, saw the couple. Phineas took a spear in his hand,

and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. (Numbers 25:8)⁷¹

The account closes with a warning to Moses, the closing portion of which we quoted above.

*Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,
"Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them;
for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor, and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor." (Numbers 25:16-18)*

⁶⁸ Numbers 25:1; 33:49; Joshua 2:1

⁶⁹ Numbers 25:8-9; 31:16

⁷⁰ Numbers 25:14

⁷¹ Phineas was greatly honored by Yahweh for this deed, even calling it making atonement for the people of Israel Numbers 25:10-13

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Whether Satan's manifestation is labeled, *schemes* (II Corinthians 2:11), or *tricks* (Numbers 25:18), he is a deceiver and will use every means at his disposal to trick, deceive, and seduce the people of God. Surrounding culture is one of the most effective venues in which he plies his trade. He knows our fallen nature and, as the god of this age,⁷² he will use what is appropriate for each era to bring down God's people.

Sadly, the surrounding culture seeps into the lives of individual Christians and into the culture of churches, before those being duped realize it. Furthermore, those who have been drawn into Satan's orbit by this ploy, often defend it and call those who do not conform to culture, *narrow minded, legalistic, and old-fashioned*.

The true follower of God and disciple of Jesus Christ, is not ashamed of such labels, perhaps even considering these labels to be a compliment, considering their source.

VICTORY AND FAILURE AT JERICHO

Any child who has attended Sunday School is familiar with the story of Israel's victory at Jericho. There is no explanation for this victory, other than God's acting in behalf of His people.

When the Israelites reached Jericho, Yahweh gave Joshua instructions as to how to proceed. For six days, the Israelites were to march around the city one time, then return to their tents. Yahweh stated how the march was to be organized and conducted:⁷³

- A company of armed men were to lead the procession.
- Next followed seven priests, each carrying a trumpet made from a ram's horn. As they marched around the city, the priests were to blow on the trumpets.
- The Ark of the Covenant, borne by Levites,⁷⁴ was next in the procession
- The rest of the people, in total silence, were to follow the Ark.

On the seventh day, the procession was to march around the city seven times. The first six of the seven times around the city, the people were to be silent, but during the seventh time, when the priests blew on the trumpets, Joshua cried out to the people, "Shout!" When the people shouted the walls fell down flat.⁷⁵

EXCURSUS

Archaeologists' Excavations of Jericho Confirm the Biblical Account

Jericho is one of archaeology's the most thoroughly investigated biblical sites. The construction of the Jericho wall was such that human efforts to make them fall just could not have happened. Jericho was built on top of a mound or hill. The Jericho wall consisted of two walls. The outer wall consisted of an enormous stone retaining wall with a mud brick wall on top of the retaining wall, greatly enhancing the retaining wall's height. Several feet inside of this wall was another

⁷² Although many versions render II Corinthians 4:4 as, *the god of this world*, the Greek term rendered as, *world*, is *αἰών* (*aiown*), which correctly is rendered, *age*.

⁷³ Joshua 6:1-14

⁷⁴ Deuteronomy 10:8; 31:9

⁷⁵ Joshua 6:20

wall that surrounded the edge of the city. This type of city/fortification is referred to as a “glacis,” and is found throughout Palestine, as well as the Middle East.

Some of the most extensive archaeological work at Jericho was led by Dame Kathleen Kenyon in the late 1950’s.

Here is an excerpt from an article that discusses some aspects of the archaeological discoveries: :



Schematic cross-section diagram of the fortification system at Jericho based on Kenyon’s west trench. Note the outer retaining wall stone, topped by a mud brick wall, and the inner wall constructed from mud bricks (this schematic, Courtesy of Answers in Genesis.)⁷⁶

Canaanite Jericho was an imposing city, with not one wall, but two: an inner wall and an outer wall. The outer mud brick wall had been built atop a revetment wall, making it twice as high. Between the two walls was a sloped rampart, with an upper wall encircling the inner city.⁷⁷ When Kathleen Kenyon excavated on the west side of the tell, she discovered, “a heavy fill of fallen red bricks piling nearly to the top of the revetment. These probably came from the wall on the summit of the bank.”⁷⁸ The current Italian-Palestinian team found the identical destruction at the southern end of the mound as well. Archaeologist, Dr. Bryant Wood explains: “Although Kenyon found the revetment wall and the earthen rampart, she did not find the city wall itself on top of the tell. But, astoundingly, a heap of fallen red bricks lay outside the revetment wall. These red bricks almost certainly came from the city wall on top of the tell or from a mudbrick parapet wall atop the revetment wall, or both, as Kenyon recognized.”⁷⁹ Amazingly, this pile of red bricks which went almost to the top of the revetment wall would have provided a natural siege ramp that would have allowed the Israelites to go “up into the city” just as the Bible describes.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ <https://answersingenesis.org/archaeology/the-walls-of-gericho/>

⁷⁷ Bryant Wood, “The Walls of Jericho,” *Associates for Biblical Research*. June 9, 2008. <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/conquest-of-canaan/3625-the-walls-of-gericho?highlight=WyJ3YWxscyIsIndhbGxzJyIsIid3YWxscyIsIid3YWxscyciLCJvZiIsIidvZiIsIm9mJyIsImpcmljaG8iLCJqZXJpY2hvJ3MiLCInamVyaWNobyIsImpcmljaG8nIiwjJ2plcm1jaG8nIiwid2FsbHMgb2YiLCJ3YWxscyBvZiBqZXJpY2hvIiwib2YgamVyaWNobyJd>

⁷⁸ Bryant Wood, “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 16:2 (1990): 44-58, 53. Online: <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/conquest-of-canaan/2310-did-the-israelites-conquer-gericho-a-new-look-at-the-archaeological-evidence?highlight=WyJjeXByaW90Ii0=>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/05/25/biblical-sites-three-discoveries-at-gericho/>

Indeed, this fits Joshua 6:20 – *the walls fell down flat* נָפַל (*nâphal* – to fall) and תַּחַת (*tachath* – bottom or below)

Another interesting fact: When the Germans excavated at Jericho in 1907-1909, they discovered a portion of the wall that had not fallen. Moreover, there were houses built on the rampart against the outer city wall. The walls of these dwellings were thin – only one brick in width – indicating that this probably was a portion of city where poorer inhabitants live. This probably was the location of Rahab's house that was spared when the walls fell down.⁸¹

Another interesting fact: Both John Garstang (excavated in the 1930's), and Kathleen Kenyon (1950's) found storage jars full of burnt grain. Kenyon found six bushels of grain in one season of her exploration. Grain was the primary food staple of ancient people. This discovery confirms several biblical details:

- The battle Jericho occurred in the spring (Joshua 3:15; 5:10). This would have been shortly after the harvest. This would indicate that the city was destroyed in the spring, since so much grain was stored. Later in the year the amount stored would have been less.
- The siege of Jericho lasted for only seven days (Joshua 6:4, etc.) Had the siege been prolonged, such a surplus of grain would have been less, since the citizens would have sustained themselves on the grain, while confined to their city.
- The Israelites were instructed to not take anything as personal plunder. All was to be burnt. This would explain why the stored grain was burned and not taken by the Israelites.

Clearly, the archaeological studies of the city and its walls, present a picture that is consistent with the biblical account.

Sadly, this grand beginning was marred by disobedience. Yahweh had given a clear command concerning any loot could be obtained from the defeat of Jericho.

"And the city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to Yahweh; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.

"But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, lest you covet them and take some of the things under the ban, so you would make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.

"But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to Yahweh; they shall go into the treasury of Yahweh."

Chapter Seven of Joshua begins with a sad report,

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against the sons of Israel.

Although Joshua did not know about this sin, Yahweh did know for He knows all things.

The next city to be taken was the small city of Ai. It was so small that only a contingent of three thousand Israelites went against the city – but, the men of Ai achieved a surprising victory over the Israelites. The Israelite warriors fled from before the men of Ai and about thirty-six Israelites

⁸¹ Joshua 2:15

were slain in the first encounter and even more as they fled back to Jericho. As a result, the Israelites hearts *melted and became as water*.⁸²

Facing the despair and confusion of the people, and his own bewilderment, Joshua, along with the elders of the people fell before the ark, tore their clothes, put dust upon their heads as a sign of contrition. Joshua's plea before Yahweh was a cry for understanding, and a bit of fear.

And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord Yahweh, why didst Thou ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan!"

"O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies?"

"For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what wilt Thou do for Thy great name?" (Joshua 7:7-9)

When Yahweh had dried up the Jordan River, allowing the Israelites to cross from the east side of the river to the west side of the river, word of this miraculous event reached the ears of the surrounding peoples. When the kings of these peoples heard the report, their *hearts melted and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel*. (Joshua 5:1)

Because of the event at Ai, Joshua feared that the surrounding nations would come and annihilate the Israelites.

Yahweh responded to Joshua's plea with some strong words,

"Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face?"

"Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.

"Therefore, the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst. (Jos 7:10-12)

Yahweh then instructed Joshua to have the people consecrate themselves on the following day. After this they were to assemble before the sacred tent, where, by lot, the guilty persons would be revealed. The lot frequently was resorted to in cases where the person guilty of a crime could not clearly be known by witnesses (see I Samuel 14:41-42; Jonah 1:7; Proverbs 18:18). It was firmly believed in these instances that Yahweh directed the outcome of the lot.

The text does not tell us how the lot was cast. Keil speculates that names were written on a potsherd or a little tablet and these were placed in an urn. Joshua then reached into the urn and drew out a piece. The name on the piece would be Yahweh's means of revealing the one to be identified by the use of the lot.⁸³

⁸² Joshua 7:5

⁸³ Keil & Delitzsch, Volume II, page 80

According to Yahweh's instructions:

- The selection by lot began with the twelve tribes. The headman of each tribe was to appear before the table and one of these would be chosen by lot.
- When the tribe had been identified, then the heads of the families of that tribe would appear and one of these would be chosen by lot.
- Next would be the heads of households of the chosen family would appear and one of these chosen by lot.
- Then men of the chosen household submitted to the process and one of these was chosen.

The final lot revealed that the guilty party was a man from the tribe of Judah, named, Achan.

Joshua strongly confronted the man and told him to confess what he had done. In response, Achan made a full confession,

So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against Yahweh, the God of Israel, and this is what I did:

when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them;

and, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it." (Joshua 7:20-21)

Joshua sent men to the tent of Achan and they found the concealed loot. They immediately brought the loot to Joshua. With all of the people as witnesses, they poured out the items before Yahweh.

Immediately, Joshua and all Israel with him,

took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor.

And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? Yahweh will trouble you this day."

And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day,

and Yahweh turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore, the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor⁸⁴ to this day. (Joshua 7:24-26)

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

There are a number of lessons that present themselves in this very harsh incident.

First and foremost, etched upon this story is the unmistakable truth – God is God and expects to be honored and obeyed as such. Yahweh's commands to the Israelites were very direct and clear. Thus, Achan knew exactly what God had commanded, as well as its accompanying prohibitions. Yet, he disobeyed and paid a terrible price for that disobedience. Tragic is the casual attitude displayed by so many people toward the commands of God - even among those claiming to be Christians. This episode cries loudly that God expects His people to do what He commands and to do it His way.

This calls to mind the closing words of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?"

And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:21-23)

A second truth is that sin not only has consequences for the sinner but for those associated with him. John Donne, the Seventeenth Century author and poet, wrote, *No man is an Island*. Achan's disobedience caused the death of Israelite warriors who went against Ai. Then, his entire family was executed because of the sin of the man who was the head of their household. Furthermore, consider the anguish some Israelites must have felt when they had to pick up stones and with those stones, kill Achan, his family, his livestock, then burn and bury these individuals.

Anyone who has lived very long has seen and probably experienced the consequence of someone else's sin – perhaps a son, a daughter, a parent, or someone with whom no relationship exists (being hit by a drunken driver, for example). Innumerable churches have been torn apart by someone (or someones) motivated by ungodly ambition or pride.

A third truth is a reminder of what Yahweh said to Cain – *sin crouches at the door*. This is another reminder of the lesson already discussed – the internal ova that each one has, and Satan looks for opportunities to fertilize an ovum and give birth to sin. Obviously, Achan had an ovum of covetousness (Joshua 7:21) and Satan presented a situation that fertilized the ovum and Israel paid the price for his sin.

A fourth truth is that God requires a sacrifice for disobedience. How blessed we are to live in the post-crucifixion era. Jesus Christ paid the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Even so, we must be faithful to Him.

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (Heb 10:26)

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which Yahweh has promised to those who love Him. (Jam 1:12)

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:10)

YET, THANKS BE TO GOD: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jo 1:9)*

EXCURSUS

Revisiting the Affair of Achan

In the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, God said that he would visit the iniquity of the fathers on their future generations.

"You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (Exodus 20:3-5)

'You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁸ 'You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (Deuteronomy 5:7-9)

When the Israelites were preparing to attack Jericho, Yahweh gave them a strong command, prohibiting their taking loot from the Jericho. Achan violated this prohibition.

"And the city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to Yahweh; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.

"But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, lest you covet them and take some of the things under the ban, so you would make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.

"But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to Yahweh; they shall go into the treasury of Yahweh." (Joshua 6:17-19)

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of Yahweh burned against the sons of Israel. (Joshua 7:1)

Yahweh then instructed Joshua to have the people consecrate themselves on the following day. After this they were to assemble before the sacred tent, where, by lot, the guilty person or persons would be revealed.

Yahweh then gave a commandment as to what should be done when the guilty party was exposed.

'And it shall be that the one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of Yahweh, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel.'" (Joshua 7:15)

When Achan was exposed as the man who had violated Yahweh's commandment, the people did what Yahweh had commanded.

And they took them (the things under the ban that Achan had taken) from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before Yahweh.

Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor.

And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? Yahweh will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and Yahweh turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day. (Joshua 7:23-26)

The question was raised, is there a contradiction between the instructions given in Deuteronomy 24:16, and the statements in Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9), as well as the punishment exacted on Achan and his family?

Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deuteronomy 24:16)

The importance of context is illustrated in this apparent conflict. Deuteronomy 24:16 is in the very lengthy section of Scripture that instructs the Israelites as to how they were to conduct themselves once they occupied the promised land and each family had received its allotted acreage, and the rhythm of life had begun. The section is very detailed in these matters, including how the justice system is to function.

Among the rules of justice is the above cited Deuteronomy 24:16. This portion of the legal code states that when someone commits a capital crime, only the perpetrator, not his family, is to be executed.

This is a different situation than when Yahweh Himself is acting in response to a particular category of sin, especially bringing into the nation the worship of a God other than Yahweh (as noted above in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9).

Yahweh had given a very specific direct order, concerning things under the ban. By disobeying a very direct order, Achan had not respected Yahweh as God.

Furthermore, throughout the Exodus and the following year, Yahweh commanded seemingly extreme actions, to make the point that God is God and He is to be obeyed, both explicitly and implicitly.

A second passage related to this subject is in Jeremiah 31. This lengthy and somewhat symbolic section of Jeremiah, describes God's relationship with His people under the New Covenant. A portion of the chapter that has relevance to this subject, states,

"In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.' But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge.

"Behold, days are coming," declares Yahweh, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares Yahweh.

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares Yahweh, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know Yahweh,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares Yahweh..." (Jeremiah 31:29-34)

The conditions reflected in this section of Jeremiah are mirrored in several New Testament passages. Here are three examples.

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, (1 Corinthians 2:12)

And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

Thus, the conclusion concerning this apparent conflict seems to rest on the nature of the pronouncements and the situation in which the instructions and narrative occur.

