

*Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the **LORD**, and against his **anointed**, saying, let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the **LORD** hath said unto me, Thou art my **Son**; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the **LORD** with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the **Son**, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

Psalms 2:1-12

Who is the LORD?

and,

Who is His Son?

The Proof



Message by: Leroy Surface

Throughout the ages of time man has known that there is a “god.” The earth itself, the trees, the grass, the sun, the moon, and the stars: the “creation” declares there must be a “creator.” David said, “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God (psalms 14:1, 53:1).*” A creation without a creator? Only a fool could think so. It would be like a house without a builder, or a watch without a watchmaker. Only a fool could conceive of such a thing. Primitive man looked at the creation around him and knew there had to be a “God.” Most often he determined that the “sun” must be that “God,” hence the “sun-gods” of all the heathen lands of old. Other tribes would look at a tree, cut it down and fashion a “god” by their own hands. Others worshipped the moon, the stars, and the planets. Dagon of the Philistines was the “fish-god,” while Baal of the Phoenicians was the “sun-god,” as were “Molech” of the Ammonites, and “Chemosh” of the Moabites.

The knowledge of the true God was brought through the flood by Noah and his three sons. As man multiplied and moved eastward, this knowledge was soon forgotten, retained only by Shem, the ancestor of Abraham. Abraham was born two hundred ninety two years after the flood, and it was he that God began to reveal himself to. Abraham was married to Sarah, who was a “barren woman.” God had promised Abraham a son, but due to the fact that his wife was barren, he took the Egyptian slave girl, Hagar, and a son they named Ishmael was born to them. Before Ishmael was born, Hagar had a dream that a “wild man” was in her womb, and that “*his hand will be against every man (Genesis 16:11-12).*” When Ishmael was a young teenager, Abraham’s wife Sarah conceived and Isaac was born. This was the son that God had promised Abraham from the beginning. Before Isaac was born, Abraham prayed that God would receive Ishmael, and this was God’s response in Genesis 17:20-21: “*And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. **But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.***”

There is evidence that Ishmael and Isaac lived peaceably during their lifetimes. They were both blessed and prospered according to the promise of God. Ishmael became a great nation, as did Israel, who was born of Isaac. It was the descendants of these two men that began to war against one another over the issue of which was the rightful seed and heir of Abraham.

For several weeks, at this writing (April 2002), there has been a “*stand off*” at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Several hundred Palestinian warriors have taken refuge in the church with Israeli soldiers surrounding the area. The symbolism of this is quiet amazing. Two nations of people, Israel and the Palestinian, are having their final skirmish of this most recent warfare at the birthplace of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Both of these nations are descendants of Abraham, the Jew through Isaac, and the Palestinian through Ishmael. As such, they are distant cousins of one another. Both of these nations claim the same piece of real estate for their homeland, each believing themselves to be the “*birthright*” son of Abraham. Both of them have declared Jerusalem to be their capital. The United Nations has set forth a plan for these nations to dwell side by side in peace. This plan can never work because neither party will be satisfied by the idea of “*separate*” lands: they want the “*same*” land. Each of them believes “*their*” land reaches from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. Israel believes the “*west bank*” was given to them by the promise of God, while the Palestinians teach their children from a world map that doesn’t have a nation of Israel on it. These problems are compounded because of the fact of the two different religions these nations hold to. Israel is the land of the Jew, or Judaism, while the vast majority of Palestinians are Muslims of the Islamic religion. This “*conflict*” is actually a “*holy war*” between two religions. Both of these religions claim Abraham as their father. Both of them hold to the “*Law of Moses.*” Both of these peoples sincerely believe they have historic if not prophetic right to be the sole possessors of the Land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Concerning Jesus Christ, neither of these religions believe that He is the Son of God. I do believe it is prophetic symbolism that at this present hour both these religions have come to the birthplace of the Son of God in their conflict.

