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Learning From The Past

By Burl Curtis

There is a striking similarity between the warning given by God to his people just before they entered the promised land and the church in the United States today. These likenesses are vivid and sometimes frightening. "Those who ignore history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past." God is looking to bless you, and others like you, who will learn from the past and follow closely his will when others do not. These will continue to make up his kingdom, the church.

Deuteronomy is a great sermon delivered by Moses. "These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness . . ." (Deut. 1:1.) The Lord had tested and humbled his people in the wilderness. "And thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." (Deut. 8:2, 3.) Likewise, God's people were humbled and tested in the early days of the United States and again in the great depression. They were "spoken against" because they stood strongly for the truth. (See Acts 28:22.) Many in the church today came from very humble beginnings as did their forefathers. Most congregations had humble beginnings. The older members can remember when most churches of Christ met on the wrong side of the tracks in the poorer part of town.

In chapters six and eight, Moses warned Israel against forgetting God when they entered the promised land. They were to "fear the Lord and keep all his statutes and commandments." (6:2.) If they did, many great blessings were promised by God. Their days would be prolonged; they would increase mightily; they would be

given great and goodly cities which they had not built. They would have houses full of all good things which they did not fill, and wells they did not dig; vineyards and olive trees which they had not planted. The land God was giving them was flowing with milk and honey; it was a "good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. (8:7-9.) This sounds very much like the great blessings the Lord has poured out on the United States. There is an abundance of wealth and prosperity in this country and it is shared by members of the church of Christ. We meet in fine church houses we did not build; we farm land we did not clear; we live in cities we did not build and work jobs we did not create. We are educated in Christian Colleges we did not provide. Some live in expensive houses and drive expensive cars. It pleased the Lord to bless his people in the land of Canaan and it has pleased him to bless his people in the United States today. Will we continue to remember the Lord and will we be so grateful for his blessings that we will keep all his commandments?

Moses had a grave warning for God's people who were headed for prosperity. "When thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (6:11, 12.) "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day; lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which

brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (8:10-14.) "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth. . . And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God." (8:17-20.)

These words are both comforting and disturbing. They are very comforting to those families in the church, who after two or three generations, maybe more, still humbly fear God keeping his commandments and see to it that their wealth is used for his glory. They are very disturbing to those families who have already begun to say in their hearts (they wouldn't dare admit it openly), "Our power and the might of our hands have gotten us this wealth." They may not see their pride but they have already forgotten the Lord by "not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes." They use their wealth for what they want not for the work of the Lord. Try as they may to hold on to the church, they will not remain long in it.

God always blesses his people (Ps. 5:12.) Financial blessings do not always accompany the greater spiritual blessings. But many members of the church today have known both. Will we learn the lessons from the past or will we perish as the nations which the Lord destroyed before Israel's face?

A BETTER WAY!

A badger met a skunk one day
Who wouldn't share the right of way
And raised his battle flag and said,
"If you want trouble just come ahead."

The badger said, "You little squirt,
You're a stinker --- mean as dirt.
But since you've got so much B.O.
I'll step aside and let you go."

The moral that's in this episode
Can serve you well along life's road
Stay clear of all that could defile,
Though it makes you walk an extra mile.
--Anonymous

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The Salt of the Earth

By Richard England

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men." (Matt. 5:13) Salt is a symbol of purity, a preservative and an enhancer of good flavors. To call one "the salt of the earth" is to pay a great compliment. To His disciples (of Matthew 5:1) Jesus said they were the "salt of the earth." They not only preserve the earth, but make it acceptable to God. When there is a complete void of righteousness, the wrath of God shortly follows.

Because of a prevalence of wickedness, God determined to destroy the antediluvian world. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen. 6:5) Had there been only ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, the entire cities would have been spared. (Gen. 18:32) Apparently there is an extent of sin beyond which God will not let man go. This may be that to which God refers concerning the Amorites when He tells Abram that He would later destroy them "for their iniquity is not yet full." (Gen. 15:16) Nineveh had reached the point where God would have destroyed them had they continued in their ungodliness, but they repented at the preaching of Jonah. (Jonah 3:10)

"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." (Gen. 6:8) This was his blessing because he, with faith, did that which God instructed him to do. (Heb. 11:7) The same is true for men today who believe God and do what is commanded.

They are saved by the grace of God. (Eph. 2:8,9) Being a follower (a Disciple) of the gospel of God concerning Jesus Christ, one becomes a teacher of the same good news. In so doing he saves (or preserves) himself and those that hear him. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." (1 Tim. 4:16).