As stated earlier, Deuteronomy 24:16 is a part of the legal code that was to govern them when they occupied the Promised Land and their societal structures were established.⁸⁵

- * Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9 refer to Yahweh's sovereign response to the sin of introducing worship of another God into the national life.
- * The episode involving Achan, is a record of an Israelite's not treating Yahweh as God – Achan disobeyed a very specific direct order from Yahweh.
- * The episode involving Achan also seems to be one of those events that Yahweh used during the Exodus to impress on the people that He, Yahweh, is God and is to be obeyed explicitly and implicitly.
- * Jeremiah refers to what the People of God will experience under the New Covenant.

Even with these perspectives before us, we must be careful to not overly explain God. The “friends” of Job, and Job himself, learned that such is a mistake. When it comes to God's sovereignty, we often must be satisfied with enigma.

THE TRAGIC ERA OF THE JUDGES

The Book of Judges, for the most part, is a record of a series of failures and the consequences thereof. The closing verse of the book explains that the main reason behind these failures is the lack of a governmental authority.

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)⁸⁶

A second cause of the failures is described at the beginning of the book

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know Yahweh, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and served the Baals,

and they forsook Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked Yahweh to anger.

So, they forsook Yahweh and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. (Judges 2:10-13)

When the generation that had traveled with Yahweh through the wilderness and the occupation of the Promised Land died, the following generations were comfortable, and at ease. There were those seasons where they did have problems, such as the period when the Midianites would steal

⁸⁵ Examples of abiding by this code are seen in II Kings 14:1-6 (another account of the same incident is in II Chronicles 25:1-4) and Ezekiel 18:19-20 (earlier verses explain the situation)

⁸⁶ The same comment is given in the middle of the book (Judges 17:6)

their grain harvest, during the era of Gideon.⁸⁷ In contrast to the era of Gideon, the Book of Ruth pictures a time of peace and prosperity for the Israelites in Canaan as does most of I Samuel,

The comfortable state of the younger generation was theirs because of the sacrificial lives that the previous generation had lived before God. In this place of ease and comparative luxury, they became indulgent in the flesh, and had no inclination to be faithful to Yahweh, the true God who had given them the land.

As the Sethites had done, prior to the flood, the Israelites began to intermarry with the pagan Canaanites and become devotees of the Canaanite false gods.

And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;

and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and forgot Yahweh their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.⁸⁸ (Judges 3:5-7)

Because of this, Yahweh ceased driving out the pagan peoples that remained in the land and allowed them to remain, in order to test Israel.

So the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice,

I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." (Judges 2:20-22)

As the Tree of Good and Evil was placed in the Garden of Eden so mankind could choose God, rather than being robots who had no other option, so these pagan nations were left in the land to give the Israelites an option – would they choose Yahweh or some other god and the lifestyle associated with that pagan god?

The series of failures recorded in the Book of Judges was interrupted from time to time, when Yahweh raised up a judge to lead the people and achieve victory over the pagans. However, each time the Sovereignly supplied judge died, the people returned to their recalcitrant ways.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN CHRISTIANS

The Book of Judges has a special lesson for American Christians. Today, most Christians in America live in a very comfortable society. This present society is the result of the character and diligence of previous generations. The founders of this nation recognized the existence of God and His involvement in the birth of America. For example, in his inaugural address, George Washington made important statements acknowledging the Hand of God in creating the United States of America. Here are three of these statements from his address:

“...it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official Act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the

⁸⁷ Judges 6:3ff

⁸⁸ An Asheroth is a female idol.

Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government

No People can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs of men more than the People of the United States.

...the propitious [favorable] smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation which disregards the eternal values of order and right which heaven itself has ordained.”⁸⁹

Other similar statements are found throughout this address and other founding fathers of America made similar statements, acknowledging that America came into existence against all odds, because of the Sovereign Hand of God.

Sadly, as we move from generation to generation, American society gives less and less thought to God’s involvement in the birth and advancement of our nation. The decline in morals as well as extreme division in our nation is a symptom of a disease. The disease itself is described in Romans 1:18ff. Although Paul wrote this treatise concerning generations that had preceded him, it is a fitting treatise on contemporary American and Western society.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers,

⁸⁹ https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html

haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

(Romans 1:18-32)

Indeed, in previous generations, even most Americans who were not “religious” recognized a standard of right and wrong and had a sense of a coming judgment. Today, in many of quarters of America, this is not true, and our nation is displaying the very traits that Paul described.

Moreover, most younger Americans give little thought to the fact that the life that they now enjoy is the result of previous generations’ sacrifices and those generations’ recognition of the Creator.

Another current trend that reflects the situation in Israel during the time of the Judges, is a lack of authority and *every man did that which was right in his own eyes*. There is a growing trend in contemporary America to disrespect civil authority. A stable governing authority and the citizenry’s respect for that civil authority is key to any society’s stability. Again, it is Paul who emphasized this truth.

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.² Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, (Titus 3:1)

Once again, we see fallen human nature as Satan’s ally in his efforts to frustrate God’s desire to have a people with whom He will spend eternity. Both the Book of Judges and the American news media record how successful in impacting a society are Satan and his ally, fallen human nature.

From time to time, God acts and restrains and at other times, as He did in raising up judges in Israel, God intervenes and brings revival. Even so, He leaves the choice to individual humans, made in His Image. He desires a relationship with those who, with a free will, choose Him.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE EBENEZER STONE

During the early years of Samuel’s ministry, the Israelites were being harassed and constantly attacked by the Philistines. Usually, the Philistines won the battles.

Samuel confronted the Israelites and told them that the reason for their plight was their harboring the idols and false gods in their midst. He told them that if they would remove these and turn to Yahweh with all of their hearts, that Yahweh would deliver them from their enemies. The people heard him, believed him, and complied.

Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying,

"If you return to Yahweh with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to Yahweh and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served Yahweh alone. (1 Samuel 7:3-4)

Samuel instructed the Israelite leaders to call the people to Mizpah, where he would pray for the nation. When the people gathered at Mizpah, they spent the day fasting and openly confessed their sin, *We have sinned before Yahweh. (1 Samuel 7:6)*

The Philistines heard that the Israelites were at Mizpah and launched an attack on them. The people urged Samuel to cry out to Yahweh for them. Samuel offered a lamb as a burnt offering to Yahweh and began to cry out to Yahweh.

Yahweh heard the prayers, saw the repentance of the people, and He caused a great thunder to shake the skies. The Philistines, stricken with fear and confusion began to flee. The Israelites pursued them and struck down many of them.

In response to Yahweh's response Samuel erected a stone of remembrance.

Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer⁹⁰, saying, "Thus far Yahweh has helped us." (1 Samuel 7:12)

The practice of erecting memorial stones, to testify of God's action in behalf of His people, and as a reminder of His action, is seen several times in the Old Testament. For example,

- *And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a libation on it; he also poured oil on it. (Genesis 35:14)*
- *Now it came about when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, that Yahweh spoke to Joshua, saying, "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, and command them, saying, 'Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.'" "Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, "What do these stones mean to you?" then you shall say to them, "Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off." So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever." (Joshua 4:1-3, 6-7)*
- *Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day. (Joshua 4:9)*
- *And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve Yahweh our God and we will obey His voice." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of Yahweh. And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of Yahweh which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, lest you deny your God." (Joshua 24:24-27)*

⁹⁰ The term, Ebenezer, means, "The Stone of Help"

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

The first lesson that comes from this episode is the need for everyone to examine his/her life, in God's Presence, for any idols that either are obvious or are hiding in one's life. When such examination takes place, and anything is discovered that competes with loyalty to God, then that idol must be removed, and we must admit that we have sinned by having such an idol.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to the Jordan to be immersed by John, he issued this challenge,

"Therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; (Matthew 3:8)

Paul, in describing his ministry to King Agrippa, stated that he called for a repentance that was demonstrated one's lifestyle.

but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. (Acts 26:20)

Paul's expectation of converts was in harmony with the words of John.

The need to live lives that reflect our faith and commitment to Christ, is a necessary need. Without such a lifestyle, then our repentance is but a fantasy and perhaps, even hypocritical.

Another important lesson that is seen in this episode is the value of physical memorials.

Although our covenant with God and our walk with God is life in the Spirit, Our Lord acknowledges that we are human and that, as humans, we need physical, visual reminders, of what He has done for us. He has given us two: The Lord's Supper and Immersion.

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. (Luke 22:19-20)⁹¹

Paul scolded the Corinthian Church for its disrespect for the Lord's Supper and thus, failing to consider observing The Lord's Supper as the primary reason for their gathering.

Therefore, when you meet together, it is not to eat The Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

For I received from Yahweh that which I also delivered to you, that Yahweh Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim Yahweh's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:20-26)

⁹¹ See also, Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Beginning in the earliest days of the Church and continuing throughout the centuries, the Lord's Supper was a central event in the Sunday meeting of the Church. However, with the birth of evangelicalism many churches ceased this practice and began focusing on preaching and, in our present generation, music.

Another factor that contributed to the break in the pattern of having the Lord's Supper every Sunday in America had to do with the belief of most denominations that a clergyman had to be present to preside. In the early days of America, because there was a lack of ordained clergy, each clergyman had an orbit of churches. He rotated among the churches, from week to week. The Sundays that he was not present, the church would meet to pray, etc. but not have the Lord's Supper. From this developed a pattern of having the Lord's Supper once a month, or in some churches, never.

It is God's design that every believer seek to observe The Lord's Supper, weekly, and thus, face the truth of what Our Lord has done to redeem us from our sins. Accompanying the observance should be a time of self-examination, and an expression of thanksgiving for God's amazing act of love.

Paul noted that those who do not do this, with a right reverence for what they are doing, frequently end up with a stunted spiritual life and perhaps even experience physical consequences.

For this reason, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.⁹² (1 Corinthians 11:30)

The second of these physical elements that the Lord has given to the Church is immersion.

After having delivered a treatise on God's grace, Paul next wrote to the Romans,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?

May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Or do you not know that all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus have been immersed into His death?

Therefore, we have been buried with Him through immersion into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,

knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;

for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (Romans 6:1-8)

⁹² Many contemporary exegetes and some contemporary English versions of the New Testament understand sleep to refer to death (ESV, NJB, NLT)

It is clear from this passage that Paul assumed that all of those to whom he was writing had been immersed into Christ, otherwise, his argument would make no sense.

Our Lord has given us immersion, whereby we symbolically bury the sinful man and symbolically are resurrected as a new man – receiving the Holy Spirit, as Peter stated on the Day of Pentecost.

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ [upon the authority of Jesus Christ] for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

Thus, Our Lord has given us two Ebenezer stones.

- First, our immersion into Christ. We can look back to that event when we buried the old man and, receiving the Holy Spirit, came out of the watery grave as a new creature.
- Second, Yahweh's Supper, whereby we weekly focus on the cross and renew our commitment to Him, as we give thanksgiving for what He has done for us.

Sadly, many contemporary churches do not have these memorial stones as a part of their church life. By neglecting these, they are robbing their people of these two gifts that God has given to His family to encourage, strengthen, and develop them as they serve Him.

THE SONS OF ELI: SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP CORRUPTED

When Israel had subdued the land, they set up the Tent of Meeting⁹³, which was the place of worship and sacrifice – where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This was the place where Israelites were to present themselves at the prescribed times of the year for their prescribed sacrifices.

About 350 years after the Israelites had placed the Tent of Meeting in Shiloh, the High Priest was Eli. He had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. According to the hereditary rule, Hophni and Phinehas served as priests, under their High Priest father. Eli was a man of reverent character. His sons were not. I Samuel 2:12-17, 22 describes the sons, despicable behavior.

Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know Yahweh and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." And if the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force."

Thus the sin of the young men was very great before Yahweh, for the men despised the offering of Yahweh.

⁹³ As noted in footnote #9, the Tent of Meeting is described by the term, *tabernacle*, in many English versions of the Bible.

Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Tragically, the sons of Eli took sinful advantage of their religious position. They were professional clergymen.

We are first informed that they took sacrificial items from worshippers and using them to satisfy their luxurious lusts. Although they had the title and the role of priests, they did not serve God but served their own bellies (Romans 16:18) As a result of their horrible behavior, the worshippers who came to Shiloh began to despise the offering of sacrifices to Yahweh.

Then, to add insult to injury, so to speak, they committed sexual sin with the women who came to serve Yahweh at the Tent of Meeting. This brings to mind the description in Jeremiah 5:8, *They were well-fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife.*

Satan must have danced with glee over his successful efforts to defame the worship of Yahweh.

Eli confronted his sons when he began to hear reports of their behavior. He told them that sinning against Yahweh was a far greater sin than sinning against one's neighbor.

"No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear Yahweh's people circulating.²⁵ "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against Yahweh, who can intercede for him?" (I Samuel 2:24-25a)

It seems that in the eyes of Yahweh, they had committed an unforgivable sin, and thus Yahweh Himself was somehow involved in their refusal to listen to their father.

But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for Yahweh desired to put them to death. ... "And this will be the sign to you which shall come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them shall die." (1 Samuel 2:25b, 34)

Yahweh also declared that He was taking the high priesthood away from Eli's descendants and giving the role to another.

Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house....'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always.

And it shall come about that everyone who is left in your house shall come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and say, "Please assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread. (1 Samuel 2:31, 35-36)

Indeed, it was not long before that sentence of death upon Phineas and Hophni was fulfilled. The Philistines came against Israel and in the ensuing battle, the Israelites were defeated. A man from the tribe of Benjamin fled the battle line and came to Shiloh. He told Eli that both of his sons had been killed and that the Ark of the Covenant had been taken by the enemy. When he heard the news that not only had his sons been killed but that the Ark had been taken, Eli fell over, breaking his neck and dying (I Samuel 4:17-18)

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

The tragic example of Phineas and Hophni should put reverential fear into the heart of anyone who is serving in any ministerial role. The lesson of this incident is related to the sin of Moses

and Aaron in the Wilderness of Zin (Numbers 20), but here the sin is greater. It is important that the Character of God be displayed in how one conducts that ministry as well as the Character of God's being displayed in the persons doing that ministry.

This especially is true of those who are in preaching and teaching ministries.

James wrote,

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

It is a fearsome thing to preach and teach, because the time will come when such ministers will stand before God and give account for how they have described Him, and how they have displayed Him in their conduct. The dreadful thought of standing before God in the Judgment and hearing God say, "Why did you say that about me?" should cause those in teaching and preaching ministries to approach their task with reverential awe.

Sadly, at least outwardly, it seems that some in our era approach this role as entertainers. Others seem to pander to the popular desires of the people. Even entire denominations are forsaking the Word of God for the current fad and the allurements of the flesh.

Some use ministry to obtain prosperity – living at a luxurious level far above the lifestyles of the members of their churches.

Such behavior causes the unbelieving world to scoff at Christianity and sincere Christians to grieve.

Let the experience of Phineas and Hophni stand as a warning to all who are in such roles. A Judgment Day is coming, and for some, even tragedy in this life.

THE FAILURE OF SAMUEL'S SONS

The Sons of Samuel also failed to follow the example their father but, manifesting the same behavior as the sons of Eli, they used their roles to enhance their personal wealth. As was true of the sons of Eli, the sons of Samuel were professional clergymen.

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba.

His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." (1 Samuel 8:1-5)

As noted earlier, the first generation of Israelites who occupied Canaan failed to remain faithful to the God of their fathers and paid the resulting penalty (Judges Chapter 3 and following).

Sadly, this pattern is repeated over and over again. The sons of Eli and the sons of Samuel are further examples of this behavior.

When Samuel's sons repeated the behavior of Eli's sons, the people became fed up with the leadership that God had appointed. They came to believe that the pattern of other nations was a better way. Note that in doing this, they had not just rejected the flawed leaders, but they were rejecting God as well as the leadership that He had instituted.

And Yahweh said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also

Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them." (1 Samuel 8:7-9)

Had Samuel's sons been faithful judges and displayed the godly character appropriate for that office, the people of Israel probably would not have come to the place of rejecting God and His leadership.

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

It seems that Satan makes a concentrated effort to own the offspring of those who are serious about their walk with God, especially the descendants of those who are in some sort of ministry. This highlights the need to intercede passionately for our descendants.

