



The Character of God

eNewsletter

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The Gospel of God (Part 1)

by Terry Campbell

Revelation 13 is a bleak desperate portrait of a world fallen far from God. A substitute power has risen, individually and collectively evil, feeding on the worship of a people who cannot see beyond the veil of the performance of religion, into its gloomy and blasphemous heart.

It will certainly look authentic. No hellish backgrounds or somber music will accompany this message. "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out heaven to the earth in the presence of men" (Revelation 13:13, NAS). The last time fire came down from heaven in the sight of men

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message of these angels, recorded in verse 8 is not so noted, but when the message is repeated in Revelation 18:2 it becomes the loudest message of all. “[H]e cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!’”

No longer is a loud voice enough. Now he cries “mightily with a loud voice.” Does the timing of this mighty cry suggest that the more vitriolic actions, from certain quarters, denouncing other religions may be premature and our better focus ought to be repeating the message in the order God has given it?

But what is that order? We read that message from the first angel and jump to the interesting words like judgment and worship and ignore what comes before as though God had simply put in so much boilerplate.

“Fear God”

“Fear God” is the angel’s initial cry, so this injunction must be paramount to understand the message which follows. Unfortunately, like untrained dogs, we have no meaning to relate to the words, so we feel free to attribute to them any action which we desire. Reverence or respect is often given as synonyms for fear. This would imply that God first desires in us the feeling one might get during an afternoon visit at the Grand Canyon, the same emotion that washes over us during the church service when the singer

holds the impossibly high note for the impossible length of time – how is that gooseflesh, spine tingle any different than at an opera or football game? How is God affected by our ecstasy? “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden” (Isaiah 29:13, 14).

“Fear God” is the primary component of God’s gospel.

Taught By the Holy Spirit

So our fear toward God needs to be taught to us by God. Everything else is just chin-wagging. Not only that, but attempting it on our own will result in a loss of understanding of Scripture, which implies a removal of the Holy Spirit because, according to John 14:26, “the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

A fundamental scripture and a good place to start understanding God’s idea of fear is Proverbs 9:10. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Two

thoughts emerge from this verse. First, the fear of the Lord is the first step to something greater which is identified in the text as wisdom. This parallels the idea in Revelation 14 where “Fear God” is the instruction in the angel messages prior to any mention of judgment, worship, marks or wrath. It is the *primary component* of God’s Gospel.

Secondly, in Biblical poetry, the lines of the poem relate to one another very closely, and the words repeat similar thoughts and ideas. For example, Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” We can see that “light to my path” is a poetic synonym of “lamp to my feet.” These coupled statements are the essence of the poetry of the Bible. Using this model then, we should be able to equate “fear of the Lord” with “knowledge of the Holy One.” So “Fear God” implies some knowledge of God.

But fear must be more than just knowledge. The knowledge must be correctly applied. After all, “You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:18, 19). Satan certainly has a great knowledge of God but he does not fear God.

Actually this passage in James offers a very interesting clue to an in-depth understanding of Godly fear. It continues with, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works

when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? (James 2:21, 22). For James, the story of Abraham demonstrates that faith is not existent in the life until action occurs. But is that true for the fear of God as well?

Another question we might ask is whether God has ever dealt with the problem of a universal system of false worship before. How did He acquire a people from such a circumstance? Are His methods at that time consistent with those in Revelation?

Noah's Flood

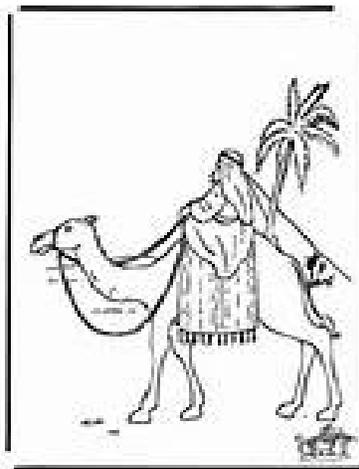
We might look to the Antediluvians and the flood judgment for our example of universal false worship, which Matthew 24:38 describes as, "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark," which may be more a picture of disdain for any worship and be better exemplified by the kind of secularism witnessed in the Western world.

The Tower of Babel

A better picture of the entire world's population specifically unified in its effort to thwart God and make themselves an object of worship is the story that follows the one about the Flood. On the plain of Shinar, all the people in the world decided, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scat-

tered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4).

The Tower of Babel denies the promise of God in the rainbow. Making a name for ourselves places human endeavor over the will of God and building the city denies God's command to populate all the earth. The people were united by language, which implies also a cultural unity and universal worldview. The description of the beast in Revelation 13:6, "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven," corresponds tightly with the Shinar population making their own name, creating their own redemption, and acting deliberately in



opposition to the kingdom of God. Is it any wonder that "Babylon" is the description God gives to the false religion of Revelation 13.

Once God had divided the people's language at Babel, and possibly their culture as well, He began searching for a people that would be His. It hardly seems like a "loud voice" at all but Romans 1:20, 21 tells us,

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Abram's Response

He spoke to the heart of each person marching from Babel. He spoke to their children and grandchildren. He spoke and no one listened. No one responded. He spoke until He found a glimmer of response in a man named Abram. Thousands of years later, in Stephen's great sermon before his death, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he begins what will be the pronouncement of the judgment of God by referring specifically to the moment when Abram answered the call of God. "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran" (Acts 7:2-4a).

This is the call found in Genesis 12:1. "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you." God may have spoken these words to millions before finding a man who would obey.

But Abram was hardly obedient. He

suffered the same failings as the world around him. His entire life would be a testament to the mercy and patience of God. God commanded Abram to leave his family, yet Abram took his father with him as far as Haran, and his nephew Lot accompanied him all the way to Canaan. In spite of that, God appears to Abram in Shechem to tell him he doesn't have to travel any more. He has arrived in the land of promise. "To your descendants I will give this land," God tells him in Genesis 12:7.

Abram in Egypt

God had specifically asked Abram to leave his family behind and live in Canaan. Instead, Abram brought his family with him and at the first hint of difficulty, ran away from the land of promise. "Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land" (Genesis 12:10). Severe or not, Abram must consider the famine to be greater than God and seeks a solution away from the land where God asked him to live. In Egypt, he lied about Sarai his wife and was expelled, possibly picking up a servant girl named Hagar when he was sent packing by Pharaoh.

To his credit, Abram returns to the land of Canaan and seeks the exact place where he last heard the word of God. "And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the

name of the LORD" (Genesis 13:3-4). But God does not come to Abram until Lot, and his family, leave Abram for the well-watered Jordan plain.

God's Promise To Abram

Finally, it is as God has asked. Abram has left his family and lives in the land God has chosen. God now comes to Abram with a promise. "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your de-



scendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you" (Genesis 13:14-17).

