

Session 2:

Abraham

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Session 2: Abraham

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Babylon

In Genesis 10 we find a man by the name of Nimrod:

Genesis 10:8: “And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.

10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”

The Bible describes Nimrod as “a mighty one in the earth” and as “a mighty hunter before the Lord”. However, there is a great deal more to the story. Nimrod was not like Esau, who was a mighty hunter of wild animals; instead he was a depraved hunter of *men* who fought the Lord and did many terrible things.

The name “Nimrod” comes from the Hebrew word *marad*, which means “rebel”. (Some people think that Nimrod might actually be his title instead of his name.) History tells us that Nimrod was an evil tyrant who hated the Lord and who spent his life fighting him. This is how the ancient Jewish historian Josephus described him:

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah -- a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually

changed the government into tyranny -- seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers. (Ant. 1: iv: 2)

As you can see, Nimrod was driven by a passionate hatred for God. He was angry at God for destroying the ancient world in the Flood and was determined to do three things: turn men away from God, get his revenge, and build a tower so tall that if God sent another Flood He would not be able to destroy mankind a second time. Nimrod was a rebellious, powerful king who had no fear of God whatsoever.

That in itself is an astonishing thing. The Lord had just shown His awesome power and wrath by *destroying the entire world in the Flood* – a fact that Nimrod knew but did not take to heart. Everyone who rebelled against God had died; the only ones who survived were God's servants. The rebels may have thought that they were stronger than God, but the Lord showed them how utterly powerless they really were. God had clearly demonstrated how *futile* it was to rebel against Him. It is simply not possible to gain victory over God – and yet Nimrod did not care. He was determined to be just like the rebels who lived before the Flood, even though those rebels had fought God *and lost*.

It is an amazing thing that men who knew about the Flood still chose to rebel against God. The Flood did not strike fear into their hearts; in fact, *it only made them hate God even more*. God had proven that He was stronger than man, but Nimrod did not care. He was determined to fight an all-knowing, all-powerful God. Nimrod saw that men feared God and was determined to draw men away from Him.

This is not the first time that men have chosen to wage war against God, and it would not be the last. Throughout history God has poured out His wrath upon those who hate Him, and yet people respond by deciding to rebel even more. Despite the fact that rebelling against God is hopeless, men *still* refuse to repent and be saved. They cling to their sin and rebellion all the way to the bitter end. Men were like this when history began, and they will still be like this when this Age draws to a close:

Revelation 16:9: “And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.”

In Revelation we see the same mindless rebellion that drove Nimrod. During the Tribulation the Lord will pour out terrible judgments upon the Earth. When God clearly demonstrating His wrath and power in a way that no one can deny or ignore, men will *still* refuse to repent. Instead of seeking forgiveness and grace they will instead curse God. Nimrod cursed God for judging the old world in the Flood; these men will curse God for judging the modern world in the Tribulation. It is the same sad story – men deliberately choosing God's wrath over God's mercy and grace. God offers forgiveness, but they will not take it. Their hatred for God is so great that they would rather curse God and die.

Nimrod's desire to rebel against God by building a tower was more than just words. As Genesis 10:10 points out, Nimrod founded Babel – the city made famous for its tower that was supposed to reach Heaven itself:

Genesis 11:2: “And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

3 And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they

had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

The city of Babel was founded as an act of rebellion against God. In fact, some have called it the first organized rebellion against God. Cain had rebelled against God, but he was just one man; there is no evidence that he led a movement. Nimrod was quite different: his goal was nothing less than the corruption of all mankind.

Nimrod founded the city of Babel and was determined to make a name for himself. He was going to build an empire that was dedicated to fighting God. Babel was not simply another city; it was an act of defiance against the Lord Himself.

Although he was determined to thwart God's plan, he did not succeed. His city of Babel did not grow into a worldwide empire that dominated the world and stamped out worship of God. The Lord saw what was going on and decided to stop it:

Genesis 11:5: "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

6 And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel;

because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

Notice how easy it was for the Lord to put an end to this scheme! Once again, mankind discovered that trying to rebel against God was fruitless. God is simply too great; He cannot be defeated. No city or power or scheme of men can possibly overthrow Him. He is far above our reach and has infinite power and wisdom. Nimrod was trying to thwart God by building a tower too tall for any flood to overcome, but the Lord did not send another flood. Instead God simply confused the languages of man, and that was that. Since men could no longer communicate with one another they were scattered abroad. The great tower at Babel was abandoned and left unfinished.

(As a side-note, notice that the Lord said “let *us* go down” – a reference to the Trinity. There are many times in the Old Testament when God refers to Himself in plural form. The Jews reject the concept of the Trinity, but despite their protests the Trinity is found in both the Old *and* New Testament.)

It is important to realize why God decided to intervene. Verse 6 tells us that “nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do”. Mankind was determined to build a kingdom that was in direct opposition to the Most High God. They were going to form a one-world government that would rule over the planet in the name of wickedness. God realized that if He did not stop them *they were going to succeed*, so He intervened. Mankind was planning on creating a tyrannical empire that spanned the entire globe, and which was headed by one wicked person who hated God. They almost succeeded – but God stopped them.

But they were not stopped forever. You see, the story of Babel did not end on the day that God confused the language of men. Babel is just another name for Babylon. Nimrod did not just found a city; he started a civilization. Although the tower was

abandoned, Babylon itself did not disappear; it continued to grow in power until it became a major civilization that conquered much of the ancient world. The book of Revelation tells us that one day Babylon will actually succeed in taking over the entire world. There *will* be a one-world government headed by an evil man of incredible wickedness – a man known as the antichrist. Nimrod's dream will come to pass and it will endure for a short while, until Jesus Christ returns and destroys it once and for all.

It is important to realize that Babylon is more than just a city or an ancient civilization. There are two sides in this universe: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Babylon is the sum of everything that is in rebellion against God. You might say that Babylon *is* the kingdom of this world. (Some have described history as a tale of two cities: Jerusalem, the city of God, and Babylon, the city of this world.) Babylon may no longer be a world power, but it was never really defeated. Saddam Hussein rebuilt the city of Babylon and it endures to this day. As the years go by its power will increase until it dominates the entire planet – and then God will judge it, just as the book of Revelation describes.

Before getting into that, however, we need to take a quick history lesson. Babylon is mentioned many times throughout Scripture. For example, during Israel's conquest of Canaan, Achan was led into sin when he saw a *Babylonian* garment:

Joshua 7:20: “And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:

21 When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.”

When this event happened Joshua had just started leading

the children of Israel into battle against the Canaanites. They had conquered Jericho and moved on to Ai, a city that was so small and weak that Joshua paid little attention to it. When he sent his army against it, however, his army lost; Ai defeated them and killed 36 Israelites. Joshua inquired of the Lord and found out that God had removed His blessing from them because one of the Israelites had sinned. All of the spoil from Jericho was supposed to go to the Lord, but Achan kept some of it for himself. This sin caused the Lord's favor to be removed from Israel and they began to lose battles; they did not win another battle until Achan was put to death.

It is interesting that Achan was tempted by a *Babylonian* garment. Achan was led astray by the kingdom of this world, and it destroyed him. The Bible strictly warns us to not love this world or the things that it contains:

1 John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

Achan loved the things of Babylon more than the things of God, and it cost him his life.

This is far from the only time that Babylon brought grief to Israel. When the evil king Ahaz rebelled against God, the Assyrians came and settled men from *Babylon* into Israel:

2 Kings 17:24: And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.”

Later, of course, Babylon would completely conquer Israel and relocate its entire population. Israel rejected God, so God gave them over to the kingdom of this world.

The good King Hezekiah was also ensnared by Babylon. Hezekiah had been gravely ill, but he cried out to God and the Lord healed him. After his recovery a group from *Babylon* came to pay their respects. Hezekiah responded by boasting about his wealth and showing them what a great and powerful king he was:

2 Kings 20:12: “At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

13 And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour; and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.”

You may recall that King Nebuchadnezzar also made the mistake of boasting about his greatness. That did not end well for him, and this did not end well for Hezekiah:

2 Kings 20:14: “Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon.

15 And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

16 And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord.

17 Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine

house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.

18 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

19 Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?"

Do you see how Hezekiah simply did not care? He didn't cry out to God and ask Him to forgive his pride and arrogance. The king did not intercede on behalf of Israel as Moses had done on countless occasions. Hezekiah was so self-centered and hard-hearted that the warning of God's coming judgment meant nothing to him! The fact that Israel would be conquered, his own sons would be enslaved, and many people would be killed made no impression on him at all. In fact, in verse 19 he even calls it "good"! All he cared about was himself. "Things will be good in my time; who cares what will happen to my children? If they're going to be brutally murdered by Babylonians, well, hey, that's not my problem."

Hezekiah had been a good king but he was led astray by the things of this world. He cared about his money, his power, and his glory; he wanted to make sure that things were good for *him*. He had fallen in love with the things of this world and wanted to make sure that the Babylon king respected him. The wrath of God was of no concern to him whatsoever.

Isaiah's dire prophecy came true. Years after Hezekiah died, King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel and hauled its men away to Babylon:

2 Kings 24:24: "In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became

his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him.”

Judah rebelled against Babylon, but the rebellion did not go well. In the days of Jehoiakim's son, Nebuchadnezzar came and besieged Jerusalem. When the city fell he destroyed the temple, sacked the city, and hauled away its treasure and people to Babylon:

2 Kings 24:10: “At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.

11 And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it.

12 And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

13 And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said.

14 And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.

15 And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

16 And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand,

all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.”

God had warned Israel repeatedly that if they rebelled against Him He would hand them over to their enemies, but they did not listen. Moses warned Israel about this before they even set foot in the promised land, and prophet after prophet repeated the warning of Moses. It was all to no avail: Israel refused to serve God, so He handed them over to Babylon. Since Israel loved this world more than it loved God, the Lord handed them over to it.

But Babylon was not left unpunished. God promised to put an end to them:

Isaiah 13:19: “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.”

Interestingly, *this prophecy has never been fulfilled*. When God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah the cities were utterly destroyed in a matter of moments, and all of their inhabitants were suddenly killed. Babylon, however, did not suffer that fate; instead it was gradually abandoned over a period of centuries. In fact, the city still existed in the days of Peter. The apostle mentioned it in one of his letters and said that there was a congregation of believers there:

I Peter 5:13: “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.”

Some have tried to claim that this was a code-word for

Rome, but that is not the case. There is no evidence that Peter ever visited Rome; when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans he greeted a very long list of people who were there (Romans 16), but Peter was not mentioned. It is much more likely that Babylon simply meant Babylon – especially since the city was still inhabited at that time.

Besides this, Isaiah 13:20 says that after Babylon is judged it will never be inhabited again, and that is something else that has never happened. In 1983 Saddam Hussein rebuilt the city of Babylon directly on top of its old site. In May of 2009 the site was reopened for tourism, and today it is a tourist attraction. The ancient city lives again.

The reason this happened is because the city's final judgment is still in the future. Isaiah's prophecy will come true during the Tribulation. Toward the end of that seven-year period the city of Babylon will be destroyed:

Revelation 18:1: “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

By the time this happens the city of Babylon will be far more than a mere tourist attraction. All nations and kings will have become entangled with her, and she will have given many merchants great wealth. Babylon will be in a position of great

political and economic power. Yet, despite its power, it will be destroyed in a single day and a single hour – just as Isaiah foretold:

Revelation 18:8: “Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.
9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,
10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.”

Notice how Babylon is called a “great city” and a “mighty city”. For more than a thousand years there was no city of Babylon; there were only ruins. Now the city of Babylon lives again, just as the Bible foretold. As the Tribulation draws near we can expect Babylon to grow tremendously and amass great wealth and power. It will once again become a mighty city that rules over the entire world – just as it did in ancient times. In fact, it will become the greatest city on the planet:

Revelation 18:17: “For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,
18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!”

In the cosmic struggle between the city of God and the city of this world, the city of this world will be utterly destroyed.

God will avenge His people:

Revelation 18:20: “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

21 And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

23 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

Long ago Nimrod founded Babylon in an attempt to defeat God and set himself up as king. Near the end of the Tribulation the Lord will utterly destroy the city that he created and put an end to the rebellion that he started. As Revelation says:

Revelation 11:15: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Amen!

The Life of Abraham

The purpose of this lesson is to give a general overview of the entire life of Abraham. By taking some time to look at his life as a whole, we can see events in context and get a glimpse of the bigger picture. Once we understand how everything fits together it will be much easier to take an in-depth look at specific events.

In this particular study we are going to start with the birth of Abraham. We all know that he was born thousands of years ago, but it's possible to pinpoint his birth a little more closely than that. Genesis 11 contains enough genealogical data to allow us to figure out approximately when he was born. First, Arphaxad (the son of Shem and grandson of Noah) was born two years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:10: “These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood:”

Salah was born when Arphaxad was 35, which means that Salah was born 37 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:12: “And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah:”

Eber was born when Salah was 30 years old, which means that Eber was born 67 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:14: “And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber:”

Peleg was born when Eber was 34 years old, which means that Peleg was born 101 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:16: “And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg:”

Reu was born when Peleg was 30 years old, which means that Reu was born 131 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:18: “And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu:”

Serug was born when Reu was 32 years old, which means that Serug was born 163 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:20: “And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug:”

Nahor was born when Serug was 30 years old, which means that Nahor was born 193 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:22: “And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor:”

Terah was born when Nahor was 29 years old, which means that Terah was born 222 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:24: “And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah:”

Finally, Abraham was born when Terah was 70, which means that Abraham was born 292 years after the Flood:

Genesis 11:26: “And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.”