First, however, it behooves all of us to examine ourselves before God to make certain that our offspring are seeing in us a true model of godly spirituality. Let none of them ever be able to label us, *hypocrite*. Let us model what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus, and let us be faithful in our prayers for the younger generations.

May Our Lord hear our prayers and not allow the pattern that we see displayed in the generations of post-exodus Israelites to be manifest in our offspring.

THE TRAGIC FAILURE OF SAUL

Genesis 15 records Yahweh's promise to Abram, that he would be the father of many nations, and that his descendants through Isaac would someday possess the land of Canaan. Yahweh said a number of things concerning what would transpire before this promise would be completed, even predicting their four-century sojourn in Egypt. Yahweh then explained why He was not giving Canaan to Abram's descendants until several centuries had passed.

"Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:16)

EXCURSUS

Identifying the Amorites

The Amorites were descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham (Gen. 10:15-16). They are described as a powerful people of great stature "like the height of the cedars" (Amos 2:9) who had occupied the land east and west of the Jordan.

Deuteronomy 3:11 describes the Amorite king, Og, "of the remnant of the Rephaim." The terms Amorite and Canaanite are used more or less interchangeably in the Bible, Canaan being more general and Amorite a specific component among the Canaanites who inhabited the land.

The Book of Joshua speaks of the five kings of the Amorites who were first defeated with a great slaughter by Joshua (Josh. 10:5-15). Then, Joshua and the Israelites defeated more Amorite kings at the waters of Merom (Josh. 11:3-8). It is mentioned that in the days of Samuel, there was peace between them and the Israelites (1 Sam. 7:14).

When the cup of iniquity of the Amorites (Canaanites) was full, Yahweh led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Although some of the tribes that occupied the land at the time of the Israelite conquest were driven out or destroyed, some remained. As we have seen in several episodes, in spite of their being warned against doing so, the Israelites, time and again, adopted the idolatrous practices of their neighbors. From time to time, Yahweh raised up a judge to lead the people, and during that judge's lifetime the people would be faithful to Yahweh, but after his death, they reverted to the practices of their idolatrous neighbors. As a result, Yahweh allowed some of these Gentile nations to remain as a test – much as the Tree of Good and Evil was planted in the Garden of Eden.

So, the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." (Judges 2:20-22)

From time to time, Yahweh would commission Israelite leaders to attack and obliterate a particular group of people. Yahweh's command to Saul to obliterate the Amalekites is one example of Yahweh's action against the Canaanite nations.

Saul's first failure

Satan's ally, fallen human nature, is dramatically displayed in the life of Saul, Israel's first king. Early-on, Saul displayed a tendency to take matters into his own hands, and not be diligent to obey God's commands, explicitly and implicitly. The first recorded example of this tendency was shortly after Saul became king. The background for the episode is Samuel's instructions to Saul immediately after Samuel had anointed Saul as king⁹⁴ (this was prior to Saul's being revealed to Israel as their king).

"And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do." (I Samuel 10:8)

Note that Samuel promised two things:

- Saul would proceed to Gilgal first; Samuel would come later and offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings
- Samuel would not arrive until seven days after Saul had arrived at Gilgal and when he did arrive, he would tell Saul what to do next

Observe that at this time, Saul was not told what he was to do at Gilgal, other than to wait for Samuel to come with instructions.

⁹⁴ I Samuel 10:1

Although the label, *priest*, is not applied to Samuel in Scripture (the two titles given to him are prophet⁹⁵ and judge⁹⁶), he often functioned in a priestly role.⁹⁷ The narrative concerning Eli, his death, and Samuel's ongoing role at Shiloh, plus his frequent functioning as a priest, leads us to conclude that indeed, he was a priest.

After anointing Saul as king, Samuel called the people together at Mizpah, to reveal to them whom Yahweh had chosen as their first king. Lots were cast and Saul was chosen by lot to be king. Samuel then called the nation to gather at Gilgal where they officially declared Saul to be their king.

NOTE: There are two Gilgals in Canaan.

- One is on higher ground west of Shiloh.
- The other Gilgal is in the plain of the Jordan.

Based on the language in the text, we conclude that the confirmation of Saul as king took place at the Gilgal on the higher ground west of Shiloh,⁹⁸ which would have been the Gilgal where Samuel judged the people in his annual circuit (I Samuel 7:16-17)

No information is given in Scripture as to where Samuel went, after confirming Saul and exhorting the nation to be faithful in serving Yahweh. In all probability, he returned to his home in Ramah.⁹⁹

After being confirmed as king, Saul called the people to assemble at Gilgal in the plain of the Jordan.¹⁰⁰ ¹⁰¹ Just prior to this, Saul's son, Jonathan had attacked a Philistines garrison. In retaliation, the Philistines assembled to fight Saul and the Israelites at Gilgal. The people who followed Saul, trembled with fright.

Remembering the exhortation and promise of Samuel - that Saul should wait seven days for Samuel to arrive, Saul waited seven days. As the day began to wane, and Samuel had not arrived the people began to scatter. When Saul saw the people beginning to disperse, he called for the burnt offering and peace offering to be brought to him and he began to function in the role of a priest. As soon as he finished the burnt offering and before he had offered the peace offering, Samuel arrived.

⁹⁵ I Samuel 3:19-21

⁹⁶ I Samuel 7:15-17

⁹⁷ I Samuel 7:8-10; 9:12-13

⁹⁸ This Gilgal was the one where Samuel judged the people each year (I Samuel 7:16). In more recent times, this town has been known as Jiljilia and at other times, as Jaljulia. Had it been the Gilgal on the plain next to the Jordan, Samuel would have said, *let us go down*, but he simply said, *let us go*. (I Samuel 11:14). The Gilgal referenced in the episode before us was the one in the plain, in that Samuel said instructed Saul, *you shall go down*, and, *I will come down to you*

⁹⁹ I Samuel 7:17

¹⁰⁰ We know that this is the Gilgal referenced in this passage because the Philistines who were assembling to attack the Israelites were encamped at Michmas, east of Bethaven – in the Jordan Valley.

¹⁰¹ This was the first site occupied by Israel, after crossing the Jordan, before they came to Jericho (Joshua 4:19).

Saul's initial response to Samuel's arrival seems to be one of being Samuel's equal. The Hebrew states that Saul went out to bless Samuel, rather than Saul's seeking Samuel's blessing.¹⁰²

Samuel was horrified by what Saul had done, sharply asking, *What have you done?* Without any evidence of repentance, Saul defended himself with three claims (I Samuel 13:11-12):

- The people were starting to scatter
- The Philistines were assembling for an attack
- Saul had not asked for the favor of Yahweh

Therefore, Saul claimed, *So, I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.* (I Samuel 13:12)

Samuel's immediate response to Saul was a rebuke and a dire prophecy,

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of Yahweh your God, which He commanded you, for now Yahweh would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

But now your kingdom shall not endure. Yahweh has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and Yahweh has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what Yahweh commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14)

Saul had committed the same sin that Uzziah committed several centuries later. II Chronicles 26, describing the amazing feats of Uzziah, concludes with this sad commentary,

Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.

But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to Yahweh his God, for he entered the temple of Yahweh to burn incense on the altar of incense. (2 Chronicles 26:15b-16)

From the time of Aaron onward, the offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings was the role of the priesthood.¹⁰³ In the case of Uzziah, he assumed the role of a priest by burning incense on the altar, which was a role reserved exclusively for priests.

The bottom line: Saul violated both the general and specific commands of Yahweh. He did what he thought the moment dictated, rather than leaving things in the hands of God. He favored expediency over obedience.

Saul's second failure

The time had come for Yahweh to totally wipe out one of Canaanite/Amorite tribes, the Amalekites. Through the prophet Samuel, Yahweh gave Saul very specific instructions concerning the campaign against the Amalekites. The Amalekites and all associated with them were to be destroyed.

¹⁰² Various English versions render I Samuel 13:10 as, *he went out to salute him* (KJV); *went out to greet him* (ESV, NAS, NIV, NKJV, NJV); *welcome him* (NLT). The Hebrew term, בָּרַךְ (*barak*), in the *piel*, which it is in this passage, means, *to bless*, and is so rendered in Young's Literal Translation.

¹⁰³ Leviticus Chapters 1-3

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Yahweh sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of Yahweh. Thus says Yahweh of hosts,

I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt.

'Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

(I Samuel 15:1-3)

Saul led the Israelites in the God-ordained campaign of genocide against the Amalekites and it appeared that the goal was achieved.

And he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.⁹ But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. (1 Samuel 15:8-9)

NOTE: The statement that the Israelites, *utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword*, must refer to all of the Amalekites that fell into their hands – a remnant must have escaped because Amalekites are mentioned again at a later period (I Samuel 27:8; 30:1; II Samuel 8:12).

Yet, even though the goal seemed to have been achieved, Saul and the Israelites violated the command to put to death every Amalekite and all of their livestock. One man was left alive – Agag the king – and the best of the livestock were not slaughtered.

Yahweh's response was immediate and severe.

Then the word of Yahweh came to Samuel, saying,

"I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands."

And Samuel was distressed and cried out to Yahweh all night.

And Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal."

Not only did Saul play loose with the commands of God, he displayed pride in setting up a monument to himself, implying that he had achieved the victory over the Amalekites. How much more appropriate would it have been for him to set up a monument of gratitude to Yahweh who had given him the victory.

And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of Yahweh! I have carried out the command of Yahweh."

But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to Yahweh your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Wait, and let me tell you what Yahweh said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak!" And Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And Yahweh anointed you king over Israel, and Yahweh sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.'"

"Why then did you not obey the voice of Yahweh, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh?"

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of Yahweh, and went on the mission on which Yahweh sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to Yahweh your God at Gilgal."

And Samuel said, "Has Yahweh as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of Yahweh? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry

Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, He has also rejected you from being king."

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of Yahweh and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship Yahweh."

But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of Yahweh, and Yahweh has rejected you from being king over Israel." (1 Samuel 15:10-26)

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

So many lessons assert themselves in Saul's tragic story. The consistent and loudly proclaimed message of Saul's failures is that God expects both implicit and explicit obedience. Even though Saul achieved the implied goal of exterminating the Amalekites, he did not display explicit obedience, in that he ignored the specific command to kill all the people (sparing the life of Agag), and to kill all of their livestock.

A message that this incident shouts loud and clear is, "Do what I say and do it exactly as how I say you should do it." Denominations, as well as the leadership of individual churches, need to hear that message. We are in an era in which compromise and adjusting to the culture has become the norm in some Christian circles.

A second lesson is the importance of obeying God, regardless of what the people around us, even those on whom we depend, are doing.

- In the first episode, Saul failed to be obedient when the people were leaving him.
- In the second episode he disobeyed by allowing the people to keep the best of the livestock. Whether or not he *feared the people and listened to their voice*, could be debated, but even so, he disobeyed God.

The voice of God, communicated to us in the Scriptures, must be heard above all the other voices and the clamor that inhabits our world.

One of Scriptures greatest statements, concerning obedience, are Samuel's words,

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed, than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.

It is important for individual Christians to examine themselves before Yahweh's Supper, and, in that examination, ask Yahweh to reveal any areas in one's life in which both implicit and explicit obedience and not being manifested.¹⁰⁴

Should our employer, our family, our friends, our school, our church leadership, our political party, our entertainment venues, or any other humans exert pressure, or present subtle influences on our behavior, the thing that must always guide us is the answer to the question, "What has God said?"

A third lesson is that our obedience to His Word is more important than the fear of any painful consequences that might result from our obedience.

DAVID'S EXAMPLE OF REVERENCE

There are many lessons, both positive and negative, that can be learned from a study of the life of David. One of the most striking is David's reverence and respect for God's anointing.

In jealousy and in fear of losing his throne, King Saul sought to kill David. A number of attempts were made, and none of them succeeded. Much of David's early adult life was spent in fleeing from Saul. Even though Saul was David's enemy, David was not Saul's enemy. One reason was David's respect for the fact that Saul was God's anointed. Reverence for God's anointing, which, in essence, was reverence for the Holy Things of God, was clearly displayed in David's life.

On three occasions David referred to Saul as God's anointed and, in reverence, feared to do him harm.

The first occasion, described in I Samuel 24:1-12, took place when Saul and 3000 armed men sought out David and his men. Knowing that they were in danger, David and his men hid in a cave. Saul did not know that David and his men were in the cave, and he went into the cave to go to the toilet.¹⁰⁵

And he came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.

And the men of David said to him, "Behold, this is the day of which Yahweh said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'"

Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.

And it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe.

So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of Yahweh that I should do this thing to my lord, Yahweh's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is Yahweh's anointed."

And David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way. (1 Samuel 24:3-7)

¹⁰⁴ I Corinthians 11:21:17

¹⁰⁵The Hebrew text says, *to cover his feet*. According to all ancient versions, this expression (also found in Judges 3:24), is a euphemism for having a bowel movement. It was the custom in the East, to cover the feet when performing this necessity of nature. Keil & Delitzsch, Volume 2, page 235

After Saul left the cave, and was some distance away, David called out to him and held up the piece of Saul's robe to show Saul that he could have killed him. Note that in his declaration, David stated that it would have been a sin to kill Saul, God's anointed.

"Behold, this day your eyes have seen that Yahweh had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but my eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is Yahweh's anointed.'

"Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. (1 Samuel 24:10-11)

The second occasion, recorded in I Samuel 26:1-9, took place when David and his men were hiding in the wilderness of Ziph. Once again, Saul and 3000 of his troops were pursuing David. When nighttime came, Saul and his troops set up camp and went to sleep. From their hiding place, David and his men observed this. David and one of his men, Abishai, slipped into the camp, where they saw Saul in the center of the circle of sleeping warriors, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head.

Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time."

But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against Yahweh's anointed and be without guilt?"

David also said, "As Yahweh lives, surely Yahweh will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish.

"Yahweh forbid that I should stretch out my hand against Yahweh's anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go." (1 Samuel 26:8-11)

As he had done with the piece of Saul's robe, from a distance David called to Abner, Saul's general. David held up the spear and jug, and then rebuked Abner for not protecting God's anointed.

So David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord.

"This thing that you have done is not good. As Yahweh lives, all of you must surely die, because you did not guard your lord, Yahweh's anointed.

And now, see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was at his head." (1 Samuel 26:15-16)

When Saul recognized David's voice and a verbal exchange took place between them, David declared to Saul,

"And Yahweh will repay each man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for Yahweh delivered you into my hand today, but I refused to stretch out my hand against Yahweh's anointed. (1 Samuel 26:23)

In this episode, David did not seek to unseat the existing government authority, but to leave that in God's hands.

David also said, "As Yahweh lives, surely Yahweh will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. (1 Samuel 26:10)

The third time that David displayed reverence for God's anointing is recorded in II Samuel 1:1-16.

Having returned from a battle with the Amalekites, David and his men were resting in Ziklag. Unknown to David, Saul and his sons had been overcome by the Philistines. Saul's sons were killed in the battle and Saul was wounded by Philistine archers. Saul asked his armor bearer to kill him, rather than leave him to the Philistines to *pierce me through and make sport of me*. The armor bearer refused and so Saul took his sword and took his own life. His armor bearer followed suit, also committing suicide (I Samuel 31:4-6).

As David rested in Ziklag, one of the Saul's men showed up and reported the death of Saul. He lied about how Saul died, taking credit for Saul's death, and presenting Saul's crown and bracelet as gifts to David.

"By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and behold, Saul was leaning on his spear. And behold, the chariots and the horsemen pursued him closely.

"And when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I said, 'Here I am.' "And he said to me, 'Who are you?' And I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.

"Then he said to me, 'Please stand beside me and kill me; for agony has seized me because my life still lingers in me.'

"So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown which was on his head and the bracelet which was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord." (2 Samuel 1:6-10)

No doubt, the young man expected praise from David for killing Saul, the man who had relentlessly sought David's life. No doubt he also expected some praise, perhaps a reward, for bringing the crown and bracelet as gifts to David.