Abram's Contingencies

Abram then begins to do as God asked and moves through the land, but his words and actions demonstrate a need to help God along and give God advice. Not content with God's promise of children, he makes contingencies and worries for the future. He tells God, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? . . . Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

It takes a lot to reassure Abram that God's promise is true. "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir. . . . Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. . . . So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:4-5).

While verse 6 says Abram "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness," a moment later he whines, "[H]ow shall I know that I will inherit it?"

So God goes the extra mile. Since the simple word of God is not enough for the man God has chosen, Abram is now given theater. Get animals! Get birds! Kill the creatures! Cut them in half! Lay them out just so! Keep the vultures away! Then when darkness falls, God puts Abram into a trance. Cue the scary music! Push the subsonics! Rattle the chains! And in the midst of the heavenly special effects, God adds to the history but never changes the basic message concerning Abram's descendants. "To your descendants I have given this land" (Genesis 15:18).

We cannot imagine the distance between heaven and earth and how far God must descend in order to speak to His servant. The Ruler of the Universe, whose words put the planets in motion, has reduced Himself to profane ceremonies of despot kings in order to pacify the one subject He has chosen for greatness.

But even with all the theatrics and

the chores, Abram is still unwilling to truly believe. He decides to help God out a little. After all, the literal wording from God is that he, Abram, would have descendants from his own body. God said nothing about Sarai being the mother. So, just as Abram gave God a little help by cutting animals into pieces for a base and worldly ceremony, he helps God out by impregnating Hagar, a woman who is not his wife, itself a cultural solution to the problem of barrenness.

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Abraham and Hagar

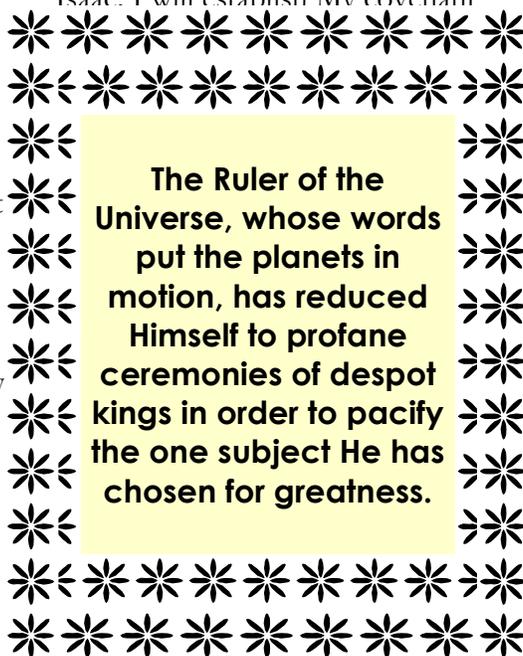
To Abram's credit, he must have loved Hagar's child Ishmael a great deal. Enough even to argue with God about him. In Genesis 17:18 he tells God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!" At least I hope love is the reason. Alternately getting God to accept Ishmael as the promised son, would absolve him from any blame in the means used to fulfill the promise. He might even look like the hero.

But God is having none of it. "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you:

Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you" (Genesis 17:9-11). A sign of the covenant, yes, but circumcision was also a permanent reminder of Abraham's great failure. The promise had already been given. The covenant was already made. God had not breached that trust. The only thing different that made the circumcision necessary was the teenaged son of an unmarried Egyptian woman.

God's Instructions To Abram

And now God spells out His instructions in excruciating detail. "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac: I will establish My covenant



The Ruler of the Universe, whose words put the planets in motion, has reduced Himself to profane ceremonies of despot kings in order to pacify the one subject He has chosen for greatness.

with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him" (Genesis 17:19). God cannot make it any clearer. Abraham will be the father. Sarah will be the mother. The child will be a boy. Abraham

will name him Isaac. The boy will have children of his own. The children and grandchildren and all future generations of Isaac will all be a part of God's covenant with Abraham.

Notice that it really doesn't matter what Abraham and Sarah think about it. Abraham asks God, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Genesis 17:17). Sarah finds the notion outrageous and asks, "Shall I surely bear a child since I am old?" (Genesis 18:13). But it is not up to them. Their belief in the blessed event will never impact the event. God has seen to that. Both of them are old and Sarah's last menses is now decades past. The two can have all the belief in the world, but unless God's promise is true, there will be no baby. God's actions are the only ones that can fulfill *this* promise. Abraham and Sarah can either prepare to be parents or be surprised by God.

God's Promise

With the birth of Isaac, God demonstrates the power of His word over nature and the feeble attempts of people. At God's convenience, where no life existed, life began. Impossibility becomes reality. And Abraham has received God's promise even after a lifetime of not getting it right. Throughout the century of his life Abraham has misunderstood, complained of, and occasionally attempted to usurp the will of God. But in all this he still identifies himself as God's servant. More importantly, God identifies him that

way too.

Abraham and Isaac

But now God brings one last test. Isaac is older now, capable of helping his aged father, but not so old as to have his own wife or children. Again God comes to Abraham and says, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2).

What is God thinking?! Given Abraham’s past actions we might expect the old man to simply ignore the demand as he did when he brought Lot with him to Canaan. Or maybe finagle his way out by renaming his son and sacrificing a turtledove named Isaac instead. Or at the very least he could whine and complain to God about it, in the hopes of changing God’s mind.

Abraham does none of those things. “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 the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (Genesis 22:3).

Why would Abraham be so complacent at the prospect of killing and burning his own son on an altar? *What has he learned* that allows him to walk that path, gather those stones, stack that wood and bind that child? Why is the knife ready to slash when the Voice calls from heaven?

Paul gives us an insight into Abraham’s mind at this moment in Hebrews 11:17-19. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

The text says Abraham concluded that God would raise Isaac up. Forming a conclusion involves taking available data, performing analysis, and evaluating results. We get a



clue from the story that Abraham had gone through this thought process from the very beginning. “[O]n the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:4, 5).

God’s Promises

“We will come back to you.” You might wonder if Abraham is lying in order to cover-up the grisly facts. But the scripture in Hebrews tells us

that Abraham knows that Isaac will not die. But how does he know? Is it blind faith? Does he just think, “Oh, God would never do that!” or is there reason behind his belief? What “knowledge of the Holy One” does Abraham have that allows him to conclude that God would raise Isaac up?

Over the course of his life, Abraham has learned that a promise from God has more truth and validity than natural law. He was promised a son when it was impossible for conception to occur – not just unlikely – impossible. But he is not the only person with a promise. God has promised Abraham that his descendents would come, specifically, through Isaac. Isaac currently has no children. He is really only a child himself. Therefore, until Isaac has children, Isaac cannot die.

This is the confidence which allows Abraham to ascend Mount Moriah. This is the peace which lets him tie Isaac to the altar. This is the joy which brings the knife forward. No angst. No fervent appeals. Abraham knows that God is about to do something amazing.

