



# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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## BENJAMIN

*"... a ravenous wolf"*

*—Genesis 49:27*

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Genesis 49 contains Jacob's prophecy of his descendants' traits and circumstances in the end time. He likens Benjamites to voracious wolves, while Moses in Deuteronomy 33:12 calls Benjamin "beloved of the LORD." What can we learn from this tribe of two extremes?

**Creatas**

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# The Beast and Babylon

## Part Nine: Babylon the Great

Before leaving the identity of the Harlot of Revelation 17 and 18, we should take a final look at how the Bible describes prostitution, harlotry, or even fornication, as the King James Version may translate the term. We will be able to see more specifically how an entire nation can be guilty of heinous betrayal of a sacred trust that it solemnly vowed to uphold when making a covenant with God.

We need to grasp more fully what motivates the betrayal, what it appears to promise, and what it actually delivers. Then, by comparing these things with what nations do, the harlotry will be clearer. Always remember that at the foundation of Israel's relationship

with God is the Old Covenant.

The Bible actually names very few prostitutes. Delilah is certainly the most prominent, and Gomer, Hosea's wife, who symbolizes Israel in its relationship with God, is directly called "a wife of harlotry" (Hosea 1:2). Tamar may have only been playing the part in order to entrap Jacob, and the final verdict is still out on Rahab of Jericho. Whether these two were actually prostitutes is moot because the Bible treats both with sympathetic dignity; if they were harlots, it appears they overcame its pulls. However, such is not the case with prostitutes in general. Scripture views them as dangerous and strictly to be avoided.

## An Evil Heart of Unbelief

On this list of biblical prostitutes is the most prominent one in the entire Bible—Israel. By looking at these harlots, we can understand what is driving much of the Israelitish culture. Undoubtedly, the fount of Israel's despicable behavior is what Paul concludes in Hebrews 3:12: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

Israel, despite the fact that God voluntarily revealed much about Himself to her, simply does not believe what He says. The fruit of unbelief is

betrayal expressed as departing from the relationship. However, an "evil heart of unbelief" is quite general. To begin, we need to explore one particular step in the process of sin beyond the "evil heart of unbelief."

In addition, we need to understand that our subject is not women who have been forced by their cultures into prostitution. Such a circumstance is far more understandable; women trapped in such a situation are truly victims and elicit our pity. We will be exploring those women who were free to pursue

other courses in life yet deliberately chose to prostitute themselves, whether in service at a pagan temple as part of the worship of a god or in making a living. Israel deliberately chose to prostitute herself.

A *prostitute* is “a person, usually a woman, who provides sexual activity in exchange for material security.” Dictionaries also define *prostitution* as “debasement of oneself for personal gain,” and this usage applies to either gender. Additionally, it is “a misuse of one’s gifts, talents, or skills,” and this too applies to either gender.

Because of these usages, in its broadest sense, prostitution is not confined either to sexual activity or to women alone. The selling of sex by a woman is only its best-known form. A prostitute is anybody who, as we would say today, “sells himself out” or makes compromises for personal gain. The gain does not have to be in the form of money. However, biblically, its descriptions and examples are confined to the illicit sexual activity of women because of Israel being symbolized as a woman. This will be our focus in this article.

A female prostitute is generally distinguished from an adulterer due to her lack of discrimination in choosing her partners. This lack of discrimination is important because it reveals a mindset, an attitude, that approaches what we today might call an “airhead,” one who seriously ignores the harsh realities of sin. The attitude also exposes a stubborn addiction to gambling on sin’s outcome. The prostitute usually justifies the sin because of her immediate needs.

All sin follows a pattern. The actual act is the next to the last step in a process that, once it starts, often does not take a great deal of time to complete. James 1:13-15 shows:

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Here, simply stated, is the process of sin:

1. Temptation triggers desire.
2. Desire stirs the yearning for gratification.
3. Failure to consider the end and to discipline oneself prompt the sinful act.
4. The sinful act brings forth death.

Repeated frequently enough, this process becomes habitual. The Bible pinpoints the source of sin in another way in Matthew 15:18-20:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

This is another way of saying that it is within mankind’s nature to sin. However, this does not justify sin because man’s nature can be disciplined far better than mankind exhibits.

If sin is to be stopped, these two areas simply must be dealt with, or sin will continue unabated. The carnal mind—man’s normal nature—is at war with God (Romans 8:7), and it is not subject to God’s law because, out of sheer unbelieving stubbornness, it will not permit itself to submit completely. This is why God says that He will give us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26).

The Bible uses the word *heart* to represent all the internal intangibles of human personality. Today, we might say this heart is what makes us “tick.” It is the spirit in that heart that lures us—indeed, drives us—to conduct ourselves in a way that is hostile to God. The Bible shows the prostitute having a specific spirit or heart driving her.

God says in Hosea 4:12: “My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God.” He adds in Hosea 5:4, “They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the LORD.” In a context like this, the Bible uses *spirit* to indicate an immaterial force or power, an attitude, leaning, inclination, outlook, position, propensity, or proclivity to move, act, or conduct oneself in a certain manner or direction.

In Hosea 5:4, the conjunction “for” shows the direct connection between the people’s sinful, idol-worshipping conduct and “the spirit of harlotry.” This spirit is one of the intangibles that comprise human nature, and its direction of conduct is to be disloyal and unfaithful to her commitment to God ratified in the Old Covenant, in which she vowed, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:7).

Remember, what we are considering is something the entire nation is guilty of, both men and women. We are looking at the streetwalker-type of prostitute only because the Bible provides a clear picture of what motivates her. Once we grasp her motivations, we can extrapolate them to illustrate the whole nation—and ourselves individually because we have participated in the same system, and its drives linger in us.

This, of course, is not to accuse anyone of being a streetwalker. Recall that two of the definitions of *prostitution* are “abasing oneself for personal gain” and “abusing one’s gifts, talents, and skills” for the same. For

instance, biographers of famous personalities, especially of artists, occasionally write that their subjects felt they had prostituted their gifts to become wealthy.

This is what God implies in Amos 3:2: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” He expected more and better from them than from any other nation. In terms of the knowledge of God and their access to instruction in the way of life that would produce the most and best toward physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, no other nation came even close to what Israel had because God had chosen them to be His people. Nevertheless, in following the examples of pagan nations who did not know God, Israel frivolously prostituted herself for what she considered personal gain.

Have we not all debased ourselves by indiscriminately accepting the personal gain of the immediate gratification of an unlawful desire, and in the same process, ignored or consciously shoved aside our knowledge of the truth of God? Once we have knowledge of the truth, thus removing our ignorance of God, His way, and His law, if we did not prostitute ourselves, there would be no sin in our lives. The sad truth is that we do not discipline or control ourselves, but instead, we indulge ourselves, and sin occurs. We have prostituted ourselves. We must do better.

God gives us a clear picture of how He perceives a prostitute’s characteristics and motivations. While exploring these traits, we need to transfer them to Israel because she is the worst prostitute in the history of mankind.

## The Mind of a Prostitute

Solomon advises in Proverbs 6:20-21, 26:

My son, keep your father’s command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. . . . For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; and an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.

This begins a long section of instruction regarding adultery and harlotry. The first warning is to protect one’s heart—not one’s body—from her because the body follows the heart’s lusts. Since Babylon, the Great Whore, is our spiritual temptation, this is a veiled admonition to steer clear of Babylon. Verse 26 reveals her predatory nature; she preys upon the precious lives of her victims like a cat preys on birds. Satan, the father of Babylon and its ways, “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

Proverbs 7:10-21 details some of a harlot’s characteristics. A careful study would find that she is described as deviously sly and cunning in that she feigns love, knowing how to pull a man’s strings. Her “love” is strictly business—it is nothing but window dressing. Part of her eye-appealing attraction is her purposeful seduction and immodest dress, arousing lust. She is described as “loud,” which might be better rendered as turbulent, flighty, confused, inconstant, and unstable. She lacks dignity and gravity, and she is stubborn, defiant, brazen, deliberately obstinate, and headstrong. Further, she is aggressive, impudent, contemptuous, presumptuous, and disrespectful.