David's response was just the opposite of what the young man expected. David and his men tore their clothes, mourned, wept, and fasted until evening, because of the death of Saul and his sons.

Once again, David displayed reverence for God's anointing,

Then David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy Yahweh's anointed?"

And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died.

And David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed Yahweh's anointed.'" (2 Samuel 1:14-16)

Other examples of David's respect and reverence for those things that were holy could be cited but these examples of his reverence for the anointing of God will suffice. David set a worthy example before us, in this matter.

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Today we live in a very irreverent culture. Disrespect for the things of God and even for God appointed authority flourishes in 21st Century America.

One of the strongest passages emphasizing the God-ordained role of government and the responsibility of God's people to respect those in these roles is Romans 13:1-7.

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same;

for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience ' sake.

For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:1-7)

Little comment needs to be made on the obvious violations of Paul's dictum, because the daily news reports are full of examples of this disrespect.

One might ask, "But what about a government that is ordering God's people to violate a command of God?"

The best answer to that is seen in the conduct of the apostles in such a situation.

The first example is in Acts 3. Peter and John had gone to the temple to pray. Encountering a man who had been lame from his birth, who was begging money at the gate of the temple, Peter replied,

"I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-- walk!"

Peter then grabbed the man by the right hand, raised him up, and immediately the man was healed. He went into the temple, *walking and leaping and praising God.* (Acts 3:6-8)

The temple crowd was excited, and Peter used the occasion to declare the resurrection of Christ. As Peter was moving toward a full proclamation of the Gospel, the temple authorities heard what Peter was declaring and wanting to put a stop to the proclamation of the resurrection they arrested the apostles. In spite of the arrest, many who heard Peter's sermon believed and the number of men in the Jerusalem Church increased to 5000 men.

Peter and John were kept in jail overnight. The next day, when they were brought before the council, Peter referred to the man who had been healed, who also was present before the council. Peter declared that the man had been healed by Jesus, the Nazarene, whom they crucified, but who had been raised from the dead. He further declared that there is salvation in none other than Jesus Christ (Acts 4:1-12).

The council found itself in a bind. It could not deny the healing, for the healed man stood before them and he had been well known as a cripple begging before the temple gate. Also, the council was afraid of how the people who had witnessed the miracle would react to any severe punishment of the apostles.

So, they did what they could to squelch the preaching about the resurrection of Christ. They commanded the apostles to cease preaching about the resurrection.

The apostles respectfully replied, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:19-20)

After a further admonition, they released the apostles and within a few days, the apostles were back at the temple preaching and healing the sick. Great numbers came to faith and were added to the Church.

In a reaction to this, the apostles were arrested again, and put in a public jail, but in the night, an angel of Yahweh opened the prison gate, and told the apostles to go back to preaching Jesus. (Acts 5:21)

When the council met and called for the apostles to be brought before them, they were perplexed because the apostles were not in the prison, even though the doors were locked and the guard was in place.

Then, the report came that the apostles were back at the temple preaching Christ.

The captain of the guard and some soldiers went to arrest the apostles, but they did so gingerly because they were afraid of the people.

The apostles could have called for the crowd to come to their defense, and created a bit of a riot, but they did not do so. They submitted to the officers and allowed themselves to be brought before the council once again.

The council reiterated what they had said before, that the apostles should stop preaching Jesus.

Again, Peter, respectfully said,

"We must obey God rather than men. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

"And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:29-32)

Although the council planned to execute the apostles, a wise man, Gamaliel, counselled against it and the council took his advice. Instead, they had the apostles whipped and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, then released them.

The apostles left the council, rejoicing that they had been privileged to suffer for Jesus' name and went right on preaching the Gospel.

The apostles gave us a model as to how we should respond to a government, or others in authority, who seek to oppose the call of God upon the Church and upon individual Christians. That model is, "Respectfully disobey and gladly accept the consequences."

In our irreverent age, the response would be, take to the streets, start a riot, disrupt society, and seek to destroy the existing order of authority.

Thankfully, in America, we have the ballot box and can make changes through a legal process. Sadly, too many Christians do not take this responsibility seriously and thus, contribute to the election of those who do not honor God nor his standards of morals and conduct.

In another vein is reverence for the ordinances that Our Lord has given to the Church. As noted earlier, one of Paul's strongest rebukes was given to the Corinthian Church for not showing reverence at Yahweh's Supper.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim Yahweh's death until He comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of Yahweh in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of Yahweh. (1 Corinthians 11:26-27)

Not only the ordinances, but the local church, itself, is something to be respected and for which to have reverence. In I Corinthians 3, Paul confronts those who are causing divisions of one sort or another in the local congregation at Corinth. Paul uses some strong language in this section, and some of the strongest is in verses 16-17.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

Sadly, division in local churches is so common that it has been the subject of humor. Sadly, such divisive activity has caused the influence of some local churches to be greatly diminished and in some cases, to cease to exist.

Fearful is the eternal fate of those who are responsible for such irreverence toward a local church, a Temple of the Holy Spirit.

SATAN EXPLOITS DAVID'S WEAKNESS

Yahweh's rejection of Saul as king was not immediately implemented. Yet, after the first episode described above, the prophet Samuel declared,

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of Yahweh your God, which He commanded you, for now Yahweh would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

But now your kingdom shall not endure. Yahweh has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and Yahweh has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what Yahweh commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14)

Paul's first recorded sermon, after he and Barnabas were launched on their first missionary journey, was given in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. In that sermon, Paul, describing David, said,

He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22)

The words, *who will do all my will*, must have been Paul's words, because, even though they convey the sense of Samuel's words, they are not in the original as cited above.

Indeed, as we read the record of David's life in I Samuel 16 – I Kings 2, there is no record of David's ever violating a direct command from Yahweh. This, as we have seen, is in stark contrast to Saul's taking liberties concerning the commands of Yahweh.

Even so, David had a vulnerable chink in his armor. That was his sexual desires. Moses, prophetically, in his valedictory speech, predicted that when the Israelites occupied the Promised

Land, they would ask for a king, like the nations around them (Deuteronomy 17:14). Indeed, as we have seen, that is what happened.

In Moses' prophetic word there were several warnings concerning what this king should avoid. One concerned the practice of polygamy.

Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away (Deuteronomy 17:17a)

This was a general command, given centuries before David was born.

Even though David never disobeyed a direct command from God, he did ignore Moses' prophetic prohibition. I Chronicles 3:1-8 lists seven of David's wives and their offspring:

Ahinoam
Abigail
Maacah
Haggith
Abital
Eglah
Bathsheba

In addition to these seven wives who bore children, David's first wife, Michal (Saul's daughter), bore no children (II Samuel 7:23). David also had unnumbered concubines who are not named (I Chronicles 3:9). Later in his life we are told he had had least ten concubines(II Samuel 20:3)

Clearly, David had a sexual appetite, which Satan used to cause David to commit one of the most grievous sins recorded in Scripture. This is an illustration of James 1:13-15, discussed earlier – David had an ovum that Satan sought to fertilize and give birth to sin. The tragic event is recorded in II Samuel 11.

Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance.

So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

And David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness,¹⁰⁶ she returned to her house.

And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."
(2 Samuel 11:1-5)

Moses' warning to Israel, *be sure, your sin will find you out,*¹⁰⁷ certainly became true in David's adultery.

Uriah was one of David's warriors. In an effort to cover his sin, David had Uriah brought home from the battlefield, expecting Uriah to go home and have sexual intercourse with his wife.

¹⁰⁶ Following sexual intercourse, the participating parties were considered religiously unclean until the evening (Leviticus 15:18)

¹⁰⁷ Numbers 32:23

David hoped to cover his sin by causing Uriah to think that the child was his, rather the result of his wife's adulterous tryst.

Uriah, however, did not go home, but slept with David's servants. Uriah told David that his fellow warriors were camping in an open field and enduring hardships associated with their campaign, and that his conscience would not let him enjoy the comforts of home and his wife's embrace, while his fellow warriors were experiencing hardship. David even got Uriah drunk, hoping that he would then go home, but he did not do so.¹⁰⁸

David sent Uriah back to the battle and gave instructions to the commander, Joab, to put Uriah in a very difficult place and abandon him, so that he would be slain. This was done.¹⁰⁹

After Bathsheba had a season of mourning over the death of her husband, David took her as his wife. It seemed that the secret sin had been kept secret, but the secret was known to Yahweh, who sent Nathan the prophet to David with a dire word.

The word began with the account of a rich man who had killed a poor man and taken the poor man's precious ewe lamb, which he killed and presented it as a meal to a visitor in his home.

David reacted and said, *surely, the man who has done this deserves to die...* Nathan then said to David, *you are the man.*¹¹⁰

Furthermore, through the prophet, Yahweh said,

*Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.*¹¹¹

Indeed, as Scripture records the events in the lives of David's children by his different wives, the account is one of hostility, deception, rebellion, incest, and conflict.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

This episode is another illustration of Satan's efforts to fertilize an ovum and to give birth to sin, but there also is a related lesson.

David was merely walking on the roof the palace, an innocent act. Then, there appeared before his eyes, a temptation which he was not able to resist. A reminder of the word Yahweh gave to Cain, *sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you* (Genesis 4:7).

In the 21st Century, Satan has more opportunities to spring temptation upon us than he has had in any previous generation. We hear so many reports of a man's researching an innocent website on his computer, when, there suddenly appears a seductive image of a woman and he is trapped in a pornographic sin.

Tragically, some of the most high-profile teachers and preachers of this era have been trapped in sexual sin. As a result, not only were their ministries impacted, negatively, but the world had occasion to mock God and His Church.

¹⁰⁸ II Samuel 11:6-13

¹⁰⁹ II Samuel 11:14-17

¹¹⁰ II Samuel 12:1-7

¹¹¹ II Samuel 12:10

Subtle messages that influence viewers are found in the stories and accounts in television programs and the movies. Innocent entertainment becomes the vehicle for Satan's programming our thinking.

Let it be noted that this sin occurred when David was "on top of the world," so to speak. His kingdom was secure. He had everything a man could have wanted. Things had progressed to the point that he could send troops into battle without having to lead them – he stayed at home while his commanders led the troops. He was in a time of leisure, when this temptation suddenly appeared.

21st Century Christians have more money to spend and more leisure time than any previous generation. Although these are seemingly very innocent matters, they allow for temptation to spring forth in unexpected places. Paul exhorted the Corinthians, *Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.* (1 Corinthians 16:13)

It is important that we be on the alert, and that we be honest with ourselves concerning our propensities and our vulnerabilities in these spiritually dangerous times.

Is there a lesson for us in the conduct of Bathsheba? Some have accused her of displaying a lack of modesty, since she was bathing on the flat roof of her house, where she could be seen by someone on the roof of a nearby building. Was this an act of thoughtless immodesty; was she perhaps deliberately displaying herself for all to see?

No information is given in Scripture concerning her motives, nor whether or not bathing on one's rooftop was a customary practice, and thus, not intrinsically immodest.

In exploring her motives, we must ask, "Was she, as an obedient subject of David's kingdom just obeying her king?"

Since her husband, Uriah, as a part of the Israeli army, had been gone for a lengthy period of time, was she a lonely woman and was vulnerable to an offered relationship?

David was the king, and the king summoned her, and whatever her motivation and emotional state might have been, she came and cooperated with David's fulfillment of his lust.

There is a lesson for us here. Regardless of how powerful, might be those who seek to influence us to disobey God's standards, regardless of how vulnerable we might be, we must be wary of Satan's schemes.

We may be required to resist the powers that control culture who are asking, or even commanding, us to do something against God's will. Even though we may say, "I'll never do that, I will never give in," we must be wary, because we may have a hidden weakness that Satan sees in us and that he will use to trap us. Indeed, we have seen instances in which someone has declared, "I'll never do that," then, in time, did exactly what that person said he/she never would do. Oh, may God have mercy on us!

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL FOR MISTREATMENT OF THE GIBEONITES

A three-year famine had brought great suffering to those living in the land of Israel. David, sensing that the famine was a judgment from God, sought Yahweh in prayer. Yahweh responded to David's prayer by stating that, indeed the famine was an expression of His judgment, and then He disclosed the cause.

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of Yahweh. And Yahweh said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." (II Samuel 21:1)

The background for this episode is found in Joshua Chapter 9.

Gilgal, a few miles northeast of Jericho, was where the Israelites had established themselves when they first crossed the Jericho. After conquering Jericho and Ai, they seemed to have taken a short respite in Gilgal, before proceeding further into Canaan. Word of their amazing victories at Jericho and Ai, reached the ears of the inhabitants of nearby towns and villages. One of these groups was the Hivites, who lived in Gibeon, about 20 miles west of Gilgal.

When the Gibeonites heard of Israel's amazing conquest of these major cities, they feared that they shortly would suffer the same fate as Jericho and Ai. They desperately devised a plot, in an attempt to avoid such a catastrophe.

They sent a delegation to meet with Joshua. They wanted their delegation to appear to have traveled a long way and thus, their country would not be in Israel's immediate path. In order to achieve this ruse, they equipped the delegation with worn-out sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins that had been torn and mended, worn out and patched sandals, worn out clothes, and bread that was old and dry.

When the delegation arrived at Gilgal, they began their deceit. Joshua and the Israelite leaders were taken in by their deceit.

And they went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us."

And the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?"

But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" And they said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of Yahweh your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroth.

"So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; now then, make a covenant with us.' "This our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. And these wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey."

And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them. (Joshua 9:6-15)

After three days, when the Israelites discovered the truth about the Gibeonites, the people of Israel began to grumble against their leaders for making the covenant. They wanted to attack the Gibeonites and their surrounding cities, Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim.

Even though the people complained to the leaders about their making the covenant, the leaders were afraid to break a covenant that had been made before Yahweh.

But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, "We have sworn to them by Yahweh, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. "This we will do to them, even let them live, lest wrath be upon us for the oath which we swore to them." (Joshua 9:19-20)

Joshua then confronted the Gibeonites and declared that because of the oath, they would be allowed to live, but from this time on, they would be slaves.

"Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of Yahweh, to this day,¹¹² in the place which He would choose. (Joshua 9:23, 27)

From the time of Joshua onward, the Gibeonites lived in the Land of Israel, occupying a portion of the region that was assigned to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:25).¹¹³

This is the background, for the episode recorded in II Samuel.

Yahweh's statement, *"It is for Saul and his bloody house,"* indicates that not only Saul, but his entire family must have been guilty of the crime. Whether or not Saul's family actively participated in the crime might be debated, but the terminology is in keeping with Yahweh's self-description that He gave to Moses,

"...who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." (Exodus 34:7)¹¹⁴

Saul, in his zeal (perhaps, pretended zeal) for the children of Israel, had sought to eradicate the Gibeonites.

the sons of Israel made a covenant with them, but Saul had sworn (literal Hebrew) to kill them in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah. (II Samuel 21:2b)

Thus, because of Saul's attempted genocide, Yahweh had brought a three-year famine on Israel. Having received a rather general answer from God, David sent for the Gibeonites. He wanted to meet with them and to discuss the wrong that had offended Yahweh. He asked them, *"What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of Yahweh"* (II Samuel 21:3)

They replied that they did not want any monetary penalty extracted from the family Saul, nor did they want to kill any Israelites, but in keeping with the principle of Genesis 9:6 and Numbers 35:3, the guilt would be expiated by the death of some of Saul's sons, blood for blood.

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. (Genesis 9:6)

'Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. (Numbers 35:31)

¹¹² Both the authorship and the date of the Book of Joshua cannot be determined with certainty. Many events following this episode are recorded in the book and the book would have been written at least a few years after the death of Joshua. We are informed that Joshua lived 110 years (Joshua 24:29). It is inferred from the statement, *to this day*, in Joshua 9:27, that the book was written some years after the event. However, the words, *in the place that He would choose*, implies that the book was written prior to Yahweh's making the Temple in Jerusalem as his choice for a permanent place of worship.