God does do something amazing. The Voice from heaven tells Abraham to stop. No death is required. God will provide the sacrifice himself. But he tells Abraham something else. “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you *fear God*, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12).

Fear God. Now Abraham “fears God.” He obeyed completely the task he was given. He stopped trying to fix things himself and relied on the exact promises given to him. He acted with confidence on what the Lord asked of him because he believed the words of God were more powerful even than death. He believed God’s impossible promise over everything he knew about death, and the Voice from heaven called that “fear[ing] God.”

David

Others in the Bible have feared God. David, a shepherd boy, is anointed to be the future king of Israel. God tells Samuel, “Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.” Later, David tells Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a



bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard,

and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God” (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

David knew he was destined to be king. And not simply destined – promised. Until he was king, no force on earth could harm him. He put God to the test against a lion and against a bear, even grappling with the creatures in hand-to-hand combat. Now he proclaims with confidence what he has learned of the power of God’s promises. “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:37).

Peter

While David took a promise and slew a giant, Peter took a promise and fell asleep. “Herod . . . killed James the brother of John with the sword . . . [H]e proceeded further to seize Peter also. . . . So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison . . . intending to bring him before the people after Passover. . . . And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison” (Acts 12:1-6).

How could Peter, the night before his execution, be getting a good night’s sleep? He had a promise of course. Jesus himself had told him, “[W]hen you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where

you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish” (John 21:18). When Peter looked in the mirror he did not see any wrinkles. He did not see any gray hair. He felt strong enough to fish all night long if he wanted. Peter fell asleep knowing that if he were chained to a hundred soldiers, it could not change the power of the promise.

The Woman Who Was Healed



Where Abraham, David and Peter have so much written about them, sometimes you find the most remarkable instances of fearing God in the little extraordinary events of humble people’s lives. “[A] woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years . . . came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. And Jesus said, ‘Who touched Me?’” (Luke 8:43-45).

What an extraordinary encounter! Jesus is actually surprised that He has healed someone unknowingly. How is one woman healed by touching Jesus when people jostle against Him constantly, many of whom are asking for healing?

Perhaps this answer is found by

noticing that the woman does not actually touch Jesus. Very specifically we are told that she touches the border of his cloak. Most likely this would have been the blue fringe Jesus would have had along the edges of His sleeves and at the bottom of His garment. Technically, according to Numbers 15:38, God had said, “Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners.”

The word here being translated as “corners” was the Hebrew word *kanaph*. This word, usually translated as “wings,” appears in Malachi 4:2. “But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.”

In all of the thousands that Jesus healed on this earth, only a handful feared God like this woman. This would have been the first time in years that she had been near a crowd of people. The flow of blood would have identified her as ritually unclean. According to Leviticus 15:25 – 27, “If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, . . . [which] runs beyond her usual time of impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity. She shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and whatever she sits on shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her impurity. Whoever touches those things shall be unclean; he shall wash his clothes and bathe in

water, and be unclean until evening.”

Being unclean, she would probably have been confined to her home. Jesus may have been the first person she had touched in twelve years. Neighbors would have known her condition so she may have had to sneak her way into the crowd to prevent others from seeing, recognizing, and banishing her. But she recognized the power of the word of God to heal her from her misery. She acted on that promise, and Jesus tells her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well” (Luke 8:48).

John the Baptist

Where the woman’s faith made her well and allowed her re-entrance into society, sometimes fearing God



sends you in a very different direction. Consider the life of John the Baptist. His earliest memories were probably of people telling him the amazing story surrounding his birth. His father, Zacharias, would speak of the angel Gabriel’s appearance. In hushed, reverent tones the old man would tell John that he was destined by God to speak the message of Elijah. His mother, Elizabeth, would remind him to not eat and drink things that other children consumed. Literally, everyone in the

area considered him a child of promise. “Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, ‘What kind of child will this be?’ And the hand of the Lord was with him.” (Luke 1:65-66).

Such a pre-constructed destiny may have terrified some, but the Holy Spirit was with John. When he appears on the scene as a man, he has immersed himself whole heartedly into the role heaven has asked him to portray. Each seed of Elijah’s identity planted within the Holy Scriptures has yielded itself full blossom within the man who precedes the Messiah.

Elijah’s appearance. “The king asked them, ‘What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?’ They replied, ‘He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist.’ The king said, ‘That was Elijah the Tishbite’” (2 Kings 1:7-8). Elijah’s home address. “Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ‘Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan’” (1 Kings 17:2). Elijah’s diet. “The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook” (1 Kings 17:6). Elijah’s message. “Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him’ . . . At the time of sacrifice, the

prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: ‘LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again’” (1 Kings 18:21, 36-37).

Added to the historical account were the two prophecies provided by Malachi. “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. ‘Behold, He is coming,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 3:1), followed by “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6).

When John appears on the scene, it is as an old time prophet. He wears animal skins instead of woven cloth. He lives rough in the countryside along the Jordan River. He eats what he finds in that wilderness, rather than the food of civilization. And his message was contained in the two-fold message of the historic and prophetic words of God. First: the Lord is coming. Second: Turn your heart back to God.

“John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”” (Mark 1:4-8).

John wore the clothes of Elijah. He lived in the wilderness like Elijah. He ate Elijah's food and he drank water like Elijah. He spoke the messages of Elijah.

John wore the clothes of Elijah. He lived in the wilderness like Elijah. He ate Elijah’s food and he drank water like Elijah. He spoke the messages of Elijah, announcing the Messiah and calling for repentance.

But he did no more than that. For all of his belief in Jesus, he never became a disciple. He preached about the coming Holy Spirit but from prison asks Jesus if he made a mistake. “John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” (Luke 7:19).

He had no greater insight into the events to befall Jesus than had been revealed to others. But he understood and acted totally and completely only within the light that he had been given. When asked about his changing role, John replied, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” (John 3:27). Being a disciple, or an apostle or any other role but the Messenger was not given to John, so he never took them. In his entire life, even when John doubted, he never wavered from his assigned task and he followed that task to an early grave. Is it any wonder Jesus calls him, “among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.”

The 144,000

In Revelation, before the messages of the angels begin, are seen the 144,000 standing with God. They also must have learned the lesson of John the Baptist and “receive nothing unless it has been given them from heaven” because they “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Revelation 14:4). They speak only what God reveals and they act only as God commands. This is the only reason they can be described as, “[I]n their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14:5).

They live their life as Abraham, David and John learned to live it. The words of God are life themselves and the answer to every detail. Who am I? What should I do? Where should I live? What should I eat? What should I wear? What should I say? All of life can be

ordered as God has promised. When we ignore our own desires and allow God's words the primacy throughout all of our actions, we can know that, like Abraham, we have finally learned what it means to fear God.