Apart from Israel, the biblical record relates the story of one woman, Delilah, who exemplifies the harlot, helping us to zero in on what drives most prostitutes. Only two verses, Judges 16:4-5, are needed to isolate her reason for living as she did:

Now afterward it happened that [Samson] loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.”

What motivates Delilah’s harlotry, and what does it teach us from God’s perspective? Harlotry has its base in lust, deceit, and treachery, entered into, executed, or performed for what the perpetrator believes is an immediate gain. Not every case of harlotry follows Delilah’s exact pattern, but the motivations center on sinning for personal gain, an element that never seems to change.

Delilah illustrates a greedy, smooth-talking temptress. Biblically, she becomes a metaphorical image for the Israelites, who reject God’s provision for her as Husband to seek personal, “more satisfying” gain by other means. The driving forces are unbelief and distrust combined with self-indulgence primarily expressed through greed.

The term “greed” may sound harsh, considering the circumstances some women get themselves into before choosing to prostitute themselves. However, we have to learn that nobody has to sin—but something motivates us to do so. *Greed* is “expressing excessive desire, especially for food, drink, or wealth.” We give ourselves and others an almost endless stream of justifications for sinning, but the bottom line is that we are simply unwilling to pay the price to discipline ourselves to do what is right. In our impatience, we convince ourselves that righteousness will not get us anything.

Recall the Great Harlot’s boast in Revelation 18:7: “I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.” This is the statement of one who would compromise rather than suffer the loss of what she felt is her due.

Greed is a synonym for lust or covetousness. However, it is especially applicable here because of Israel's well-known desire for wealth and comfort.

Notice how clearly Hosea expresses this:

For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. . . . She

will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now." For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—which they prepared for Baal. (Hosea 2:5, 7-8)

## How Israel Prostituted Herself

The Bible leaves a clear record that Israel aggressively sought after sin. It was not through mere weakness that she gave in to sin, but she pursued it with intense desire. It is helpful to remember that we are looking into Israel's relations with other nations and their anti-God cultures. Instead of Israel trusting God to provide for her, she used the Babylonish systems of religion, justice, government, education, culture, economics, trade, negotiation, and contracts.

Notice Ezekiel 23:5, 11-12, 16-17, written about 75 years after Hosea:

Oholah [Israel] played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians. . . . Now although her sister Oholibah [Judah] saw this, she became more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry. She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. . . . As soon as her eyes saw them, she lusted for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their immorality; so she was defiled by them, and alienated herself from them.

Israel vigorously pursued relationships with foreign cultures because she thought she saw a way to benefit from them. However, those who prostitute themselves become entangled in a web of greed and deceit that obscures realities essential to a clear understanding of what is really happening. Eventually, though, alienation occurs, as it did with Amnon in his lustful, one-sided relationship with his half-sister, Tamar (II Samuel 13:1-15). But it was too late. The dirty deeds had been done, and the painful penalties began to be exacted.

Like Gomer in Hosea, Israel prostitutes herself before her lovers/idols, who seem to promise much without demanding as much as God seems to require. She is pictured as throwing herself at what she thinks is easy gain—a quick profit without the hard work.

Israel has followed the pagan prostitutes' habits. Hosea saw this and declares in Hosea 9:1, "You have

been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute" (NIV). Here, clearly stated, is cause and effect. As a whole, Israel loves the way of the heathen; she has made it hers.

II Kings 17:14-16 tells us dogmatically why God sent Israel into captivity:

Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their father, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

This was Israel's great sin, typified as prostitution: debasing themselves and God through the adoption and practice of the way of the heathen, and rejecting the way, providence, and sovereignty of God for something far inferior, corrupting, and shameful.

In the midst of His law, God warns Israel—and thus us as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16)—that to do things as the heathens do them constitutes harlotry. Notice how clear His terminology is in His instructions to Israel in Leviticus 20:2-8:

Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and

all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech. And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. And you shall keep My statutes and perform them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

Isaiah 23:15-18 records another specific harlotry of the heathen world, which Israel adopted as her own:

Now it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as in the song of the harlot: "Take a harp, go about the city, you forgotten harlot; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that you may be remembered." And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre. She will return to her pay, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the LORD; it will not be treasured nor laid up, for her gain will be for those who dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for fine clothing.

Tyre was the New York City of its day, and here God is prophesying of its defeat. Though it would survive, it would be brought into line with God's purpose for Israel. He depicts the commercial merchandising system of this heathen city as harlotry. Tragically, Israel adopted these heathens' attitudes and ways of doing business. Israel has a proclivity for taking an idea or concept from others, refining it, and making it work better than it did for its originators—yet in so doing she rejects God's economic systems.

Nahum 3:1-4 opens the way to understanding Israel's harlotries from another angle:

Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs. The noise of a whip and the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots! Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses—they stumble over the corpses—because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries and families through her sorceries.

God directs this prophecy against Nineveh, not Israel, but it gives us insight into the way God perceives matters and their uses. He considers as harlotry their military power and its use against others. In addition,

God repeats His earlier statement that dealing in the occult, sorcery, is harlotry.

Ezekiel 23:5-7 carries this principle of sin into yet another area:

Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, who were clothed in purple, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. Thus she committed her harlotry with them, all of them choice men of Assyria; and with all for who she lusted, with all their idols, she defiled herself.

Though not clearly stated within these three verses, God refers to political alliances throughout this chapter as harlotry. Israel entered political alliances with neighboring nations rather than trusting God to provide for them in their dealings.

Isaiah 1:21-26 is especially interesting because it describes the harlotry principle working within the social justice system:

How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them. Therefore the Lord says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

Judges were selling themselves out through accepting bribes or for personal advantage in some other area of life, and counselors—lawyers—were giving bad advice to tip the scales of "justice" favorably for their careers. Under such corruption, justice in Israel was difficult to find, so difficult that "the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time" (Amos 5:13).

God makes the contrast between harlotry and faithfulness clear. "Harlotry" is the Bible's code word for faithlessness to God regardless of the area of life in which the faithlessness occurs or of which gender is sinning.

Perceiving Israel's faithless proclivity, God warns Israel as early as Exodus 34:14-16:

*(continued on page 18)*

# BENJAMIN SON OF THE FATHER

Everyone is familiar with the story of Joseph, the eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons. However, fewer people are familiar with the story of his younger full-brother, Benjamin. His story and that of the tribe he fathered contain some interesting parallels and lessons for us today. Benjamin's tale begins in Genesis 35:16-19.

Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel travailed in childbirth, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." And it was so, as her soul was in departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

Rachel, whose entire married life had been spent desiring to bear sons for Jacob, gave birth to a second boy. Realizing that she was dying from the birth, she named the baby *Ben-Oni* meaning "son of my sorrow." However, Jacob changed the name of the boy to *Benjamin* meaning "son of my right hand." Matthew Henry explains:

But Jacob, because he would

not renew the sorrowful remembrance of the mother's death every time he called his son by his name, changed his name, and called him Benjamin, the son of my right hand; that is, "very dear to me, set on my right hand for a blessing, the support of my age, like the staff in my right hand."

## BELOVED OF THE FATHER

Not long thereafter, Jacob thought he had lost a son whom he loved dearly. Bringing Joseph's goat's blood-smeared tunic to him, his sons had caused him to believe that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. With Joseph gone, Jacob placed all his affections on his youngest son, Benjamin, the son of his right hand. Already, Jacob viewed the young Benjamin as the staff in his right hand.

When famine struck the land as God had told Joseph it would, Jacob sent his sons into Egypt to buy grain. He did not send Benjamin because, as he says in Genesis 42:4, "Lest some calamity befall him." To get a better understanding of Jacob's love for Benjamin, notice verse 38:

But [Jacob] said, "My son [Benjamin] shall not go down with you, for his brother [Joseph] is dead, and he is left alone [of Rachel's sons]. If

any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."

His words picture an old man believing that the loss of another beloved son would cause his death. By protecting Benjamin, Jacob was protecting his own heart—and to him, his very life!

We have a heavenly Father that loves us even more than Jacob loved Benjamin! As the oft-repeated John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." I John 3:1 (NIV) provides an indication of just how much: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" Not only did our heavenly Father love us enough to ask His only begotten Son to die as a redemption for our sin, but He *lavishes* such love on us that His desire is to make us His very children.