This most recent conflict between these nations is certainly not a new thing. The strife between the “*sons of Ishmael*” and the “*sons of Jacob*” has existed for almost four thousand years. The Midianites that overran Israel in the days of Gideon were the “*sons of Ishmael.*” Judges 6:3-6 describes it in this way. “*And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and **they came as grasshoppers** for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.*” It is interesting to note that “*they came as grasshoppers.*” The Hebrew word used should have been translated “*locusts.*” “*...they came as (Locusts) for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.*”

The Psalmist “*Asaph*” relates the following in Psalms 83:1-8: “*Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, **Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.** For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee: The tabernacles of Edom, and **the Ishmaelites**; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.*” This was three thousand years ago that a confederacy of nations was formed to utterly destroy the nation of Israel. The Romans accomplished this almost two thousand years ago, but they did not make a full end of the people. For most of nineteen centuries the Jews were scattered into almost every nation under the sun, but for all that time they kept their distinct identity. Never in the history of the world has any nation of people been so severely persecuted for so long a time and survived.

Early in the twentieth century the Jew began to be drawn to return to the land of Palestine. God spoke by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 43:1-7, saying, “*But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba*

for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.” Almost twenty five hundred years before it happened, God promised Israel that He would bring them back to their land. It was in 1948 that Israel was established once more as a nation. The Jew had a homeland once more. God had kept His promise.

Who Is God?

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

Isaiah 43:10-12

It was to Israel that God spoke by the mouth of Isaiah, saying, “...ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.” If anyone in this world wants to know who the true and living God is, look at Israel and the Jew. They are the proof of who the true God is. Chosen of God in Abraham almost four thousand years ago, God has kept them, watched over them, and preserved them, all because of his promise to Abraham. Many times God has chastised them. In their backsliding He has given them into the hands of their enemies, but in their repentance He has always delivered them. No nation has ever been able to utterly destroy them. Hitler, who murdered six million Jews, was not the first, and will not be the last, to discover that God destroys those nations that seek to destroy the Jew. Israel was in a backslidden condition when God pled with them through Isaiah, “...ye are my witnesses that I am God.” Paraphrasing the heart of God, “*If I were not God, you would still be slaves in Egypt. If I were not God, the Red Sea did not open before you. If I were not God you would have perished in the wilderness. There would have been no manna from heaven, or water out of the flinty rock if I were not God. Your very existence is the proof that I am God. If I were not God, the walls of Jericho did not fall. If I were not God the land of Canaan would have devoured you. The Midianites would have slaughtered Gideon and his three hundred if I were not God.*” On and on the evidence pours in that the God of Israel is “**The GOD.**”

In Isaiah 43:9, God says, “*Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth.*” God is calling for a hearing from all the nations that gather against Israel. “*Bring your witnesses! Bring any nation that at any time has been able to prevail against the ‘God of Israel.’ Where is any other God that reveals the end of a matter before the beginning? Where are the ‘prophets’ that have ever, at any time, spoken contrary to the ‘God of Israel’ and been vindicated in their words? If you have no witnesses, then hear my witness, and say ‘it is truth’.*” After four thousand years of war against the children of Israel by the sons of Ishmael, the sons of Esau, and the children of Lot, yet Israel stands, proof that their God is GOD.

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of

the earth be gathered together against it.

Zechariah 12:2-3

Today in America, there are millions of Muslims who believe they worship the same God as the Christian and the Jew. They keep the law, they live clean moral lives, and they honor Moses and all the prophets. They even “accept” Jesus as a prophet of God. Let them hear Jesus in Luke 21:24, speaking first of the Jew, then of the Gentile, “and they (the Jew) shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” In the year seventy AD the Jew fell by the sword of Rome and was scattered into all nations just as Jesus said. From seventy AD until June 1967, Jerusalem was inhabited by, or, “trodden down” of the Gentiles. In June 1967, the times of the Gentiles to possess Jerusalem ended, just as Jesus said, bringing upon the world a time of trouble that will end only with the second return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Jesus told us in Luke 21:32 that the generation that sees these things come to pass will not pass away until all things be fulfilled. We are that generation.