The Flood occurred in approximately 2348 BC. (This is something I have talked about extensively elsewhere, so I will not

repeat that discussion here.) If the Flood occurred in 2348 BC and if Abraham was born 292 years after the Flood, then Abraham would have been born sometime around 2056 BC.

As we have seen, Genesis 11 gives us quite a bit of genealogical information regarding Abraham. He had two brothers: Nahor and Haran. His father was Terah and his grandfather was Nahor. He was 10 generations removed from Noah and, like all of mankind, was in his direct line. (Everyone in the world is a descendent of Noah.) Abraham was a descendent of Noah's son Shem, as are all of the Jews. (This is why the Jews are called a Semitic people and why being against Jews is called anti-Semitism. Shem, incidentally, means “name”; the Semitic people are literally “the people of the name”).

When Abraham was born his name was Abram, and it stayed that way until shortly before Isaac was conceived, when God changed it. His two names have meanings: Abram means “exalted father” and Abraham means “father of a multitude”. He married a woman named Sarai:

Genesis 11:29: “And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.”

God later changed Sarai's name to Sarah. Sarai means “noble woman”; Sarah means “princess”. (God changed both names to reflect the fact that a great nation was going to come from Abraham and Sarah.) What is not commonly known is that Sarah was actually Abraham's half-sister. This is what Abraham told Abimelech:

Genesis 20:12: “And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.”

Genesis 11 tells us that when Haran (Abraham's brother) died, the family was living in the land of Ur:

Genesis 11:28: “And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.”

After Haran died, Terah (Abraham's father) moved the family away from Ur to go to Canaan. The family only made it as far as Haran, a city that was once located in what is now Turkey (and yes, the city had the same name as Abraham's dead brother). Terah lived there for the rest of his life, and died there:

Genesis 11:31: “And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.”

While Abraham was living in Haran, the Lord came to him and told him to move:

Genesis 12:12: “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

It's interesting to note that at this point there was nothing particularly distinguishing about Abraham. The Bible never says that God decided to call Abraham because he was an exceptionally good man. There is no evidence that Abraham had won some sort of "best person" contest, or that God picked him because he was better and more holy than everyone else. Abraham did later demonstrate faith (by believing God's promises) and obedience (by being willing to sacrifice Isaac), but when God first came to Abraham he had not done any of those things. God simply chose to give him some amazing promises: to bless him, to make him a great nation, to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him, and to bless all families on the earth through him.

There are two important points here. First of all, God gives some people gifts that He does not give to others; that is His right as Creator. God created the world and we are His people; He is free to do to us as He pleases. If He chooses to make one person great and one person small, who are we to talk back to God? We often think that God should be "fair", but the Lord never promised that. He does as He pleases. He chose Abraham out of everyone in the world. There are some that God blesses with great talents and riches, and there are others who are not given nearly as much. The Bible tells us that He is the potter and we are the clay. If we accept this we will find contentment; if we reject it and demand that God be "fair" then our lives will be full of trouble.

The second point is that God's promises to Abraham were *not conditional*. God did not say "As long as you continue to obey me I will do the things I have said." The promises were not conditioned on his obedience or on the obedience of his descendents. Not all covenants are like this – for example, the Mosaic Law is a conditional covenant. God told Israel that He would bless them as long as they obeyed and He would curse them if they disobeyed. Israel would be allowed to stay in the land as long as they followed Him, but they would be evicted

from the land if they left Him. The Abrahamic covenant, however, was *not* conditional. There was nothing Abraham's descendents could do to void it. The promises that God made were binding then and are still binding now.

God has kept that covenant. He did make Abraham a great nation and He did bless him and give him a great name. Through Christ, a descendent of Abraham, all families on the earth are indeed blessed. However, there are two other aspects of the covenant that are still in force: God continues to bless those who bless Israel, and the land of Canaan still belongs to the Israelites. God promised to give the land to Abraham and to his descendents forever, and that promise is binding. There is nothing the Jews can do to forfeit their title to the land. Their disobedience has caused them to be evicted from the land on two separate occasions, but the land still belongs to them. There will come a day when their disobedience will be ended once and for all and they will accept Jesus as their Messiah; after that they will never again be evicted from the land. This, though, is something that we will talk about in a future lesson, so I will not dwell on it here.

When God told Abraham to leave the city of Haran, Abraham did so. At the age of 75 he took Lot and his family and moved to Canaan:

Genesis 12:4: “So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”

Lot was the son of Haran, the brother of Abraham who

had died some time earlier. Abraham and Lot were apparently close; he went wherever Abraham went, and when he got into trouble Abraham tried to help him. It is possible that Abraham felt some measure of responsibility for his orphaned nephew.

Abraham traveled to Sichem in the plain of Moreh. God appeared to him there and promised to give that land to his descendants:

Genesis 12:6: “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.
7 And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.”

Notice that no conditions were placed on this promise. The Lord simply told Abraham that He was going to give the land to his descendants.

After this a famine arose, so Abraham traveled to Egypt:

Genesis 12:10: “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.”

This has interesting parallels with what happened to Jacob, Abraham's grandson. In his days there was also a famine in the land, and Jacob and his family ended up moving to Egypt to be with Joseph. (That, however, is a story for another time.)

When Abraham moved to Egypt the Egyptians saw his wife and were taken by her beauty. Rather than being honest about who she was, Abraham had Sarah tell everyone that she was his sister. (That was actually a half-truth, since Sarah really was his half-sister. However, she was also his *wife*, which is a very relevant fact.) Since the Egyptians believed that Sarah was

just Abraham's sister, they took her to Pharaoh's house. Pharaoh was pleased and gave Abraham many presents.

God, however, was *not* pleased. He cursed Pharaoh's house with “great plagues” (Genesis 12:17), which finally got Pharaoh's attention. (Is this story sounding familiar? There was another time when God cursed Egypt with great plagues...) Pharaoh found out about Abraham's deception and was quite upset. He sent Sarah back home and made Abraham leave:

Genesis 12:18: “And Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.

20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.”

Centuries later, when Israel was driven out of Egypt during the time of Moses, they plundered the Egyptians and left with great riches. Likewise, when Abraham left Egypt he left it a wealthy man:

Genesis 13:2: “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.”

In fact, Abraham was so rich that there was strife between his servants and Lot's servants because of the size of their herds. They simply had too many cattle to live together in one place. To resolve this dispute Abraham stepped in and told Lot that they need to go their separate ways. Lot decided to go to Sodom, so Abraham went the other way:

Genesis 13:10: “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and

beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

Lot chose to live in the plain of Jordan because it was a beautiful area that was perfect for raising cattle – but there was a drawback. He chose to live in Sodom, a city full of wickedness. That choice would later cost him everything he had; at the end of his life he would find himself living in a cave. It is not a good idea to pitch your tent toward Sodom or to choose to live in the center of wickedness and depravity. Lot did not have to live in Sodom, but he chose to do so – and it cost him dearly.

After this God promised to give Abraham and his descendents "all the land which thou seest":

Genesis 13:14: "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, **and to thy seed for ever**.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of

it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."

It should be noted that the promise was not *just* to Abraham's offspring; it was also to *Abraham himself*. God specifically said "to thee will I give it, and to thy seed". This is significant because Abraham did not get any of the land during his lifetime! The fulfillment of this promise is still in the future – it is something that will happen during the Millennial Kingdom. Today that piece of land in the Middle East is hotly disputed, but it will not always be that way. The day will come when Israel will dwell securely in that land and no one will ever try to take it from her again. It will belong to Abraham and his descendants forever.

This passage has both the land promise and the promise to have many descendants. Interestingly, Abraham did not live long enough to see either of these promises come true. He died before Jacob had his twelve sons, and he died centuries before the Israelites inherited the land of Canaan – and Abraham himself never inherited any of it. God kept his promises but Abraham could only see their fulfillment far off, with the eyes of faith. To this day the land promise has only been partially fulfilled, but one day it will be wholly fulfilled. In Abraham's lifetime these two promises were tests of faith, for it seemed that God had failed – but He never fails.

After this, Abraham went to the plain of Mamre, "which is in Hebron", and built an altar to the Lord:

Genesis 13:18: "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord."

Some time after this, the kings of Sodom were attacked by a coalition of other kings:

Genesis 14:1: “And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations;

2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.”

Their attack upon Sodom was successful: the kings of Sodom were defeated, their cities were looted, and the conquerors carried off its people and its wealth – which included Lot. When Abraham heard about this he immediately put together a plan to rescue his nephew. He armed 318 of his trained servants (yes, Abraham was so wealthy that he had more than 300 servants!), then pursued the invaders to Dan and attacked them during the night:

Genesis 14:14: “And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.”

God gave Abraham the victory; his tiny army of trained servants was able to defeat the combined armies of several kings. Amazingly, Abraham returned everything that he recovered. The king of Sodom tried to get him to keep the wealth but Abraham refused:

Genesis 14:21: “And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:”

However, Abraham did give a tithe of everything to Melchizedek, a priest of God:

Genesis 14:18: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

The Bible has a lot to say about Melchizedek, but since we will be discussing him in a future lesson we will not dwell on it here.

Interestingly, right after Abraham saved Lot and got nothing in return, God came to Abraham and said that He was “thy exceeding great reward”:

Genesis 15:1: “After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”

He also said that He was Abraham's shield. Shields are defensive items; they are used to protect a person from attack. God essentially said that He was protecting Abraham – and He continues to watch over Abraham's children to this day.

During this encounter with God, Abraham complained that God hadn't given him any children. God reiterated His promise that his descendents would be as the stars of the sky in number:

Genesis 15:5: “And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.
6 And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

Verse 6 is of key importance: Abraham believed God, "and he counted it to him for righteousness". Abraham's salvation was by grace through faith, not by works. He was saved because he believed God, not because of anything he had done. His faith is what saved him.

God then told Abraham that He had brought him out of Ur so that He could give him the land of Canaan. Abraham asked for a sign, and God commanded him to offer a sacrifice. When the sun was going down Abraham fell asleep, and "an horror of great darkness fell upon him". God then told Abraham that his descendents would be "a stranger in a land that is not theirs" and would be afflicted for 400 years. God would then judge the nation that afflicted them and lead them out with great wealth. Meanwhile, Abraham would live to a ripe old age and die in peace.

God then made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to give his descendents all of the land between the Nile and the Euphrates river – a piece of territory approximately 1500 miles wide:

Genesis 15:18: “In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:”

It should be noted that Israel has never possessed all of that land – but one day they will. God will keep the promise that He made to Abraham all those years ago. Currently Israel is a very small country, but that is going to change. Israel will reign over all of that territory during the Millennial Kingdom. God always keeps His promises.

After this, Sarah became upset that she was now old and still did not have any children. She told the 86-year-old Abraham to sleep with her maidservant Hagar:

Genesis 16:1: “Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.

2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

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

4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.”

The Bible tells us that Sarah “dealt hardly with her” and Hagar ran off into the wilderness. “The angel of the Lord” (possibly a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, although that is a discussion for another time) came to her and told her to go back to Sarah and submit to her. He also told her that she would have a

son named Ishmael, who would have many descendents; Ishmael would be a wild man, and “his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him”.

Hagar obeyed, went back to Sarah, and gave birth to Ishmael, who is the father of the Arab peoples. It is interesting to note that the conflict in the Middle East is between the descendents of Ishmael (the Arabs) and the descendents of Jacob (the Jews). The Middle East crisis is essentially a giant family feud.

When Abraham was 99 years old God made another covenant with him and gave him a set of promises:

Genesis 17:1: “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

This is the Abrahamic Covenant. In it, God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), promised to make him the father “of many nations”, promised to give him “all the land of Canaan”, and promised “to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee”. This is said to be an *everlasting* covenant – one that is not dependent upon Abraham in any way and therefore cannot be voided by him or his descendents. This means that there is nothing Abraham or his descendents could do to break this covenant and forfeit its promises.

Circumcision was instituted, and Abraham and his offspring were charged with keeping it. It was to be done on the eighth day after birth; those who did not would be cut off (but note that not keeping it would *not* void the covenant; it would simply cut off the individual breakers). God also changed Sarai's name to Sarah and said that she would have a son. Abraham asked God to bless Ishmael, and God said that He would but that He was making His covenant with Isaac.

Some time after this (but before Isaac was conceived), Abraham was visited by three men:

Genesis 18:1: “And the Lord appeared unto him
in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent
door in the heat of the day;
2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo,
three men stood by him: and when he saw them,
he ran to meet them from the tent door, and
bowed himself toward the ground,”

People commonly assume that these three men were angels, but that is not the case. If you read the chapter you will see that when they speak the Bible calls them Lord (see verse 13). It's quite possible that at least one of these men was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

The men tell Abraham that Sarah was going to have a son. When Sarah found this impossible to believe and laughed, the

Lord rebuked her. God also told Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom. Abraham interceded on the city's behalf, and God agreed to spare it if there were just 10 righteous people there:

Genesis 18:32: “And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.”

The Lord then left and Abraham returned “unto his place”. The next day Abraham got up early and saw that Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed. However, God remembered Abraham and saved Lot:

Genesis 19:27: “And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord:

28 And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

29 And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.”

After this Abraham moved to Gerar. Once again Abraham told everyone that Sarah was his sister, and once again this caused problems. This time the victim wasn't the Pharaoh of Egypt, but Abimelech the king. When the king took Sarah, God warned him in a dream that Sarah was Abraham's wife. Abimelech then gave Sarah back (along with some gifts), and gave Abraham a piece of his mind:

Genesis 20:9: “Then Abimelech called

Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done."

Abraham told the king that he had made a deal with Sarah: everywhere they went she was supposed to tell people that they were brother and sister and not a married couple. In the end Abraham prayed and God healed the women of the house of the king, "for the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech".

