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Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Baby Seven Billion?

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According to demographers, the seven billionth human being was born somewhere on earth in the previous few months. Alarmed by what they consider to be frightening overpopulation, many progressive agencies like the United Nations are calling for stepped-up population-reduction plans. But is that really true? And, of course, they have once again left God out of their calculations.
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Living by Faith and Human Pride

We learned in the previous article that the Bible is exceptionally clear about two things. The first is that God the Father, who created all things through Jesus Christ, is sovereign over all. His sovereignty reaches into every nook and cranny of His creation. Jesus Christ is often shown as equal with Him and is to be given the same respect and honor. His word is to be given the same dignity as if it came directly from the Father's mouth.

He Himself says, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), but He also clearly states, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). While this seems to be contradictory, it is easily understood. They are one in that They are in perfect agreement in regard to the purpose that They are accomplishing and to how it is to be accomplished. Thus, They work in perfect harmony. However, He still "looks up to" the Father, saying in John 8:29, "I always do those things that please Him."

The second item the Bible is exceptionally clear about is that angels and human beings are responsible to, answerable to, and accountable to both of Them. We must come to know Them and Their purpose and voluntarily submit to Their authority and creative activity in our lives.

However, Romans 8:7 introduces a major barrier to mankind following through with this responsibility: "Because the carnal mind is enmity

against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." The carnal mind is the nature in which a person's conduct is based until God acts to convert or transform him; it is man's deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9). Once an individual is called, and the Father and Son have revealed Themselves and some of Their purpose to him, this verse succinctly describes the major impediment to our submitting to Them. This resisting influence from within each of us is the major barrier to perfect deference and compliance to Them.

Of course, Satan and the world also influence us, but the major impediment to our responsibly submitting is what is already part of our characters even as we are being converted. We quickly revert to carnality when confronted with something that we do not want to do.

What element in our carnality drives our resistance? Solomon states in Ecclesiastes 1:2, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." *Vanity* implies something that is useless and impermanent, like vapor rising from a pot of boiling water, and therefore something of little or no value toward accomplishing God's purpose for mankind. The "all" in Solomon's statement includes us.

Notice this evidence regarding mankind's unconverted state from Psalm 39:5-6, where David writes:

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Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.

In Psalm 62:9, he adds, “Surely men of low degree are a vapor, men of high degree are a lie; if they are weighed in the balances, they are altogether lighter than vapor.”

These are blunt statements, showing that unless something is done to change the value of what we are in reality, what good reason does God have to work with us?

But there is more from God’s Word that paints the picture of our unconverted value and the strength of our natural resistance to Him even more acutely. The aforementioned Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” “Above all things” implies all things considered evil. This by itself is a vivid comparison—and God does not lie—but He goes beyond that by adding that man’s heart is not merely wicked but *desperately* wicked. This means our heart is without care for danger and recklessly, badly, extremely, furiously, impetuously wicked.

Jesus adds force to this word-picture by confirming in Matthew 15:17-20 that the heart is the place from which our evil resistance to God is generated. However, an irony comes into play because the heart is the same place that generates to us in our thoughts the belief that we are really something good! This is quite an effective combination in producing sin. It occurs because our hearts produce self-esteem with the result that our ideas and actions—our very lives—are focused on self-satisfaction. To meet that need, we will sin as a way of life. What generates that drive?

Pride’s Source

Ezekiel 28:14-17 says regarding Satan:

You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you.

Here is the original source of the internal, self-centered influence in mankind’s hearts; this is where sin began in the distant past. From this being sin spread to other angels; and from them into mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve; and from them on to all of mankind. Notice how God clearly describes that his sins had their birth in his prideful feelings about himself, and in turn, this corrupted his wisdom.

Job 41:34 reveals his present position and location: “He beholds every high thing; he is king over all the children of pride.” This verse portrays God speaking of Leviathan, which clearly represents a being of awesome power and influence over mankind. God’s description of Leviathan must not be misunderstood by focusing merely on its monstrous physical appearance, but rather on its reality as a living being, possessing strong leadership qualities and powerful influence.

Leviathan strikes fear into men to bring about submission to him and thus control of them. He is the king of pride, and he rules “the children of pride,” who are the overwhelming masses of unconverted people, those not submissive to God. They, like their king and spiritual father, are enemies of God. Whether his mass of followers is aware of it or not, they have been forcibly inducted into his service. He is named in II Corinthians 4:4 as “the god of this age.” This is the same being of which Jesus informed the Jews in John 8:44:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

The one who became Satan is a powerful and dominating creation of Almighty God. He was created, not as an enemy of God and His purpose, but as a powerful cherub to serve Him in His purpose by leading other angels in their service to God. Jude 6 discloses that the place of their service was on Planet Earth before mankind was created. But, as we saw in Ezekiel 28, he turned his heart against God to become an enemy, influencing the angels under his charge to rebel with him to fight against God (Revelation 12:9; Isaiah 14:12-14).