Now, hear the prophet Zechariah in our text above. Jerusalem became that “cup of trembling” and a “burdensome stone” in June of 1967 when Israel once again gained control of the city. Zechariah, a prophet of the true and living God, spoke of this generation, of a siege against Judah (the Jew) and against Jerusalem. Notice the warning of God that “...all that burden themselves with it (Jerusalem) shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.” What a powerful prophecy. Not only the Palestinian; not only the Arab nations; not only the Muslims: but all who gather together against Jerusalem will be cut in pieces. Even if everyone on earth came against Israel, they would be destroyed. Would that be proof enough that the God of Israel is The God over all? Even if Western Europe gathers against Israel, or, the United Nations, or, God forbid, if America turns to fight against the Jew in Jerusalem, we would all be cut in pieces. I realize that no “realistic” thinking person could believe that the tiny nation of Israel, scarcely a dozen miles wide at one point, and not over two hundred miles in length, with a population of about six million could utterly destroy every nation that comes against it. The truth is, they can’t, but their God can and will. It is His promise. Every nation that God would destroy, He brings against Israel.

What About Jesus?

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.
John 14:6*

This is the most incredible claim that any man could ever make. Jesus, however, was not just a man; He was and is eternally the Son of the living God. During His earthly ministry He made many claims about Himself. The following are a few from the book of John.

John 6:48 I am the bread of life
John 8:23 I am from above...I am not of this world
John 9:5 I am the light of the world
John 10:7 I am the door of the sheep
John 10:11 I am the good shepherd
John 10:36 I am the Son of God
John 11 25 I am the resurrection and the life
John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life
John 14:10 I am in the Father
John 15:1 I am the true vine

As Christians we accept, as a matter of faith that all the New Testament says of Jesus is true. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, did the works and will of His Father on this earth, died on the cross for our sins, was buried in a borrowed tomb, resurrected from the dead the third day, was seen of above five hundred people after His resurrection, and was received into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God to make intercession for us. All these things are precious to us who believe, but what if you were

born into a Muslim family? Or perhaps into Hindu, Shinto, Buddhist, or any one of dozens of Eastern religions? All these things that are so precious to you now, would have been foolishness to you. Paul told us in I Corinthians 1:18 that the *“preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish.”* What would it take to convince such a person that Jesus Christ truly is the Son of God and Lord over all? There must be a proof of who Jesus is. In the Old Testament God said of Israel, *“Ye are my witnesses, that I am God.”* As we showed earlier in this message, you can look at Israel, and the very fact that they have been restored and sustained is present day proof that the God of Israel is the living God. How would you convince a Jew that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and their Messiah? There must be a proof beyond our arguments and reasoning.

I heard a liberal Muslim speaking on talk radio. He labeled himself a *“liberal,”* and said it was wrong to think that Islam is an enemy to Christianity. He said, and I quote, *“I had to become a Christian before I could be a Muslim: I had to accept Jesus Christ, because he is one of our prophets.”* He continued, *“Islam offers prosperity in this life, and Heaven in the life to come.”* The indication was that this was the same as Christianity, but then he added, *“Islam offers more, because Islam offers ‘virtue’.”* He went on to tell of how Muslims watch very little television, live clean lifestyles, are family oriented, etc. He went on to say that it is also a mistake to think that the terrorists are not Muslims. He said the terrorists are very devout Muslims who believe virtue must be forced on the people, while the liberal Muslim believes it must be your choice to be virtuous. He concluded that America should pray for and promote *“liberal”* Islam as our answer to terrorism. This man saw Islam as a more *“virtuous”* religion than Christianity. How would you convert Him to Jesus Christ?

A good many years ago I was visiting with a close friend of mine who happens to be a Jew. Another minister who had recently tried to convert him to Christianity had angered him. My friend looked me in the eye and said, *“Leroy, you can’t tell me that Jesus is such a savior that you can break God’s commandments all week; lie, steal, and commit adultery, and go to church on Sunday and pray ‘God forgive,’ and be forgiven only to do the same things on Monday.”* I could only tell him, *“No, that is not the kind of savior Jesus is.”* Without the miracle of Calvary, the death and resurrection of the believer with Jesus Christ, Christianity is no different than any other religion. In fact, it is weaker than most if there is not the *“miracle”* of the new man in Christ.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