After this Sarah conceived and Isaac was born:

Genesis 21:1: "And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac."

Isaac (which means "laughter") was born when Abraham was 100 years old. Not everyone was happy to see him, however. When Sarah caught Hagar mocking Isaac, Sarah told Abraham to get rid of both her and Ishmael. God told Abraham to not be grieved over this:

Genesis 21:12: "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I

make a nation, because he is thy seed.”

So Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away. Ishmael survived and became a great nation; his descendents are the Arabs.

After this Abraham made an agreement with Abimelech (likely a different person than the one who took Sarah). Abraham was upset with him because Abimelech's servants had violently stolen one of his wells, and Abraham set aside 7 “ewe lambs” to indicate that the well belonged to him. Abraham planted a grove there and called upon the name of the Lord. He then “sojourned in the Philistines' land many days”.

God then tested Abraham:

Genesis 22:1: “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.”

Abraham took his son Isaac to the place God had indicated. In fact, Abraham even got up early the next morning to do so! He did not delay or waste any time. However, when he was about to kill Isaac, God stopped him and said he had passed the test. God then supplied a ram in Isaac's place and Abraham sacrificed it instead.

There are some important parallels here that should not be

overlooked. Romans tells us that the wages of sin is death; we all deserve to die. Under the Mosaic Law there was a sacrificial system where animals were offered as payment for sins (although the blood of animals never actually atoned for sin; the sacrifices were pointing to Christ). In an animal sacrifice an animal dies in place of a person. This points us to Christ, who died in our place and atoned for our sins by paying for them with His own body and His own blood. Just as the ram took Isaac's place, so Christ took our place and suffered for the sins that we committed.

Some time after this, Sarah died at the age of 127:

Genesis 23:1: "And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah."

One commentary noted that of all the women in the Bible, Sarah is the only one whose age at death is recorded. It is also interesting to note that, despite what Catholics claim, the Bible *never* tells us to look to Mary as an example of a godly woman. It does, however, tell us to look to *Sarah* as a godly example (Isaiah 51:1-2, 1 Peter 3:3-6).

Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah so he could bury her. The cave was purchased from Ephron the Hittite for the ludicrous price of 400 shekels of silver. This is what one commentary said about the purchase price:

By all accounts, 400 shekels of silver was an exorbitant price. "Omri paid 6,000 shekels for the whole site of Samaria, and Jeremiah gave only 17 shekels for a parcel of land probably about the size of Machpelah." (*Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament*)

The Hittites really took advantage of Abraham. The only thing Abraham wanted to buy was the cave, but they forced him to buy the cave, the field, and the surrounding trees – and to pay

23 *times* what it was worth. (This would be like being charged \$2.3 million for a house that was only worth \$100,000.) Abraham paid it and buried his dead.

After Sarah died, Abraham sent his "eldest servant" to go back to Abraham's homeland and get a wife for Isaac:

Genesis 24:1: "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

3 And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:

4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."

His servant was successful and returned with Rebekah. It turns out that she was related to Abraham:

Genesis 24:24: "And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor:"

Her grandfather Nahor was Abraham's brother (Genesis 11:26).

After finding a wife for Isaac, Abraham married a woman named Keturah. He had numerous children with her but he still left everything that he had to Isaac:

Genesis 25:1: "Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah.

2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and

Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim.

4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Ephher, and Hanoch, and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.”

Abraham lived to be 175 years old and then died:

Genesis 25:7: “And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.

8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.”

His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the same cave where Sarah was buried:

Genesis 25:9: “And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;

10 The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.”

Thus God fulfilled His promise to Abraham – he lived a long life and died in peace, exactly as God had said.

The Order of Melchizedek

Some time after Abraham left his family home and moved to the land of Canaan, a famine arose. Since there was no food for him or his family, he left Canaan and went to Egypt. When the famine ended and he returned to Canaan, he and Lot had so many cattle that the land could not support both of them. The two men were forced to part company. Abraham gave Lot first choice, and he looked around and decided to live in Sodom:

Genesis 13:10: “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.”

Life in Sodom was not as easy as Lot had expected. There came a day when a coalition of kings invaded Sodom and defeated it, carrying off (among other things) Lot and all of his possessions:

Genesis 14:1: “And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal

king of nations;

2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

3 All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.

4 Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

5 And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emins in Shaveh Kiriathaim,

6 And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness.

7 And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar.

8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;

9 With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.

10 And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

11 And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their

way.

12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.”

When Abraham heard about this, he armed his servants for war and fought the kings that had taken his nephew:

Genesis 14:14: “And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.”

This is when we meet a man named Melchizedek. When the king of Sodom came out to meet the victorious Abraham, Melchizedek came as well:

Genesis 14:17: “And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all."

This is the first and only time that the mysterious Melchizedek appears. He is a very unusual and unexpected character. First of all, Melchizedek is the king of Salem. The city of Salem (which literally means "Peace") is very famous; the rest of the Bible refers to it as Jerusalem. Melchizedek, then, was king over Jerusalem in the time of Abraham.

Melchizedek was not just a king, though; he was also a priest. Verse 18 tells us that he was "the priest of the most high God". This makes him both a king *and* a priest, which is an unusual combination.

Right from the start we can see parallels between Melchizedek and Jesus. Jesus is also a king; during the Millennial Kingdom He will reign over the entire world. Jesus is also our high priest, who gave His own life for us and who intercedes on our behalf. Also, like Melchizedek, Jesus will one day reign as king *from Jerusalem*.

It is interesting that Melchizedek was not just a priest, but was a priest "of the most high God". Melchizedek is not a descendent of Abraham; he was not a Jew, a Levite, or (as far as we know) even a relative. To find someone back then who was *not* related to Abraham but who still worshiped the most high God is quite amazing; to find someone who not only worshiped God but who was also a king and a priest is even more amazing. Melchizedek simply comes out of nowhere and then disappears. We don't know anything about his ancestry or how he came to be king. His past is shrouded in mystery.

One thing we do know is that as great as Abraham was, Melchizedek was even greater. We know this because Abraham actually gave a tithe of the loot to Melchizedek:

Hebrews 7:4: "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch

Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. ...

6 But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.

7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better."

We can see that Melchizedek was an interesting person: he was both a king and a priest, he reigned over Jerusalem, and he was apparently greater than even Abraham. All of that is good to know, but his importance runs much deeper. The book of Psalms tells us that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek:

Psalm 110:4: "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

What does that mean? Well, in order to understand this we need to understand the Levitical priesthood. When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, the Lord established the priesthood. The first priests were Aaron and his sons:

Exodus 28:41: "And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office."

Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi:

Exodus 2:1: "And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.

2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink."

This is why it is called the Levitical priesthood – all priests were of the tribe of Levi. However, not everyone in the tribe of Levi was a priest; that right was reserved strictly for the descendents of Aaron. The rest of the tribe was charged with ministering to the priests and keeping up the tabernacle:

Leviticus 18:1: "And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.

2 And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness.

3 And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die."

As we can see, only the descendents of Aaron were allowed to minister as priests and perform sacrifices. The priesthood was of the tribe of Levi and the line of Aaron. If you were not of the tribe of Levi and a descendent of Aaron, *you could not be a priest.*

The reason this matters is because Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi:

Revelation 5:5: "And one of the elders saith

unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

How could Jesus Christ possibly be our high priest if He was not of the tribe of Levi? It is because God has made Him a priest after the order of *Melchizedek*, not the order of Levi:

Psalm 110:4: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek was not from the line of Levi and yet he was still a priest. Jesus is our high priest, but as the apostle Paul explains He is not a *levitical* priest:

Hebrews 7:14: “For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

15 And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest,

16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

17 For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Why was this necessary? Well, the reason Jesus needed to be a priest of a different order is because the levitical priesthood could not save anyone. The levitical sacrifices were actually unable to forgive sins:

Hebrews 10:4: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away

sins.”

Not only were the sacrifices unable to take away sins, but no one could be saved by keeping the Mosaic Law:

Galatians 3:11: “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

As we can see, the levitical sacrifices could *not* take away sin, and keeping the levitical law could *not* justify anyone in the sight of God. (This is by design; the law was intended to point us to Christ and was not an end in itself.) In order for salvation to be possible there needed to be a change in the order of things, and in order to change the law the priesthood had to change as well:

Hebrews 7:11: “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

12 For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

In the days of Moses the Israelites were under the Mosaic Law and the levitical priesthood – but neither of those could save them. Today we are not under the law but are under grace – and the reason that is possible is because the levitical priesthood has been replaced with something else. Jesus, our high priest, has done away with the old order and has created a new one – and the reason *that* is possible because He is *not* from the tribe of Levi. The old system has been annulled:

Hebrews 7:18: “For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before

for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.”

As Christians, we know that we are not under the law but are under grace. We know that the Mosaic Law has no power over our lives; we are not bound to keep it, as Israel was. This is *why* we are not under the law. Because there has been a change in the priesthood, the law of the old levitical priesthood has been annulled and replaced with a different law – the law of grace:

Romans 8:2: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

This is why these things are so important – in order for us to be saved there had to be a change in the law and a change in the priesthood. The old law and the old priesthood could not save us. Christ, however, did not come as a levitical priest, but as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and that made all the difference. Now salvation is indeed possible:

Hebrews 7:22: “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when

he offered up himself.

28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.”

Under the levitical system the priests had to constantly offer sacrifices, day after day after day. Jesus, however, does not need to do that. He offered one supreme sacrifice – Himself – and then sat down at the right hand of God. That one ultimate sacrifice was enough to pay for all of our sins and make us right with God. Jesus literally “paid it all” with His own blood.

Yet Jesus is still our high priest and He still executes that office. One point that we often overlook is verse 25 – Jesus can save us *because He ever lives to make intercession for us*. Our eternal life depends on the eternal life of Jesus. We will continue to be saved as long as Jesus continues to live and intercede for us. Our salvation is continually dependent upon Jesus for the rest of time.

Now we know that Jesus is the Eternal One; He has always lived and He will always live. We also know that He will never stop making intercession for us. Our eternal salvation and everlasting life is absolutely assured beyond any possibility of doubt. What I want to point out is that we will *always* be dependent upon Jesus as our high priest.

When the Bible says that Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, that is not simply a useless bit of trivia; it is a vital fact that makes our very salvation possible.

Defile Not The Land

One of the promises that God made to Abraham was that He would give him and his descendents the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession:

Genesis 15:7: “And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.”

The Lord went on to tell Abraham that his descendents would be enslaved for 400 years, and afterward God would deliver them and give them the land of Canaan:

Genesis 15:13: “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;
14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”

In other words, while God was going to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendents, He wasn't going to do it right away. Later in the chapter God explained to Abraham why He was waiting:

Genesis 15:16: “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

As you can see, the reason Abraham's descendents had to wait 400 years to get what God had promised them is because

God was waiting on the Amorites. Their wickedness was not yet complete – or, as the Bible puts it, their iniquity was “not yet full”. God was going to wait until it became full, after which time He would take their land away from them.

This fact should grab our attention, because God *did not have a covenant relationship with the Amorites*. We are used to the idea of God evicting *Israel* from the land if they disobeyed Him, but the idea that God might evict other nations *for the same reason* is foreign to us – but that's exactly what it says in Genesis 15:6. God was going to wait until the Amorites were completely depraved and then He was going to destroy them and give their land to someone else. The Amorites did not have a covenant with God and were not under the Mosaic Law (in fact, the Mosaic Law didn't even exist in the time of Abraham!), but that didn't matter. Once their iniquity became full God was going to destroy them.

This principle is expounded upon in the book of Leviticus. God strictly warned the Jews to not defile the land and told them that the reason the Amorites were evicted was because they had broken that commandment:

Leviticus 18:24: “Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you:

25 And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.

26 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you:

27 (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;)

28 That the land spew not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spewed out the nations that were before you.”

There's a lot going on here, but the basic message is pretty simple. God told the nation of Israel that although there were many different sins (and the penalty for all sin is death), there were certain sins that resulted in consequences upon the entire nation. These sins were so terrible that they caused the land itself to be defiled and brought down God's judgment. God destroyed the nations that used to live in Canaan because they committed these sins, and God warned Israel that if they committed the same sins they would also be destroyed.

In other words, God established a principle. If a nation committed certain sins then those sins would defile the land and bring down God's judgment upon that nation. In fact, verse 25 warns us that the “land itself” would “vomit out her inhabitants”. It is important to note that this threat was not directed specifically at Israel. God made it clear in verse 28 that this principle applies to *all* nations. The Amorites are a great example of this: they did not have the Mosaic Law or a special covenant relationship with God, and yet they were evicted from their land *because of their sin*. This principle applies to all nations, not just Israel.

Now it may seem strange to say that some sins bring God's judgment upon a nation while others do not, but it makes sense if you take a step back and think about it. The Bible says that *people* are judged for their sins *after* they die. If they are in Christ then they will be forgiven and receive mercy; if they have rejected Christ then they will face God's wrath. That principle, however, applies to individuals, not nations. Whereas individuals are judged after death, *nations* (like the Amorites) are judged in *this* life. National sin is a little different from personal sin, and there are some sins that defile a nation as a whole. One of these sins is murder:

Numbers 35:31: “Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

32 And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.

33 So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: **for blood it defileth the land**: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."