God defeated them, and they were cast back to earth. Satan and his minions are still here, continuing their war against God and His creation—man. Ephesians 2:1-3 informs us about how this warfare is being carried out:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom

also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Satan's influence is worldwide: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (I John 5:19). His ultimate object is to destroy God, but along the way he also strives to destroy any aspect of God's creation, most especially man. He is doing this through inducing human beings to sin in order to bring upon them the wages of sin—death.

His basic tool for accomplishing this is by means of his spirit. The driving forces of his prideful, deceitful mind and those of his demon companions are deceit, hatred, anger, competition, and destruction, all encompassed within an overweening pride. People absorb them into their thinking processes, becoming like him in attitude and conduct. These characteristics lodge into human hearts and generate resistance to God, His law, and His purpose.

Satan's Spirit's Effects

Before baptizing anybody, the ministry almost invariably urges the person to "count the cost" of giving his life to Christ. While counseling the candidate, the minister expounds Luke 14:26-27: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

The cross we bear may be any potentially long-lasting trial that persistently affects our liberty to submit to God. However, very often at the base of this chronic resistance to submission is our desperately wicked heart with its deeply engrained baggage of proud, self-centered, anti-God habits of thinking and conduct. Despite our being baptized and having God's Spirit, pride remains a fellow traveler, stirring resistance to the knowledge of God. Satan's pride separated him from the Creator, and if permitted, it has the power to separate us from Him as well.

Without really stopping to evaluate why, we are proud about what God describes as nothingness, vanity, a vapor. Pride resists the sovereign Almighty God and greatly hinders us from fulfilling our responsibility to submit.

What is pride, the subtle yet powerful influence that most commentators believe is the father of all other sins? Hebrew, Greek, and English share the sense of the word's basic meaning: to be lifted up; to have an undue sense of one's importance or superiority.

Pride motivates us to exaggerate the value of *our* thoughts. It causes us to elevate our opinions and raises the importance of the fulfillment of what we perceive as our needs even above God's and, of course, decidedly higher than our fellowman's.

To be even handed, the Bible shows that there is also

a narrow, positive application of the word, and thus, depending on the context, it can be translated as "dignity" or "glory." For instance, Proverbs 16:31 reads, "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness." This verse provides us with a slender sliver of insight that there is a natural pride to which God gives His approval. However, He qualifies it with "if it is found in the way of righteousness." Righteousness is the very thing pride sets itself to resist, making achieving a proper sense of pride more difficult. With God's own Word describing man at his best state being "altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5 KJV), it certainly makes one wonder what we really have to be proud of!

In the context of the relationship between God and man, the overwhelming number of usages of the six Hebrew words and four Greek words translated as "pride" or its synonyms are negative and damning. These words are translated into such terms as "arrogance," "lifted up," "presumptuous," "loftiness," "proud," "proudly," "exalted," "overbearing," "condescending," "haughty," "superior," "disdainful," "scornful," "boasting," "self-esteem," and "contemptuous." Not all of these synonyms are in the King James or the New King James Versions, but various modern translations use them depending on the context.

Pride carries not only a lofty self-centeredness but also a lively competitiveness against others that easily becomes a lustful, destroying enmity. It is highly critical, envious, and impatient, and it can be effortlessly stirred to anger, possessiveness, and suspicion of being taken advantage of. These characteristics are part of Satan's spirit. Each of them is destructive to loving family unity within the church.

Isaiah 2 provides us with a detailed overview of the immorality that existed in Judah a few years before they fell to the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah reports what he witnessed the people being involved in, and he also foresaw the conclusion if no repentance occurred. It was a time not far different from what we observe in America today.

For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; they are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners. Their land is full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is also full of horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. People bow down, and each man humbles himself; therefore do not forgive them.

Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. For the day of the

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LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought down low—upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan; upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; upon every high tower, and upon every fortified wall; upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all the beautiful sloops. The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, but the idols He shall utterly abolish.