II Corinthians 5:17-21

When the angel Gabriel came to Daniel in the ninth chapter of Daniel, he told him of the coming of Messiah, and what Messiah would do when He came. The time period given for this coming of Messiah and fulfillment of the promise was *“seventy weeks”* of years. There would be sixty-nine weeks until Messiah, and a seventieth week in the midst of which Messiah would be *“cut off, but not for Himself.”* The dates given by Gabriel for the beginning of the seventy weeks until the middle of the seventieth week coincides perfectly with the death of Jesus on the cross (write and ask for my book, *“The Seventieth Week of Daniel”*). The promise that must be fulfilled within those seventy weeks of years is found in Daniel 9:24. *“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”* Let me list these promises in order:

- 1 To finish the transgression***
- 2 To make an end of sins***

- 3 *To make reconciliation for iniquity*
- 4 *To bring in everlasting righteousness*
- 5 *To seal up the vision and prophecy*
- 6 *To anoint the most Holy*

The Jew looks at this promise and says, "If Jesus had been my Messiah He would have ended sin. There would be no murder, no prostitution, no war, etc." The Jew is correct in this thinking. In fact, if Israel could have received Him in that day, most certainly that glorious kingdom on earth would have been established immediately, but the scripture says, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name (John 1:11-12)." The nation rejected Him, but an individual, whether Jew or Gentile could yet receive Him. They would receive the power to be the sons of God. The promise would be fulfilled in them and upon them. They would find as I have, that Jesus Christ is the Kingdom of God. They would find as John said, "We know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him (I John 3:5-6)." There is a new creation in Christ Jesus. In that "new" creation the promise is fulfilled. Let me list the fulfillment in the same order as the promise:

- 1 *Transgression is finished*
- 2 *Sin is ended*
- 3 *Reconciliation has been made for iniquity*
- 4 *There is everlasting righteousness*
- 5 *The vision and the prophecy has been fulfilled*
- 6 *The Most Holy has been anointed.*

All these were fulfilled in the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Romans 8:19

I know a man who recently married a Muslim lady from Indonesia. He called me one night and told me about a dream she had the night before. She said the form of a man came to her and asked her who she believed in. She answered, "I believe in God." A second time the man asked her who she believed in. Again, she said, "I believe in God." The third time the man asked of her the same question, "Who do you believe in?" This time she was quite shaken and answered, "I believe in Jesus." Immediately the form of this man turned into pure light. She said he reached out his hands toward her, and the light began to flow from him into her.

I know Jews that have felt the presence of their Messiah. One stood on the Mount of Olives with a tour group of American Jews and felt the presence of His Messiah. He recognized this presence as the same he had felt many years before at a Christian service he had attended. This man believed upon Jesus as his Messiah, and finished the years of his life still in the synagogue, but praying to Jesus. Other Jews have felt the presence of their Messiah, and they do not yet know who he is. They may not know it but they are "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." When they feel the presence of their Messiah upon a "true" Christian, they will know in their hearts exactly who their Messiah is. The nation who rejected Jesus Christ almost two thousand years ago will soon turn in mass unto Him.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: AND THEY SHALL LOOK UPON ME WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Zechariah 12:9-10

Many times have I heard from the Jew, *“It doesn’t matter who my Messiah is, I will receive Him!”* Some believe the Jew will first receive a deceiver, an anti-Christ. God said in our text, *“they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for His only son...”* This will happen before the return of Jesus to this earth, just as Jesus told Jerusalem in Matthew 23:39, *“Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