What God is saying is that when someone murders a person, that act causes the land itself to become defiled. This principle was first demonstrated in the story of Cain and Abel, where God said that Abel's innocent blood cried out to Him:

Genesis 4:10: "And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

The blood of murdered people still cries out to God, just as Abel's blood did. As Numbers 35:33 points out, the **only** way that the land can be cleansed of this innocent blood is by executing the murderer. (Note that this is talking about cleansing the land, not obtaining forgiveness. The sinner can obtain forgiveness by repentance, but the only way the land can be cleansed is by executing the murderer.) God strictly warned Israel to "take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer" and said that "he shall be surely put to death". Why? Because *the innocent blood defiles the land*, and if the land is defiled it will "vomit out" its inhabitants (Leviticus 18:28). The Amorites – who were *not* under the Mosaic Law – were destroyed by God for defiling their land. This is a hard-and-fast rule that applies to all nations: if a nation defiles the land then God will destroy them.

Israel learned this lesson the hard way. The evil king Manasseh shed a great deal of innocent blood, so – decades later – God sent armies against Judah to destroy them:

2 Kings 24:2: “And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets.

3 Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did;

4 And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; **which the Lord would not pardon.**”

We need to keep in mind the fact that Manasseh had *actually repented* of the terrible things he had done. He was very sorry about it:

2 Chronicles 33:12: “And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

13 And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. ..

15 And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.

16 And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.”

Manasseh's repentance was sincere: he put away the idols, repaired God's altar, and served the Lord. God accepted his cry and took him out of Babylon (where he had been held captive), returned him to Jerusalem, and gave him his kingdom back. However, despite all this, 2 Kings 24:4 tells us that the Lord *would not pardon* the innocent blood that had been shed. Even though Manasseh had repented and turned from his sins, the innocent blood still defiled the land, and that required God's judgment upon the nation. Manasseh had personally been forgiven but the land had still been defiled, so God brought judgment upon the nation.

Manasseh was not king when the Lord sent His judgments against Judah; when judgment finally came he had been dead for more than 30 years. The passage of time, however, had done nothing to cleanse the land. God sent armies against the nation and destroyed it so that the innocent blood might be avenged. In the end the blood was paid for by the deaths of countless Israelites and the destruction of their entire country. This happened *despite the fact that Manasseh had repented*. The innocent blood had to be paid for and God avenged it by destroying Israel.

Needless to say, the United States has a great deal of blood on its hands. More than 50 million children have been murdered since the Roe vs Wade decision 40 years ago, and there is no sign that abortion will ever become illegal again. In fact, things are going in the opposite direction. When President Obama was an Illinois state senator he supported killing babies *after* they were born. What used to be called murder is now called a “post-birth abortion”, and it is becoming increasingly accepted by society. It may soon be legal for mothers to execute their children before *and* after they are born. It's worth noting that the number of American soldiers who have died in all the wars that this country has ever fought, *combined*, is less than *the number of abortions that take place in this country every year*. The United States has executed innocent lives by the tens of millions and has defiled the

land on a *massive* scale. Worst of all, as a nation, we are not sorry. We have not stopped our behavior and repented, as Manasseh did.

As if that were not enough, the idea of executing murderers has fallen completely out of favor, even among Christians. It is seen as barbaric and cruel. Things have become so bad that people aren't ashamed to say that they are ok with executing unborn children who have committed *no* crimes, but are against executing rapists and murderers. It is somehow *wrong* to execute a murderer but *right* to execute a child. All of this is an abomination to God, but as a nation we simply don't care. Even though God demands that murderers be executed in order to cleanse the land of its innocent blood, we just laugh at God and tell Him “no”. We're not concerned.

We somehow think that God will never hold this nation accountable for what it has done – but that is a very great error. After Manasseh defiled the land by shedding much innocent blood, God waited decades before He sent armies against Judah to destroy it. It has been 40 years since Roe vs Wade legalized abortion nationwide, and America has not repented or turned from her sins. God is simply waiting, as He did in the case of Manasseh – but you can be sure that judgment *will* come. The innocent blood *must* be paid for. It is only a matter of time.

Murder, however, is not the only thing that causes the land to be defiled. Sexual immorality does as well. Leviticus 18 contains a list of immoral acts that cause the land to be defiled. The list of immoral acts includes **incest** (Leviticus 18:6-18), **adultery** (Leviticus 18:20), **child sacrifice** (Leviticus 18:21), **having sex with animals** (Leviticus 18:23), and **homosexuality**. Interestingly, homosexuality is the *only thing on the list that is singled out as an abomination*:

Leviticus 18:22: “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”

In other words, as bad as all of these other sins are –

incest, child sacrifice, and so forth – the one thing that is worse than everything else and that rises to the level of an abomination is homosexuality. While all of the things on this list cause the land to be defiled, homosexuality is *especially* bad. God hates it with a passion and promises to judge nations for it.

This is very bad news for us because western civilization has embraced these sins. Adultery has become widespread, and homosexuality is actually celebrated and encouraged. Our culture condemns those who are against homosexual marriage as being bigots and hate-mongers. Homosexuality has been embraced – not just by the culture, but even by many churches. It has gotten to where some churches have absolutely no problem with openly homosexual pastors. I once saw a church that had a special service to repent of the sin of *thinking poorly about homosexuality*. They wanted to make it clear to God that they loved homosexuality and were embarrassed about having ever opposed it.

Many people are not the least bit concerned about the rampant epidemic of adultery, homosexuality, and abortion that plagues our country. This nation is massively immoral and is proud of it. Many churches across the country have embraced this nation's sins and do nothing to fight them. We have defiled the land on a massive scale and are not the least bit sorry about it. In fact, the United States even has Gay Pride days to celebrate our immorality!

Some people might claim that these provisions are from the Mosaic Law and do not apply to us today. They claim that we live in a new age and are not under the law, but are under grace. While that theory may sound wise, there are actually several problems with it.

First of all, notice that the nations that were evicted from Canaan for committing these sins *did not have the Mosaic Law!* Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed long before Moses was even born, and the Bible is quite clear about why God destroyed those cities:

Jude 1:7: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and

the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

As you can see, the reason God destroyed those cities is because they gave themselves over to fornication and homosexuality. They defiled their land, and so God utterly wiped them out and burned their cities to the ground. The fact that they were not a part of the Mosaic Covenant did not make the least bit of difference.

It should also be noted that the sins that are listed in Leviticus 18 are *still sins*. The New Testament is quite clear that adultery is still a sin and warns Christians repeatedly to abstain from fornication. It also warns against homosexuality and goes so far as to say that no unrepentant homosexual will enter Heaven. Finally, taking children and burning them alive as a sacrifice to pagan gods is still a terrible sin. You simply cannot argue that God is no longer against the behaviors that are listed in Leviticus 18. The awful things that the chapter lists are still sins today.

There are some other things that can cause the land to be defiled. We find them listed in Hosea:

Hosea 4:1: “Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.

3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.”

Hosea tells us that because of swearing (yes, swearing!), lying, murdering, stealing, and sexual immorality, the land mourns and those who live in it languish. When these verses were written the Lord was angry with the Jews because they lacked truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God. We are even told that the fish of the sea would be taken away, implying that these sins would trigger mass animal deaths. (Incidentally, isn't it amazing how many mass animal deaths there have been in the news lately? Huge groups of animals are suddenly dropping dead and no one seems to know why. Has this nation been swearing, lying, stealing, and committing adultery? Isn't it interesting that all these strange natural disasters have started happening at a time when lying is so common that we just *expect* other people to lie to us?)

As Christians it's easy to point at Israel and say "They sinned against God, so God evicted them from the land" – and that is absolutely true. But we miss the fact that *this principle applies to all nations*. Israel is not the only nation that God threatened to judge for committing abominations in His sight. After all, the Amorites were evicted from the land for their sin (as Leviticus 18:28 said), even though they were *not* God's chosen people and did *not* have a covenant with Him. The same thing can be said about Sodom and Gomorrah.

These days many churches are reluctant to criticize homosexuality, and many pastors defend it. (I saw this headline in the news some time ago: "Prominent UK Pastor Steve Chalke Defends Pro-Gay Position". Chalke argues that homosexuality is not a sin. Articles like this seem to appear on a weekly basis; there is always some pastor speaking up in favor of homosexuality and denying that the Bible condemns it.) God, however, is quite clear: homosexuality is an abomination in His sight and is exactly why He destroyed Sodom. Homosexuality is one of many things that defiles the land and brings God's judgment.

God told Israel that He destroyed the Amorites because they defiled the land, and He warned Israel to not live the way the

Amorites lived:

Leviticus 18:3: “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances.”

He warns Israel not to obey the “ordinances” of the land of Canaan. I looked up the word “ordinances” in Strong's (it's number #2708), and it means what you would expect – ordinance, statute, custom. What God is saying here is that the sins listed in Leviticus 18 (incest, homosexuality, murdering children) had become *the law* in Canaan. They were not just isolated sins by isolated people; they had become a national custom. At that point – *when sin becomes an ordinance* – it's all over. The iniquity of the Amorites was full and they were evicted from the land.

The reason I bring this up is because we are now in the same situation as the Amorites. We as a nation legalized the murder of children in 1973, and since then it has been an “ordinance” that parents can have their unborn children executed. The Canaanites murdered their children to serve pagan gods; our nation does it largely for the sake of convenience.

Since 1973 the situation has not improved. Homosexuality – the one sin specifically listed in Leviticus 18 as being an abomination in the sight of God – is now mainstream, and the Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled in favor of it. It has gone beyond being culturally accepted; things are now to the point where disagreeing with homosexuality is seen as a crime. Anyone who is against it is criticized, condemned, and hated. Businesses whose owners are opposed to it are no longer welcome in some cities. If you run a business and don't want to make a wedding cake for a homosexual couple, you will be taken to court and found guilty. Homosexual marriage is not merely tolerated; it is celebrated, and the courts are busy striking down all laws that are opposed to it.

In other words, *homosexuality has become an ordinance*. We have embraced the ordinances of the Canaanites – the very ordinances that brought down God's judgment upon them and got them evicted from their land. Our own President signed a proclamation on June 1, 2012, celebrating homosexuality and declaring that month to be Gay Pride Month. Interestingly, June 2012 was not a good month for the United States. There was a terrible drought that lingered for months and caused tremendous damage and economic loss. June 2012 was also a time of intense heat; in fact, 2012 became the hottest year on record for the northeast.

It's amazing how many times natural disasters can be connected to homosexuality. Six days after New York State ruled in favor of gay marriage, Hurricane Sandy hit that very state and caused \$71 billion in damage. (The ruling was on October 23, 2012; the hurricane hit on October 29. Interestingly, the hurricane was already on its way when the ruling came down! People are now saying that this extremely rare superstorm has caused far more damage and economic loss than Hurricane Katrina.) Hurricane Isaac, which hit New Orleans seven years to the day after Hurricane Katrina, struck as New Orleans was celebrating a festival called Southern Decadence – a time dedicated to immorality, adultery, and homosexuality. (Hurricane Katrina also hit when that same city was celebrating that same festival.) Something else to think about: the October 1987 stock market crash, which was the greatest one-day crash in history, happened just 8 days after a massive homosexual march (200,000 to 500,000 people) on Washington DC. The economic loss resulting from that crash amounted to the hundreds of billions of dollars.

None of this should come as a surprise. After all, the book of Psalms says this:

Psalm 107:33: “He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground;
34 A fruitful land into barrenness, for the

wickedness of them that dwell therein.”

It is a grave error to think that Israel is the only nation that has to worry about facing God's judgment. We have this idea that we can do as we please and there will be no consequences. Few people are concerned that God might judge us for what our nation has done – even though God has judged nations for sin time and time again. What concerns me the most is that even Christians are not concerned about God's judgment. Many pastors openly laugh at the idea that a natural disaster might be some kind of judgment from God. The very idea that God would keep His promise to punish nations that defile the land is somehow seen as laughable and ridiculous.

But consider this: have we seen record-breaking natural disasters? Earthquakes? Storms? Droughts? Animals dying off in large numbers for no apparent reason? Have the timing of these disasters coincided with national sin? These are questions that we need to be asking. Why do we think that God no longer takes sin seriously? Why do we believe that the God who would destroy the Amorites for their immorality, and who would wipe out Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins, would spare us when we have sinned on an *immensely greater scale*?

Now I do not believe that every storm and natural disaster is due to divine judgment. We do live in a fallen world and disasters do happen. But when a particularly devastating disaster happens at the same time that a nation commits a sin that is an abomination in God's sight, then in that case I think it may be more than just a coincidence.

After all, God did warn us. He told us that if a nation commits the sins listed in Leviticus 18 that the land itself would vomit us out. He told us what would happen if we adopted the ordinances of the Canaanites, but we have not listened. Our nation has taken the one sin that was singled out by God as being an abomination – the sin of homosexuality – and has worn it as a badge of pride. Churches have celebrated homosexuality and appointed homosexuals as ministers. Our culture has even taken

the rainbow – a sign given to mankind by God Himself as a reminder that He would never again flood the entire world – and turned it into a symbol promoting homosexuality! (If that's not trying to spit in God's eye then I don't know what is.) Is it any wonder that the land is turning against us?

Sadly, I think that things are only going to get worse. Both political parties have embraced homosexuality and support it. Very few churches are fighting this, and those that are have had very little impact on the culture.

God has made it clear that He will destroy the nations that do these things, and He always keeps His word. I am very much afraid that America is going to continue to defile the land and that God is going to destroy her for it. I do not know how much time we have left, but I fear that our time is running out.

An Everlasting Possession

As we saw in our study of the life of Abraham, the Lord promised to give the entire land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. Now, if God had only mentioned that promise once and never spoke of it again, that would still have been enough to make His will clear. God never goes back on His word; when He promises something, whatever He promised will come to pass. In this case, though, the Lord didn't mention it just once; He actually *repeated* this promise on numerous occasions. God wanted to make it absolutely clear, beyond any possibility of doubt, that He was giving the land of Canaan to the Jews.