## BROTHERS

As the first son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, Joseph was highly favored by Jacob, which caused jealousy and anger among Joseph's brothers. They captured him, put him in a pit, and sold him to slave

# BENJAMIN IN THE RIGHT HAND

traders, who took him to Egypt where he became the slave of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Through a series of adventures involving dreams, Joseph came to the attention of Pharaoh. By correctly interpreting the Pharaoh's dream of seven fat years of plenty followed by seven lean years of famine, Joseph rose to a place of great prominence in Egypt, that of vizier or prime minister.

Citizens of all the nearby countries came to Egypt to buy grain because the famine had struck them so sorely—and the descendants of Abraham and Isaac were no exception. The ten sons of Jacob must have found it confusing and frightening to go into Egypt to buy grain so that the family could survive the drought. The streets teemed with people foreign to them. To make matters desperate, the stern, mighty Egyptian ruler who oversaw the distribution of grain suddenly accused them of being spies! They tried to tell the official that they were just shepherds from Canaan in need of food. Their confusion must have deepened when he asked about their family back in Canaan. Ultimately, one of the brothers, Simeon, was bound and placed in prison as a hostage until they returned with proof of their story. And what strange proof this man wanted! He demanded they bring their youngest brother down into Egypt.

As the brothers discussed their

predicament, they began to admit that their sin against Joseph was the reason for their dilemma. Of course, they had not recognized the Egyptian ruler as their brother, Joseph. It is a strange quirk in people that, when placed under severe stress, they begin to consider their sins and shortcomings. The sons of Jacob began to feel chastened.

Upon their return to Egypt, with Benjamin in tow, they were well-treated. Simeon was restored to them, and Joseph took them into his own house and fed them. Benjamin, however, received five times the food that the rest received. In addition, each brother was given a new garment, but Benjamin received three hundred pieces of silver and five new sets of clothing!

Genesis 45:1-2 reveals how Joseph really viewed his meeting with his brothers:

Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.

And in verses 14-15, he expresses his feelings for Benjamin specifically: "Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and

Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover, he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him."

God orchestrated the events in Joseph's life to bring him to a position of greatness in Egypt, from which he could save his family from physical destruction in a time of distress. In fact, God had foretold these happenings through Joseph's dreams (Genesis 37:1-11), in which he saw his family bow down to him. It takes no great stretch of the imagination to see that Joseph is a type of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. Notice Hebrews 2:10-11:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Our Elder Brother left the splendor of a holy heaven and came to the corruption of earth. He took the form of a man and associated with wicked men. He suffered emotional and physical pain and death to pay the penalty for mankind's sins. He has promised that He has gone to prepare a place of everlasting, spiritual safety for us, His brothers:

In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3)

Just as Joseph yearned to see his younger brother and prepared a means of physical safety for him, Jesus Christ prepares a place for us in His everlasting Kingdom. He longs to see us there, just as Joseph yearned for Benjamin. Undoubtedly, there will be tears of great joy when we are finally united with our Elder Brother and Savior.

## SAUL

As was the custom of the time, when Jacob was about to die, he blessed each of his children. To Benjamin he said: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil" (Genesis 49:27).

Historically, Benjamin was the smallest and weakest of the twelve tribes of Israel. This was due to a war Benjamin fought against the other eleven tribes, in which Benjamin was virtually annihilated (Judges 19-21). Despite this, God made good use of this weakest of peoples—an object lesson for us as Christians (I Corinthians 1:27).

Israel's first king, Saul—a tall, strong, regal-looking man—was a Benjamite. His reign began well: "And Saul answered and said, 'Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?'" (I Samuel 9:21). God even "gave him another heart" so that he prophesied with the prophets (I Samuel 10:9-10). He was so humble that, on the most important day of his life—at Mizpah where all Israel was gathered to proclaim

him king, he hid himself among the baggage (I Samuel 10:21-24)! The people were so impressed that they "shouted and said, 'Long live the king!'"

But Saul sinned. The sad tale is found in I Samuel 15:19-21:

[Saul asked,] "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."

Like all sinners, Saul had his excuses. How well we understand that! Nevertheless, as with all sin, a price had to be paid for disobeying God: Saul's kingdom was taken from Him. What was Saul's reaction? He attempted to kill the man God appointed to replace him!

### **I Samuel 18:10-11, 28-29:**

So David played music with his hand, as at other times; but there was a spear in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall with it." But David escaped his presence twice. . . . Thus Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, . . . and Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul became David's enemy continually.

**I Samuel 19:10:** Then Saul sought to pin David to the wall with his spear, but he slipped away from Saul's presence; and he drove the spear into the wall. So David fled and escaped that night.

Saul became as ravenous as a wolf, trying to devour his prey and to divide his spoil. He was so depraved that he sought to kill his own son, Jonathan, for his loyalty to David (I Samuel 20:30-34)!

## PAUL

Moses penned a second prophecy concerning Benjamin in Deuteronomy 33:12: "Of Benjamin he said: 'The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by Him, who shelters him all the day long; and he shall dwell between His shoulders.'"

Philippians 3:5-6 introduces another son of Benjamin: "... circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." This is, of course, the apostle Paul as he described himself and his qualifications.

We find some of Paul's history in Acts 8:1, 3:

Now Saul [as he was known then] was consenting to his [Stephen's] death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Later, in Acts 9:1-2:

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

*(continued on page 22)*

*"It is the glory of God  
to conceal a matter,  
but the glory of kings  
is to search out a matter."*

Proverbs 25:2

# Why Does God Keep Secrets?

In Proverbs 25:2, we read the enigmatic passage, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter." Countless individuals throughout history have expressed frustration and bewilderment at God's proclivity to conceal things or keep secrets.

When Job was trying to make sense of his devastating trial, he lamented, "And these things You have hidden in Your heart; I know that this was with You" (Job 10:13), and, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat!" (Job 23:3). He wanted to pry out a few secrets.

Most people at one time or another have identified with the ceramic clay in Isaiah 45:9 and Romans 9:20, who asks, "What are you making?" and "Why have you made me like this?" Has God a pragmatic reason for keeping mankind perpetually in the dark, ignorant of His intentions?

Scripture reveals that there are certain things God has kept back from His creation, purposing instead to reveal things incrementally to His obedient offspring: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are

revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

## General Revelation

Theologians have long discussed a general or public revelation that anyone with eyes and a brain could figure out for himself. Zophar, one of Job's counselors, alludes to this empirical revelation: "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7).

The American pamphleteer and propagandist, Thomas Paine, wrote a book entitled *The Age of Reason*, in which for his thesis he attempted to answer Zophar's double-pronged question. To the first part, he answered unequivocally in the affirmative, citing the order and design of the cosmos. Paine, a practicing Deist, points to Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" as affirmation of the general or public revelation.

*(continued on page 20)*

# THE BEAST'S

**S**cattered within its pages, the Bible provides signs or clues about the person known as the Beast—or to some, the Antichrist—who will dominate the world scene during the last several years before Christ's return. Because we believe that time to be just ahead, it follows that this evil man will soon make his debut—or has done so already. Do we know enough of biblical prophecy to identify him when he appears?

The Bible, of course, gives us neither a name nor a set of vital statistics. Even his racial and/or national origins are a matter of conjecture, although the Bible calls him the "King of the North," a title last held by Rome. What Scripture offers to the student of prophecy is a jigsaw puzzle of prophesied behaviors and characteristics, as well as clues to his motivations and temperament through various types. Assembling and pursuing the evidence about this coming, enigmatic figure holds all the suspense of a good mystery.

Because of the knowledge explosion over the past several decades, Christians today have the ability to learn a great deal about the various men throughout history who have been types of the end-time Beast. Many volumes containing the histories and biographies of these Beast-like prototypes line the shelves of libraries and bookstores. It takes only a little study to discover the traits and motivations that the ultimate human ruler will share with these types.

Why should we take the time and effort to do this? It will be to our advantage to recognize him before or as soon as he rises to prominence and to identify him to others to prepare them for the unprecedented tumult of the prophesied Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord—tumult the Beast will catalyze. Moreover, the sooner we identify him, the better able we will be to anticipate and, if possible, counter the effects of his policies and actions.