Zechariah 13:1

The Proof

The only *“proof”* that Jesus Christ is the *“saviour,”* is a people who have been *“saved from their sins (Matthew 1:21).”* The only proof that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is His resurrection from the dead and exaltation to the right hand of God (Romans 1:4, *“...declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead.”*). The only proof that Jesus is risen from the dead is that His life is made manifest in our mortal flesh (II Corinthians 4:11-12). A sin-laden church will never reach the world for Jesus Christ. A weak and sinful church cannot even prove there is a God. Certainly they cannot prove that Jesus Christ is His Son. Paul told in Titus 2:14 that Jesus *“...gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”* The proof that Jesus is the saviour, is the people He has redeemed from all iniquity and purified unto Himself. They are cleansed from all sin, they are pure of heart, and holy of life. All that they are, is of Him. Peter called them the *“Holy Nation (I Peter 2:9).”* Everything God ever promised that His people would be, these people are. They are the redeemed from amongst men, the blood washed, the sanctified. No man born of woman was ever such as the redeemed of the Lord are. They are *“born again”* of the Spirit of God, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. The redeemed of the Lord are such as He is. They bear His image and they abide in Him. He makes His abode with them, and the Father will honour them with His presence. They will be known as *“the people of His presence.”*

I spoke with a militant member of the *“Black Panthers”* over thirty years ago. He had come into my tent revival to disrupt and turn *“his people”* away from me. He was filled with hatred and wanted nothing more than to burn American cities. He was also the son of a local Houston Texas pastor. He would not repent. He said *“I would rather have what I have than to have what I have seen in the church all my life”*. Speaking of the coming destruction of America, he said *“We will kill everything that moves against us, man, woman, or child.”* He continued, *“The only one we fear is Jesus Christ.”* He then concluded, *“We also fear what you preach. If you, are any people, have what you preached tonight, we fear them and cannot harm them. If we find,”* he continued, *“that you do not possess what you preach, we will destroy you.”* I had preached that night on the *“Seed of Abraham”* and what a true child of God is.

The *“religions”* of this world scorn modern *“Christianity”* as a weak and lascivious religion, and without the *“miracle”* of death and resurrection with Christ, without the manifestation of Jesus’ life in His people, that is exactly what it is. Saul of Tarsus hated Christianity and sought to eradicate the name of Jesus from the face of the earth. Then he met Stephen whom they stoned to death. He heard Stephen’s message, saw the glory of God on his face, and still consented unto Stephen’s death. Saul went on to make havoc of the church, persecuting it from city to city. When on the road to Damascus, Jesus revealed Himself to Saul, He rejoiced to know his Messiah and immediately became the great defender of the faith of Jesus Christ. He first saw the evidence of Christ in the face of Stephen, and heard it in his words. His heart was pricked from that day, and he was prepared for an encounter with Jesus.

Concerning the righteousness that is by the law, Paul said he was blameless (Philippians 3:6). Concerning outward things, Saul was not a sinner. He was moral, honest, decent, honourable, and, he *“persecuted the church.”* When He received Jesus, he *“lost”* everything he had once trusted in, as he said in Philippians 3:8-9, *“...that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”* Did he lose the righteousness of the law that had kept him *“blameless”* only to gain a righteousness that was weak and sinful? Of course not! When Saul received the righteousness which is by faith, he received that righteousness Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:20 where He said *“except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God.”* The righteousness of Christ far exceeds the righteousness that is by the law. With the righteousness of Christ, we do not sin because there is no sin in our heart or nature. We have been washed; we have been sanctified; we have been justified (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

Conclusion

I spoke in the beginning of this message of the prophetic symbolism of the standoff between the Muslim and the Jew at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The only answer for the problems facing the entire world today is a *“rebirth”* of true Christianity. I know there must be thousands of men and women of God who are just as hungry as I am to see the *“Mystery of Christ”* revealed in this generation just as it was in the early apostles. If you are one of these then you know that the church, at least in America, has been led down the path of compromise. It is the truth of the gospel that has been so compromised until the American church is effectually no different than the world around us. We will never reach the world as long as this is the case. We must reject the premise that this is just the way it is, that we can do nothing about it. We can! When the world around us sees Jesus Christ manifested in His people, they will know that He is Lord. Let us humble ourselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways. Let us stay in the altar of God until God, once again, pours out of His Spirit upon us.

Has man-made religion built you a

HOUSE OF CARDS?

Message by: Robin Knott

...every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:12-14

I recently sat through a business presentation as part of a design-build development team. We had elected to abandon the usual multimedia presentation in favor of a presentation storyboard format. These boards folded in the middle and opened up much like a book. As the presentation progressed, more boards were opened and stacked on top of each other to create a complete story—at least in

theory. The problem is that if the boards were opened wide enough to see the information printed inside, they wouldn't stand up AND they didn't stack easily. One of our team members had to sit behind the boards to keep them from toppling over. It was a House of Cards.