The first time God made this promise was when Abraham first arrived in Canaan:

Genesis 12:5: "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him."

As we can see in verse 7, the Lord promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. After God made this promise a famine arose and Abraham left Canaan and traveled to Egypt. When he finally left Egypt and returned to Canaan the

Lord repeated the promise:

Genesis 13:14: “And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.”

As He had done before, the Lord promised to give all of the land of Canaan – including all of the land that Abraham could see – to Abraham and to his descendents *forever*. No conditions were placed on this promise; Abraham did not have to do anything in order to keep the land. It was an unconditional promise. God was going to give the land to him *and* to his descendents, and it would belong to them forever. This promise could not be annulled or forfeited.

Some time later, after Abraham defeated the kings that had kidnapped his nephew Lot, the Lord once again repeated this promise:

Genesis 15:18: “In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:”

This is the third time that God said that He was giving the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendents. That is not the last time, however. Shortly before Isaac was born, God promised the land to Abraham yet again:

Genesis 17:4: “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called

Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

As you can see, God promised to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites a total of *four times*. The Lord said on two separate occasions that the land would be theirs **forever**: once in Genesis 13:14, where He said that the land would be theirs “for ever”, and again in Genesis 17:8, where He said the land would be their “everlasting possession”. No conditions were placed on this promise; the Israelites did not have to do anything in order to keep the land. The Lord was giving it to them freely and it was their land forever, and they could never lose their right to it. It was a permanent, irrevocable gift.

Now, it's true that during the time of Moses the Lord said that if the Israelites disobeyed Him He would evict them from the land. However, that eviction would be temporary and they would not lose their title to the land. Even if they were not living in the land it would remain theirs. We find this in the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 29:24: “Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?

25 Then men shall say, Because they have

forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt:

26 For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them:

27 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book:

28 And the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”

The Lord made it clear that if the Israelites forsook Him He would curse them and root them out of the land. However, the loss of the land would not be permanent. If they repented He would bring them back:

Deuteronomy 30:1: “And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee,

2 And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul;

3 That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.

4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch

thee:

5 And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers."

While disobedience could get them removed from the land, even *that* would not cause them to lose the land forever. The land still belonged to them, and the Lord would never break His covenant with them or cast them away. We find this in the book of Leviticus:

Leviticus 26:42: "Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

43 The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes.

44 And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God.

45 But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD."

The phrase "covenant of their ancestors" is very important. It does *not* refer to the Mosaic Law, since the Lord was currently in the process of giving that Law to Israel. The covenant

God is talking about in verse 45 is the covenant He made with their ancestor Abraham – the promise to bless Israel and give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. No matter what Israel did, the Lord would never utterly cast them away. He would never abandon them. The Jews would always be His people, just as surely as the sun shines by day and the stars shine by night:

Jeremiah 31:35: “Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

37 Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.”

I want to be absolutely clear on this point. God gave the land of Canaan to the nation of Israel, and it is theirs and theirs alone. He gave it to them with no conditions attached; it was to be theirs forever as an everlasting possession. If Israel abandoned God He would evict them from the land, but that eviction would not be permanent; He would remember His covenant with Abraham and would bring them back. No matter what, though, the land was theirs and it would always be theirs.

Some might argue that God placed the condition of circumcision on the covenant that He made with Abraham. It is true that He said this:

Genesis 17:11: “And ye shall circumcise the

flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you.”

However, note that circumcision was a *token*, or sign of the covenant. Those who did not do this were “cut off” (as it says in verse 14), but it did *not* abrogate the covenant as a whole because *the covenant was unconditional*. No matter what happened, no matter what the Israelites did, “all the land of Canaan” was theirs “for an everlasting possession”.

The reason I am emphasizing this is because many Christians today have no idea that Israel has any special significance to God. They think that when the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD that God was finished with the Jews, and from that point on the Church became God's only special people. (This school of thought is called “replacement theology”, and it gets its name from the idea that the Church has “replaced” Israel.) They see no significance in the modern nation of Israel and do not believe that Israel has a right to that plot of land in the Middle East. They incorrectly think that God has abandoned Israel forever and that the Jews are no longer God's chosen people.

This is a very great error. As we saw in Jeremiah 31, God has made it clear that there is *nothing* Israel can do to get Him to abandon them. They will always be His people because His covenant with Abraham was unconditional.

It is true that after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem the nation of Israel was exiled for a long time – but that long exile actually fulfills an Old Testament prophecy. In fact, not only does the Bible predict a long exile, but it even foretells the date when Israel would become a nation again. We can find all of this in Ezekiel 4:

Ezekiel 4:1: “Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:

2 And lay siege against it, and build a fort

against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about.

3 Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.

4 Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity.

5 For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

7 Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it.

...

13 And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them."

Here we find that God is using Ezekiel as an object lesson. The Lord was going to punish Israel for 430 years (390 years + 40 years), and to illustrate this God commanded Ezekiel to lie on his side for 430 days. This was done as a sign to the house of Israel, but the Israelites paid no attention to the warning. Instead of repenting they hardened their hearts, and God's judgment came upon them – exactly as Moses had forewarned in the book of Deuteronomy. Israel abandoned God and so God removed them

from the land. As was foretold, they were carried into captivity by the Babylonians and spent the next 70 years in exile.

Back in Deuteronomy God said that if He exiled the Israelites *and they repented* He would regather them to the land. After the 70 years were over God kept His promise and returned Israel to the land. However, Israel still refused to repent. Because of this the Lord only allowed a small remnant of the Jews to return to Israel in 536 BC. The rest of the nation remained scattered abroad, as the Lord had threatened in verse 13.

When the Jews returned home only 70 of the appointed 430 years had taken place, which still left 360 years of punishment. However, the fact that the Israelites did not learn their lesson during the first 70 years activated this provision of the Mosaic Law:

Leviticus 26:23: “And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;

24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.”

This says that if God punished the Israelites and they refused to repent, God would multiply their punishment by seven. $360 \text{ years} \times 7 = 2520 \text{ years}$. Since the Bible uses 360-year days in its prophecies, that would equal 2,483.8 of our calendar years. (The math: $2520 \text{ years} \times 360 \text{ days} = 907,200 \text{ days}$. $907,200 \text{ days} / 365.25 \text{ days per year} = 2,483.8 \text{ years}$.) So, if you add 2,483.3 years to the spring of 536 BC (keeping into account there was no year 0, only 1 BC and then 1 AD), you get the spring of 1948. (Math: $1948 + 536 = 2484$.)

When did Israel become a nation again? On May 14, 1948. This time, however, more than just a small remnant returned to the land; there are now millions of Jews living in Israel, and more continue to move there as time goes on. This process will only accelerate as the time of Christ's return draws near. The Lord is calling His people back to their promised land.

On top of this, Israel became a nation in a *single day*, just as the Lord had foretold through Isaiah:

Isaiah 66:7: “Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.

8 Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? Saith the Lord: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? Saith thy God.”

It seemed very unlikely that Israel would become a nation again in a single day, but that is exactly what happened. The modern regathering of the Jews to Israel is not a random historical event; it is the fulfillment of prophecy. In fact, when God said that He would disperse the Jews, He also said that He would regather them a *second time*:

Isaiah 11:11: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.”

The Israelites have been dispersed twice: once when they were deported to Babylon and once when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The first time they were regathered was in 536 BC after spending 70 years in Babylon; the second time was in the modern era. The modern nation of Israel, therefore, represents the *second time* God has regathered them. God promised to bring His

people back to the land and He has done so.

The Bible goes on to say that the nation of Israel will never be destroyed again:

Amos 9:15: “I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land **which I have given them**, saith the Lord thy God.”

The reason God has regathered them is to save them and turn their hearts to Him, and He will accomplish exactly that:

Hosea 3:4: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:
5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

Do you see what this is saying? Israel did “abide many days” without a king, or sacrifice, or even a country. Now they have returned “in the latter days”, as it says in verse 5. The phrase “David their king” refers to the Messiah; the passage is saying that when Israel is regathered they will seek the Lord, and ultimately the Messiah as well. (That, however, is a topic I've discussed elsewhere so I won't repeat it here.)

What I want to focus on is that the land of Israel belongs to the Israelites. It does not belong to anyone else. God made that promise to Abraham and He later confirmed that promise to Jacob – thus making it clear that the land was being given to the *Jews*:

Genesis 35:11: “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation

and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;
12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land."

God was very specific when it came to the ownership of the land. The Arabs are the descendents of Abraham's son Ishmael, but the land was not given to them. The Palestinians are the descendents of Isaac's son Esau, but the land was not given to them. The land was given only to Jacob's offspring, the Jews. Even the city of Jerusalem was given to the Jews:

Zechariah 8:7-8: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

There is one other point that needs to be brought out. The land promise was not the only promise that God made to Abraham; there was something else as well. We can find it in Genesis 12:

Genesis 12:3: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

As Christians we know that Jesus is the descendent of Abraham that God used to bless the entire world. In Him all the families of the earth are blessed indeed! However, we often overlook the rest of the verse. God was not just talking about Abraham here; He promised bless those who blessed the Jews *and to curse those who cursed them*. God has some very harsh words for those who would try to harm Israel:

Zechariah 2:8: “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”

Later in Zechariah God elaborates on this theme. He makes it clear that He is going to destroy all nations that seek to harm Israel:

Zechariah 12:9: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 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.”

These verses are describing a time when Israel (the “house of David”) will finally realize that Jesus is the Messiah and will repent as a nation. It says they will “look upon me whom they have pierced” – a reference to Jesus. (We know this day is drawing near because verse 10 says that when this happens the Israelites will possess the city of Jerusalem, and the Jews regained control over Jerusalem in 1967. The Jews will actually repent at the very end of the Tribulation, but that is a topic for another time.) The key point that I want to emphasize here is verse 9, where God says that He will seek to destroy “all the nations that come against Jerusalem”. God takes attacks on Israel *personally*.

God makes this even more clear in the book of Joel:

Joel 3:1: “For, behold, in those days, and in that

time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

2 I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land."

Here God says that when He has returned Israel to the land and has given Jerusalem back to her, that He would gather all nations and judge them. The reason God is angry with the nations is because they have scattered the Jews and have "parted my land". In other words, God is incredibly angry with the world because they have *taken land away from Israel*. Taking land away from Israel *really* upsets God.

The fulfillment of these verses is not far off. In recent history God did indeed "bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem". On top of that, over the past few decades the nations of the world have tried very hard to divide Israel (especially Jerusalem!) and take away her land. These events that God foretold centuries *before* the birth of Christ are happening in our lifetime.

Zechariah expounds on this a little further and points out something very important:

Zechariah 14:2: "For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on

the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.”

In verse 2 we see the same language as in Joel 3:2. However, a very important detail is added: on the day that the Lord gathers all nations to Jerusalem so He can judge them, the Lord will fight against them *in person*. Verse 4 says that “his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives”. This event is quite famous; people usually call it the Second Coming. When Jesus Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation, the city of Jerusalem will be under attack; the nations of the world will have gathered around it and captured it. In response Jesus will come back to Earth, destroy those nations, and put an end to all those who threatened Israel. To put it another way, at the Second Coming Jesus returns *to defend Jerusalem on Israel's behalf*. He comes back so He can (among other things) *personally* kill all those who have dared to come against Israel and take what God has given to her.

God makes one point very clear: the land of Israel belongs to the Jews, and God gets *very upset* when people try to take that land away from her. The Lord said “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye”, and He meant it. In fact, the day will come when God will get so upset at what people are doing to Israel that He will return *in person*, with the armies of Heaven, to destroy all those that have come against her. (You *know* a nation has crossed the line in a big way when God actually leaves Heaven so He can *personally* destroy it!)

The point I'm trying to make is that taking land away from Israel is a *really big deal* in God's sight. He hates it. He gave that land to Israel and it belongs to them. Those who try to take it away from her do so at their peril.

This peril is not merely theoretical. I believe that God has actively pursued what He said in Genesis 12:3 throughout history.

Those nations that have blessed Israel have been blessed, and those nations that have cursed Israel (or have tried to take away her land) have been cursed.

For example:

October 30, 1991: President Bush announced a new Middle East peace plan, in which Israel would be forced to surrender parts of its land in return for peace – including parts of Jerusalem.

October 30, 1991: A powerful storm suddenly developed off the coast of Nova Scotia, which quickly reached hurricane strength. The next day the storm (which by now was hundreds of miles wide) smashed into New England, then traveled down the East Coast into the Carolinas. It caused millions of dollars in damage and was nicknamed “The Perfect Storm”. (The storm was so significant that a book and a movie were written about it, both named *The Perfect Storm*.)

President Bush owned a home in Kennebunkport, Maine, that was heavily damaged in the storm. The storm hit his home on the same day that the President initiated the Madrid Peace Conference, in which Israel was pressured to give up land.

August 24, 1992: The Madrid Peace Conference was moved to Washington, D.C., making it the first time that conference was held on American soil. Not only was Israel going to be pressured into giving up more land, but the Palestinians were going to be governing the land that Israel would have to give up.

August 24, 1992: Hurricane Andrew hit Florida and became the worst natural disaster ever hit to America (up to that time). \$30 billion in damage was done. The hurricane struck just a few hours before the Madrid peace conference began.

September 13, 1993: In Washington, DC Israel signed an

agreement with Yasser Arafat, surrendering Gaza, Jericho, and the West Bank to Palestinians.

September 13, 1993: Hurricane Emily hit North Carolina, doing \$1 billion in damage.

January 16, 1994: President Clinton met with Syria's dictator, President Hafez Assad. They talk about making peace with Israel, and the agreement they came up with included Israel surrendering the Golan Heights to Syria.