One of the paramount, biblical keys to this man of unbridled ambition is that he will be fundamentally militaristic. The Beast will be a man of war—a formidable, almost invincible general and conqueror. We will see that Scripture verifies that martial zeal and prowess are among the foremost characteristics of all those who have been types of the Beast.

## Napoleon and His Lik

Renowned British historian Paul Johnson, who has a talent for detecting the central character and the prime motivations of the people he chooses to write about, has recently written a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte. A colorful, controversial figure, Napoleon made a huge impact on European history, certainly, and some of the effects of his actions and policies are still being felt today. In his slender volume, Johnson pegs Napoleon, his character, and motivation in the conclusion to a chapter titled, "Master of the Battlefield":

Thus from 1799 to the end of 1809 Bonaparte seemed invincible and strode the landmass of Europe like a colossus. . . . What is clear from the story of the seven coalitions [formed among European nations opposing Napoleon] is that Bonaparte remained, from start to finish, a military man. As such, he enjoyed extraordinary success. Where he failed was as a politician, and still more as an international statesman. His failure was so complete that it eventually involved his military ruin, too. (*Napoleon*, Viking, New York, 2002, p. 72)

Herbert Armstrong taught that Napoleon was the fifth head of the Beast, and in this regard, the life of Napoleon becomes quite instructive. Napoleon is an outstanding example of extreme militarism.

Napoleon originated from among the minor nobility on Corsica, where he was born. In 1779, when Napoleon was ten years old, the governor of Corsica sponsored him to attend a preparatory school for a year before attending the French royal military academy in Brienne, where he studied for five years. Following this, he spent a year at an officer's school in Paris. From that point on, except for brief periods of relative peace, Bonaparte was engaged in warfare until his exile to St. Helena in 1815.

If we add these years together, Napoleon was immersed in war in one form or another—either in training or on campaigns—for 36 years. In 1821, only six years later, he died on St. Helena. All but sixteen years of his life—his first ten and his last six—he spent

# MILITARISM

engaged in war. Bonaparte's martial life represents an authentic model of the end-time Beast.

He is not alone. Many of history's Beast-like conquerors had similarly long and intense military careers.

The Bible calls Nebuchadnezzar "the head of gold" (Daniel 2:37-38), the archetype of all world rulers. Like Napoleon, he spent the bulk of his life at war. It is likely that he had spent his formative years fighting under his father, Nabopolassar, and while still a young man, he was given command of the armies of Babylon in 609 BC, five years before he ascended the throne. He was the victorious commander of the army that defeated Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in 605 (see II Kings 23:29; II Chronicles 35:20). While subduing Egypt in 604, he heard of his father's death and hurried back to Babylon to secure his throne. During his reign, he defeated Egypt twice more and Judah four times, and enjoyed many other conquests. Of these others, he conducted a 13-year siege of Tyre between his seventh and twentieth years on the throne. Nebuchadnezzar's armies were in the field almost continuously, expanding his empire, until his death in 561 BC.

When Alexander—later to be called "the Great"—was about eighteen, his personal valor won the battle at Chaeronea for the Macedonians (338 BC). His father, Philip of Macedon, was killed only two years later. Energetically, Alexander put down his opposition and was chosen by his soldiers to command the Greeks against Persia in 334 BC. In one campaign in 333, he conquered most of Asia Minor, then he subdued Syria, Tyre, Palestine, and Egypt before 331 was out. After two years of consolidation, he defeated Bactria, and by 327, he had crossed the Indus River and penetrated as far as the Jhelum River in Kashmir, where his discontented troops forced him to turn back. He was planning more grand military campaigns when he died in Babylon at thirty-three in 323 BC. He had spent most of his life at war.

Antiochus IV, surnamed Epiphanes, was king of Syria from 175-164 BC. Part of the history and prophecy concerning the King of the North in Daniel 11 is based on his twelve-year reign. It was against his despotic, barbaric rule that the Jews under the Maccabees revolted and won their autonomy. After

four campaigns against Egypt (171-168 BC), he turned his wrath on Judea, taking Jerusalem by assault in 167, slaughtering a large number of its inhabitants, abolishing the Temple worship, and imposing Greek religion and culture on the Jews. While attempting to put down the subsequent Jewish insurgency, he fought wars against Parthia, Armenia, and Elymais in Elam. Like other types of the Beast, Antiochus spent a great deal of his reign in warfare.

Other historical types of the Beast include Julius Caesar (100?-44 BC), Justinian (AD 483-565), Charlemagne (AD 742-814), Otto the Great (AD 912-973), Charles V (AD 1500-1558), as well as the more recent Giuseppe Garibaldi (AD 1807-1882), Benito Mussolini (AD 1883-1945), and Adolf Hitler (AD 1889-1945). All of these, with the possible exception of Justinian (who conquered through excellent generals), were military men and strategists.

## Prophetic Characteristics

What does Scripture say about the Beast? Regarding the King of the North, a type of the Beast, Daniel 11:36-39 characterizes him:

Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall magnify himself above *them* all. But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain.

Obviously, this is a man who regards the military and warfare as a kind of religion, conquering, ruling,

*(continued on page 18)*

# SEARCHING

## Part Nine: The Migration

*"Once I have sworn by My holiness;  
I will not lie to David:  
His seed shall endure forever,  
and His throne as the sun before Me;  
it shall be established forever like the moon,  
even like the faithful witness in the sky."  
(Psalm 89:35-37)*

Jeremiah 52:7-11 describes the end of Judah's elite at the fall of Jerusalem:

Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled and went out of the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were near the city all around. And they went by way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he pronounced judgment on him. Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. And he killed all the princes of Judah in Riblah. He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put

him in prison till the day of his death. (see also II Kings 25:4-7)

With the death of King Zedekiah, his sons, and Judah's princes, three questions arise:

1. Had the scepter departed from Judah? Jacob prophesied in faith that it would not (see Genesis 49:10). But who now in Judah held it?
2. Had God reneged on His unconditional promise to David, that his monarchy (specifically, his house and his kingdom) would "be established forever . . ." (II Samuel 7:16)? From all indications, the "house" (dynasty) was now dead.
3. Had the house of David come to the point that it lacked "a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 33:17)?

To each of these questions, the answer is a resounding, *No!* Centuries in advance, God had taken steps to ensure that. In doing so, He provided more search criteria for identifying the whereabouts of Israel today.

### Judah's Two Crowns

The story begins some 850 years before Zedekiah's time, in the days of Jacob's son, Judah.

Genesis 38 relates the sordid affair between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. She was the widow of Er,

# FOR ISRAEL

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## ation of a Monarchy

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Judah's firstborn son. The illicit liaison produced twin sons—but with an interesting hitch:

Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins were in her womb. And so it was, when she was giving birth, that the one put out his hand; and the midwife took a scarlet thread and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? This breach be upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand. And his name was called Zerah. (Genesis 38:27-30)

Of course, the purpose of the thread was to mark the firstborn son—the one who would receive the birthright. The breach, or the potential for estrangement between the brothers, lay in the unexpected reversal of birth order: The boy ready to be born, Zerah, as marked by the thread, became the second born.<sup>1</sup> His older brother was named Perez. David and his dynasty were descendants of Perez. Christ also came through this line (Matthew 1:3-5, 16; Luke 3:23-33).

Whatever happened to Zerah and his descendants?

Cheated of their birthright, the descendants of Zerah separated from the children of Israel soon after the Exodus. This separation explains why so few references to Zerah appear in God's Word.<sup>2</sup> Some of the children of Zerah went north to Greece. Others went to Troy, near

the Dardanelles, which, by the way, bears the name of Zerah's fifth son, Darda. After Troy's fall to the Achaeans (Greeks), a group of Zerahites under the leadership of Brutus migrated to Britain via Malta. In England, they founded "New Troy," which the Romans much later renamed Londinium, now London.

Other Zerahites settled down in Ireland, after residing for a time in Spain, where they founded the city of Saragossa, literally, the City of Zerah. By the time of David, a princely clan of Zerahites was established as Ireland's royal family, ruling a part of the tribe of Dan, the *Tautha de Danann* (that is, tribe of Dan) of Irish legend, which had also settled there.