We have seen that Peter certainly learned that as well and speaks

about it in 2 Peter 1:3, 4. "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature." In moving from the "great and precious promises" that give us "life and godliness," we enter into the realm of "partaking of the divine nature."

If Peter seems to be saying that using the promises of God in all that pertains to life and godliness is a good definition of "fear God," he also seems to indicate that this is not an end result. Something occurs because our lives are given over to God. We get to actually participate with Divinity according to the text. This moves us from "fear God" to the next message in God's Gospel – "Give glory to Him," our subject for next time.

The Puzzling Character of God (and Forthcoming Book)

by Ryan Heaney (posted by Greg Boyd)

(Editor's Comment: I'm not sure whether to attribute the first paragraph to Ryan Heaney or Greg Boyd. You decide.)

There is a storm beginning to brew on the horizon. It is a debate among Evangelicals about the violent depictions of God, stirred up largely by Eric Seibert's [Disturbing Divine Behavior](#). Here is a post that sounds "the clarion call."

The debate is presently around two options.

Option 1: Traditionalists argue we must simply embrace the violent depictions of God in the Old Testament (and the allegedly violent Jesus of the book of Revelation). The price we must pay to accept this option is that we must accept that genocide (e.g., Deut. 7:1-2; 20:16-20), ripping babies out of the womb of pregnant mothers (Hos. 13: 16), .

causing parents to cannibalize their children (Lev. 26:29; Jer. 19:9; Lam. 2:20; Ezek. 5:10), commanding parents to stone to death their children when they engage in certain behaviors or reflect certain attitudes (Ex. 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21), and a multitude of other similar atrocities can sometimes be considered just, holy and good, for God sometimes performs and commands such actions.

While I agree with these folks that all Scripture must be embraced as "God-breathed," I also consider the price of accepting Option 1 to be too high. For one thing, I consider it a moral certainty that commanding people to mercilessly slaughter infants (and a number of other horrendous things attributed to God) is *always* wrong. Moreover, a wealth of research demonstrates that violent depictions of God in literature that people considered sacred is a powerful force in justifying and inciting

violence, as the bloody history of the Church demonstrates all too clearly. As one who is called to be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9), I consider it imperative we end the precedent this material sets by denouncing it. Yet, the most important reason I consider this price too high is that these violent depictions of God contradict the revelation of God in the crucified Christ, which is the definitive revelation that trumps all others, as I shall argue at length in my forthcoming book, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*.



Option 2

Option 2: Certain progressive Evangelicals such as my friend Eric Seibert and the Nazarene Old Testament scholar C.S. Cowles argue that we must reject these violent

depictions of God. In *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, for example, Eric appeals to skeptical Old Testament scholarship that suggests that the Old Testament's conquest narrative is not anchored in history, so we need not accept its genocidal portrait of God.

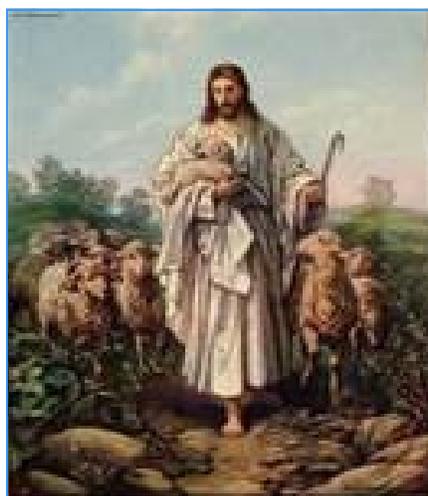
The price we must pay to accept this option is that we must accept that it is permissible to at times dismiss canonical material. **[Editor's Comment: No. You do not have to reject the clear statements of Scripture to conclude that God is totally beneficent in the passages attributed to Him. These people are circling around the clear statements of Scripture, to find an answer to this dilemma. Still, it is gratifying to see the great interest in this topic. Surely the Holy Spirit is at work)**

Finding a Solution

While I fully empathize with Eric's concern over Scriptures' violent material and applaud the bold manner in which he identifies the problem, I also regard the price this option requires us to pay to be too high. On the authority of Jesus, the entire New Testament, and the church tradition I feel compelled to embrace all Scripture, including its violent depictions of God, as divinely inspired, and I take this to mean we never have the right to dismiss any part of it. Moreover, as I demonstrate in *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, if we're going to try to solve the problem of divine violence in the Old Testament by rejecting these portraits, we're going to end up dismissing a *great deal* of Scripture. Like it or not, the fact of the matter is that the basic storyline of the Old Testament is woven around horrifically violent depictions of God (e.g., the Flood, the Passover, the Conquest of Canaan, the overthrow of the Northern and Southern kingdoms). Remove the violence of the Old Testament, and it's not clear that anything like a coherent narrative remains.

New Book

My forthcoming book introduces a third option into this debate. I find it highly significant that, before the Church got comfortable with the use of violence, and even for a while afterwards, there were a number of noteworthy theologians who did not see these as the only two options. Thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa, John Cassian, and especially Origen felt compelled to embrace all canonical material as divinely inspired and thus considered it impossible to dismiss. Yet, largely because of the revelation of the enemy-loving, non-violent God in Christ, they also



felt compelled to reject a literal interpretation of the Old Testament's violent depictions of God. They therefore embraced this violent material, but they did so while *reinterpreting it*.

Unfortunately, once the Church accepted the use of violence in the fourth and fifth centuries, Scripture's violent depictions of God not only ceased being problematic, they

became *advantageous* inasmuch as these portraits provided a precedent that could be appealed to for Church authorities to incite Christians to engage in violence – despite Jesus' emphatic instructions to the contrary (e.g. Matthew 5: 38-48; Luke 6:27-35). The reinterpretation project was thus unfortunately aborted.

This is the option I want to resurrect and defend in *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*. Yet, while I believe these early church theologians were pointing us in the right direction, I do not think the *allegorical way* these theologians reinterpreted this material is plausible any longer. I am rather proposing what I call "The Cruciform Thesis." It consists of four principles that I derive from the revelation of God on the cross, for I argue that the cross is the quintessential revelation of God and the thematic center of everything Jesus was about.

It's interesting that Church theologians throughout history have been very willing to reinterpret large portions of Scripture that were considered problematic for one reason or another. For example, consider how much Scripture must be reinterpreted to get Scripture to conform to the classical conception of God as temporal, immutable, and impassible! While I don't accept this conception of God, my project is standing in line with this long theological tradition. It's just that, instead of reinterpreting Scripture to get it to align with the *metaphysical* attributes of God, I'm reinterpreting it to get it to align with the *moral* attributes of God. More specifically, I'm attempting to interpret it in a way that

(Cont'd on Page 21)

Trust In Labels

By Floyd Phillips

Labels are extremely appealing crutches, shortcuts that allow prejudice to flourish without being questioned. This is what fuels nationalism, patriotism and many other “isms” where hatred of outsiders becomes a virtue and is seen as honor. Labels are used in racism and for every form of prejudice. Because of this we should view them with extreme suspicion and with great awareness of the high risks involved.