¹¹³ The city of Gibeon and its surrounding pasture was given to the Levites (Joshua 21:17).

¹¹⁴ Note that this self-description is in harmony with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9)

They asked for David to deliver to them seven of Saul's descendants, whom they would kill and impale on stakes where they could be seen by everyone.

David complied, delivering to them two of Saul's sons and five of his grandsons. The Gibeonites did exactly what they had said that they would do. In the first days of the barley harvest, they put to death these seven descendants of Saul. The Hebrew literally states, *they exposed them on the mountain before Yahweh*. (II Samuel 21:9)

Rizpah, the mother of the two sons of Saul, took sackcloth and positioned herself in front of the exposed bodies. During the day, she kept the birds from feeding on the flesh of these exposed bodies, and by night she drove away the wild beasts that came to eat the flesh.

When David heard about Rizpah's desperate action, he responded by retrieving the bones of Saul and Jonathan, as well as the remains of the ones killed by the Gibeonites, all of whom he buried in a grave at Kish.

After this, Yahweh was moved by their entreaty and the famine ended.

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

There are some who seek to use this episode as an example of God's punishing a nation because of its injustice to a minority group, especially in reference to the action of America's police and police action against the African Americans. In a recent *Christianity Today* article, Michael Lefebvre, referring to the II Samuel 21 episode, wrote,

“Today, the African American community is literally crying out in our streets. It is crying out against injustice in our nation's policing systems. As Christians who fear God, we ought to sense the same urgency King David recognized, knowing that God hears the cries that humans ignore. We ought not dismiss these cries hastily, but should listen and seek measures aimed at resolving them. Otherwise, heaven's judgment will continue against the nation.”¹¹⁵

It can be debated as to whether or not II Samuel 21 as an example of God's punishing a nation because of its abuse of a minority community.

One thing, however, is certain – an oath, before Yahweh, had been made to the Gibeonites. Saul broke that oath and that was a very serious matter. At least four times in the Law of Moses (perhaps more), the importance of keeping oaths is emphasized.¹¹⁶

'And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am Yahweh. (Leviticus 19:12)

"If a man makes a vow to Yahweh, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:2)

"When you make a vow to Yahweh your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and Yahweh your God will surely require it of you. (Deuteronomy 23:21)

¹¹⁵ Michael Lefebvre, “To Serve, Protect, and Redeem,” *Christianity Today Magazine*, (Volume 4, Number 6) September 2020, page 46

¹¹⁶ Our Lord Jesus, informed us that under the New Covenant, Christians should not pronounce oaths (Matthew 5:33-37). It is important to recognize that the episode before us in II Samuel 21 was in the period in which the Old Covenant, the Covenant of Moses, was in effect for the People of God.

"You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to Yahweh your God, what you have promised. (Deuteronomy 23:23)

Totally apart from these considerations, there is another important lesson highlighted in this episode. When a king or a head of a clan displays godly characteristics, those under that authority tend to experience God's blessing. When the king or head of a clan does not display those characteristics, those under his authority find themselves in less than blessed circumstances. Proverbs 29:2 states, *When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan.*

This is especially important for American Christians, because we select our leaders through the elective process. Therefore, every American Christian has a responsibility to vote, rather than ignoring the responsibility and just accepting the outcome.

In the 2016 election, only 61 percent of voting-age Americans cast a ballot. The percentage of self-identifying Christians who voted, both evangelical and non-evangelical, was about the same.¹¹⁷ To vote is the *beginning* of our civic duty as American Christians.

American Christians should seriously examine the candidates and other issues on the ballot.

How does one decide how to vote on issues and for whom to vote? When it comes to the candidates, whether for President or dog catcher, we always will be choosing between the better of imperfect options, because there is no such thing as a perfect person. Perhaps the temperament or the personality of a candidate is offensive, but that cannot be the determinative factor for Christians. Other considerations must prevail.

The fact that we have candidates put forth by two parties, the place to begin is to examine the party platforms of each party. What are the principles and values contained in the planks of the platform? Which platform more closely conforms to the values of God and His revealed Word? Such information is available on the websites of the political parties of the candidates.

A very important consideration is the candidate's worldview, because that will be the basis for the public policy that would result from his/her election.

Sadly, one's worldview often is not the same as a candidate's faith. For many candidates, faith is very private and is not what influences their decisions. The worldview, on the other hand, reveals those beliefs fundamental to how one will govern.

One of the most obvious examples of worldview, rather than faith, as the determining factor in a politician's conduct, has been Roman Catholic politicians who have voted for bills that fund abortion (funding for Planned Parenthood is an example), even though Roman Catholicism considers abortion to be a sin. Obviously, their worldview did not reflect their faith.

What are the candidates' stated policies? Policies are based on ideas and ideas have consequences. Bad policies always result in victims.

Another consideration is the legion of those whom the candidate will bring into office with him/her. For example, what sort of person would this President recommend for the Supreme Court, as well as other judges, who will serve for a lifetime?

¹¹⁷ John Stonestreet, *Why and How Christians Should Vote* (Colson Center for Worldview, Tuesday September 22, 2020).

The bottom line, concerning election time and how an American Christian should vote, is the importance of prayer. All of the above considerations should be couched in and shrouded in prayer. May God reveal to each of us how we should fulfill this sacred American responsibility.

In keeping with this point, is the fact that Joshua and the leaders of Israel did not consult Yahweh before making a covenant with the Gibeonites. This is just another reminder that all of life's serious decisions should be enshrouded with prayer. One has to wonder how many sorrows and troubles America could have avoided as a nation, and how many we could have avoided in our private lives, if God's counsel had been sought before making a life-altering decision.

SOLOMON'S FALL RESULTING FROM SUCCESS AND POWER

Both I Chronicles and I Kings contain narratives of Solomon's being made king of Israel.¹¹⁸ Details of the event that are not recounted in the brief statements in I Chronicles are given to us in I Kings. We learn from I Kings Chapter One that when David was weak and near death, his fourth son, Adonijah,¹¹⁹ attempted to become king. Adonijah was somewhat of a spoiled brat who was blessed with good looks and ambition.

Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." So, he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. And his father had never crossed him at any time by asking, "Why have you done so?" And he was also a very handsome man; (I Kings 1:5-6a)

Adonijah enlisted the help of Joab, the commander of the Israelite army, and the priest, Abiathar, who had been David's trusted companion and confidant during the days that David was fleeing from Saul.¹²⁰

David had promised Bathsheba that their son, Solomon, would succeed him as king. When David learned of Adonijah's action, he summoned the priest Zadok, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, commander of a portion of the Israelite army. These men were loyal to David and he instructed them to immediately take public action, making Solomon king. They carried out David's orders and Solomon became king (I Kings 1:32-48).

David died shortly thereafter, and Solomon's kingdom was firmly established (I Kings 2:12). Initially, Solomon was somewhat overwhelmed by the responsibility. Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream and the encounter revealed Solomon's pure heart at that time.

In Gibeon Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you."

Then Solomon said, "Thou hast shown great lovingkindness to Thy servant David my father, according as he walked before Thee in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward Thee; and Thou hast reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

And now, O Yahweh my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. "And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people who cannot be numbered or counted for

¹¹⁸ I Chronicles 23:1; 28:5; 29:22; I Kings 1

¹¹⁹ II Samuel 3:4

¹²⁰ I Samuel 22:20-23; 23:6-9; 30:7

multitude. So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?"

And it was pleasing in the sight of Yahweh that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words.

Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

"And I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. "And if you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days."

Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, and offered burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants. (1 Kings 3:5-15)

Indeed, Yahweh blessed Solomon with great wisdom, but also with great prosperity. From that time onward, Solomon's reputation became widespread – both for this wisdom and for the prosperity of Israel under his rule.

I Kings 10 recounts the Queen of Sheba's coming to Jerusalem to see if all that she had heard about Solomon and his kingdom were true. What she saw was so magnificent that it took her breath away. She tested Solomon's wisdom by asking difficult questions and he answered every one of them.

The greatest honor bestowed on Solomon was Yahweh's using him and his reign to build the Temple, which was to succeed the Sacred Tent as the home of the Ark of the Covenant and the site of all of the stipulated sacrifices.

Solomon now was in complete control of a kingdom that was very prosperous and had become a major world power (I Kings 4:20-34; II Chronicle 9:13-30).

Solomon had it all, and as a king without any restraints, it was not long before he began to behave like any oriental monarch. To a degree greater than his father, David, had done, Solomon did not heed Moses' prophetic warning to the Israelites and their future king.

"When you enter the land which Yahweh your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,'

you shall surely set a king over you whom Yahweh your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.

Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since Yahweh has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.'

Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. (Deuteronomy 17:14-17)

Solomon amassed a huge number of horses.

And Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. (1 Kings 4:26; 10:26; II Chronicles 1:14)

He also had many wives and concubines who, as predicted by Moses, turned his heart away from Yahweh.

King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which Yahweh had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love.

And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to Yahweh his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites.⁶ And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and did not follow Yahweh fully, as David his father had done.

Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

(1 Kings 11:1-8)

Even though David had ignored Moses' prophetic warning about the spiritual danger in having many wives, he never did turn away from Yahweh. Throughout his life, David worshipped only Yahweh.

Solomon, on the other hand, not only violated the warning given to the Israelites about taking wives from pagan tribes, but he succumbed to their influence, building places of worship for their false gods and even participating in worship of them. He reaped the consequences.

Now Yahweh was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from Yahweh, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what Yahweh had commanded.

So Yahweh said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant.

Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. (1 Kings 11:9-12)

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Solomon is an example of the, "Power corrupts, and total power corrupts totally."

When he was devoid of any restraints and wealthy beyond imagination, Solomon became totally oblivious to the God who had blessed him and given him this place of power and prosperity.

Twenty-first Century Americans have more prosperity and freedom of choice than any previous generation in any nation. The more freedom and prosperity that we have, the more we are at risk of ignoring the supreme role of God in our lives.

Even if our choices are somewhat limited, how we choose when we do have total freedom, in any area, is very revealing of who we really are. This is true, for example, of how we manage finances, what we do with our leisure time, what career choices we pursue, what church we attend, and what relationships develop.

Also, Solomon's downfall illustrates the danger of romance and sexual connections. Sadly, most of us know of a number of situations in which a church member has become romantically involved with an unbeliever and, as a result, has walked away from God and His Church.

For some, their downfall is not the result of romantic relationships but rather, it is the result of engaging in deep relationships with ungodly people, becoming a "part of the gang," so to speak.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)

TWO TRAGEDIES, TWO SOURCES, AND TWO RESPONSES

The tragedies faced by Job and the tragedies faced by the Northern Kingdom of Israel (described in Isaiah 9) were the result of two totally opposite causes. Job's tragedies were the result of Satan's efforts to cause Job to reject Yahweh. Samaria's (Israel) troubles were a chastisement from God.

We will examine these accounts and seek to discern what 21st Century Christians might learn from them.

There are many questions that come to mind, when one begins to read the Book of Job. We will not pursue those questions, but we will take the account at face value and seek to learn the underlying lesson of the book.

The account of Job's experience begins with a laudatory statement concerning Job's character.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil. (Job 1:1)

Job had seven sons and three daughters and also was quite wealthy, *and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east (Job 1:3)*

Satan challenged Yahweh, accusing Job of being a spiritual prostitute – he only served Yahweh because of the blessings that he had received.

And Yahweh said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

Then Satan answered Yahweh, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

"But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face." (Job 1:8-11)

Yahweh responded to the challenge and allowed Satan to do whatever he wanted to do with everything that Job had, but he could not touch Job personally.

Satan immediately went to work and through a series of calamities destroyed all of Job's possessions as well as taking the lives of his children. (Job 1:13-19)

Job's response was exactly the opposite of what Satan had hoped to accomplish.

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. Yahweh gave and Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh."

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. (Job 1:20-22)

Satan then challenged Yahweh again, stating that even though Job did not sin after the destruction of all of his possessions and the death of his children, if Yahweh would allow Satan to touch Job himself, then Job would reject Yahweh.

And Satan answered Yahweh and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face." (Job 2:4-5)

Yahweh gave Satan permission to bring some sort of sickness on Job, but that he would not allow Satan to kill this righteous man.

Then Satan went out from the presence of Yahweh, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:7-9)

Once again, Job foiled Satan.

But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 2:10)

Three of Job's friends came from three different locations, to spend time with him and comfort him. However, when they saw Job, they were so shocked by his appearance that they sat silently for seven days.

When Job finally did speak, he asked, in a lengthy lament, "Why was I born – why didn't I die at birth?" (Job 3:1-26)

After Job's lengthy lament, his friends, one by one, began to speak. In some of their speeches, they accused Job of having some sort of hidden sin that had brought him the calamities. Some of their speech was an attempt to describe God and his ways.

Yahweh put an end to all of this by delivering a lengthy speech to Job, in which He pointed out that no human is able to understand God, nor to advise God.

Job responded humbly by stating,

"I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted.

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore, I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask Thee, and do Thou instruct me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; Therefore, I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

Yahweh then rebuked Job's three friends, telling them that His wrath is kindled against them, *because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. (Job 42:7)*

Yahweh instructed them,

"Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has." (Job 42:8)

The three friends did what Yahweh had commanded them to do. Yahweh not only accepted Job, but He also restored all of his wealth and gave Job and his wife, seven sons and three daughters.

Calamity falls on the Northern Kingdom, Israel

Yahweh sends a message against Jacob, And it falls on Israel. And all the people know it, that is, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria,

Asserting in pride and in arrogance of heart: "The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with smooth stones; The sycamores have been cut down, But we will replace them with cedars."

Therefore Yahweh raises against them adversaries from Rezin, And spurs their enemies on, the Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west; And they devour Israel with gaping jaws.

In spite of all this His anger does not turn away, And His hand is still stretched out. Yet the people do not turn back to Him who struck them, Nor do they seek Yahweh of hosts. (Isaiah 9:8-13)¹²¹

Yahweh's judgment had fallen on the Northern Tribes, i.e., Samaria. Yet, instead of humbling themselves before God and seeking His favor, in pride they took the attitude that they would not be brought low by His judgment.

The Samaritans arrogantly said that what had fallen were clay bricks but, in defiance of God, they would rebuild with smooth quarried stones – something better than what God had destroyed.

Furthermore, they would replace the sycamores with cedars – a more useful tree, in their culture.

The Samaritans manifested the spirit of William Ernest Henley,¹²² expressed in his well-known poem, *Invictus*. Sadly, some have cited this poem as an example of a Christian spirit.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

¹²¹ This is one of those instances in which the chapter and verse divisions don't quite fit the text. Verses 1-7 are wonderful prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, whereas verses 8 and following deal with Yahweh's judgement on Samaria and the pride of its citizens.

¹²² William Ernest Henley (23 August 1849 – 11 July 1903) was an English poet, critic and editor in late Victorian England. Though he wrote several books of poetry, Henley is remembered most often for his 1875 poem, *Invictus*. As a result of complications from tuberculosis, Henley experienced the amputation of a leg at 19 years of age. He later was hospitalized for two years (1873-1875), while undergoing a series of surgeries to prevent the amputation of the other leg. The poem, *Invictus*, was one of several written during this hospitalization, published as a collection entitled, *In Hospital*.

As a result of Samaria's arrogance, Yahweh declared that more and greater calamities would befall the nation.

NOTE: Interestingly, more than one politician has quoted Isaiah 9:11 as if it were an example of how we should respond to tragedy, seemingly ignorant of the fact that the passage refers to an act of despicable pride and an affront to God.¹²³

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Even though one of these two accounts describes a calamity's coming on an individual and the other describes a calamity's befalling a nation, together they have a lesson for us. Looking at these two passages of Scripture, one thing that stands out is that when serious calamity befalls us, we need to determine the cause and source:

- is it a judgment from God calling us to repentance,
- is it an attack of Satan seeking to cause us to turn from God,
- is it a circumstance that God allows for our testing,
- is it just a part of the experience of being members of a fallen race in a fallen world?