Therefore, because of the Zerahite monarchy, the scepter did not depart from Judah (Genesis 49:10) with the dethroning of Zedekiah and the death of his sons.

However, this fact in itself does not address the question of *David's* monarchy, which God said was to be everlasting. It fails to address this issue because Zerah's monarchy was *not* David's monarchy. While related, they remained *separate* monarchies, God having established David's much later than Zerah's. The Davidic monarchy was not linked to its Zerahite counterpart. Hence, we cannot claim that God fulfilled His promise of a perpetual throne to *David* through the Zerahite monarchy.

### The Healing of the Breach

To resolve this issue, God *connected* the two monarchies. To see how, we must return to the time of Jerusalem's fall.

The Babylonians appointed Gedaliah as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal to rule Judah. Jeremiah 41 relates how Ishmael, who was of the "royal family" (verse 1), assassinated Gedaliah (verse 2), probably out of jealousy over the power the Babylonians had bestowed on him. Ishmael took a number of prisoners (verse 10), probably as bargaining chips should his schemes go sour. And sour they went. Ishmael was forced to flee to Ammon (verse 15).<sup>3</sup> His prisoners escaped. Verse 10 mentions something about those prisoners the casual reader might miss. Among them were some VIPs: "Then Ishmael carried away captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters. . . ."

While none of his sons survived Jerusalem's fall, Zedekiah was survived by at least two daughters. One of these daughters had recently married an Irish prince of the line of Judah through Zerah. In fact, the marriage took place during (or shortly before) the siege of Jerusalem. Thus, Zedekiah's daughter, who was a descendant of Perez, married a man descended through Zerah. Both had Judah as a common ancestor.

It is not fanciful to adduce that an Irish prince was visiting Jerusalem in the sixth century BC. The ancients were more traveled than many today want to believe, and international relations, complete with ambassadors, pro-

ocols, and "diplomatic immunity," were extant as well. Nehemiah 11:24 mentions a certain Pethahiah, who was probably one such ambassador. More importantly, he was "of the children of Zerah, the son of Judah, [and] was the king's deputy in all matters concerning the people."

The word *deputy* literally means "hand." In modern idiom, Pethahiah was the Persian king's "right-hand man." As strange as it may seem, several generations after Jeremiah's day, there was a highly placed Jew (that is, someone of Judah) in the *Persian* court whose task it was to look after the Jews in Palestine.

We do not need to read too much between the lines to understand from this scripture that Ireland had diplomatic relations with the Persians, and Pethahiah, possibly of the Irish royal family, was sent to Persia to represent the interests of the Jews in Palestine. That is, the Irish king, himself a Jew in that he descended from Judah, felt responsible for the Jews in Palestine. Since he did not enjoy hegemony over that part of the world, he looked after their interests through a highly placed person—virtually an ambassador—in the Persian court. Even in today's complex world of foreign relations, this technique is a common method through which a leader can exercise a measure of control over an area outside his immediate authority.

## Overthrown, Overthrown, Overthrown

In all these proceedings, God typically fulfilled the prophecy recorded in Ezekiel 21:25-27. II Chronicles 36:12 relates that Zedekiah "did evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD." On the day of Jerusalem's fall, the rule of this "profane, wicked prince of Israel," ended (Ezekiel 21:25). Zedekiah was forced to "remove the turban, and take off the crown" (verse 26); with the death of his sons, "nothing shall remain the same" (verse 26). Indeed, a new world order had come. God "exalt[ed] the lowly" throne of Ireland, while he "abase[d] the exalted" one in Jerusalem. Perez was abased; Zerah exalted—to the point that the Irish king was a peer of the Persian King Xerxes. These were indeed the days of throwing down and building up.

God will bring about the final fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy when Zedekiah's counterpart, a profane king sitting on David's throne at the return of Christ, will be forced to "take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same" (verse 26). No, everything will change when "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). At that time, God will exalt the lowly, using the "foolish

things of the world to put to shame the wise" and the "weak things . . . to put to shame the things which are mighty" (I Corinthians 1:27). So shall the "weak things" become "kings and priests . . . and . . . reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10). When God brings this about, He will finally fulfill the Ezekiel 21 prophecy, having "abase[d] the exalted" (verse 26)—suddenly bringing to nothing the vast wealth of Babylon's system, as Revelation 18:19 makes clear.

Just as Ezekiel 21:27 says, God did overthrow David's throne three times. As we have seen, He overthrew it in Judah, transplanting it in Ireland. Later, He overthrew it a second time, transplanting it from Ireland to Scotland. God overthrew the throne a third time at the death of Queen Elizabeth I of England. Dying, she willed her throne to the Stuart king, James VI of Scotland. He ascended to the English throne as James I in AD 1603. (Incidentally, this is the James of the King James Bible.)

The Davidic throne resides in England at this time. It "shall be no longer [moved] until He comes whose right it is" (Ezekiel 21:27). Remember, we saw that David's throne was in fact God's (more correctly, Christ's). That throne will remain in England until Christ comes to claim it as His rightful heritage.

The marriage of one of Zedekiah's daughters—of the Perez branch of Judah—to a prince of the Zerah branch healed the breach in Judah's family. Through this healing, God

- perpetuated the Davidic monarchy, as required by the unconditional promise to David in II Samuel 7:16. The offspring of the Irish prince and Zedekiah's daughter would legitimately bring the two branches together indefinitely, as one family, one monarchy.
- maintained the authority of the Davidic monarchy over the "house of Israel," as God prophesied in Jeremiah 33:17.

Jeremiah received the job of transporting the royal couple back to Ireland.

## Jeremiah's Big Job

Jeremiah 1:9-10 recounts God's commission to Jeremiah, at the time a teenager: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."

Jeremiah's task was so important that God had prepared him for it from his conception (verse 5). He encouraged Jeremiah by telling him not to fear those to whom he would be sent, "for I am with you to deliver you" (verse 8). He ends His commission in verse 19, assuring Jeremiah that the people to whom he would be sent will "fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you, . . . to deliver you."

Jeremiah was destined to carry on God's work over the objections of entire nations and kingdoms (note the plurals). As Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:2-3, God knows full well that there is "a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; . . . a time to break down, and a time to build up." God did not only use Jeremiah in His purpose to root out, pull down, destroy, and overthrow the Perez-centered monarchy, but also to plant and build a Zerah-Perez monarchy. Let us see how God did all this.

Jeremiah 40:1-5 describes the favor God granted Jeremiah in the eyes of the Babylonians. The captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan, gave Jeremiah leave to go "wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go" (verse 4). However, Jeremiah followed the captain's urgings (verse 5), and stayed with Gedaliah, whom the Babylonians had appointed as governor of the area.

Note that Jeremiah did *not* choose to go to Babylon. Jeremiah certainly remembered what God had revealed to him, as recorded in Jeremiah 33:17, "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel." He knew that it was not his task to "build up" the throne of David in a *Gentile* land. His was not the task of overthrowing a Gentile throne at this time. Jeremiah knew full well that he had to carry the Davidic monarchy to the people of Israel.

Jeremiah's party consisted of his secretary, Baruch, at least one of Zedekiah's daughters, and her husband, the Irish prince and heir to the throne of Zerah. Considering the rank of the people Jeremiah was escorting, the party certainly included servants of various sorts as well. As time passed, the party expanded to include the couple's son, who, tradition has it, was born in Spain. Jeremiah led these people to Ireland via Spain, where they arrived about 569 BC, some sixteen years after Jerusalem's fall.

David's throne did not become defunct with the death of Zedekiah's sons. It remains intact, awaiting Christ's return. Jeremiah did not plant it in a Gentile nation, such as Babylon, nor did he hide it in Jerusalem. Christ, during His first coming, did not "dig it up." During His human lifetime, it was a Gentile throne—that of Rome—which held sway over the Jews in Palestine. He left it that way at His ascension.

However, as Isaiah 9:7 avers, Christ will ultimately sit "upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time [the time of His return] forward, even forever." Centuries after Isaiah, the archangel Gabriel said the same thing to Mary, as recorded in Luke 1:32: Her son "will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David."