Labels. Truth in advertising. Faith. What do these have in common?

Labels and Reputation

We come to trust certain brands of things that we purchase for the quality that we expect from them. Labels have to do with reputation, and reputation can readily be manipulated and leveraged. Large companies invest millions of dollars and pay great attention to the reputation to protect their brand name, their label. All of us are aware of the dynamics of labels and the good and harm that can come about as a result. The news is full of stories both good and bad about issues swirling around labels, whether it be about companies or groups of people.

Jesus managed to get Himself in regular trouble because of people's reliance on labels to determine their beliefs about who was right or wrong. In fact, this issue of labels is one of the main things He came to challenge when He came from heaven to earth as a baby. As soon as He arrived the labels started flying and the charges started piling up to discredit and diffuse the truth He had come to reveal to us about what His Father is really like.

The Jews believed that having the right label was of the highest importance.

One of the things that got Jesus into trouble was His defiance of labeling. The Jews, those people who placed great confidence in their label of being God's chosen nation, placed enormous importance on their status based on that label. They believed that having the right label was the highest priority even if the inward quality was totally dysfunctional and lacking. They had come to believe that God likewise was most interested in labels more than in what was inside the label. They had a real problem concerning truth in advertising.

Because the Jews placed their greatest faith in labels and keeping up outward appearances, they became confident that anyone not covered by their brand name could not have any saving relationship with God. Their pride and arrogance and self-righteousness became a facade behind which was hidden all sorts of corruption and hypocrisy, greed and ungodliness. Yet they considered anyone outside their nationalistic label as rejected and outside of God's mercy. Gentiles were the lost and Samaritans were even worse off.

Faith Among the Gentiles

Imagine the shock and horror produced, then, when Jesus said that He found more faith in gentiles than He could find in Israel. It was comments like these that aroused the anger of His hometown people more than anything else He said. In His homecoming sermon Jesus made inflammatory statements about God paying more attention to people outside Israel during the Old Testament times than to people inside the chosen elect. This nearly cost Him His life before His ministry even got off the ground. He didn't seem to have the respect for proper use of labels like what was expected of any good Jew.

Our Danger

Lest we think we are free of such prejudices, think again. We fall into many of the same labeling mistakes as did the Jews who rejected Jesus. He warned their leaders about trusting in their superior knowledge of Scriptures instead of trusting directly in Him, the Author.

We easily fall into that same trap of assuming our knowledge of Scripture is sufficient to save us while gravitating toward the use of labels in very similar ways. Labels are convenient ways to avoid thinking and taking responsibility. Labeling can also encourage others to avoid thinking for themselves. We can just tell people in our group to trust in our brand name and leave the responsibility up to the leaders for making sure everything is right. But this discourages individual accountability and perverts God's purpose to lead each person directly.

Forms of Bondage

Labels most often bind people into forms of bondage, not freedom. Labels can rob people of their potential to learn and grow by searching out truth, being accountable and exercising responsibility under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

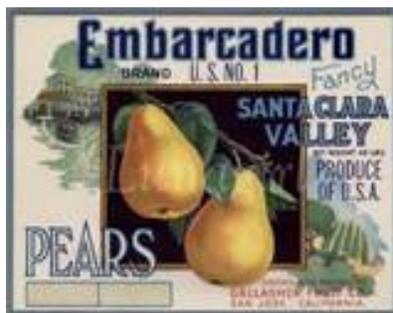
It is nearly impossible to even talk without using labels. They constitute too large a part of our thinking and our language to avoid. They may be useful in generalizations, but far too often they become crutches used with the wrong motives while at the same time conveniently obscuring those very motives.

Religious labels may purport to strengthen faith while in reality they very often do the opposite. Faith is not encouraged through a reliance on labeling and generally does not lead to growth in the knowledge of truth or in relationship with God. Rather, faith looks past the surface labels of all kinds and sees that we are all of the same family no matter

what labels have been slapped on us.

Labeling People

Labels are not just restricted to words, though sooner or later they usually involve them. What people look like often serve as labels we use to determine all sorts of things about how we are going to feel about them and relate to them. This plays directly into the world's system of valuation. We instantly determine an estimated value of someone the first time we see them based on our own list of preferences. Because of this reality we can spend an inordinate amount of effort seeking to keep up our own appearances in order to create as good an impression as possible on others so we can be more valued in their estimation. This is all part of the 'other gods'



syndrome that God warned us against.

When labels are used to identify inanimate things, they can prove quite useful. Even living creatures need names for us to identify and communicate concerning them. God gave the job of labeling to Adam as his very first assignment after creation, partly to awaken in him an awareness of his own incompleteness without a complementary mate. Labels can serve to alert us that some brands of products are

more likely to have the quality that we want compared to other brands that are known to be inferior. Labels themselves are not the problem. It is when we allow this estimation of value to begin to divide and gradate our love for other humans that we leave God's will for His children.

Religion in particular has exploited and abused labeling. Religious labels are almost always used for purposes of prejudice which is defined as prejudging. That brings us to the related issue of judging which Jesus explicitly warns against doing. He said that not even He was going to exercise the authority given Him by the Father to judge, but that the words of truth He spoke would serve as our judge in the end.

What were the words of Christ? If we discern them properly we will see that the main purpose of Jesus coming to this earth was to reveal the real truth about God in sharp contrast to the false notions we have about Him so that we could come to know the truth. Whenever truth about God is allowed into the heart, genuine faith and trust in God can be awakened which is the very thing that sin has destroyed in us. This is a personal thing as well as a collective problem. But we must be extremely careful not to get trapped by labels we so frequently rely on that can blind us to the personal responsibility we have to respond to the truth God is impressing on us.

Church Labeling

I sense that many in my own church are beginning to move in the wrong direction when it comes to labeling. It is easy for leaders all the way to the highest levels to seek to impose policies for members only to accept teachings from church-approved sources or read books by church authors. This is a blatant abusive use of labeling, for it infers that the church they control as a public corporation should be trusted implicitly to be the only source of reliable information for salvation while all other sources should be considered inferior at best or be viewed with suspicion or simply left out.