It is important that we seek to determine the cause and thus respond accordingly. Our first act should be to examine ourselves, before God, to see if there is sin in our lives that is related to the calamity.

Many horrible and globally significant events have taken place, thus far, in the 21st Century. For Americans and for the Church, it is important that we prayerfully seek revelation as to the cause, so that we might respond appropriately. Even so, regardless of the cause, we should always turn to God with a contrite and surrendered heart. By doing so, we will both frustrate our enemy, Satan, and be pleasing to our Lord.

A model for us, as a nation, is President Abraham Lincoln's March 30, 1863, Senate resolution calling on the whole nation to pray, to fast, and to repent. Lincoln gave this call to prayer when the United States was just completing the second year of the devastating Civil War (April 12, 1861– April 9, 1865). A portion of Lincoln's proclamation, reads,

“And, insomuch as we know that by His Divine Law nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people?

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown.

But we have forgotten God.

¹²³ Two notable examples are United States Senate Majority Leader, Tom Daschle, on September 12, 2001, in response to the shocking 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers. A second is the former US Senator from North Carolina and Democratic nominee for Vice President in 2004, John Edwards, speaking to a congregational caucus on the third anniversary of the 9/11. It is quite obvious that neither of these politicians had taken the time to learn that they were reading a passage describing a country's arrogance against God.

We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!"

Sadly, as an increasing percentage of our population has no relationship with the God of our fathers, the closing paragraph of the above quote describes much of 21st Century America.

EXCURSUS
CAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANS CLAIM II CHRONICLES 7:13-14
AS A PROMISE TO AMERICA?

God is the Great Promise Keeper. He never breaks his Word nor fails to fulfill a promise. That being true, what are American Christians to make of II Chronicles 7:13-14? Is this a promise to us, and if it doesn't happen, can we shake our fist at God and vehemently say, "But you promised?"

"If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

These verses often are cited as a motivation for American Christians to pray in a time of national crisis. Certainly, every Christian should be diligent in praying for his country and praying for his country to display righteousness, according to the dictates of God's Word. Yet, can these verses be claimed as a promise to Christians in whatever land they may live?

When we apply the basic six "Ws" to this passage, it becomes difficult to claim that these verses are a promise of God to Christians in every land and any point of history:

Who said it
To whom was it said
When was it said
Where was it said
Why was it said
What was said

Applying these questions to the text, it is apparent that Yahweh made the promise to His people who are called by His name – obvious reference, in this instance, to the nation of Israel.

The promise was given as a part of the dedication of the Temple and the Temple clearly is involved in the fulfillment of the promise. Here is the context.

Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Yahweh filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of Yahweh, because the glory of Yahweh filled Yahweh's house.

And all the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of Yahweh upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave praise to Yahweh, saying, "Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting."

Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before Yahweh. And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep. Thus, the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

And the priests stood at their posts and the Levites, with the instruments of music to Yahweh, which King David had made for giving praise to Yahweh-- "for His lovingkindness is everlasting" -- whenever he gave praise by their means, while the priests on the other side blew trumpets; and all Israel was standing.

Then Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of Yahweh, for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to contain the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fat.

So Solomon observed the feast at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, who came from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt.

And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for the dedication of the altar they observed seven days, and the feast seven days.

Then on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their tents, rejoicing and happy of heart because of the goodness that Yahweh had shown to David and to Solomon and to His people Israel.

Thus, Solomon finished the house of Yahweh and the king's palace, and successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of Yahweh and in his palace.

Then Yahweh appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.

If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.

For I now have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. (2 Chronicles 7:1-16)

One of the problems in declaring that this is an absolute promise to Christians is how to identify the, *My people, who are called by My Name*. The expression in this passage refers to the People of Israel. Whether or not an individual might be loyal to Yahweh, Israel was God's chosen nation, and every citizen of that nation was one of His people, called by His name.

This is not true of America. Christians are but a portion of the citizenry of America, and increasingly a smaller portion. Furthermore, it is somewhat of a myth to claim that America is the new Israel.

The land occupied by those who were Called by My Name, was the *Promised Land – the Land of Israel*. The citizens of Israel were the occupants of that land and they owned it. The promise was made to them and to their land. Christians are not the exclusive owners of America.

Should American society ignore God's standards and substitute human standards in place of God's standards, and in such a wicked society, every Christian (those called by His Name) repent of every personal sin and pray, while the nation continues in its sinful way, can we hold God to this promise made to Israel? It would hardly seem to be so.

Another crucial element in Yahweh's promise, is the location from which the prayers of repentance and intercession should originate – the Temple.

Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

The Temple does not exist in America or, for that matter, anywhere in the world, at this time.

In the light of these matters, as well as other things concerning the promise of II Chronicles that could be cited, we ask, "What should the Church's response to society's ills?" Scripture is clear

- Christians should be consistent in humble intercessory prayer for the nation, for the governmental authorities, especially the courts and those who make the laws (I Timothy 2:1-2).
- Let us, as God's people, be constant in our prayers for God to bring society to a place of recognizing its sins, turning from them, and seeking to acknowledge the Lord of the Universe, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords.
- Let us be courageous enough to address evils in our culture when we encounter them, and where possible, take steps to rid our culture of the perceived evils.

Even though some action on our part and our example may accomplish some good, ultimately, only God Himself can accomplish these things, acting through the Holy Spirit, and through Christians' proclamation of the Holy Spirit empowered Gospel.

ASA'S EXAMPLE OF FAITH AND FAILURE

Asa was the great-great-grandson of Solomon and the third King of Judah after the separation of Judah and Israel. A brief account of his reign is recorded in I Kings 15:8-24 and a more detailed account in II Chronicles Chapters 14 – 16.

The first ten years of his reign were prosperous and peaceful. He began his reign by instituting many reforms in the nation of Judah.

- He destroyed all of the foreign altars and altars of incense where previous generations had worshipped pagan gods.
- He conducted a campaign to destroy the high places where previous generations had worshipped false Gods.
- He tore down the pagan gods' sacred pillars and destroyed the Asherim (wooden symbols of a fertility goddess).
- He rid the land of the male prostitutes that were associated with the worship of some pagan gods.
- One of his most dramatic acts was deposing his mother who was the Queen Mother of the nation, because she had made a horrid Ashera. Asa cut down the image, crushed it and burned it at the book Kidron.
- He restored the altar in front of the porch of Yahweh in the Temple.
- He commanded Judah to seek Yahweh God and to observe the Law and its Commandments.
- During his early years, when Yahweh had given him rest, Asa built fortified cities.

After an initial season of peace during the early years of Asa's reign, Zerah, the Ethiopian came against Judah with an army of one million men, plus 300 chariots. Asa and his forces were faced with overwhelming odds as they prepared to battle the Ethiopians.¹²⁴

Asa cried out to Yahweh and Yahweh responded.

Then Asa called to Yahweh his God, and said, "Yahweh, there is no one besides Thee to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Yahweh our God, for we trust in Thee, and in Thy name have come against this multitude.

O Yahweh, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee."

So Yahweh routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar; and so many Ethiopians fell that they could not recover, for they were shattered before Yahweh, and before His army. (II Chronicles 14:11-13)

As Asa and the people were returning from the battle, they were met by the prophet, Azariah, with a word from Yahweh.

Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Yahweh is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. (II Chronicles 15:1-2)

To impress the people deeply with this truth, the prophet drew a powerful picture of the times when a people is forsaken by God, when peace and security in social intercourse disappear and the terrors of civil war prevail.

"And for many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress, they turned to Yahweh God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him.

And in those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands.

And nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. "But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work." (II Chronicles 15:3-7)

These words strengthened Asa to carry out further reforms. One of the most significant things that he did was bring a revival of Yahweh worship to the nation.

And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that Yahweh his God was with him.

So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. And they sacrificed to Yahweh that day 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the spoil they had brought.

And they entered into the covenant to seek Yahweh God of their fathers with all their heart and soul; and whoever would not seek Yahweh God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman.

Moreover, they made an oath to Yahweh with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets, and with horns. And all Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought Him earnestly, and He let them find Him. So Yahweh gave them rest on every side. (II Chronicles 15:9-15)

¹²⁴ II Chronicles 14:9ff

Even though Asa was a zealous reformer, he was not able to destroy all of the high places. Obviously, some people of Judah did not keep pace with his zeal.

But the high places were not removed from Israel; nevertheless, Asa's heart was blameless all his days. (II Chronicles 15:17)

After the passage of many years,¹²⁵ Baasha, the king of Israel, began to move against Judah. One thing that he did was to strongly fortify Ramah, a key city on the highway north of Jerusalem, thus preventing anyone from traveling to and from Jerusalem.

Instead of relying on Yahweh, as he had done in his younger years, in the conflict with Ethiopia, Asa resorted to human means to protect Judah from the onslaught of Israel.

The King of Aram, Benhadad, had aligned himself with the Northern Kingdom, Israel and its king, Baasha. Therefore, Benhadad was considered to be Judah's enemy. Asa sent a bribe to Benhadad, asking him to break his treaty with Baasha and attack some of the cities in Israel. Asa assumed that if Benhadad did this, Baasha would have to back off from his harassment of Judah.

Then Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of Yahweh and the king's house, and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, saying,

"Let there be a treaty between you and me, as between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you silver and gold; go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me."

So Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali.

And it came about when Baasha heard of it that he ceased fortifying Ramah and stopped his work.

Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber with which Baasha had been building, and with them he fortified Geba and Mizpah.

(II Chronicles 16:2-6)

At first, it appeared that Asa had been wise in the bribing Benhadad, but that sense did not last long. The prophet Hanani came to Asa with a word from Yahweh,

At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on Yahweh your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand.

Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on Yahweh, He delivered them into your hand.

For the eyes of Yahweh move to and fro throughout the earth, that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars." (II Chronicles 16:7-9)

¹²⁵ The number of years is uncertain. II Chronicles states, *In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha the King of Israel came up against Judah.* This doesn't fit I Kings 16:8,10 which states that Baasha died in the twenty-sixth year of Asa's reign, *i.e.*, in the twenty-seventh year of Asa. Older commentators, for the most part, accepted the view that the thirty-fifth year (II Chronicles 15:19) is to be reckoned from the commencement of the kingdom of Judah and that Baasha's invasion occurred in the sixteenth year of his reign, and that the land had enjoyed peace until his fifteenth year. See Keil & Delitzsch, Volume , page 867

Yahweh informed Asa, through Hanani the prophet, that if he had relied on Yahweh, not only would he have been protected from Baasha, but he would have been able to defeat both Baasha and Benhadad. Because of his failure, the peaceful state of affairs in Judah was forfeited.

Rather than repenting and seeking forgiveness from Yahweh, Asa was so angry with Hanani that he had the prophet imprisoned. Then, Asa began a season of oppressing some of the people – behaving like an oriental monarch (II Chronicles 16:10).

The final comment on Asa's life describes a man who no longer took Yahweh into account, but relied on human means to solve his problems, without success. What a sad comment on the closing episode of the life of a man who began his career as an exceptional example of faith,

And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek Yahweh, but the physicians.

So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign. (II Chronicles 16:12-13)

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

A number of important lessons are seen in the life of Asa.

FIRST LESSON: One lesson that is evident, not only in Asa's life, but as pointed out in episodes we already have considered, is the fact that the fate and experience of a people is largely determined by the conduct of its leadership. We again emphasize the importance of American Christians' prayerfully voting for or against the candidates offered to us.

SECOND LESSON: A second important lesson is a personal lesson. When the prophet, Hanani, confronted Asa about his sin, rather than repenting and seeking God's forgiveness, Asa had Hanani imprisoned. He then obstinately began to live as if his own standard were only standard, without regard to the plight of those under him.

How different was David's response to the prophet Nathan's pointing out the sinful action of David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. When David's sin was exposed, he cried out, *I have sinned!*¹²⁶ The anguish of David's heart and his repentance is displayed in Psalm 51, which David composed in response to his sin, his repentance, and his plea to God to not reject him.

One of the most challenging and yet, comforting, passages of Scripture is in John's First Epistle, *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;*

but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous;

and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (I John 1:6-2:2)

¹²⁶ II Samuel 12:13

Indeed, the example of David's repentance, rather than the example of Asa's obstinacy, should exemplify how we conduct ourselves before God.

Addressing this subject, Proverbs 12:1 declares,

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

- Let us live in the light where our failures are freely recognized.¹²⁷
- Let us rejoice that we have brothers and sisters who love us enough to point out our sins.
- Let us maintain a humble attitude of admitting our sin and repentance from our failures.
- Let us rejoice in the freedom that comes from experiencing God's forgiveness.

THIRD LESSON: When he was a young man, Asa was a marvelous example of faith and trust in God. In his more mature years, he displayed just the opposite. What caused this change of his attitude and relationship with God? One can only speculate. Even so there is a lesson for us.

It is important that throughout our lives, we live a life of consistent and growing faith.

Regardless of what we face, both when we are young and when we are old, when we are weak and when we are strong, let us not forget that God is with us. As Hebrews points out, discussing our reliance on God,

for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," (Hebrews 13:5b)

May our faith in God, and this promise, sustain us through every hardship, and motivate us to thanksgiving in every season of life.

FOURTH LESSON: Citing II Chronicles 16:12, *And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek Yahweh, but the physicians,* someone might argue that a person of faith should seek God and abstain from seeking help from physicians.

They also might cite James 5:14-16 to shore up their argument.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (James 5:14-16)

They also may cite Paul's experience with his infirmities.

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself!

Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

Paul did not turn to physicians nor resort to medication, but he prayed and accepted God's pronouncement.

¹²⁷ Relevant to the subject of living in the light and being transparent with one another, is the Epistle of James' comment on praying for the sick *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.* (Jam 5:16)

EXCURSUS

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

From time to time, one encounters a teacher who argues that Paul's thorn in the flesh was not a physical illness, but an individual who was harassing him, *i.e.*, *a messenger of Satan*. They argue that because of his faith, Paul never was sick. Such an argument has several things against it.

One such argument against this concept is that the thorn was *in* Paul's flesh. This was not just an external aggravation from an individual who was harassing him.

Also, the argument that Paul never had an illness is contradicted by his letter to the Galatians.

but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. (Galatians 4:13-15)

Paul and his companions had been traveling through Galatia, and they had not planned to spend time in Galatia. However, Paul's illness forced them to stop in Galatia, and as a result, the Galatians received the Gospel.

Given this last statement in this passage, it is possible that Paul had some sort of eye disease, and since he commented that they did not despise him because of this illness, it could have displayed itself in a manner that was sickening to observe. It is obvious that Paul had a physical ailment.

Those arguing for the position of faith versus medicine, state that

- since we have no evidence of Paul's seeking medical help from physicians,
- or that he took any medicinal potions for his illness,
- then Paul set the example of relying on faith alone for healing.
- Thus, we should do the same.

Such an argument fails in the light of Paul's words to Timothy. Timothy had several unnamed physical ailments. Paul mentions stomach problems as one of these ailments. Note that Paul did not tell Timothy to display faith and pray a prayer of faith for healing, or to call for the elders to anoint him and pray for his healing. Instead, Paul gave Timothy a prescription.

No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. (I Timothy 5:23)

Another fact that has little bearing on our topic, and yet was important enough for Paul to mention in his Epistle to the Colossians, is the fact that the profession of Luke, one of his closest and trusted companions, was a physician. (Colossians 4:14)¹²⁸

The important point for us is that whether we pray for healing, or turn to physicians and their healing skills, we must always do so believing that God is in control.