The key of David is vital knowledge indeed! Lacking that knowledge, it would be impossible to locate David's throne, his dynasty. We could search high and low, looking north among the American Eskimos and the Siberian Yakuts, south among the inhabitants of Easter Islands, vainly studying the legends of the North and South American aborigines, finally asking the Bedouins of the Middle East and the Ethiopians of Africa. Some have done this. Yet, they have failed to find the throne of David.

But, when we look for a perpetual dynasty, one without hiatus, one that has to this day never lacked a monarch, our field of search narrows considerably. God has been loyal to His promise to David. Our search criteria regarding the Key of David, discussed in the fourth article of this series, remain intact.

Next month, we will review all the search criteria we have gathered so far, and see to what peoples they point.

—Charles Whitaker

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The unexpected reversal is somewhat analogous to that perpetrated by Israel when he crossed his hands at the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, thereby giving the greater blessing to the second-born son. This too resulted in a reversal in birthright.

<sup>2</sup> Among the relatively few references to Zerah is I Chronicles 2:6, which catalogs Zerah's sons as "Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara,—five of them in all." I Kings 4:31 mentions that Solomon was wiser than "Heman, Chalcol and Darda." We will discuss another important reference, Nehemiah 11:24, in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Is there in Ammon—probably today's Jordan—a vestige of Judah's royal line, a descendent of Ishmael?

(continued from page 7)

. . . (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods, and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.

God does not stop with one form of idolatry because He again specifically warns in Leviticus 17:7: “They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.” And

again in Leviticus 20:6, “And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.”

Are the modern Israelitish nations guilty of utilizing and promoting a rapacious merchandising and economic system? Do they use international diplomacy to make treaties and trade agreements against the will of God? Do they employ their militaries to intimidate other nations into submission to their will for political or economic purposes? Are their justice systems shining rays of hope for the weak, or are they corrupted by foolish decisions and strongly influenced by money? Are their religions holy and pure in their spirituality and morality, or do they pander to demons and man at the expense of God?

## We Must Not Fail

Idolatry is the sin most frequently mentioned in relation to harlotry—seven different times—and is directly called “whoring.” The concept undergirding this subject is the monogamous marriage of the nation of Israel to her Husband, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is

in direct contrast to the polytheistic approach of Babylon’s religions, which say, “We are all worshipping the same god,” but it is an outright lie. How can all these religions, which believe and practice different things, derive from the mind of one pure and holy Being? If they do, that

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and pillaging in the name of his “god of fortresses.” The remainder of the chapter narrates what he does: attack, overwhelm, overthrow, plunder, destroy, and annihilate. The Beast is obsessed with war.

In Revelation 13:4-7, describing the Beast from the Sea, John writes:

So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Revelation 13 covers similar ground to what appears in Daniel 11. The Beast is not given this authority *carte blanche*, but will earn a great deal of it with his own abilities and the force of his personality, as well as with the energy and aid that the Dragon, Satan (Revelation 12:9), gives him. Of course, God makes all of this possible to bring about the end—so that all will work out according to His plan (see

Revelation 17:17).

Nevertheless, the Beast is so formidable in battle that the whole world is convinced that he is invincible—“Who is able to make war with him?” Humanly, they are correct: No country or confederation can match him, and he ends up dominating “every tribe, tongue, and nation.” What power! He will be able to hold that power only by military means.

Revelation 17:11-14, the angel’s explanation to the apostle John of verses 1-10, adds more detail:

And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings. . . .

Revelation 19:19-20 picks up the thread of the story:

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs

Being is terribly confused!

The Old Covenant lifted Israel to a place of honor as the only nation with whom God had entered into such an agreement. Her proper response should have been gratitude, love, and obedience, but she turned from God's provision to pursue the empty promises of other gods. She sought her own pleasure rather than her Husband's. She failed, and therein lies the major lesson for us. We must not fail! We are in a similar position as Israel. Like her, we vowed to God at baptism to do what He says.

However, there are differences between Israel and us. Hebrews 8:6-7 confirms, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." In contrast to the Israelites of old, we have been given far better promises under the New Covenant, made to ensure that we enter God's Kingdom. In other words, we have far fewer excuses than they did.

Though we have already entered into the covenant, the marriage is not yet "consummated." Like Mary and Joseph before Jesus' birth, we are promised to Christ,

but we have not come together. It will not officially be so until His return, as the Parable of the Ten Virgins and other passages show. Unlike Israel, we must prove our loyalty first, before the marriage actually takes place. Under the Old Covenant, the flaw was in the people—they failed. Under the New Covenant, the flaw is still in the people, but God will remove it before the marriage is fully formalized. We are the Bride of promise.

Hosea 1:2 provides the shortest, easiest Bible definition of spiritual prostitution: "When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD.'" It is being unfaithful to the Lord in transgressing His way of life for personal gain. It may indeed involve illicit sex, but in principle, unfaithfulness involves breaking any of His commandments, which He gave to guide us through life.

In Christian love,

*John W. Ritenbaugh*

in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The Beast reigns but a short time, but in that brief period, he gathers tremendous military power—provided by the ten rulers who use him as a front man for their predatory purposes. He uses this power to conquer everything in his path. He even thinks that he is powerful enough—with the combined armies of all mankind at his back—to take on Jesus Christ when He returns to earth!

What arrogance! And as it turns out, what folly! This is the mind of a man who places all his bets on his abilities as a military genius.

## Martial to the End

At the end of Daniel's vision concerning Medo-Persia and Greece, a short passage describes both the type (Antiochus Epiphanes) and the antitype (the end-time Beast):

And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be

mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall magnify himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand. (Daniel 8:23-25)

To the end, the Beast is a fighter and a dogged, cunning strategist, who believes that he can win on any battlefield. He is a proud man who thrives on military victories and the adulation and riches those victories bring, and who delights in utterly destroying his enemies and imposing his will upon the conquered.

These scriptures suggest that the Beast is not necessarily a politician (though he will be adept at political manipulation), but a man who loves war. In this age of do-nothing diplomacy, he will be one whom many will accuse of being rash and too quick on the trigger, but his victories will put down any dissent from that quarter. He will urge swiftness, decisiveness, and overwhelming force. Like many of the past types of the Beast, he will enforce his own terms—probably terribly harsh ones, if history is any guide—on those he subdues.

Keep these clues in mind when watching for the rise of the Beast.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

*"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter."*

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Romans 1:20 more definitively substantiates the idea of a public or general revelation: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." Even with such an overwhelming testimony some hapless fools, having immersed themselves in evil behavior, have deluded themselves into rejecting this general revelation, refusing to see God (Psalm 14:1). Even the public or general revelation cannot penetrate the darkened minds of those whom, because of their addiction to sin, God has given over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:21).

Thomas Paine responded to Zophar's second question, "Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" with a resounding, "No." Largely, Paine is right on target. The carnal mind, because of its propensity to sin and lawlessness, is enmity against God (Romans 8:7). Knowledge of God's intent or purpose has always been conditional, linked to obedience to His holy law. He promises to those He has scattered for disobedience:

But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice. . . . (Deuteronomy 4:29-30)

Consequently, the answer to Zophar's second question has strings attached. We may see God's intent and purpose for our lives more clearly if 1) we yield to His will, and 2) we actively and tirelessly seek for Him as we would for buried precious minerals.

Axiomatically, God will only re-

veal Himself (making known His purposes and intentions) to people who yield themselves to Him and actively and aggressively seek Him. Paul, addressing the philosophers of Athens, suggests that finding God requires some expended effort and energy:

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:26-27)

God Almighty has placed a high priority on the "seeking out" and the "exploring" aspect of our character. Even the use of the Helper, God's Holy Spirit, requires explorative, investigative application. Consider: "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (I Corinthians 2:10). The receipt of this power to search and investigate also comes with strings attached. As the apostle Peter says, the Holy Spirit is "given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Even after God draws an individual into His Family (John 6:44), He does not instantaneously put all the pieces together. Herbert Armstrong often referred to the Bible as a coded book or a jigsaw puzzle, with God revealing the schematic diagram incrementally through His Holy Spirit. The main guiding interpreting principle in the greater church of God has been that the Bible interprets the Bible, but the clues are not all found in one place. As one begins the process of putting the pieces together, he practices the principle introduced in Isaiah 28:10, "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line,

line upon line, here a little, there a little."