Many nations have reached a peak of development and then become so corrupt within that they have fallen. The great empire of Rome is said to have fallen, among other reasons, because of the wickedness and internal corruption. It may well be that the nation of which we are a part will either continue or fall because of the life YOU live. If God is counting the righteous persons in these United States of America with a figure below which He will not let it go without His destroying it, will He include you among the good people?

The greatest thing you can do in life for yourself, your family, the nation, and even the whole world is be a faithful Christian. In so doing you will be the "salt of the earth." On the contrary, Jesus uses the greatest insult against those who are not true to Him: "good for nothing." Uselessness is a tragedy. Whether you are useful or useless is ENTIRELY up to you, personally. Jesus provides the way to righteousness. (John 14:6)

Young Mothers, Babies and Worship

Young mothers with small children sometimes feel that they aren't able to really worship God! Just about the time they have focused their mind on the words of some song and begin to feel inspired, the 19 month of age hits his head against the pew, the cries are louder than the singing. Or, you are just about to get into the sermon with understanding when the three year old needs to go to the bathroom. Everyone around seems to not understand that they too once had babies. The different ways your concentration can be distracted is endless. Sometimes you feel there is no real purpose in church service while trying to manage them! About now you think "WHY NOT KEEP THEM HOME", so that your children, and others in the service will be a lot happier? Young mother, your feelings are perfectly understandable. You do have a problem, but do not be discouraged. Your children and their problem are a golden opportunity.

You as a young parent have within your power, if you deal wisely with the problem, to accomplish some great and wonderful objectives:

FIRST: TO IMPLANT IN YOUR CHILDREN the habit of attending church. This allows them to learn about God as they grow up. This early training may very well mean the difference between their becoming faithful Christians or going the way of the world.

SECOND: YOU MANY NOT BE LEARNING MUCH from the sermons, but you can understand that you are learning for yourself great practical lessons in patience, self-control, self-denial, perseverance, discipline, and obedience to God.

THIRD: YOU ARE TEACHING OTHERS. By your faithful attendance and courageous tackling of your problems with the children, you are setting a wonderful example to the rest of the congregation. Such an example is a priceless asset to any church. It is more powerful in influencing the lives of others than many sermons from pulpits. A church cannot have too many young mothers of this caliber. We need and want them all!

So young parents, don't be discouraged! Keep coming! Bring your babies! Remember, that most of us have been through the same experience with babies and we understand your problems. We admire your courage in continually coming. We want your fellowship in worship. We need your help in teaching the church. So bring your babies on in to worship.

- Selected -

The Salvation of OT Saints

By Steve Williams

Frequently Christians wonder about the basis of salvation of God's faithful during the days before the New Testament. We read of their forgiveness and salvation, yet, we also know that OT animal sacrifices had no eternal atoning value (Heb. 10:4). Two NT passages explain this difficulty. Paul declares that the blood of Jesus, received by faith, brings about redemption: "This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Rom. 3:25). As the NEB translates it, "In his forbearance he had overlooked the sins of the past." The Greek term for "overlooked" or "passed over" (*pareisin*) means to neglect, to let go unpunished. In one place it refers to paralysis, that is, an absence of activity.

The thought is not that God did not care about sin and ignored sin due to apathy. God was not being lenient and indulgent. God was not contradicting his holy nature which can not bear the presence of sin. Rather God temporarily suspended the punishment of the sins of the OT saints, since in his foreknowledge he knew of the future death of Christ which would eternally pay for those sins. The death of Christ "was to show God's righteousness" (Rom. 3:25), that is, the cross was the ultimate proof that God has always been just, fair, and holy in dealing with sin. The sins of OT saints, were forgiven because they were paid for by the future death of Christ, thus, God did not allow sin to go unpunished. The death of Christ is retrospective and prospective in its efficacy, affecting the whole world in all ages (1 Jn. 2:2).

A similar idea is expressed in Hebrews: "He (Jesus) is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant" (Heb. 9:15). We have a unity with the saints of earlier ages in the common means of our salvation (Heb. 11:40; 12:23).

PLAN YOUR GIVING

By Mack Lyon

Our elders have been working diligently and prayerfully in recent weeks on plans for this church for another year. They have completed their plans and are about ready to present them to the congregation. This necessitates some planning, now, on the part of the individual members. Planned spending depends upon planned giving. You should plan your giving because:

Planned giving is the only kind of Scriptural giving. Paul wrote the church at Corinth, "Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart" (II Corinthians 9:7). This simply means the Christian must deliberately and intelligently determine the amount of his gift rather than wait until the moment arrives then let the size of the crowd, his approval or disapproval of the sermon, or the nature of the weather determine it for him.