January 17, 1994: A 6.8 magnitude earthquake hit Los Angeles, causing \$25 billion in damage. This happened less than 24 hours after President Clinton pressured Israel to give up more land.

September 27, 1998: Secretary of State Madeline Albright met with Arafat in New York City, to finalize an agreement in which Israel would surrender 13% of its land in exchange for peace.

September 27, 1998: Hurricane Georges hit the Gulf Coast, doing extensive damage to Mississippi and Florida. The hurricane then stalled, causing severe flooding. The total damage came to \$5.9 billion.

There are many more examples I could give, but in the interests of time I'll limit it to one more. In April 2005 President Bush met with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon in order to set a timetable for Israel's withdrawal from 25 Jewish settlements. The process was started on August 16 and it was completed on **August 23, 2005**. Approximately ten thousand Jews were forcibly evicted from their land. The reason this happened is because President Bush put enormous pressure on Israel to evict them and give that land to the Palestinians. In fact, the United States offered to give Israel \$1.2 billion in order to relocate the settlers. (In other

words, the United States was actually *paying the bill* to make this happen.) This was the first step in evicting all Jews from Gaza in order to further Bush's plan to establish a Palestinian state.

The eviction of these settlers was not a minor task. Thousands of people lived there. The area was a major agricultural center of Israel and produced about 15% of Israel's vegetables. It took 40,000 troops to force the settlers to leave. After they were evicted the army demolished their homes and destroyed their settlements. The last settler was removed on August 23, and on that date President Bush praised Prime Minister Sharon for his "courageous decision to withdraw from Gaza and parts of the West Bank."

One might ask: what else happened on **August 23, 2005**? A tropical depression formed over the Bahamas, which grew into Hurricane Katrina. I don't think I have to tell you what happened when Hurricane Katrina hit the United States. The total damages from that storm came to a staggering \$81 billion.

Some might say that it's just a coincidence that every time America forces Israel to give up her land, some terrible disaster happens. If so, it's really an amazing string of coincidences! This phenomenon doesn't just apply to the United States; it can also be seen in other countries. For example:

March 9, 2011: Japan announces that they are sending the Palestinians millions of dollars so that they can create a state with Jerusalem as its capitol. (To do this, of course, Jerusalem will have to be taken away from the Jews.)

March 11, 2011: Japan is hit by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake – the worst it has ever experienced in its history. The damage from that earthquake was estimated to be *\$300 billion*.

July 21, 2011: Norway's prime minister goes to an island in Norway that is home to a youth camp. He announces that Norway

is going to support a Palestinian state and will help the Palestinians take land away from Israel. The youth in the camp are excited about this and shout that they, too, want to help destroy Israel.

July 22, 2011: Anders Breivik just happens to travel to that very same island in Norway and just happens to open fire on those very same young people. 69 people are killed and 110 are injured. It was the deadliest attack in Norway since World War II; 25% of Norwegians knew someone who was affected by the attacks.

If this is all just a coincidence then it's the most amazing set of coincidences in all of history. These things happen like clockwork: whenever a nation decides that it's going to try to take away Israel's land, something enormously bad happens to them. This happens over and over and over again. You don't have to take my word for it, though; just wait until the next time the President goes to Israel and forces her to give away her land to her enemies. Then see what happens.

I believe that God is fulfilling His promise to trouble those who trouble Israel, and I think this phenomenon will continue to occur. As America and other nations continue to force Israel to give up her land, you can expect even more breathtaking disasters. God is not a respecter of persons.

Now, I'm not saying that every natural disaster that happens is because of this; there are many things that happen simply because we live in a fallen world. However, God has been known to judge nations that have transgressed His laws (remember Sodom and Gomorrah?), and I believe He continues to do so today. After all, God does not change.

The final judgment, though, is still ahead of us. One day the nations of the world will gather against Jerusalem in order to destroy her and her people. They will invade the city and they will sack it, but then Jesus will come back *in person* to destroy them all. He will put a final end to all those who seek to trouble His people.

The Theology of Covenants

As we saw during our study of Abraham, the Lord made a covenant with him on several different occasions. The very first time was when the Lord commanded Abraham to leave his home:

Genesis 12:1: “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

This is what God promised:

- To make Abraham a great nation
- To bless Abraham
- To make Abraham's name great
- To make Abraham a blessing
- To bless those who blessed Abraham
- To curse those who cursed Abraham
- That in Abraham all the families of the Earth would be blessed

Later on, God made another covenant with Abraham. It was quite similar to the one in chapter 12 but it contained some additional promises:

Genesis 17:1: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

As we can see, there is a lot of information there. (It should be noted that these promises do not cancel out the earlier ones; rather, this *adds to* what God had said before.) This is what God promised:

- To make a covenant with Abraham
- To give Abraham many descendents
- To make Abraham the father of many nations
- To make an everlasting covenant between Himself and Abraham, *and* between Himself and Abraham's

descendents

- To be a God to both Abraham and Abraham's descendents
- To give to both Abraham and his descendents all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession

Those are the promises that God made to Abraham in what theologians call the “Abrahamic Covenant”. On the surface this looks pretty straightforward; there isn't a lot of complexity here. Despite the simple nature of the passage, however, there are two entirely different schools of thought that have arisen to interpret these promises. One method of interpretation is called **Covenant Theology**, and the other is called **Dispensationalism**. These two approaches are entirely different, and they are as opposed to each other as they can possibly be.

It is vital that we understand both systems because they impact the way the rest of the Bible is interpreted. The system that you follow will determine how you view Israel and how you view the study of end-times. It is an important area of study that is all-too-often neglected.

The names of these two systems are very misleading. Covenant Theology does *not* mean that you are interpreting the Bible as a series of covenants, and Dispensationalism does *not* mean that you are interpreting the Bible as a series of dispensations. Everyone agrees that there are covenants in the Bible; the Abrahamic covenant is one of many. (The word “covenant” appears in the King James Bible an astonishing 280 times!) Likewise, everyone agrees that the Bible speaks of something called “dispensations”. For example:

Ephesians 1:9: “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:
10 That in the **dispensation** of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:”

The dictionary defines a dispensation as a “divinely appointed order or age”. For example, there was one order of doing things before the Fall in the Garden of Eden, and one afterward; there was one way of doing things before the Flood, and one afterward; there was one way of doing things before Christ died and rose again (in other words, before the Church Age), and one afterward. Those are examples of dispensations.

So, then, the dispute is *not* about whether Bible has covenants and dispensations, because the Bible clearly has both. Instead the issue comes down to this: what is the correct method for interpreting these covenants?

The cornerstone of **Covenant Theology** (which is a system I utterly *reject*) is the idea that the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. (This is why Covenant Theology is often called Replacement Theology.) It teaches that when Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God rejected Israel and replaced them with the Church. The only people who are special to God are those in the Church, because the Jews have lost their special position. God no longer has a plan for them and they are no more special to Him than any other nation or people.

This has a lot of implications. First of all, covenant theologians teach that Israel has no right to any land in the Middle East. When the Jews rejected Jesus they lost whatever rights they might have had. This is why churches that believe in covenant theology are hostile toward Israel and often side with the Palestinians: they believe that Israel is an enemy of God and that Israel ought to be defeated and her land taken away and given to the Arabs. It is not at all uncommon to see such churches boycott Israel or speak up on behalf of those who are attacking her.

Because they believe that the Church has replaced Israel, they believe that God's promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church. The many covenants in the Bible (like the Abrahamic Covenant) are re-interpreted in spiritual and symbolic ways. Instead of blessing the Jews, God now blesses the Church. All Scripture in the Old Testament that spoke of Israel is reinterpreted

as speaking to the Church.

Since they believe that God has rejected Israel, they also believe that Israel will never reign over the entire world during a literal millennium. Instead they interpret Revelation as speaking of the Church Age and interpret the millennium symbolically. Covenant theologians always become amillennial because the millennium deals with Israel and they believe God has rejected Israel. No covenant theologian could ever accept an interpretation of Revelation that included a literal Israel ruling over the entire world.

So, then, Covenant Theology teaches:

- That the Church has replaced Israel
- That God has taken His promises away from Israel and has given them to the Church
- That Israel is not special in God's sight
- That the modern nation of Israel has no right to exist and is not any more special to God than any other nation
- That Revelation should be interpreted symbolically
- That the millennium is purely symbolic, and not literal
- That prophecies and covenants should be understood spiritually, symbolically, and allegorically, *not* literally

For the record, this definition of Covenant Theology is exactly what any of the major covenant theologians will tell you. If you read men such as Charles Hodge in *Systematic Theology* or R. J. Rushdoony in *Thy Kingdom Come*, this is what you will see. If you attend a church that believes Covenant Theology (as I did for a number of years) you will hear all of these things said with great boldness and pride. This is where they stand.

The points of Covenant Theology are not arbitrary; they all logically follow from the idea that the Church has replaced Israel. Its entire system of interpretation comes from that point. For example:

- God made Israel certain promises – promises that have not been fulfilled. If the Church has replaced Israel and Israel is no longer special to God, then those promises *must* be transferred to the Church. Otherwise God would have broken His word.
- Many of the promises in the Old Testament are very specific, and there is simply no way they could be transferred to the Church. (For example, no one believes that the Church has a right to the land of Canaan.) Therefore, the only way to make the system work is to interpret the prophecies “spiritually”, or allegorically. If you interpret them literally then you end up with Dispensationalism, which Covenant Theology despises. Covenant Theology forces you to interpret the Old Testament in a very non-literal way, because any other method of interpretation would disprove Covenant Theology.
- If God has rejected Israel and God's promises to Israel no longer apply to Israel, then Israel has lost its right to the land of Canaan. Therefore, the Jews are occupying land that does not belong to them – and on top of that, they are enemies of the gospel since they have rejected Christ. Therefore, churches who believe in Covenant Theology are hostile toward Israel, often boycotting Israel, speaking against them, and so forth. They do this because their theology demands it.
- If you interpret Old Testament prophecies and the book of Revelation literally, they will tell you that God has set aside 7 years for chastising Israel, after which Israel will be saved, Jesus will return as Israel's king, and Israel (with Jesus as King) will rule over the whole world for 1000 years. However, if you believe that God has rejected Israel, then God can't possibly have set aside a time that is specifically aimed at Israel; therefore they interpret prophecy symbolically, since a literal interpretation will yield a result that they do not like.

The point I am making is that Covenant Theology will lead people to reject Israel, to interpret the Bible in a very non-literal manner, and to become amillennial. That is where the system invariably leads. The more you study it the more you will be drawn to those ends. It is simply inescapable.

Covenant Theology also teaches that people in the Old Testament were saved by believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is despite the fact that the Bible did not reveal *any* of those things until the time of Isaiah, and no one actually understood what Isaiah was talking about until after Christ died and rose again. They insist that people have always been saved in exactly the same manner, by believing in exactly the same thing.

Frankly, this idea is ridiculous. While Adam and Eve did know that a Messiah was coming, mankind was not told that the Messiah would die and rise again until *thousands of years later*. How could they possibly have believed something that they were not told? How could Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob believe in a gospel that had not yet been revealed to mankind? It simply doesn't make sense.

Dispensationalists agree that mankind has always been saved by grace through faith alone; the difference is that they teach that the *content* of that faith has changed from one dispensation to the next. The Bible tells us that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness. God did not tell Abraham everything that He has told us; however, Abraham believed what he *had* been told and God accepted that. People in the Old Testament were saved by *believing what God had revealed* – not by believing something they could not possibly have known.

As I said earlier, I reject the system of Covenant Theology; the evidence against it is simply too great. I believe that Dispensationalism is a much better system.

Has the Church replaced Israel?

If the Church has replaced Israel and is now the “true Israel” then you would expect that fact to be mentioned somewhere in the Bible. However, that is not the case. There are no verses that say the Church has replaced Israel as God's special people. Moreover, the Bible never refers to the Church as “Israel” (or vice versa). In every single case, the word “Israel” refers to Israel and the word “Church” refers to the Church. The two words are used separately and distinctly and are never used in place of each other.

What the Bible actually says about this matter is quite different from what Covenant Theology teaches. The Church has not replaced Israel; instead, we have been grafted in:

Romans 11:17: “And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;”

The Bible says that some of the original branches of the tree – meaning Israel – were broken off, while we Gentiles were grafted in. That, however, does *not* mean that we have replaced Israel, as the chapter takes great pains to point out:

Romans 11:11: “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.
12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?”

Israel has fallen but they have *not* been replaced. Through their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles. However, God has

not forsaken Israel. Our salvation is intended to provoke them to jealousy. One day they will be saved and will be grafted back in:

Romans 11:23: “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sakes.

29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

Notice that last verse – the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. What that means is that when God makes a promise He will not go back on it. God made a covenant to take away Israel's sins and that is exactly what He will do. God chose Israel as His own and they will forever remain exactly that. For a time Israel has been blinded and hardened, but that is not because God has rejected Israel; it is so that we Gentiles might be saved. After God has finished obtaining a people among the Gentiles He

will take away that blindness and all Israel shall be saved.

God cannot and *will never* cast away His people. Not only does Romans 11 make this clear, but the Old Testament does as well:

Jeremiah 31:35: “Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

37 Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.”

There is simply nothing that Israel can do to forfeit the promises that God made to them. He will never cast them off. The apostle Paul said that all Israel shall be saved, and they will be. The Old Testament speaks of a time when their hearts will change:

Hosea 3:4: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:

5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

Hosea tells us that “in the latter days” the Israelites will return and fear the Lord. Zechariah tells us the same thing:

Zechariah 12:10: “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.”