The irony was not lost on me. Here we sat, Architect, Builder, and Facilitator, telling a prospective client that we were the right team to help them design and build a facility that would cost millions of dollars and would last a life time; yet we couldn't even design a cardboard house that would stand up through a 45 minute presentation. I was amused.

Looking back on the incident, however, I see a not so amusing correlation to modern Christianity (so-called). Religion and religious leaders tell us that they have an answer for our problems, for our struggle, for our sin, but it is a house of cards. It cannot stand. Why? First because it is built on the wrong foundation.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians. 3:11

You might ask, “Are you saying that modern Christianity and Christian leaders are building upon a foundation other than Jesus Christ”? Ridiculous! you might say. “They all invoke the name of Jesus.” “They all speak of Jesus.” True, but Paul warns in II Corinthians 11 of those who would come preaching another Jesus.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

II Corinthians 11:2-4

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

II Corinthians 11:13-15

Paul indicated that the gospel of Jesus Christ is one of simplicity—God’s ways always are. After God made Adam, he placed him in the garden of Eden “to dress it and to keep it.” God gave Adam dominion over every living creature. God had created this wondrous paradise, and all Adam had to do was live in it and enjoy it. God didn’t set out principals and precepts for successful garden living. Adam had free reign, with one exception. He could eat of every tree of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had told him “*thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*” Gen. 2:17. Simple.

Most of you know the story how that the Serpent came to Eve and said, “*Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*” Eve responded, “*We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*” Eve clearly understood the simple instructions handed down by God—“*Eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and you shall die.*” The “*serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*” You know the rest of the story, Eve looked upon the tree, saw that it was “*good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise...*” Eve took the fruit and ate it and gave some to Adam, and he ate it; Sin and iniquity entered the world and paradise was lost. Adam no longer had dominion over the animals or the land to enjoy the fruits thereof but was relegated to toil and labor all the days of his life.

Actually, the message of the serpent to Eve didn’t sound like such a bad thing—“you will know good and evil; you will be able to discern good from evil; you will be as gods or (Elohiym) God himself.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have the same knowledge as God? Wouldn’t it be wonderful to be able to discern good from evil? How can that be a bad thing? It certainly made sense to Eve. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word *ra’* which is translated evil in Gen. 3:5 is also translated as adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, distress, grief, harm, heavy, hurt, mischief, misery, naughty, noisome, sad, sore, sorrow, trouble, vex, wickedness, wretchedness, and wrong in other scriptures. Yes, Adam and Eve now knew both good and evil—the experienced it first hand (sin, adversity, affliction, etc.) as did all mankind after them. “*Wherefore, as by one*

man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:” Rom 5:12. When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, something within Adam and Eve died and all of mankind was forever separated from God--all because of disobedience, all because of Sin.

How does this relate to the foundation?

The foundation that the apostles laid is this, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil; he came to take away our Sin and to reconcile us to God. God has no fellowship with sin. *“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”* I Jn 1:5 We can have no fellowship with God as long as sin lives. *“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”* I Jn 1:6-7. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from **ALL** sin.

I like Peter’s statement in Acts 3:19, *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”* the phrase “blotted out” literally means “to be removed at the origin.” I’m reminded of an often-used expression related to the meaning of the word “justification” or “justified”—“just as if I’d never sinned.” While as clever as this may be, this is not the true meaning of justification. In fact, justification could more appropriately be described as “just as if Adam had never sinned.” Jesus reconciled us to God through his death on the cross. All we have to do is believe it, receive it, and enjoy it. He died, and I (the old man) died with him. He was buried, and I (the old man) was buried with him. He rose, and I (the new man) was raised a new creation. The phrase, “just as if I’d never sinned” implies that I have forgiveness of the sins I have committed in the past without dealing with the cause of sin. I am left to struggle with a sin nature that will lead me to sin in the present. “Just as if Adam had never sinned” means that I no longer have a sin nature that leads to acts of sin because sin was removed at its origin. Jesus, in effect, undid for those who believe, what Adam did through his transgression. Jesus removed our sin at the origin. It’s as simple as that!