Without the connecting links supplied by God's Holy Spirit, the disjointed segments remain unrelated and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Our Savior Jesus Christ incorporated the same coded feature into the parables. When the disciples asked Him why He used these coded figures of speech, He told them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11).

Jesus gave the crowds a clear figure of speech, but he withheld both the referent and the grounds of comparison, sharing it with the disciples in private (Matthew 13:11-13). He refers to a scripture in Isaiah 6:9 as His reason for not sharing the connection with the uninitiated: "And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive."'"

As a coded book, the Bible demands readers to look for parallels, recurring patterns, and symbol clusters. Otherwise, it is just as inscrutable as the score of a symphony to one who cannot read music.

## Digging Deep

**A** principle pertaining to discovering biblical knowledge appears repeatedly in Proverbs. Regarding wisdom, Solomon suggests: "If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:4-5). Likewise, Proverbs 8 suggests that those who diligently search for wisdom will find it. A former Ambassador College administrator used to refer to the institution as a gold mine, adding with caution that gold or silver ore does not lie neatly above the ground, but must be sought for amidst waste tailings and slag.

Whether we apply the principle to mining procedures or pedagogy, what we acquire too easily, we do not esteem very highly. In my experience, the lessons I have learned from glib instructors equipped with the latest technological bells and whistles seem to stick to the memory like Teflon®. On the other hand, some of the one-on-one independent study courses in which I metaphorically had to assemble each piece or dig out each nugget of ore chunk by chunk, have remained a permanent part of my learning repertoire.

In 1910, American educator John Dewey wrote a book entitled *How We Think*, in which he demonstrated how people develop the mature process of reflective thinking and problem solving. He suggested that to foster mature reflective thinking, a state of perplexity or a "forked-road" situation offering ambiguous alternatives must be placed in the learner's way. As long as no obstructions are placed in the path, reflective or problem-solving skills will not be called for, but when an obstruction of some kind emerges, calling for some kind of decision, the intense need to resolve an ambiguity initiates the process of reflective thinking.

Job had to undergo multiple revisions of thought brought about by "forked-roads" in his thinking. As he methodically resolved each fork, he grew in reflective thought processes until he finally saw God (Job 42:5). The Almighty had to lead Abraham through many forked roads until he became the friend of God, intimate with the His intents and purposes.

We could refer to the Creator's pedagogical techniques as inductive—starting with the experiences and working to the generalization or consequences. Inductive or inquiry approaches are generally more time-consuming and seemingly indirect, but their results are far more permanent.

## Studying Fish

**Nathaniel Schaler**, a student of the famous professor of Zoology at Harvard, Louis Agassiz, provides a classic example of the inductive-inquiry approach to learning:

When I sat me down before my tin pan, Agassiz brought me a small fish, placing it before me with a rather stern requirement that I should study it but should on no account talk to anyone concerning it nor read anything relating to fishes until I had his permission to do so. To my inquiry, "What shall I do?" he said in effect, "Find out what you can without damaging the specimen. When I think you have done the work, I will question you." In the course of an hour I thought I had compassed the fish. It was rather an unsavory object, giving forth the stench of old alcohol, then loathsome to me, though in time I came to like. Many of the scales were loosened so that they fell off.

It appeared to me to be a case of a summary report which I was anxious to make and get on to the next stage of the business. But Agassiz, though always within call, concerned himself no further with me that day nor the next, nor for a week. At first, this neglect was distressing, but I saw that it was a game. For he was, as I discerned rather than saw, covertly watching me. So, I set my wits to work upon the thing and in the course of a hundred hours or so thought I had done much—a hundred times as much as seemed possible at the start. I got interested in finding out how the scales went in series, their shape, the form and placement of the teeth, etc. Finally,

I felt full of the subject and probably expressed it in my bearing. As for words about it then, there were none from my master except from his cheery, "Good morning!"

At length on the seventh day came the question, "Well?" and the discourse of my learning to him as he sat on the edge of my table puffing his cigar. At the end of the hour's telling, he swung off and away saying, "That is not right." Here I began to think that after all, perhaps the rules for scanning Latin verse were not the worst infliction in the world; moreover, it was clear that he was playing a game with me to find if I were capable of doing hard, continuous work without the support of a teacher, and this stimulated me to labor. I went at the task anew, discarded my first notes and in another week of ten hours a day labor, I had results which astonished myself and satisfied him. Still there was no trace of praise and words or manner. He signified that it would do by placing before me about half a peck of bones, telling me to see what I could make of them with no further directions to guide me.

As a young graduate student, I complained to my English professor that no one had assembled a systematic phonemic inventory comparing the sounds of English to other languages. Dr. Hackenburg challenged me, "Why don't you construct one yourself?" With this challenge, I assembled such a reference book over a period of years and then shared the work with my linguistics students. Today, collectively, my students and I have compared and contrasted more than 56 languages. When my students complain about the tedium of this work, I metaphorically compare

*"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter."*

it to blueberry or blackberry picking—it takes a long time to fill the pail and enjoy the results.

## Incremental Learning

Our father Abraham stepped out in faith incrementally until he became a friend of God and the father of the faithful. These titles did not accrue to him all at once, but came about as a result of a lifetime of learning experiences in which he diligently searched for God's purpose for him. Abraham learned through raw experience that "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

By demanding exploratory behavior, God Almighty has modeled the most effective instructive techniques known to education, the emphasis on inductive or inquiry approaches to learning, which take perhaps a little longer than traditional, straight lecture, deductive methods. In it, God

deliberately withholds many of the answers He could have given all at once.

Herbert Armstrong related many times how he and Loma had kept the Feast of Tabernacles several years at Siegler Springs without having a clue as to what they meant. Today, because of his persistence at seeking God's intent, the greater church of God has a better picture of how the pieces fit together. Over more than seventy years, God has annually rehearsed with us the incremental pieces of the Divine Master plan. Some of the misguided members of our previous fellowship have scorned the practice of removing leaven from their homes in the spring and living in temporary dwellings in the fall, relegating it to foolish, childish ritual. Evidently, they found putting up Christmas trees and hunting for Easter eggs as more adult behavior.

However, like the students of Louis Agassiz, we should look upon these annual learning activities as a means of getting to know our Creator more

intimately and of understanding His plan. Each time we rehearse them, we should get a clearer picture of God's ultimate purposes and intent. To those who stay with these learning activities outlined by the plan of God, He promises understanding, communion, and family membership.

As Proverbs 15:29 warns us, "The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous." If we want to become privy to more of our Father's secrets, we need to seek Him actively and tirelessly and draw close to Him. James 4:7 assures us that if we, with all deliberation, resist the Devil and draw close to God, He will come near to us.

Ultimately, all of the riddles, figures of speech, and esoteric prophecies will be cleared up for us. Our Elder Brother Jesus assures us, "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father" (John 16:25).

—David F. Maas

## SON OF THE RIGHT HAND

*(continued from page 10)*

Yet, a strange thing happened to Saul on his way to Damascus. He met Jesus!

And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." (verses 3-5)

And what were the results?

Immediately he preached the

Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. (verses 20-22)

Paul was a ravening wolf rending his prey, the church, and devouring and dividing the spoils of it, but Jesus Christ entering his life changed him forever. Like the prophecy of Benjamin, he became the beloved of the Lord, one who was covered by Him and made to dwell safely between

His shoulders.

Christians are much like Benjamin. We have a heavenly Father, like Jacob, who seeks to protect us and keep us close to Him. We also have a heavenly Elder Brother, like Joseph, who has suffered for us and gone ahead to prepare for our deliverance. Like King Saul, we also have been as ravenous wolves trying to devour our prey and take spoils. And like Paul, we have met Jesus Christ and been changed by the encounter.

Now we are striving to be worthy of the title "the beloved of the Lord," and we pray for the safety available only between His shoulders. Except for God's love, we might have been Ben-Oni, son of sorrows, but our heavenly Father has reserved for us another name, Son of His Right Hand.