Planned giving stimulates cheerful giving. He who purposes or plans his gift to Christ thinks of the blessings and the prosperity he has enjoyed from God and gives accordingly (I Corinthians 16:2). He does not feel that he is being taxed, but is

happy to express his love to God, who has so richly blessed him. The person who purposes his giving settles once and for all, a question that constantly plagues the man who does not do so, namely: "Is my giving as the Lord would have it?"

Planned giving encourages regular giving. The Christian who plans his giving, gives even when he is away on week-end trips, vacations, or emergencies. He is never tempted to "embezzle" the Lord's money. When he gives as he has purposed he does not use his contribution to pay pressing bills, vacation expenses, etc. The Christian knows that "upon the first day of the week" he is to lay by him in store as he may prosper (I Corinthians 16:2). This demands regularity.

Planned giving inspires liberal giving. Paul said, "He that giveth, let him do it with liberality" (Romans 12:8). Those who do not plan much do not give much. The more we purpose to do, the more we will do! He who does not plan his giving does not realize how little he gives to the Lord.

Planned giving increases our work for Christ. Giving is a means to an end - more work for the Lord. Thus, the more we plan to give to God, the more we give; the more we give, the more we can do for him. The elders can depend on the Christian who plans his giving to support a program of work.

Planned giving eliminates deficits and drives. If we will purpose in our hearts to give according to our prosperity, then give that regularly, there will be no need for deficits. All Paul asked the Corinthians to do was to give as they had purposed; and he had no fear of deficits (II Corinthians 9:3-7).

Let us all purpose in our hearts to give liberally in the coming year. Let every person, young and old alike, have a part in the good work our elders are setting before us - with no "free-loaders", no "hitch-hikers" - but each one doing his part. We hope you will thoughtfully and prayerfully consider your giving and be prepared to fill in a purpose card this Sunday let the elders know you can be counted upon. The Corinthians promised a year before what they would do for the poor (II Corinthians 9:2-7). If it was right for them, it is right for you. It is right to say, "If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15).

Finally, you may be assured, the Lord is able to make you able to give as you have purposed (II Corinthians 9:8).

THE WISDOM OF MEN

By Johnny Ramsey

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 the great apostle Paul solidly stated the firm foundation upon which he stood. He made it crystal clear that the preaching of the cross would cause men to place their faith in the power of God instead of the nebulous wisdom of men. Today we continually need this exact emphasis. High sounding theological arguments or towering monuments of sophistry will not save the sin-burdened souls of mankind. Plain, thrilling, uncontaminated truth is the basic ingredient missing in so many lives and so many sermons. America and the world stand on the very threshold of damnation and utter ruin because of the glaring lack of dynamic, straight-forward, uncompromising Bible preaching. Elbert Hubbard was very perceptive when he stated: "Theology is an attempt to explain a subject by men who do not understand it. The intent is not to tell the truth but to satisfy the questioner." If you have ever listened to a man who knows a lot of homiletics, philosophy and textural criticism but very little about the Bible you can well appreciate the foregoing statement. Far too many preachers today are studying what men say about the Bible rather than what the good Book says about men!

In James, chapter 3, we read the vivid contrast between man's wisdom and God's wisdom. There is a chasm vast and wide and the wisdom of the world shuns the power of the gospel because it is just not sophisticated enough for the arrogant leaders of society. However, the very message they reject will rise up to haunt them in judgment (John 12:48; Romans 2:16). We ought always to remember the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When any man, who claims to be a gospel preacher, refuses to proclaim the simple message of Christianity he chooses a course that will condemn him and his audience. When anyone sells his mind to Satan for use in teaching error or veiling truth he becomes a mental prostitute. There can be no crime more serious. We may live in a highly educated, secularized and mobilized age but it still takes plain vanilla (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and Galatians 3:27) to save a soul. While the souls of men are dying in sin for want of gospel preaching let us not be found at the shrine of theology drooling over vague and conflicting dogmas that may sound ever so brilliant. The tremendous vocabulary of a university professor may be the source of pride for some people but it has seldom been the cause of conversion for anyone.

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THE WISDOM OF MEN

(continued from page 3)

I have actually listened to some men on lectureship programs who speak in such high-sounding terms that one would think it was an unknown tongue. Such orators would probably name their stray dog Phydeaux (that's French for Fido, don't you see?).

* * * * *

A man cannot touch his neighbor's heart with anything less than his own.

I went out to find a friend
 But could not find one anywhere;
 I went out to be a friend
 And friends were everywhere!

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

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