¹²⁸ The only portion of the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke* that is preserved in the original Greek, probably composed in the late Second Century, states, *Luke was born in Antioch, by profession was a physician. He had become a disciple of the apostle Paul and later followed Paul until his [Paul's] martyrdom. He died at the age of 84 years.* See Horatio Balch Hackett, *A Commentary on the Original Text of the Acts of the Apostles* (Gould and Lincoln; Sheldon, Blakeman & Co) 1858 page. 12

THE CULTURE THAT SURROUNDED GOD’S CHOSEN PEOPLE, ALTERED THEIR VALUES TO THE POINT THAT THEY FOLLOWED THE CULTURE’S PRACTICE OF SACRIFICING THEIR CHILDREN TO THE CULTURE’S GODS.

All of us live in a culture, and even when we are not aware of it, we are influenced by it. Culture often has been illustrated with the life of a fish. Fish live in water, but do not know that they are wet. Water, flowing through their gills is processed by the fish’s unique respiratory system and thus, provides oxygen. Water provides the manner in which fish feed, and water provides the atmosphere in which they spawn. Water is the only culture that a fish knows, and the fish is controlled by it and dependent on it.

The same is true of any animal. The animal’s culture determines the nature of the life that the animal will lead.

Animals cannot create their culture, they accept it, unthinkingly. Humans, on the other hand, create their culture. All of us were born into a culture that the previous generations had created, and future generations will be born into the culture that we leave for them.

Most people never give much thought to how culture is influencing them, especially during their younger years – the years in which style of life and values are being programmed into them. Whether one grows up in a church culture or a secular culture, that culture bears greatly on what that person will be as an adult.

Even as adults, culture, like the water to a fish, is the environment in which we live, and it has an influence on us of which we often are unconscious. Many people, just, “go with the flow” and consciously or unconsciously accept the norms of the surrounding culture. Sometimes, when a person encounters a new culture – such as moving to another country – he adapts to the mores and values of that culture in order to fit in – sometimes it is an unconscious adapting of the values and habits of that culture.

Yahweh gave many warnings to the Israelites, concerning how culture would influence them. Indeed, the idolatry of the cultures in which they found themselves did have an influence on them and their values. One practice of the pagan culture was offering one’s children as living sacrifices to their gods. Anticipating this situation, prior to their entering into the Promised Land, Yahweh gave specific warnings against this practice.

Neither shall you give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am Yahweh. (Leviticus 18:21)

"You shall also say to the sons of Israel, 'Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. 'I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name. 'If the people of the land, however, should ever disregard that man when he gives any of his offspring to Molech, so as not to put him to death, then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut off from among their people both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the harlot after Molech. (Leviticus 20:2-5)

"You shall not behave thus toward Yahweh your God, for every abominable act which Yahweh hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. (Deuteronomy 12:31)

"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, (Deuteronomy 18:10)

NOTE: Some have argued that the phrase, "pass through the fire," refers to a person's walking between two lines of torches – a line of torches on the left and a line of torches the right side of the path. Ezekiel 16:21 destroys that argument.

"You slaughtered My children, and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. (Ezekiel 16:21)

Clearly, the expression refers to offering one's children as burnt offerings to Moloch.

In spite of Yahweh's clear warning against this horrible act, the Israelites, influenced by their surrounding culture, began worshipping the culture's gods, and, as a part of this worship, began offering their children as human sacrifices to the culture's gods. Even two of Judah's kings, the twelfth king, Ahaz, and Judah's fourteenth king, Manasseh, succumbed to this practice.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of Yahweh his God, as his father David had done. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh had driven out from before the sons of Israel. (2 Kings 16:2-3)

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh dispossessed before the sons of Israel....And he made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of Yahweh provoking Him to anger. (2 Kings 21:1-2, 6)¹²⁹

A few years after the Northern Kingdom (Israel), separated from the Southern Kingdom (Judah), the entire population of the Northern Kingdom began to conform to the customs of the culture in which they lived.

Now this came about, because the sons of Israel had sinned against Yahweh their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom Yahweh had driven out before the sons of Israel, and in the customs of the kings of Israel which they had introduced. ...

And they rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers, and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which Yahweh had commanded them not to do like them.

And they forsook all the commandments of Yahweh their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of Yahweh, provoking Him. (2 Kings 17:7-8, 15-17)

¹²⁹ Also reported in II Chronicles 33:1-6

In Jeremiah's day, during the reign of Zedekiah, Yahweh said that He was allowing the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem and burn the city, because of the people's beginning to worship idols, build places of worship for these idols, and even put idols in the Temple of Yahweh. One of the horrible practices that Yahweh enumerated was,

"And they built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. (Jeremiah 32:35)

Through Ezekiel, Yahweh cited, once again, this horrible conformity to the culture, *and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their first-born to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am Yahweh."* (Ezekiel 20:26)

"And when you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live," declares Yahweh God, "I will not be inquired of by you. (Ezekiel 20:31)

"For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food. (Ezekiel 23:37)

The Psalmist commented,

But they mingled with the nations, And learned their practices, And served their idols, Which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters, Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with the blood. (Psalm 106:35-38)

Tragically, the surrounding culture so influenced the people of both Judah and Israel that they began to conform to the surrounding culture, worshipping that culture's gods, even to the point of sacrificing their children.

LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN CHRISTIANS

One thing that comes immediately to mind as we ponder how culture might influence a people to sacrifice its children, is the horrible practice of abortion as a means of birth control. Depending on the source of the statistics, in recent decades, close to one million children have been killed by abortion, annually. Abortion has become an industry in the United States, through which great profit is obtained by the investors. This especially is seen in the sale of aborted body parts.

Some government entities have ruled that if a child survives an abortion, the mother has the choice as to whether or not let the child live. In these situations, it is currently legal for the medical practitioners performing an abortion to deny medical care to the infant and leave the baby to die, sometimes over the course of hours or days.

For example, in an interview with KTOP news, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam expressed his support for a state bill that would allow the killing of an innocent baby after birth if it is what the mother wanted. According to Gov. Northam,

"If a mother is in labor, I can tell you exactly what would happen. The infant would be delivered. The infant would be kept comfortable. The infant would be resuscitated if

that's what the mother and the family desired. And then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother...¹³⁰

Even some Christian denominations and their constituency have a permissive view on this subject.¹³¹

This attitude demonstrates a callousness some Americans have toward their children – clearly the influence of the contemporary culture in that surrounds us.

A second example of a culture's sacrificing its children is the programming children's views on homosexuality, lesbianism, the LGBTQ movement, and same-sex marriage. Even some public schools are indoctrinating children to accept these anti-biblical views of sexuality and sexual identity. Teachers who hold to a biblical view of these matters, refusing to present this view of sexual identity, often are penalized in one way or another.

Some American denominations not only are tolerating but pushing the view that homosexuality and lesbianism are caused by God and must be accepted. Some allow the ordination of lesbians and homosexuals to ministry positions.^{132 133}

Even Pope Francis, in a recent documentary, spoke in favor of same-sex civil unions.¹³⁴

These views clearly are at odds with the Will of God and are in defiance of His right to determine these matters.

When Yahweh gave His laws of conduct to Moses, He stated,

'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)
'If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

That this was not just a part of the Mosaic Law, but a permanent revelation of the Will of God, is attested to by Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

¹³⁰ KTOP News, January 30, 2019.

See also, <https://www.newsbreak.com/virginia/richmond/news/1546136464519/governor-ralph-northam-signs-bill-removing-abortion-restrictions-allowing-non-physicians-to-commit-abortions>

¹³¹ For Pew Forum surveys on this subject, see

- <https://www.pewforum.org/2009/01/15/abortion-views-by-religious-affiliation/>
- <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/views-about-abortion/by/religious-denomination/among/parent-of-children-under-18/non-parents/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>

¹³² For a list of various denominations that allow this practice, see,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_affirming_LGBT

¹³³ <https://baptistnews.com/article/baptist-church-calls-transgender-pastor/#.X5CRz5KSk2w>

¹³⁴ for quotes from the interview and related information, see,

https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/pope-endorses-civil-unions/2020/10/21/id/993033/?ns_mail_uid=fab3e2bc-094b-4a86-a056-d437e9c79b7d&ns_mail_job=DM155018_10212020&s=acs&dkt_nbr=010502n7tlrd

Romans 1:18 -32 describes a culture that has rejected God and, as a result, God has removed His restraining hand on that culture. Verses 26-27 describe the God-condemned sin of lesbian and homosexual behavior that manifests when God no longer restrains.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:26-27)

Sadly, Romans 1:18-32 is an accurate description of the conditions existing in 21st Century America. Our humanistic culture, declaring that man is the measure of all things, is sending a generation of children into the fires of hell by teaching them to approve of, and to practice, those things that damn a person for eternity.

Another example is the growing acceptance of polyamory. Polyamory is a situation in which a group, consisting of a mixture of males and females live together and have multiple sexual relationships among them.

Noteworthy is the city of Somerville, Massachusetts' recent new domestic partnership ordinance granting polyamorous groups the same rights as those held by spouses in marriage, such as the right to confer health benefits. J.T. Scott, a city councilor, said that he knew of at least two dozen polyamorous households in Somerville, which has a population of about 80,000.¹³⁵

We have to wonder if polyamorous relationships will have growing acceptance in a culture that increasingly is embracing just about anything humans want to do.

On a number of issues, the values of our contemporary culture are at odds with God's Will and are impacting a generation that will stray further and further away from the path that leads to heaven. As noted, sadly, an increasing number of religious institutions are going along with these views, even as the people of Israel and Judah went along with the cultures that surrounded them.

Scripture contains a revelation of God and a revelation of His Will. Heaven and hell are in the balance. Whatever the cost, the men and women of God's Church must oppose the influence of a humanistic culture and its effect on our children. God's people must take a stand in conformity with the revelation contained in God's Scriptures. Future generations will reflect how firmly and aggressively that stance has been taken.

As stated earlier, all of us were born into a culture that the previous generations had created, and future generations will be born into the culture that we leave for them.

On another note, it is important that every Christian parent be aware of his/her influence on one's children. The same is true for every leader in the church. Even when we do our best, we cannot guarantee the desired outcome in our children's lives, but we must ask, can they look at us and think, "What a hypocrite"? Do our children see cultural idols in our lives that will influence them – hobbies, addictions, the priorities in our activities? Oh, may God give us insight, as we seek to be aware of anything in our lives that reflects the influence of cultural idols.

¹³⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/us/somerville-polyamorous-domestic-partnership.html>

**UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE SURROUNDING CULTURE, ISRAELITES
ADJUSTED THE WORSHIP IN JEHOVAH'S TEMPLE TO ACCOMMODATE
THE GODS OF THE CULTURE**

As noted earlier, not only did the Israelites begin sacrificing their children to Moloch, but they also began to add idols to the furnishings in very Temple of Jehovah.

And they rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers, and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which Yahweh had commanded them not to do like them. And they forsook all the commandments of Yahweh their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. (II Kings 17:15-16)

As noted earlier, concerning Manasseh,

And he built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yahweh had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Yahweh. And he made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of Yahweh provoking Him to anger.⁷ Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which Yahweh said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. (II Kings 21:4-7)

One of the most dramatic revelations of this situation was given to Ezekiel.

And it came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of Yahweh God fell on me there.

Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. And He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located.

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain. Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes, now, toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.

And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, that I should be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations."

Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. And He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance.

And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here." So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.

And standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising. Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'Yahweh does not see us; Yahweh has forsaken the land.'"

And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing."

Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of Yahweh's house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. And He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these."

Then He brought me into the inner court of Yahweh's house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of Yahweh, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of Yahweh and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

And He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. "Therefore, I indeed shall deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I shall not listen to them." (Ezekiel 8:1-18)

In a later vision, Ezekiel witnessed the Shekinah Glory's departure from the Temple. Ezekiel was given a vision of sapphire stones, a theophany. Accompanying the theophany was a vision of several angels, and wheels in the middle of the heavens. Then the Shekinah Glory's dramatic departure from the Temple began to unfold.

From the time that the Ark of the Covenant had been constructed and the Sacred Tent erected, the Shekinah Glory of God was present in the Holy of Holies, above the Ark of the Covenant, first in the Sacred Tent and then in the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem.

In Ezekiel's vision, the Glory first moved from the Holy of Holies to the entrance of the Temple, and temporarily the entire Temple court was filled with the glory of Yahweh

Then the glory of Yahweh went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of Yahweh. (Ezekiel 10:4)

Next, the Glory stood over the cherubim (angels), and moved to the east gate of the Temple

Then the glory of Yahweh departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of Yahweh's house. And the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. (Ezekiel 10:18-19)

Finally, as the very lengthy vision drew to a close, the Glory departed from the Temple.

And the glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city, and stood over the mountain which is east of the city. (Ezekiel 11:23)

For the first time, since the days of Moses, the Holy of Holies was without the Presence of God. Yahweh no longer dwelt with His People as He had in the past.

This tragedy resulted from God's People's adjusting the worship in the Temple to accommodate the idols of their surrounding culture.

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

At the bottom of the problem in Israel, was a rejection of the revealed Law of Yahweh, given through Moses. The Israelites began to feel free to ignore these statutes and design a worship that conformed to the patterns of the culture that surrounded them.

Sadly, that has been happening to the Church for many years. Even though there have been differences between Roman Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, etc.,

historically all of these sought to base their beliefs and practices on God's revealed Word¹³⁶ and to not violate what they saw in this revelation.

Beginning the late 19th Century and accelerating the first decades of the 20th Century, there was a growing rejection of the Divine inspiration of Scripture.

The late 1800's saw the birth of the Documentary Hypothesis, which viewed the documents of the Bible to be a conglomeration of many humanly produced documents.

The early 20th Century, especially during the 1920's saw the inroads of "Liberalism" in many denominations.

In 1907, Walter Rauschenbusch, who taught at Rochester Theological Seminary, published, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, which redefined the Gospel as the *Social Gospel*. Embracing theological liberalism, he accepted the views of liberal theologians such as, Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf Harnack. Rauschenbusch saw the role of the Church to be that of bringing in the Kingdom of God and he believed that socialism had the best answer to many of society's ills. Reforming society rather than salvation of the individual became more of his emphasis.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, who adopted much of Rauschenbusch's view of Christianity, pastored both Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, and the very influential interdenominational Riverside Church in Morningside Heights, Manhattan. Fosdick became one of most influential voices in America, advocating a modernist-liberal view of Christianity. Rather than seeing the Bible as the literal Word of God, Fosdick regarded it to be a "record of God's unfolding will." He saw the history of Christianity as one of development, progress, and gradual change, devoid of an unchanging doctrine. On May 21, 1922, he preached one of his most famous and oft-quoted sermons, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?*

The path laid out by Rauschenbusch and Fosdick has continued through the succeeding years, sometimes, with a surge of influence in the church.

These men and others who followed them have produced a modernist/liberal Christianity, which often has little resemblance to the Scriptural view of Christ, redemption, and the theologies which are presented in Scripture.

One of the most recent developments has been a movement known as, *Progressive Christianity*. Progressive Christianity reflects an idolization of intellectualism and societal norms, rather than the foundational truths of Scripture.

Paul, Peter, and Jude¹³⁷ warned that a departure from the faith, in one form or another, was to be a part of the Church's experience. Today, that clearly is seen to be true. In a recent Ligonier survey, one third of evangelicals agreed with the statement, "Jesus was a good teacher, but not God." In another portion of that survey, 65% of evangelicals agreed with the statement, "Jesus was the first and greatest being created by God."¹³⁸

Again, the people of God, the Church, must stand strong against these forces, which are more aligned with the culture than they are will God's Holy Word.

¹³⁶ Even though Roman Catholics view tradition, as well as Scripture as authoritative, they consider their traditions to be in harmony with scriptural revelation.