Reliance On Labels

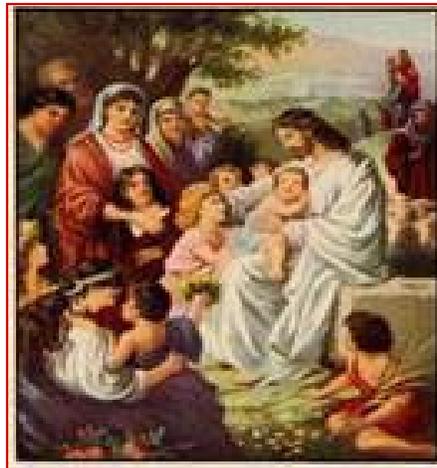
Yet this is reliance on a technique that has repeatedly proven all throughout history to be extremely fallible and even abusive. The Jews used this method, but the Bible shows that it often led to spiritual isolation, arrogance, apostasy and finally disintegration. I am not suggesting here that we should embrace without question anything that comes along claiming truth. God is very much into guidelines, parameters, exclusions and protections. However, we have far too often tried to condense God's protective boundaries into a system of reliance on labels alone to decide what is safe for us when God intends for His children to be guided by His Holy Spirit given for that very purpose.

People who listen to God's Spirit have quite often been branded as heretics by the mainstream religion

of their day, partly because they exposed the corruption and evil that had been neatly hidden behind the facade of righteousness constructed partly out of labels. Because prophets and messengers challenged the labeling system of those trusting in them, they were themselves labeled as false, dangerous, heretics and many other negative labels. That same reaction will always be true to the end of time.

Jesus' Example

Jesus never once gave His disciples instructions about how to properly label people so they would know who to trust and who to avoid. On the contrary, Jesus exploded just about every labeling system in place when He walked among us, which is one of the main reasons He found Himself constantly at odds with reli-



gious people around Him. He refused to endorse their neat system of categorizing people according to their indexing system and thus was accused of just about every violation that could be thought of based on their notions of righteousness. They retaliated by slapping derogatory labels on Him.

Man looks on the outward appearances but God looks on the heart. Labels depend on what we determine about a person which necessarily only involves what we have access to through our physical perceptions. But God repeatedly warns us against relying on our systems of valuation and labeling, for our ways always lead to judging, which Jesus warns us sternly against. When we judge people by labeling them, we are usurping the job of God who only is the righteous judge who reads the heart, and we find ourselves at the cross judging God as being out of harmony with our sense of justice.

Labeling stifles a gift that the Spirit of God wants us to use that is replaced by our abuse of labeling.

As with everything Satan has done in his counterfeit system, for every good gift or truth that God has established, Satan has a counterfeit that seems so close at times to the true that at first it may be hard to see the difference. But the closer one comes to the true the more obvious the dangers they discover in the counterfeit.

Discernment

Reliance on labeling is the counterfeit of Satan to what God wants us to have – discernment. But godly discernment needs the context of a humble mind, an open heart, a growing knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and most of all a vital connection with the One who called Himself not just the Truth but also the Way and the Life.

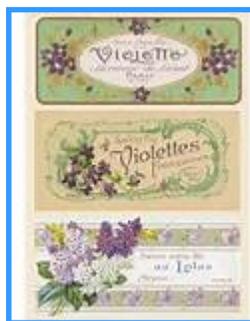
Labeling is one of those counterfeits that is used prolifically in the system of Satan which all the kingdoms of this world operate on. Religion itself becomes infected with these same principles that can seem so logical but are not in harmony with God's ways of *agape* life. Jesus said many things about this labeling problem that we ignore because they make us uncomfortable, so we religify His teachings, explain them away, refer them to committees of theologians who come up with reasons why we should not take them too seriously and continue to maintain our status quo.

Yet in the end it will be the words of Jesus that will serve as our judge, working to expose the fraudulent counterfeits we have relied on for our assurance of salvation. Too many assume if they belong to the right church that they have a high probability of being saved. Some people think if they just keep the right day as the Sabbath that they can guarantee their spot in the kingdom. Some think if they avoid the wrong society that their religion will remain pure (assuming that it is pure to start with) because they are relying on religious experts of the Bible to figure everything out for them.

Discernment is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we all need. Sadly I think it may be one of the weakest gifts in our church, or at least one of the most unappreciated gifts. I believe this may be in part due to our practice of relying so much on labels rather than living in direct connection to the Holy Spirit. When we slip into a reliance on la-

bels instead of learning to be guided by the Spirit in using His gift of discernment, we abort our responsibility and lose some of the benefits available to us as children of God. All who are true children of God are to be led by the Spirit of God instead of following their own hunches or being guided by their old ways of looking at things.

The whole New Testament seems to focus on this problem as much as anything. Yet we still continue to rely heavily on the practice of using shortcut labels for people, factions, systems of thought, denominations, nationalities and many other divisive elements. Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world, and for very good reasons. One of those reasons is this diabolical practice of labeling affecting how we think and treat those around us instead of being transformed in our thinking, feeling, acting and living through the renewing of our mind by the Holy Spirit who is sent to lead us into all truth.



The Final Affect of Labeling

Jesus said that we should not use labels like rabbi, father or other such titles. But did He simply mean to avoid the particular labels that He listed, or are we willing to embrace the underlying principle that He was seeking to teach us? I'm afraid that we have simply substituted different labels for the ones Jesus told us not to use and then smugly think we are

still obeying Him. The real problem is not which label we use but rather the mindset and spirit of using them to begin with. Jesus said we are all family— brothers and sisters. That is a safe enough label and is also a very revealing one when it comes to undo influence by the world's system of hierarchy. Brother and sister is about as close as you can get to establishing a spirit of equality. That is what Jesus intended exactly. Most other labels push us toward thinking some of us are more important while others are less, which is anathema to the kingdom of heaven.

Pastoral Warning

I had a pastor warn me against listening to a certain teacher because he felt that teacher would mislead me into heresy. I happened to know that the teacher in question is actually much closer to the truth about God's character than the pastor warning me. So what is really going on here with his use of labels? We try to slap a negative label on anyone who disagrees with our particular opinions without bothering to compare their teachings with the Word of God and pay attention to the Spirit of God.

I will agree that there are many false teachers in this world – far more so than there are teachers who embrace the true gospel of Jesus Christ. But our abuse of labels has far too often blocked many from coming to know God or the truth about Him from fear of what others might say or think about them. We are afraid of being tainted by the negative reports circulating about someone while unwilling to

investigate the truth for ourselves to see if someone is simply being slandered or is actually deceiving others. I will agree that this is a job for the more mature; but at the same time Satan leads many to rely on others they consider experts in religion or law to do their thinking for them and to come up with neat labels on which the rest can then rely to guide them as to who to trust or distrust.

This method is extremely dangerous at best and very irresponsible when it comes to matters of salvation. Each of us must be personally accountable to God for our own souls and should never leave this responsibility in anyone else's hands no matter how expert or pious they may seem to us. If we rely more on labels than on the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, we shall never be safe from the subtle deceptions of the enemy who relies on these shortcuts to keep millions in a false sense of security while those they put their confidence in are themselves influenced by the wrong spirit.