Before Jesus was crucified He said that Israel would not see Him again until they accepted Him as their Messiah. Zechariah looked forward to the day when that would happen – when Israel would look upon their Messiah, whom they have pierced, and would mourn for Him and repent of what they had done. The day is coming when Israel will repent and be saved, just as the Old Testament prophets foretold. That, in fact, is what the Tribulation is all about – it is a time God has set aside not just to punish the world for its wickedness, but to finish the trials of Israel and finally bring them to salvation. At the end of the Tribulation the Israelites will repent and be saved, and Jesus will return and rescue them – but that is a topic for another time.

The point is that God has *not* abandoned Israel and has *not* cast her off forever. Israel has been blinded for a time so that we Gentiles might be saved, but that blindness is only temporary. As both the Old and New Testaments tell us, one day Israel will be saved.

People who are dispensational believe that God has not *replaced* Israel with the Church, but instead *both* are His people. Israel and the Church are two separate things. (There are some Jews who are saved and are a part of the Church, but Israel and the Church are still different – just as France and the Church are different. There may be Frenchmen who are in the Church, but that doesn't turn the Church into France.) They believe that God

still loves Israel and has a plan to save them.

Has God Taken His Promises Away From Israel?

Of course not! As Romans 11:23 said *when talking about this very subject*, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. There are no Scriptures anywhere that say that God has taken away His promises and given them to the Church instead. It simply doesn't say anything like that.

Besides, if you look at the promises that God made to Israel it becomes very apparent that they can never apply to the Church. For example, take a look at the promises that God made to Abraham:

Genesis 17:8: "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Here God promised Abraham, unconditionally, to give him and his descendents all of the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. Notice the phrase *everlasting*. That means that, no matter what, for the rest of time, the land of Canaan would always be theirs. God may remove Israel from the land for a time due to their obedience, but *the land would always be theirs*.

Covenant Theology teaches that, due to Israel's disobedience, they have forfeited this promise and no longer have a right to the land. But look at what the verse says! The land was given to them as an everlasting possession. If they lost the land then it wouldn't be an everlasting possession anymore, would it? It would mean that God had broken His promise.

Covenant Theology also teaches that all of God's promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church. Does that mean that the Church now has a right to the entire land of Canaan? Nobody

actually believes that, so covenant theologians have “spiritualized” this verse to talk about some vague spiritual blessings. Does the Bible ever interpret this verse in that manner? No, it doesn't. Nowhere in the Old or New Testament is this verse interpreted in any way other than literally.

The problem is that when this verse is interpreted literally it contradicts Covenant Theology – so covenant theologians have invented new ways to interpret these very straightforward verses (ways that have no Scriptural backing whatsoever). They are not interpreting the Bible with the Bible or reading it in a normal, straightforward fashion; instead they are imposing their own interpretation on these verses *in spite* of what the verses actually have to say.

If you interpret the Bible in a normal, straightforward manner then you will arrive at Dispensationalism. People who are dispensational believe that God has not rejected Israel, and they believe this because the Bible says that God has not rejected Israel. They believe that Israel has an everlasting right to the land of Canaan because that is what God promised Abraham. It is not complicated; they simply take God at His Word and do not invent symbolic, allegorical interpretations that have no Scriptural basis.

Has God Taken Canaan Away From Israel?

This is something that I have talked about extensively in an earlier lesson, so I will not dwell on it here. The Old Testament makes it quite clear that God would evict Israel from the land for their disobedience, but that He would also gather them back again. Covenant Theologians like to claim that the modern nation of Israel has no Biblical significance whatsoever, but they are wrong. As I explained in a previous lesson, the Bible foretold the Jews' long absence from the land, the rebirth of Israel in 1948, the rebirth of the nation in a single day, and a great deal more. Modern Israel is actually fulfilling Bible prophecy. If Israel has lost their right to the land in the Middle East then why did God

promise to give it back to them? Why did He promise to regather them to their land? Why did He promise to give them Jerusalem again? Why did He make so many promises to them regarding giving them the land “in the latter days”? It simply makes no sense.

The reason Dispensationalists believe that modern Israel is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy is because they can point to a long list of specific Bible prophecies that modern Israel has fulfilled. Since we have talked about this earlier I will not repeat it here. The point is that despite what Covenant Theology teaches, modern Israel *is* a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The reason they once again live in the land of Canaan is because God regathered them to the land and has protected them, exactly as He promised. Israel really does have a right to the land that God gave them as an “everlasting possession”, and covenant theologians are treading on very dangerous ground when they try to take that land away from them.

Is The Millennium Purely Symbolic?

Covenant Theology teaches that Israel is not special to God and that Israel has no right to any land in the Middle East. Because of this they reject the idea that Israel will one day rule over the world during the Millennium. Since they cannot accept a straightforward, literal interpretation of those verses, they instead teach that those verses should be interpreted symbolically. Covenant theologians argue that the Millennium is symbolic of the Church Age – the age we are living in now. They teach that at this very moment, Satan is bound and the Church is reigning triumphant over the world through the gospel. This interpretation is known as amillennialism.

There are two big problems with amillennialism. First, it is obvious to everyone that Satan is *not* bound, and second, it is equally obvious that the Church is *not* reigning triumphant. Revelation makes it clear that when Satan is bound he is unable to

cause any more harm:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

Notice the great pains the passage takes to make sure we understand that Satan has been utterly removed from the scene. He can no longer deceive anyone, cause any harm, or oppose the Church. In fact, Satan can't even go anywhere anymore; he has been cast into the bottomless pit and imprisoned. His days of causing harm are over for an entire millennium.

Does this accurately describe the Church age? No, it certainly does not. The New Testament warns us repeatedly that Satan is actively attacking the Church and that we must be on our guard:

1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

Notice how the passage says not only that Satan is “seeking whom he may devour”, but that he is walking around! Someone who is locked in the bottomless pit can't possibly be *walking around the Earth*. If Satan was truly bound then he would be unable to seek and devour. After all, if he can still kill and destroy while being bound then then being bound loses all meaning. It should be emphasized that this verse was written

during the Church Age – the very age in which covenant theologians teach that Satan has been rendered utterly harmless. The Bible contradicts them and warns us to put on the armor of God, for we are in a very real battle against the forces of darkness:

Ephesians 6:11: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Who does Paul want us to stand against? *The devil*. If Satan was bound and could no longer cause any harm then the devil wouldn't be a problem, would he? But both Peter and Paul believed that Satan was *not* bound. They believed that he was still roaming around and was capable of causing great harm. The Bible simply does *not* support the idea that Satan is currently bound; instead it teaches exactly the opposite.

The Bible also does *not* teach that the Church is reigning triumphant in this age. In fact, it says quite the opposite. The Bible teaches that the world hates the Church and persecutes it. We are not reigning over the world; instead we are beaten down, hated, despised, and rejected. All over the world Christians are hunted, imprisoned, and executed. Paul went so far as to say this:

I Corinthians 15:19: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

What Paul was saying is that if Christianity was only good for this life and had no value or reward in the next, then we are the most miserable of all men. Why? Because in this life Christians are faced with terrible persecution. Jesus told us this would happen:

John 15:18: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”

John 16:33: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Did Jesus say that the Church would reign triumphant over the world during this age? Absolutely not! Instead He said that we would be hated, despised, hunted down, and executed – and that is exactly what happened. It is utterly ridiculous to think that we are now reigning with Christ.

But there is another problem. Take a look at what else the disputed passage in Revelation actually says:

Revelation 20:4: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”

Who lives and reigns with Christ? *The martyrs*. The passage clearly says that the martyrs are *resurrected* and live and reign with Christ. They were dead, but they lived again.

Has this already happened? Have the martyrs been resurrected from the dead and do they now reign over the Earth? Of course not! That is utterly ridiculous. Satan has not been bound, the Church does not reign, and the martyrs have not been raised from the dead. These things simply have not happened. Therefore, the idea that the Millennium is symbolic of the Church Age is entirely, conclusively wrong. Amillennialism is a false doctrine.

Revelation 20 should be interpreted in a normal, straightforward way, which is exactly how dispensationalists interpret it. They teach that one day in the future Satan will be bound and will be unable to deceive the nations any longer. The dead martyrs will be raised back to life and they will live and reign with Christ for a literal thousand years. It is not complicated, and it will play out exactly as the Bible foretold.

Should Prophecy Be Interpreted Symbolically?

Covenant Theology teaches that prophecy should be interpreted symbolically. It claims that the Millennium is symbolic of the age we live in now, and teaches that Revelation is just a symbolic look at the struggle between good and evil. It does not interpret prophecy literally.

There are many problems with this approach to interpreting the Bible. First of all, while it is true that the Bible contains symbolism, the proper way to interpret the Bible's symbolism is *to use the Bible itself*. The Bible always interprets its own symbols. If you want to know what a symbol means, all you have to do is look it up in the Bible and see how the Bible defines it.

For example, take this verse from Revelation:

Revelation 1:12: “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;”

How should the seven golden candlesticks be interpreted? The answer is *not* to decide for ourselves what we think they mean; that is a very great error. No prophecy is of any private interpretation; we do not have the right to assign our own meanings to prophecies. Instead we must believe the interpretation that the Bible provides, which can be found a few verses later:

Revelation 1:20: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”

What are the seven candlesticks? They are the seven churches. We know this because that is what the Bible tells us. *This is how you interpret the symbolism in the Bible.* This is the only way it can be done.

Covenant Theology, however, does not take this approach. Instead, covenant theologians decide *for themselves* what they think a passage might mean, based on nothing more than their own ideas. They do not use the Bible to interpret prophecy because *the Bible does not support their system of interpretation.* There simply are no Bible passages that offer a symbolic interpretation of prophecies. Therefore, they invent their own.

It is very telling that Covenant Theology's system of interpretation has proven to be a dismal failure. The Bible has a great many prophecies about the *first* coming of Christ. Do you know how many of them were fulfilled literally? *All of them.* Do you know how many the Bible interprets symbolically? *None of them.* Every single fulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible – and

there are hundreds of them – *has been fulfilled literally*. Not a single one has ever been fulfilled symbolically.

The same can be said for all of the prophecies that have been fulfilled since the time of Christ. The prophecy that Israel would become a nation again in a single day was widely mocked by covenant theologians – right up until 1948 when it was *literally fulfilled*. The prophecy that the Jews would regain Jerusalem was also widely mocked, until it actually happened. All of the prophecies that covenant theologians have tried to interpret allegorically *are being fulfilled literally*. That tells me that there is something badly wrong with their system of interpretation: their predictions have failed over and over again, while the predictions of dispensationalists have been proven right time and time again.

Prophecy has *always* been fulfilled literally, and there is no reason to believe that will ever change. For example, let's take a look at the 70 weeks of Daniel:

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.”

As you can see in verse 24, the angel Gabriel told Daniel that seventy “weeks” had been set aside. This is one of those times where our translations of the Bible are in error. The word in verse 24 is not the Hebrew word for week, which is *shavuot*. The verse instead uses the word *shavuim*, which simply means “sevens”. It does not refer to seven *days*, but seven of *something*. It is like the English word “dozen”. When someone says “a dozen” it tells you that they are speaking of twelve of something, but without more information that is all you know. A better translation of verse 24 would be 70 *sevens*. In this context the item being counted is years. 70 sevens therefore refers to 70

periods of seven years, or 490 years.

Notice that these 490 years have been set aside *for Israel and for Jerusalem*. Notice also that this time period is being set aside *to make an end of sins*. This is God's 490-year plan to save Israel and end their rebellion. At the end of these 490 years Israel will repent and believe in Jesus as their Messiah. This goes along with what Paul said in Romans – one day all Israel shall be saved. The 70 weeks is God's plan to make that happen.

The Bible goes on to give more detail about those weeks:

Daniel 9:25: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”

This verse says that the Messiah will appear 483 years (that's 69 periods of 7 years each) after the decree goes out to rebuild Jerusalem. This period of time broken into two parts: there is a period of 49 years and a period of 434 years. It should be noted that after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued, it took 49 years to rebuild that city. Then, 434 years after Jerusalem was rebuilt, the Messiah was crucified. There were exactly 483 years from the time the decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem until the death of Christ on the cross. In other words, *the first 69 weeks were fulfilled literally*.

When Christ died the Jews had two options. One option was to accept Him as their Messiah. If they had done that then Christ would still have died, but history would have taken a very different course. The Tribulation would have started immediately after His crucifixion, and 7 years later the Millennial Kingdom would have begun. There would never have been a Church Age at all.

However, the Jews instead rejected Him. Because of their

disobedience the last 7 years were put on hold and the Church Age came into being. As long as the Church is here the end will not come. At some point, however, the Rapture will occur and take the Church out of the world. After the Church is gone the antichrist will rise to power and the last 7 years will begin, and the final of the 70 weeks will be fulfilled.

It is simply not reasonable to think that the first 69 weeks are literal and that the last week is symbolic. Prophecy is *always* fulfilled literally. Since the first 69 weeks were fulfilled literally, it only makes sense to believe that the last week will be fulfilled literally as well. Dispensationalism looks forward to a literal fulfillment of prophecy.

My point in all of this is simple: Covenant Theology (also known as Replacement Theology) is wrong. It is a failed system. God has not cast off Israel, Satan has not been bound, and prophecy should not be interpreted allegorically. The Jews really *have* been given the entire land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, and their temporary rejection of their Messiah has not caused them to forfeit the land. God really will bless those who bless Israel and will curse those who curse Israel – and will bring great woe upon those who try to take land away from His people.