¹³⁷ I Timothy 4:1ff; II Thessalonians 2:3ff; II Timothy 3:1ff; II Peter 3:3; Jude 1

¹³⁸ <https://disrn.com/news/one-third-of-evangelicals-believe-jesus-was-a-good-teacher>. The final results of the survey had been released at the time of this writing.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

The Epistles of the New Testament were written by one or another of the apostles. In chapters 2-3 of *The Revelation to John*, also known as, *The Apocalypse*, are seven epistles of which Christ Himself is the author. These chapters contain Jesus' epistles to seven churches of Asia. John is the scribe who wrote what Christ dictated.

The seven cities were connected by a great triangular highway and the seven letters are addressed to the seven churches their geographical order.



EXCURSUS

Dispensationalism and the seven churches of Asia

Irishman, John Nelson Darby (November 18, 1800 – April 29, 1882) originally a Plymouth Brethren and founder of the Exclusive Brethren, is the man who systematized and popularized Dispensationalism. This eschatological theory was advanced in the United States by C. I. Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible. Lewis Sperry Schafer, influenced by Scofield, founded Dallas Theological Seminary, which today, is the leading proponent of Darby's Dispensationalism.

According to Dispensationalism's view of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches represent the seven periods of Church History.

One thing that makes this view somewhat unpalatable is that these churches were on the Roman road that began at Ephesus, proceeded north, then east and the south, and then back to Ephesus. That the conditions in these churches just happened to be having that particular experience at that time, and that the particular sequence of these churches along the Roman road is a foretelling of the coming sequential ages of the church, is a bit of a stretch. One has to choose to believe this, in the absence of any objective evidence that this is so.

There are abiding lessons in each of these epistles. We will consider each of them and note the contemporary application of the approvals and criticisms offered concerning each church.

The first church addressed is the Church at Ephesus.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.

'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.' (Revelation 2:1-7)

The Ephesian Church received accolades from Christ for

- Exercising care in determining who were the true apostles of Christ
- Enduring trial and not growing weary
- Hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans

Little is known about the Nicolaitans. Later in Revelation (2:14-15) they seem to be connected to the teaching of Balaam. The Church at Ephesus survived in a city that was known for its licentious idolatry. Ephesus was famous for the temple of Artemis¹³⁹ and prided itself as being the protector of that temple and its worship. Most assume that, as was true of Balaam, the Nicolaitans sought to entice Christians to accept this Goddess. Thus, the Nicolaitans would have sought to draw the Christians into the same error noted earlier - the Israelites' erecting idols in the Temple of Yahweh.

Even though the church received these accolades, Christ had one thing against the Ephesian Church – they had lost their *first love*.

It seems that the church had become somewhat of a fundamentalist congregation that held to all of the correct doctrines, but it did so for the wrong reason. Rather than their fervor for Christ, they seem to have operated on a fervor for correct doctrine, etc.

Such is a temptation to contemporary congregations. Being surrounded by all of the false doctrine and compromising denominations, it is easy for the focus to be on doctrine, rather than the Christ from whom all correct doctrine flows.

Indeed, the practice of bibliolatry often lurks at the threshold of the Church. The resulting intellectual legalism often is not God-honoring. Instead of looking to the Bible as our authority, we must look to God, who is the author of the book, and that is the only reason that Scripture has any authority. Thus, God is our authority, and He has revealed His Will in Scripture.

Let us continue to be motivated by our fervor for Christ, rather than our fervor for anything else, regardless of how correct or noble it might be.

¹³⁹ See Acts 19. The Roman name for this goddess was Diana. For some unknown reason, rather than rendering the Greek literally, the KJV translators substituted the name of the Roman goddess, rather than using the Greek name which is contained in the text.

The second epistle is addressed to the Church at Smyrna.

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.' (Revelation 2:8-11)

The Church at Smyrna did not receive any rebuke, but rather, was commended for its faithfulness in the midst of suffering – that suffering was going to increase and those who remained faithful in the midst of the horrible suffering would receive the crown of life.

Oh, may our church be faithful, regardless of what comes against us – following the example of Smyrna.

Pergamum is the next church on the circuit.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.

'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.' (Revelation 2:12-17)

Pergamum received a mixed message

- approval for the fact that in the midst of great persecution they held fast to Christ's name. One of their members, Antipas, had been martyred for his refusal to deny Christ.
- Yet, the church tolerated those who put forth the teaching of Balaam, the same charge that was launched against Ephesus.

For the contemporary church, the lesson here is that we must be faithful, regardless of the persecution that comes against us. At the same time, we must not tolerate in our presence any individuals who will advocate inculcating into the Church the popular gods of culture.

The next church on the Roman road is Thyatira.

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

'And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 'Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 'And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them-- I place no other burden on you.

'Nevertheless, what you have, hold fast until I come. 'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father;²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Revelation 2:18-29)

Thyatira received a glowing accolade: Its faith and works had grown as the years had progressed. However, similar to the Church of Pergamum, Thyatira tolerated a Jezebel in its midst.

There is much speculation as to the identity of this Jezebel, but it would seem that in Thyatira there was a woman who influenced Christ's servants and Our Lord used the Old Testament Jezebel to express that this woman was a seductive and wicked influence on God's people.

EXCURSUS

The Old Testament Jezebel

The Old Testament Jezebel was the notorious daughter of Ethball, pagan king of the Zidonians. His subjects in Tyre and Sidon were Baal worshippers. Jezebel married Judah's wicked king, Ahab and then she set up the worship of Baal in Israel (I Kings 16:29-33). When God raised up the prophet Elijah and sent him to rebuke Ahab, Jezebel frightened the prophet so badly that he fled for his life and even wanted to resign from the ministry (I Kings 19:1-4). Historically, Jezebel has been associated with Sodomy. Dr. Donald Barnhouse has pointed out that, "every sanctuary in a sacred wood was at the same time an asylum of debauchery and adultery, institutions of male and female sexual practices. The priests of Baal were wicked sex perverts."¹⁴⁰

Although the Old Testament Jezebel had been dead for almost a millennium, the demon that had driven her was now controlling another woman and using her to corrupt the church at Thyatira.

Note that Jesus describes Jezebel and her followers as espousing, *the deep things of Satan, as they call them*. Evidently, some sort of Satanic worship had invaded the Thyatira church.

Although there is a vagary about what this Jezebel was doing, clearly Satan had an agent in the church and some of the Thyatira church members had been seduced into this evil spirituality.

Jesus commended those who had not succumbed to Jezebel and her influence. He gave a wonderful promise to the faithful believers,

'Nevertheless, what you have, hold fast until I come. 'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with

¹⁴⁰ Lehman Strauss, *Revelation*, (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux Brothers) 1965, page 65

a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father;²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

Note Jesus' the emphasis on deeds – an emphasis that often is downplayed.

Certainly, as Paul declared, we are not saved by our good deeds.

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:5 NAS)

Even so, our deeds do play into evidence of our salvation and our experience when we come before God in the judgment. Here are some pertinent New Testament passages that speak of the importance of deeds.

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28-29)

"Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. (Acts 26:19-20)

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: (Romans 2:5-6)

And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. (II Corinthians 11:14-15)

Note the contrast between Ephesus and Thyatira:

- Ephesus would not tolerate false doctrine and evil, but the church was waning in its ardor for Christ.
- Thyatira, on the other hand, grew in its Christ-focused fervor, but it tolerated evil in its midst.

We see these two extremes in churches today.

- In some assemblies, there are moral and doctrinal perfectionists, like the Pharisees, but have little compassion and love, especially relating to those whom they believe to have departed from the faith.
- In other assemblies, some preach tolerance and love to the point of allowing a coexistence between truth and error, between good and evil, etc

Certainly, Scripture consistently emphasizes love, but it also tells us that righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (II Corinthians 6:14)

Another thing that catches our eye is that Christ gave this Jezebel time to repent and she did not do so. This is another example of Our Lord's desiring that all individuals would come to repentance.

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

Thus, the lessons for the 21st Century Church, contained in the letter to Thyatira are quite obvious.

- Our Lord is pleased when our ardor for Him grows through the years.
- That ardor is demonstrated by fervency in deeds.
- Satan will do his best to introduce into the church, spiritual practices that have their origin in something other than the Holy Spirit. Church leaders must be wary of anyone who claims to have received some new revelation from God. As Jude declared the faith and doctrine that we have was *once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude verse 3).
- Those who remain faithful, and demonstrate that faithfulness by deeds, will receive an indescribable blessing when Our Lord returns.

The next church on the circuit is Sardis

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this:

I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Revelation 3:1-6)

The indictment of the Church at Sardis is rather striking - *you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.* What could this mean?

Here is another church which merited a comment on its deeds. It would seem that to all outside observers, this church was a beehive of organized activity. It was not lacking in deeds/works. Yet, in God's eyes it was dead. This statement brings to mind the truth of I Samuel 16:7, *for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart.*

Here are some other pertinent proclamations of Scripture:

Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote, (Isaiah 29:13)

"When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (Matthew 6:2)

"And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. (Matthew 6:5)

"And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

"But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. (Matthew 23:5)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23:27-28)

Again, we are brought face to face with the question of motive – why do we do what we do? Is our reason for doing what we do because we are led and directed by the Holy Spirit? Do we do what we do, longing for a deeper relationship with God? Do we do what we do in order to receive compliments from our culture?

On and on we could go with such questions, but, the bottom line is, “Our motives must be pure and as an expression of our relationship with God.”

In the midst of this dead congregation, there was a small minority that received praise from Our Lord.

'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.

The Greek word rendered as, *few*, is ὀλίγος (*oligos*), an adjective meaning, *small, slight, little*. Those who had not *soiled their garments*, were those whose garments had been made white by being washed in the blood of the lamb, and had not succumbed to results oriented culture of the Sardis Church.¹⁴¹ These were very few in number in the Church at Sardis.

Once again, a statement in the Sermon on the Mount is relevant to this situation.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Oh, dear God, may we be among the few, whose ways as well as our hearts are right before You.

The next church in the circuit is the Church in Philadelphia.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie-- behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, “white” describes excellent things in Revelation: the redeemed of the Great Tribulation wear white robes washed white in the blood of the lamb (Revelation 7:14). There is a white cloud (14:14), the white horse (19:11), the white horses (19:14), and the great white throne (20:11)

I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.

'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Revelation 3:7-13)

The name of the city, *Philadelphia*, is a combination of two Greek terms, φίλος (*philos*), and ἀδελφός (*adelphos*). The first of these terms is a general term for love and the second refers to one's brother. Thus, *Philadelphia*, is the city of brotherly love.¹⁴²

Note that in Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia, only the churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna did not receive any rebuke from Our Lord.

Various opinions are offered, concerning how the Philadelphia Christians had *a little power*.

I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

The view of some is that the Christians in Philadelphia were small in number. Perhaps that is true. Whatever the term, *little power*, means, the Philadelphia Church used what it had in its service to Christ and they were rewarded for this faithfulness. One writer has commented,

“The Church at Philadelphia is not blamed for the slenderness of her equipment, which evidently is due to causes outside her control. She is praised for having made good use of the slight resources she possessed.”¹⁴³

In spite of their little power, and in spite of what challenges surrounded them, they had remained loyal to the Word of Christ – the true Gospel message. Our Lord is more concerned with quality rather than quantity. Our Lord does not condemn us for having little power in our city/nation, but for having little faith and little regard for His Word.

The Philadelphians had received the Word, believed the Word, loved the Word, and obeyed the Word.

It followed that being loyal to the Word, they were loyal to the giver of the Word, Christ Jesus. In Scripture, *the name* stands for all that a person is. It is more than just pronouncing a name, but functioning under the authority and in obedience to that name. One cannot go around spouting a name unless the one who is *the name* has given authority to use his name.

Not surprisingly, the Name of Jesus Christ provokes hatred of those who do not love Him, and these haters of Christ persecute those who do love Him.

"And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matthew 10:22)

When Christ commissioned Ananias to anoint Saul and that He had plans for Saul, He said, *for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.*" (Acts 9:16)

From the language and the context, there were those in Philadelphia who were opposed to the truth. These Jews claimed to be Christians, but their true character is revealed in dramatic terms.

¹⁴² The city was given this name in honor of Attalus II, because of his loyalty to his ailing elder brother, Eumenes II, king of Lydia, whom Attalus II succeeded upon Eumenes II's death. Philadelphia was in the province of Lydia. Through the succeeding years, Philadelphia has existed under many names.

¹⁴³ James Moffatt, DD, *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, Volume V (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans' Printing Company) 1976, page 366

Our Lord said that they were *of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie.*

Because of the era in which this was written, and evidence of such in Paul's epistles, especially in Galatians 2, we conclude that these probably were Judaizing teachers. Whoever they were, a day of accounting awaited them.

In contrast to these who were of the *synagogue of Satan*, were those in Philadelphia who remained faithful to the Name of Christ and His Word. These faithful ones had a wonderful blessing awaiting them – that blessing is expressed in hyperbolic symbolism,

'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.

'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Whether we are a small minority in our culture, and regardless of what pressures are on us, let us remain faithful to the Name of Christ and His Word. When we do that, a wonderful reward, something beyond anything we have known in this life, awaits us.

The final church in the circuit is in the city of Laodicea

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot.

'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.

'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.

'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Revelation 3:14-22)

Laodicea was the chief city in the province of Phrygia. Three highly traveled highways intersected at Laodicea and much commerce converged on the city. The city became a highly successful commercial and financial center. It was a city of wealthy bankers and financiers. The wealthy citizens of Laodicea built theatres, a huge stadium, lavish baths, and fabulous shopping centers. The Laodiceans were a proud lot who, as a city, "had it all."

It seems that this civic pride had infected the Church. In contrast to the Church at Philadelphia, the Laodicean Church was so full of self-confidence and its secure position that it did not feel the need to humbly rely on anyone, even God. To the Laodiceans, money was no object of concern.

Sadly, their values were far from the values honored by God.

Christ, in His great mercy, called the church to wake up to its spiritual poverty and to repent. How significant for all of us is Our Lord's statement, *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.*

One manner in which we see the Laodicean spirit today, is manifested in an attitude of self-righteousness. Our Lord's parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector speaks to this topic.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer.

The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14)

Not only individuals, but congregations must have this same attitude – regardless of how secure we seem to be in matters of this world, only God's mercy and our willingness to repent of those things of which He reproves will assure of receiving the heavenly reward. True humility is one mark of a genuine Christian and a genuine Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God, in His love for us, as individuals and as a church, may allow/cause us to lose everything of value in this world, so that we may learn to rely on Him, His mercy, and His grace.

May Our Lord deliver us from the spirit of Laodicea.

IMPORTANT LESSON FOR 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

Each of the seven letters concludes with the exhortation, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. These seven letters contain many lessons for the 21st Century Church.

- We must recognize the importance of not being guilty of bibliolatry, nor being satisfied with just being, “a people of the Book.” It is important that we continue in a living relationship with Our Lord and view the Bible and its content as God's letter to us. The Author, not the document, must be the source of our identity.
- At the opposite end of this truth is the importance of the Word. Being spiritual cannot be a substitute for the authority of Scripture, which is God's objective voice to His Church.
- Although there may be great zeal for Christ in a congregation, leadership must be alert to any evil that is being tolerated – false prophets, false spirituality, and any seductive ploys of the enemy.
- Even though we are not saved because of our good deeds, the absence of good deeds is an indication that something is lacking in our relationship with Christ.
- External measurements of success do not mean that a church is pleasing to God. The most important thing is the humble relationship with the Redeemer. Obedience is more important than measurable results.
- Should all of the forces of society and establishments be aligned against us, and we have little influence or no voice at all in the culture, we still must remain faithful, preach the Gospel, and allow Our Lord to open or close doors before us.
- Satan will do all that he can to distort God's desire for the Church. He will do all that he can, through false spirituality, legalism, and, in company with fallen human nature, to redefine the church as just another good work in a secular society.

In summary, we need to be aware of the relentless activity of our enemy, doing all that he can to deprive God of having a people, made in God's Image, with whom God will spend eternity.

Sadly, Satan has a powerful ally in fallen human nature.