Labels belong in department stores, not in our search for truth and salvation. The only labels it is safe for us to embrace are the labels of Christ: abiding in Christ, resting in Christ, trusting in Christ, obedience in Christ, loving with Christ's love in the way that He loved. As we grow up into Christ in every way, we will see those around us in His body as also growing up in Him and being drawn to Him.

Too many are resisting His drawing and are being used by the enemy to

discourage and mislead others by relying on labels for their security. But our focus must be on Christ alone and to cooperate with His transforming work in our own souls. As we focus on Him and allow Him to heal and grow us up into more perfect reflections of His character of love, we can live free of the curse of labels and enjoy the peace of Christ that passes all comprehension. We will also find ourselves growing closer to each other as the barrier of labels is stripped away and we enter into the joy of the Lord and the fellowship of His Spirit.



CORRECTIONS

A sharp-eyed reader caught the following errors in the last (March 2013) Newsletter:

Page 2, Generation 1 – 1864-1874 Third Watch

Page 2, Generation 1 – 1874-1884 Fourth Watch

Page 7 – Change “Nathan Oduma” to “Nathan Onduma”

My appreciation to this reader.

Camp Meeting Schedule

As we near the close of the work here on earth our opportunities to meet in the fellowship of the Spirit are more and more precious. We hope to enjoy camp meeting with you this year.

For on-going information about each camp meeting please check the **TruthInJesus.org** website or contact the following:

St. Philip, Barbados:

Demetrius Leach, 208-475-4028
demetriusleach1964@gmail.com

St. Maries, Idaho:

Victoria Johnson, 208-318-6430
victoriajohnson@cableone.net

Manchester, Jamaica:

Owen Barnett, 876-280-9994
876-839-8059
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(876) 862-7040
(954) 353-9704
cherryeyes2001@yahoo.com

Linda Baker

(509) 287-2055
(509) 288-2744
jlmission@frontier.com

THE AFRICA WORK

Kenyan Report

Since February, the work in Kenya has progressed naturally and consistently. Brothers James Ongiri and Nathan Onduma have continued their work of translating the book *God's Character: The Best News in the Universe* by Dr. Elliot Douglin, into Swahili. This is done in several steps.

The book was originally translated into Swahili as a first draft, in 2008. Then, it was reviewed once by a Kenyan professional who lives in Canada. This manuscript, now, is being reviewed for accuracy of translation and for final editing. The electronic file had to be converted from a PDF file to a Word document. In this process, much of the



electronic formatting was lost. So, to start with, each chapter is sent to Nicola Straub for reformatting. Then, the formatted draft is reviewed for editing, by James Ongiri. Next, James and Nathan go through his suggestions together, and Nathan inputs all the changes into the electronic file, with all changes highlighted in red. This highlighted version is sent to Nicola with notations inserted into the document explaining all the changes to the manuscript. Feedback is given on the revisions by Nicola as it relates to making sure the Swahili properly expresses the intent of the English and of the original author. From there, it is given back to the translation team to input all final adjustments to that chapter into the computer file again. This process is repeated chapter by chapter. It is painstaking work but a labor of love as we anticipate the printing of the final Swahili version with much joy and expectation. In order to speed up this process, it would be greatly beneficial to have some outside support to provide a stipend for James as he focuses on the translation work and ministry trips. Without support, he must take time apart to work

and provide for his family's needs. Only \$150 per month can supply enough for them to live on while he

focuses full time on the ministerial needs, as a Bible worker and literature evangelist. Please keep this need in prayer as you remember the Kenyan work. Travel expense support would also be a great blessing to the work.

In addition to the translation work, James and Nathan have continued travelling to teach where they are called. They also travel to hold Bible studies and share literature with people who are contacts of the ministry, via the Internet. We only had a very limited supply of books purchased and these supplies are virtually depleted. There is a great need to purchase more books and Bibles for sharing. In March and April several groups were reached with God's love and with plans to follow up with continued studies.



God be praised as His message of love is spread throughout the land of Kenya and even into neighboring countries, according to His riches and grace. Thanks to all those who pray for this important field of work!

Nicole Straub
nicola.straub@yahoo.com

“Come Let Us Reason”

Fireside Chats on the Character of God

with Kevin Straub



Permissive Paradigm—Part IV

So, how are we to understand all this about God setting up kingdoms and authorities in the world, even ordaining that we should obey them? (Dan. 2:21; Ex. 9:16; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1, 2; Ti. 3:1).

It is so because of the hardness of men's hearts. Bible language is such that God "ordains" many things that are not according to His perfect will. God will not cast man off entirely when He is rejected but seeks to accommodate man within his darkened thinking.

One does not have to think too deeply to realize that it is not God's will that man should have ever needed earthly governments. They are a present reality due to the fall, in place to mitigate

the intensity and frequency of the many ways in which humans violate other humans.

Arbitrary Constructs

Although depicted as "ordained of God," they function by the inconsistent and ever-changing rules of human law.



These systems are arbitrary constructs that prescribe rewards and punishments to ensure compliance; as such, the basis of their appeal is that of self-exaltation/gratification and fear of pain or

loss. In other words, they function within a paradigm of promotion and protection of the flesh. This para-

digm cannot comprehend God's ways. It cannot see that when His Spirit directs every individual, perfect love reigns and love works no ill towards its neighbor. God's perfect will is reflected in His perfect law, wherein we would look out for the best interest of all others, while the others would be looking out for our own. It is the perfect "all for one and one for all"!

What if . . .

If men *were* to return to God's perfect will, the kingdoms of this world would fall. If every man and woman in an earthly national government, within its law enforcement, judiciary, military, and financial sectors were to subscribe to Jesus' peace teachings, there would be no more force of arms and that kingdom would fall. If the armies of the aggressor nation that took over were to do the same thing, they also would topple. It would be a "domino effect." If righteousness were to fill all the earth, there would be no nations. But since the fall of the kingdom of God in man, self-exaltation has replaced God. Without the restraints imposed by human laws, with their arbitrary punishments (fines, imprisonment, physical punishment, death) we know that the ensuing chaos would catapult mankind to a speedy extinction. With the increasing wickedness in the world, we see how it can be so. So, although it is not God's will that men should rule over each other, He gives over to it in the paradigm of permissive will, or "accommodative will."

What gets accomplished in this is *probationary time*. Permissive will is none other than forbearance and

grace. It puts a check on runaway evil so that the knowledge of God can be preserved in the earth and future generations can at last come out of the darkness, be renewed in His image and prepared at last for entrance into eternity, where His perfect will reigns. So, when God "ordains" rulers, it is in the Biblical language. It is not that He does it proactively, but He gives man over to the various modalities of human governance, ranging from relatively benign and free to tyrannical and murderous. All are ordained of God, even those that run away into absolute depravity, because what men do with free choice is out of His hands. No human government is perfect; all operate by Satanic principles, but many of them go too far and incur further wrath (giving over) to the point where they fall altogether as God must withdraw further from them.