That last point is, perhaps, the greatest danger with Covenant Theology. Many churches that believe in Covenant Theology are actively trying to cause Israel harm – by preaching against them, boycotting them, and even aiding Israel's enemies. As we saw earlier in the course, *this is a terrible error*. God has promised to judge those who try to cause Israel harm, and that is exactly what He has done throughout history. If you set yourself up as the enemy of Israel then God will judge you for it, just as He promised time and time again. Those who fight Israel are actually fighting God, and they will come to discover that God cannot be defeated. Those who insist on taking that road will be judged for it.

They Shall Keep The Way Of The Lord

Before Isaac was born, Abraham was visited by three people – one of whom was probably the preincarnate Christ. These three people had come to see just how bad things really were in Sodom:

Genesis 18:20: “And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;
21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.”

The Lord decided that He wanted to check out Sodom and Gomorrah *in person*. Now, we know that God sees all things; there is nothing that is hidden from God and there is no place one can go to get away from God:

Psalms 139:7: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and

the light are both alike to thee.”

There are some people who think that Hell is separation from God – that it is the one place in the universe where one can finally get away from God altogether. As we see in verse 8, however, that is not the case. God is there as well, pouring out His endless wrath upon those who refused His mercy.

So, then, we know that God sees all things; nothing is hidden from Him. He did not *need* to leave Heaven and go to Sodom in person to know what was going on, but He chose to go anyway. This actually emphasizes the extreme depravity of Sodom. By way of an analogy, imagine hearing about something that is so horrifying that it wasn't enough to simply hear about it; you had to go in person and see it for yourself. The sin of Sodom was so great that God actually went there to deal with the situation *in person*. This is similar to the Second Coming, when the Lord will return with the armies of Heaven so that He can personally destroy the Antichrist.

As the Lord was on this mission to investigate Sodom, He asked Himself whether or not He should tell Abraham what He was about to do:

Genesis 18:17: “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

The Lord decided to tell Abraham everything, and the reason He made this decision was because Abraham and his descendents were going to keep the way of the Lord. They were

going to walk in His ways and God was going to bless them for it and make them a great nation. Since God knew this would happen, He told Abraham what was going on. When He did this Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom and asked God to spare it if there were just 10 righteous people there. God agreed to this, but since He did not find 10 righteous people in Sodom He destroyed the city with fire and brimstone:

Genesis 19:24: “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;
25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.”

What we see here is a sharp contrast between Abraham, who kept the ways of God, and between the men of Sodom, who were exceedingly wicked:

Genesis 13:13: “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.”

God treated Abraham and Sodom in very different ways: He blessed Abraham and He utterly destroyed Sodom. The man who obeyed God was blessed, and the men who were exceedingly wicked were burned alive with fire and brimstone.

The reason I bring this up is because nothing has changed. Yes, those who follow Christ in this life will suffer persecution and go through many trials. Ultimately, however, they will be spared God's wrath and will go on to inherit everlasting life and joy. On the other hand, those who reject Christ will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. They will be burned alive – just like the people of Sodom.

We know that we are not saved by our works. The apostle

Paul makes this quite clear:

2 Timothy 1:9: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,”

Our works do not save us; we are saved by grace and grace alone. I want to emphasize that our works play *no part in our salvation*. However, works are a *result* of salvation, and *all true faith will result in works*. This is the point that James made:

James 2:7: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”

Our works demonstrate that our faith is real; they are the certificate of authenticity. A faith that produces no works is a dead faith – one that is false, counterfeit, phony. Real faith *always* results in works.

The Bible is clear that Abraham was saved by his faith, not by his works:

Romans 4:2: “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on

him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

What saved Abraham was his belief in God. He believed God and that was counted to him for righteousness. It was his faith that saved him. We can tell that Abraham's faith was genuine because it was followed by works: when God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he obeyed. Abraham's works showed that his faith was real. The fact that he kept the way of the Lord demonstrated that he had genuine, saving faith.

The reason this is so important is because there is an epidemic of disobedience in the modern Church. There are many people who call themselves Christians but who utterly reject the authority of God over their lives. They do not believe that God has a right to tell them what to do. They do exactly what they please, when they please, and they laugh at the restrictions found in the Bible. There is this idea going around that you can be a Christian without ever submitting to the lordship of Christ – that you can say “God, forgive my sins, but don't you dare tell me what to do. Just stay out of my life and keep me from going to Hell. Thanks.” That is not a saving prayer – but it is exactly what a great many people believe.

It is easy to spot people who have rejected God's authority over their life. For example, just look at the way people treat the Bible. The Bible claims to be the inspired, infallible, and flawless words of God Himself. It is God speaking to us directly, communicating His laws, values, and decrees. The Bible contains God's will for our lives.

Today, however, people despise the Bible. This is not limited to nonbelievers, but includes Christians; in fact, many supposed Christians are often the very worst. It never ceases to astonish me when I try to teach a Christian something from the Word and am told “Well, I just don't care what the Bible says”. Other times I hear “Well, I know the Bible says that but I just believe differently.” Then there is the horrific “I know the Bible says that, but I will never, ever obey that. Ever. I completely

reject that.”

There are many people who attack the authority of the Bible and claim that it is full of errors, or that the apostle Paul was wrong, or that you can't really believe what the Bible says. However, the people who make those claims have no ground on which to stand. They cannot prove that the Bible is in error; many people have tried but no one has ever succeeded. They cannot prove that the text of the Bible has been corrupted. They cannot prove that the apostle Paul was wrong. In fact, the majority of people who claim such things have never even *tried* to prove their point. The reality is that those claims are just excuses. The real issue is that *the Bible tells them things they don't want to hear and so they reject what the Bible has to say*. Their criticism of the Bible is just an attempt to hide their own rebellion.

God, however, is *not* amused. He is very clear about how He sees His word:

2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Notice what it says: *all* scripture is given by inspiration of God. It is not a mixture of the “words of God” and “words of men”. It is not part truth, part corruption, part myth, and part lie. It is all given by the inspiration of God – every last word of it. Peter put it this way:

2 Peter 1:20: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

This really could not be any more clear! Scripture did not come by the will of man; instead, “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”. This is true not just of prophecy but of *all* Scripture. It is *all* the words of God. As the Psalms says, the Bible is true from the very first chapter:

Psalm 119:160: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

Nor is the Bible full of lies and error. All of God's words are true, and there is no error or deceit among them:

Proverbs 30:5: “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.”

Not only is the Word of God true, but it is also filled with power:

Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Many supposed Christians absolutely hate the things that Paul wrote and dismiss him entirely. They eagerly claim that Paul was wrong about a lot of issues. However, the apostle Paul made it very plain that the things that he wrote were nothing less than commands from the Lord Himself:

1 Corinthians 14:37: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto

you are the commandments of the Lord.”

Lest you think that was just Paul trying to prop himself up, the other apostles agreed with him. Peter made it clear that the letters of Paul were just as much holy Scripture as the Old Testament itself:

I Peter 3:15: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

Peter said that many unlearned people deceitfully misinterpret both Paul's epistles and *the other scriptures*, thus putting Paul's letters on the same footing as the rest of the Bible. Paul's writings are not the scribblings of a deranged lunatic, even though that is what many supposed Christians believe today; instead they are the very commandments of God, and those who reject them are rejecting God Himself.

That is the real issue. The words in the Bible are the very words of God, and those who reject it are rejecting God. It is not any more complicated than that. As Christians we are called to *obey* God, not reject Him. This is what Jesus Himself had to say:

Matthew 4:4: “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Jesus said that we are to live by *every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*. We are to highly esteem the words of

God; we are to know them and obey them. *Jesus expected His followers to live by every last word of God.*

But that's not how things are, is it? Instead we have churches full of people who are utterly ignorant about the Bible. The reason they are ignorant is because *the Bible doesn't matter to them*. I know this is the case because people aren't embarrassed to tell me that. These self-professed Christians are completely comfortable saying things like “I don't care what the Bible says” or “what the Bible has to say just doesn't matter” or “I don't care if the Bible says it; I will never, ever do that”. They don't study the Bible because *it doesn't matter to them*. They don't understand the Bible because *it doesn't matter to them*. They don't obey the Bible because *it doesn't matter to them*. They see the teachings of the Bible as being utterly unimportant – not worth their time or attention, and *certainly* not binding over their life.

The Bible has a very different viewpoint. The apostles taught that we ought to be *very* concerned about what the Bible has to say:

Hebrews 2:1: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward;

3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”

Where do we find “the things which we have heard”? In

the Bible. The things that God has borne witness to – the signs and wonders and divers miracles – where do we find those? In the Bible. It contains the things that we ought to give “the more earnest heed” to.

But many modern Christians have utterly rejected the Bible, and they have also rejected its authority over their lives. If Christians actually cared about the Bible they would not approve of homosexuality. We would not have churches led by homosexual clergy. We would not have entire congregations gathering to ask God to forgive them for the “sin of condemning homosexuality”. We would not have rampant adultery and divorce in the church. The Church would be a radically different place if Christians actually cared about what God had to say – but they don't.

Yes, I realize there are those who do, but they are the exceptions. So many churches are utterly and breathtakingly corrupt. Many congregations have made peace with the world and have accepted sin, and simply don't believe the Bible anymore. I am utterly, thoroughly sick of hearing Christians tell me to stop telling them about the Bible because – as they themselves explain – *they don't care what it has to say*. The fact that a Christian would actually dare to say “I don't care what the Bible says” should shock us, but these days it's normal.

One fact that we absolutely must realize is that if you have rejected God's authority over your life then *you are not a Christian*. I don't care if you are a deacon, a pastor, or a Sunday School teacher; I don't care if you've been a missionary for 50 years or have been a church member since the day you were born. If you are telling God “You have no say in my life; I'm going to do whatever I please” then you are not saved. Period. Your Christianity is a lie and your faith is false.

You see, in order to be saved, Jesus must be your Lord *and* Savior. One of the key parts of salvation – and one that many churches have tossed aside – is the element of *repentance*. The Bible says over and over that in order to be saved you must repent. In fact, that is the very message that Jesus Himself

preached:

Matthew 4:17: “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 9:13: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance.”

Why did Jesus come? To call sinners to repentance. Jesus condemned those who did not repent:

Matthew 11:20: “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:”

Not only did He condemn them, but He made it clear that those who refused to repent would perish:

Luke 13:2: “And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?
3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

When someone tells God “Please keep me out of Hell. Thanks.”, that is *not* repentance. Repentance is where you are sorry for your sins and you tell God that the things you have done are wrong; you are agreeing with Him that *you have sinned*, and – this is key – you are placing yourself under His authority. It means that you ask God to forgive you for the wrong things you have done, and to change you so that you can walk in God's ways. Repentance is a *change in allegiance*. It is putting an end to your

rebellion against God. You are no longer living for yourself; you are now living for God. Jesus is now your master. We become what the Bible calls a living sacrifice:

Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

After we are saved we no longer live for ourselves. We no longer do what *we* think is right or what *we* think is best. Instead we are bound to follow God and God alone, doing what *God* says is right and what *God* says is best. We obey God at all times regardless of the cost. We do what God tells us to do, we believe what He has to say, and we humble ourselves and accept His rule over our lives. Being a Christian means that God is our king and our master. It means that we acknowledge and accept His authority over us.

Where do we find God's commands and decrees? In the Bible. Therefore, as Christians, we are bound by the Bible. We *must* obey what it says. We must believe what it teaches. We must treasure it and care about it because it is the very words of our master, Jesus Christ. It means that every last word in the Bible matters because *they are all God's words*. Those words are binding over us; they have absolute authority over us. Obeying them does *not* save us, but *we must obey them*.

Why? Because they are the words of our king – the words of the One Who purchased us with His own blood. There are many people who believe that they can reject the authority of God and still be saved. They think that they can laugh at God's commands and somehow everything will still all work out in the end. *This is a grave error*. You see, if you reject God's commands then you can no longer say that God is your master. At that point *you* are the master. You are doing what *you* want to do. You have replaced God *with yourself*. This is a fatal mistake, because if Jesus is not your Lord *then He will not be your Savior either*. It is

a package deal. If you reject His authority over your life then He will not save you.

Jesus made this quite clear in one of His parables. In the parable that we find in Luke 19, when the master returned he rewarded those who were faithful to him. Those who rejected his reign, however, were executed:

Luke 19:27: “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.”

God is very clear about this: all of those who reject the authority of God and who refuse to allow God to reign over them *will be damned*. They will all be cast into the Lake of Fire, where they will be burned alive for all of eternity. Rejecting the authority of God has very serious consequences.

The men of Sodom utterly rejected God. They did not fear Him and they laughed at His commands. They were exceedingly wicked, so the Lord reigned down fire and brimstone from Heaven and killed them all. Abraham, however, was righteous. He believed God and he proved that his faith was genuine through his obedience. He was careful to keep the way of the Lord. The Lord blessed Abraham, and He will bless all those who chose to repent.

Abraham chose to keep the way of the Lord and the Lord rewarded him; the men of Sodom chose to reject that way and the Lord killed them all. Today the world is faced with the same choice. Those who repent and believe, submitting themselves to the lordship of Christ, will be saved and will go on to inherit everlasting life. Those who reject God's authority and mock His word will be tormented day and night in the Lake of Fire. There are no other options.

I am greatly afraid that many people who claim to be Christians have chosen the second option. They claim to have genuine faith but they reject the authority of God and despise His words. These people are not Christians at all but are utterly lost.

When they stand before the God whose authority they have rejected they will find only wrath – a wrath that will last for all of eternity.

My plea to you is this: *do not join them*. There are many who will go down the road to destruction, but I urge you to not go down that path. Do not follow them to Hell. Accept the Lord and yield to Him, while there is still time. The day is rapidly approaching when it will be too late.