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Romans 5:18-19

Modern Christianity, however unwittingly, has more often taken up the message of the serpent than that of the eyewitness apostles. While giving lip service to Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, they preach a gospel that is ineffectual. Many have even rejected the idea that sin is even an issue with God. “If I don’t recognize it as a problem, then it must not be a problem” or “if I ignore it, it will go away.” On the other hand, many of those who still see sin as an issue preach a gospel that implies that what Jesus did was insufficient, a gospel that requires our help to complete the work in us. “Jesus saved you, but now you need to keep yourself from sin.” “You need to understand the pitfalls of sin.” “You need counseling to understand what caused you to sin in the first place so you’ll know how to avoid it in the future.” “You need a step program.” “You need principals and precepts to live by so that you won’t backslide.” You need... “to discern good from evil”. Sound familiar? Sound good? Eve thought so!

Those who trust in the devices of religion to keep them, to do for them what Jesus shed his blood to do, regardless of how well intentioned, regardless of how good and sensible it sounds, find themselves as Adam and Eve, knowing both good and evil, experiencing both good and evil, separated from God. A Jesus that leaves you to struggle in your sin is another Jesus and is another foundation.

I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

1 Corinthians. 3:10

The second reason that the house of cards built by religion will not stand is that it is not only built on the wrong foundation, but that which is built on the foundation is not the workmanship of God.

Paul admonishes the church at Corinth to “take heed” how they build upon the foundation, even the foundation that Paul laid. Anytime we try to approach unto God through our religious works, the mechanics of religion, or through our own ability or endeavors, we are building something that cannot stand.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1 Corinthians 3:12-14

A teaching that suggests that there is anything we can do, **or need to do**, to add to the work of Calvary, is wood, hay and stubble. If it is our work, it will fall when the winds rise and when the storms rage. If it is our workmanship it will turn to ashes when the fires come, but what He does in us will stand. His work will last the test of time.

Recently the news media has had a number of reports of sexual abuse by Catholic priests—a number that seems to be growing rapidly. Protestants, especially fundamentalists, might sit by smugly, gloating that this has nothing to do with them. This thought, wherever it exists, is too presumptuous. In the late 1980s the national news abounded with reports of failures by fundamentalist ministers. The church’s answer: counseling, accountability partners, internet filters, step programs, and any number of complicated contortions—“if you hold your mouth just right, and stand on one leg, and hop in circles, while patting your head..., all to little or no effect. Sin still reigns. Indeed, today I was grieved to hear a news report of another fundamentalist minister’s failure—today in 2002.

Religious leaders have told us that internet filters will stop or curtail pornography, yet a recently published statistic indicates that significant numbers of those same religious leaders are addicted to pornography themselves. Religious leaders have told us that counseling, accountability partners and step programs will prevent any number of moral failings, yet they themselves still fail at much the same rate of occurrence as the unchurched. Do you see where I’m going with this? How can you expect a solution that will stand the test of time if that solution doesn’t even stand the test of the here and now for the architects or the designers or the facilitators of the solution?

The availability of pornography is not the cause of addiction to pornography—sin nature is the cause. Vows of celibacy are not the cause of sexual abuse—sin nature is the cause. Lack of counseling or lack of accountability partners or lack of step programs is not the cause of moral failure—sin nature is the cause.

It is evident that the solutions offered by modern Christianity are not an answer. The result is a house of cards. It may look good. It may have an attractive façade. It may appeal to our intellect and our very human need to control our own destiny, but when the rains come, when the winds blow, when the storms rage, it will fall. The answer? The real answer? The simple truth that Jesus shed his blood to free you from sin, to remove sin at the origin. When sin is gone, filth and uncleanness is gone. When sin is gone, immorality is gone. Jesus said in John 8:32 “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” Believe the truth that Jesus died to free you from sin, and when the tempest rages, the house will stand because it is built on the foundation that is Jesus Christ

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