A Strong Nation

A nation is strong in proportion to the fidelity with which it fulfills God's purpose for it; its success depends upon its use of the power entrusted to it; its compliance with the divine principles is always the measure of its prosperity; and its destiny is determined by the choices its leaders and people make with respect to these principles (*Education*, pp. 175, 174, 177, 178; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 536). God imparts wisdom and power that will keep strong the nations that remain faithful to Him, but abandons those that ascribe their glory to human achievement and act independently of Him (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 501).

Men "who refuse to submit to the

government of God are wholly unfitted to govern themselves" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 584). When, instead of being a protector of men, a nation becomes a proud and cruel oppressor, its fall is inevitable (*Education*, p. 176). As the nations one after another have rejected God's principles their glory has faded, their power departed, and their place been occupied by others (*Ibid.*, p. 177). "All are by their own choice deciding their destiny," and in rejecting God's principles *accomplishing their own ruin* (*Ibid.*, pp. 178, 177). "The complicated play of human events is under divine control. This is how it is said that "Amidst the strife and tumult of nations, He that sitteth above the cherubim still guides the affairs of earth" and overrules "all for the accomplishment of His purposes" (*Ibid.*, p. 178).



We must be very careful how we think about this, for if we see God's role in the great controversy as One who guides affairs and overrules by any kind of arbitrary means, moving pieces about on the board out of turn or by breaking any of the rules because He is bigger and stronger, Satan will immediately cry "foul" on Him. We must be very careful about using the "sovereignty of God" types of arguments, for He is not out to win the great controversy by pulling rank. Power of might proves nothing with regard to worthiness

of character. Love and freedom have to win the argument.

A Complicated System

It is a very complicated system which only God can order in righteousness, maintaining freedom of choice yet working His influence upon men to the maximum limit, never stepping over the line and resorting to force. He gives over to men's choices but hopes to stay in the picture as much as possible, in an advisory capacity, ever striving to lead back to a better way, and better still, until man's ways are repudiated and God's ways are once again established.

Hosea relates God's way of overruling (ruling over) the affairs of earth for the accomplishment of His purposes:

I gave thee a king in mine anger,
and took [him] away in my wrath
(13:11).

Remnant Under Theocracy

So here we see that *permissive will is actually wrath*. (Note that the final generation elect will not function under it. That which is called the church—visible church in the various legal structures of nations—is today organized under permissive will/wrath, but the latter-rain/loud-cry messengers will be organized as a *theocracy*, not a *hierocracy*.) When Israel clamored for a king to be like the nations (the world) they were asking to be after *the common order* which is a rejection of God. In keeping with His character of love, it was not God's will to be rejected because it would not be good for

(Cont'd from page 12)

allows us to see how even the most horrific portraits of God are not only consistent with, but actually bear witness to, the enemy-loving, non-violent, self-sacrificial character of God revealed in the crucified Christ.

I believe my thesis will appeal to people to the degree that they find both of the options that are thus far present in the debate to be unacceptable as well as to the degree that people accept that the revelation of God in Christ isn't one revelation alongside others, but is rather the definitive revelation that trumps all that preceded him. It will be interesting to see how this all pans out. Stay tuned! And, most importantly, pray that God pours out his Spirit on all involved in this debate to empower us to conduct it in a spirit of Christ-like love, grace and humility.



(Continued from page 21)

them. He told them all the bad things that would happen under a king. But then He selected a king for them. This is *permissive* will in action. He gave over to their errant desires.

Human Governance

We'll come back and finish comment on this text from Hosea in a moment, but first I want to quickly look at the establishment of human governance in the camp of the Israelites under Moses as less than

God's perfect will, as yet another example of permissive will. Turn to Exodus chapter 18 and notice how Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to Moses with a suggestion for human hierarchical organization and it is all written as though it were ordained of God (v. 19, 23). But what is actually the basis for this advice? First, Moses complained that the people would come to him to inquire of God (v. 15). (They needed to be taught to go to God, apparently, as also we must learn today, instead of "making flesh our arm.") Second, Jethro came with advice of his own and Moses ran with it because it seemed the easier way (vv. 18, 24). Ellen White concurs:

The Lord **permitted** Moses to choose **for himself** [not for God, because this was not God's choice] the most faithful and efficient men to share the responsibility with him. Their influence would assist in **holding in check the violence of the people, and quelling insurrection**; yet **serious evils would eventually result from their promotion**. They **would never have been chosen had Moses manifested faith** corresponding to the evidences he had witnessed of God's power and goodness. But he had magnified his own burdens and services, almost losing sight of the fact that he was only the instrument by which God had wrought. He was not excusable in indulging, in the slightest degree, the spirit of murmuring that was the curse of Israel. **Had he relied fully upon God, the Lord would have guided him continually and would have given him strength** for every emergency (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 380, par. 2, emphasis added).

The Fate of Saul

Returning to our text in Hosea to continue our view of how God accomplishes His purposes, notice also that even the taking away of that king was the anger of God which is a principle of His government in action, i.e., "giving over" or "hiding His face," or "sparing not," wherein God exercises His judgment that He must allow consequences to fall to such degree that corresponds with the extent to which the free moral agent has rejected Him and His ways. So, in taking away Saul in wrath, the Bible declares that God slew him (1 Chron. 10:14), but we know that Saul actually committed suicide on his own sword (v. 4). Saul rejected

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"No sorrow can bear any comparison with the sorrow of Him upon whom the wrath of God fell with overwhelming force. . . . The agony which Christ endured broadens, deepens, and gives a more extended conception of the character of sin, and the character of the retribution which God will bring upon those who continue in sin" (7 BC 1103).

* * *

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God, and God withdrew from Him. He will not force His way into a situation where He is not wanted. But He strives to stay in the picture to as large a degree as possible, as long as the hardness of heart has not reached fullness.

In the next and final installment, we will briefly cover God's instructions to ancient Israel in the use of violence.

(To be continued...)



The Peru Work

Please Note: The Workman's are returning to the US on May 5 and will be going directly to Alaska after spending a day in Ft. Lauderdale. The Mission Peru Account in Farmington Washington has been closed and all remaining funds have been sent to the Workman's to distribute to the various Peru projects including Mama T. Any further contributions for them and the Peru work should be sent to Isaac and Sandy Workman, C/O Herme Tol, P.O. Box 623, Valdez, AK 99686.

Your prayers and support have been very instrumental in sharing the gospel in Peru and we all thank you for being a part of God's great work.



The Project

To those who are interested in what I am doing in my corner of the vineyard, I am working on a huge project that I am not yet able to report on as yet, until all the pieces come together. Stay tuned.

I anticipate next time I will be ready to make an announcement. Until then, keep praying. There are many, many projects around the world that need your prayers and support.