—Carl Childs

## How Did Europe Get This Way?

For centuries, Europe was essentially “ruled” by Catholic and Protestant Christianity—if not in a direct, civil sense, then at least in a cultural sense. Religion was at the core of society, and the various governments could not dismiss the opinion of the churches as they do now. But the Europe of the past few decades has honestly earned the label of “that vast plain of irreligion.” Secular humanism is the dominant religion now, after 1,500 years of nominal Christian supremacy. How did this change take place?

While the secularization of the West has gradually developed, and a number of factors have contributed to it, blame can be laid at the feet of liberal—heretical—Christianity. Lawrence Auster, in an analysis titled “How Liberal Christianity Promotes Open Borders and One-Worldism” (FrontPageMagazine.com, December 3, 2004), posits that multiculturalism, mass immigration, and even secular humanism, to a degree, can be seen as natural outgrowths of false doctrine within Christianity. He states that when the liberal order began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was not altogether hostile to religion. Rather, liberalism “marked out a religiously neutral public space where religious conformity would not be demanded and a person’s religion could not be used against him.” However, as the demand for individual freedom became “ever more insistent and far-reaching, the respect accorded [Christianity] and religious morality . . . steadily diminished.”

This leftward tilt did not leave the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches unscathed:

No longer looking for the meaning of life in God and Christ, but in the celebration and achievement of human rights and equality—or, rather, defining God and Christ *in terms of* human rights and equality—these liberal Christians tend to look at every issue through the lens of social justice, one-worldism, . . . and are deeply committed to diversity, multiculturalism, and open borders. The liberal belief in the equal freedom of all human beings as the primary political and spiritual datum leads inexorably to the idea that [any] nation should open itself indiscriminately to all humanity.

In Europe, along with defining God and Christ in terms of human rights and equality, the Left sought to “create a new, materialistic society in which all human needs would be met without reference to anything higher than man.” As mankind continued to develop technologically, and as “the belief in man’s spiritual and material autonomy” became deeply entrenched, by the mid-twentieth century, much of Christianity felt pressured to “adjust itself to these new developments instead of condemning them.”

This drive was more or less formally accepted by the Second Vatican Council. In his closing speech in December 1965, Pope Paul VI told the Council:

[The Church] was also much concerned with **man**, with **man** as he really is today, with living **man**, with **man** totally taken up with himself, with **man** who not only makes himself the center of his own interests, but who *dares to claim that he is the principle and [the] final cause of all reality*. **Man** in his phenomenal totality . . . presented himself, as it were, before the assembly of the Council Fathers. . . . *The religion of God-made man has come up against the religion—for there is such a one—of man who makes himself God.* [Emphasis added throughout.]

Instead of condemning the institution of “man who makes himself God,” the Council, according to the Pope:

was filled only with an endless sympathy. The discovery of human needs—and these are so much greater now that the son of the earth has made himself greater—absorbed the attention of the Synod. . . . [W]e also, we more than anyone else, have **the cult of man**. . . .

Since Vatican II, all of the Popes, including John Paul II, have helped the “cult of man” to spread to most areas of liberal Christianity. In place of the Creed, which begins, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” a diocese in France sings a hymn that begins: “I believe in God *who believes in Man*.” In another diocese, instead of the Creed a poem is read which begins:

*I believe in me*—son of an almighty Father,  
Creator with him of a more human world. . .  
*I believe in me because he believed in me.* . . .

Thus we see humanism—a “system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*)—alive and well within Christianity. Even the common Protestant cliché, “Jesus loves you,” while correct, focuses on man rather than God’s worthiness of worship. Humanism has definitely existed within mainline Christianity for a century or more, but it has been *theological humanism*. Only recently has its cousin, *secular humanism*, gained prominence. Mankind has been worshipping itself for a long time, but has only recently decided to drop the mention of God altogether. Humanism has transformed a nominally Christian culture into one that has no place even for the mention of God. ■

NEWS AND TRENDS Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

# BIBLE STUDY:

## *THE PARABLE OF THE MINAS*

Having invited Himself to the home of a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, Jesus spoke the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27) because the people “thought that the kingdom of God would appear immediately.” In it, He declared the true purpose of His ministry: As the Son of Man, He had come to seek and save the lost. Jesus used this parable to provide the truth about when He would take His place on the throne of David as King of kings. The disciples hoped that Christ would redeem Israel by making a public stand to convict their wicked society, deliver the chosen people from servitude to the Romans, and usher in the Kingdom of David in all its

ancient glory. Jesus’ disciples had not yet understood that, because of His approaching death and resurrection, He would establish the church, and it would do its work for many years. His Kingdom would not be ushered in until His return to earth as its rightful King.

The parable teaches that Jesus grants privileges to His servants, expecting faithfulness in return, and that He will reward His servants at His coming. Church members receive equal privileges, but the more diligently faithful will produce better results. This parable demonstrates the distinction between the faithful and the faithless.



1. Who is the nobleman and where did he go? Luke 19:11-12.

**COMMENT:** In this parable Jesus describes Himself as a man from a noble family with rights to a kingdom. Because he had to go away to receive his kingdom, his servants would be responsible to care for his interests in his absence. On his return, he would reward all who had been faithful—and deal severely with those who had disregarded His instruction. Jesus ascended to God’s throne (Hebrews 1:3) to receive His Kingdom, and from there He exercises power (Philippians 2:9-11).

2. What is the servants’ responsibility to the nobleman? Luke 19:13, 15-21.

**COMMENT:** Traditionally, rich noblemen had a retinue of servants or bond-slaves, among whom were those who, because of their integrity and resourcefulness, could be trusted to care for their master’s interests while he was away. Upon his return, the parable’s nobleman commanded his servants to account for their business done on his behalf in his absence. The ten servants (verse 13) represent not only the disciples of Jesus’ time, who served during His earthly ministry and in the early church, but all the saints, whom He expects to serve Him faithfully until He returns.

The first servant’s mina gained him ten minas for which he humbly took no credit. He had faithfully fulfilled his responsibility in trading with the mina. Taking advantage of every opportunity, he increased his master’s investment tenfold, and he was rewarded with rule over ten cities.

The second servant had not been as diligent and ambitious, his mina increasing fivefold. Nevertheless, he still received increased responsibility in proportion to his trustworthiness and capability. The God we serve notices both the quality and quantity of what we do for Him (Luke 19:15; I Corinthians 3:13).

The third servant was not diligent enough to increase his mina at all. His excuse revealed his twisted opinion of his master and his expectations of his servants.

3. Why did the citizens hate the nobleman? Luke 19:14.

**COMMENT:** The nobleman’s uncompromising character and their fear of his judgment set his citizens against him. Since his servants knew the nobleman was demanding, they should have wisely made the best use of the money he had entrusted to them. But since they knew his character ahead of time and the strict compliance he required, they had no right to complain when they were condemned (verse 22-27).

In the end, Jesus’ rebellious “citizens” cast off all restraint (John 19:14-16), resulting in Him paying the penalty for sin. Christ is patient in spite of the resistance He receives, and when He returns to earth to establish His Kingdom, He will deal with all rebels decisively. We know that God is just and fair and will call us into account for our actions. We should be prepared to meet Him with proof of our increase.

4. Was the nobleman’s judgment too harsh? Luke 19:22-27.

**COMMENT:** The nobleman owned the money, but the servants had to trade with it. However, the goal contemplated by the nobleman was not moneymaking as much it was His servants’ development of character. Those who are diligent and faithful in serving Christ are commonly blessed in being made blessings to those around them. Jesus commands His disciples to improve and increase their talents, understanding and making the most of them, as well as to increase their capability of doing good and to do it until He returns (I Corinthians 12:7-11; Ephesians 4:7-16).

Jesus emphasizes His return and receipt of the Kingdom, at which time His Father would grant Him all legal rights (I Corinthians 15:23-28). In such a Kingdom, the King must have trusted and competent servants to assist Him in governing. We have the promise that, if we suffer with Him and work with Him now, if we are diligently faithful to Him, we will reign with Him (Revelation 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6). God has given us abilities and truth to use and develop, and we are held accountable for our efforts and effectiveness in using them for the benefit of our King and Savior.