They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. Sever yourself from such a man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he? (Isaiah 2:6-22)

God is illustrating in His own picturesque way that pride (loftiness and haughtiness), emanating from within man and triggering his conduct, is heavily involved in human life—perhaps it is even the basis and foundation of all sin. He mentions the accumulation of wealth in the form of treasures, silver, gold, chariots, and horses. He speaks of manufacturing (the works of their own hands) and of religion (creating idols). He portrays things of sturdy power (oaks of Bashan) and things of grace and beauty (cedars of Lebanon). He mentions military power (high towers and fortified walls), large nations (high mountains) and small nations (hills that are lifted up), and commerce (beautiful sloops).

The Destructive Fruit of Pride

We get a sense of this in the original sin of Adam and Eve, when Satan held out to them the promise of attainments beyond what they had experienced to that point in the Garden of Eden. Tempting them, he said, “You will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). This helped motivate them to become greater than what God, their Creator, had assigned to them.

In Genesis 2:31, when God saw everything He had made, He declared it to be “very good.” Pride is not “very good.” It was not in them as God created them, but it entered into their thinking in Satan’s presence. The very first exercise of that pride earned them death and ejection from God’s presence and the Garden.

At some time following His creation by God, pride arose in Satan, and he uttered this desire, as written in Isaiah 14:13-14:

For you have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.”

His devious offer to Adam and Eve in the Garden is an echo of his challenge against God. This exercise of his pride separated him from God.

Pride, Satan’s lofty feelings of superiority regarding his beauty, corrupted him. It deceived him into wanting even greater power to complement his splendor. After all, he deserved it, did he not? Notice how great he was in his own eyes!

In Daniel 5:18-23, we find another example of rising pride, in this case involving a man. Daniel says to King Belshazzar of Babylon:

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.

We see that pride has the power to create evil ambition in a man, persuading him to rise above what he is to something greater—to become something that he thinks he deserves, even though he should have known better. Belshazzar lost his life and his kingdom.

I John 2:15-16 warns us not to love the world of Satan's creation because it is a huge reservoir of influences to the budding kernel of pride in each of us. It can lead us from that sin to others in order to accomplish our ambitions. What other kinds of sin? The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector provides an example, showing how destructive it can be to relationships: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess'" (Luke 18:11-12). Pride can make a person become condescending and self-righteous, so that he sees himself as greater than others, which can lead to misusing them.

At the same time, it blinded the Pharisee to his spiritual condition. Jeremiah 49:16 is spoken against Edom. "Your fierceness has deceived you, the pride of your heart, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill! Though you make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there," says the LORD." One of pride's most destructive fruits is self-deception, blindness to one's own spiritual condition. It strongly tends to produce a sense of infallibility.

Hosea 7:8-12 confirms the fruit of self-deception using Ephraim as the example:

Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake unturned. Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it. And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, but they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek Him for all this. Ephraim is also like a silly dove, without sense—they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. Wherever they go, I will spread My net on them; I will bring them down like birds of the air; I will chastise them according to what their congregation has heard.

The signs of a spiritual cancer are everywhere for all to see, but the proud person or nation is oblivious. Unless change occurs, they will fall.

Jeremiah 43:1-2 records another example of pride:

Now it happened, when Jeremiah had stopped speaking to all the people all the words of the LORD their God, for which the LORD their God had sent him to them, all these words, that Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, "You speak falsely! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to dwell there.'"

What fruit does this show us? Pride's deceptive, blinding power motivates people to reject God's Word, whether it is given through His servants or through His Book.

Two more proverbs will provide a clear picture of the

fruit of pride. Proverbs 26:12 asks an important question and then succinctly answers it: "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." The way of pride is hopeless because it keeps the proud one from real progress, for he will not be corrected. Proverbs 16:18 makes the clinching statement: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Unless a person recognizes his pride and repents, the inevitable result is destruction.

A Summary

The psalmist Asaph writes in Psalm 73:1-9:

Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak loftily, they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.

He mentions pride directly, as well as boasting among men and speaking loftily, arrogantly against the very God of heaven, as evidence of the driving force of the wicked person's life. Pride and wickedness fit together like hand and glove—so much so that God describes pride as the wicked person's ornament, as if it were displayed as a necklace.

In short, pride identifies the wicked; evil people are always proud. They scoff at God's Word, speak against Him, and gossip against fellow man. What we see on the outside is evil attitude and conduct, but what is motivating from the inside is pride. The proud person offends against God by self-exaltation, and he offends others by haughty preoccupation with himself, leading him to rudeness, impatience, and gossip. And all the while, he ignores the instruction from God that would correct him.

All of this is based on a vain delusion of grandeur that, if allowed, can lead to what God prophesies in Obadiah 2-4, 18:

"Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the LORD. . . .

(continued on page 14)

Finishing the Week

Each year in the spring, when we observe the Passover, we partake of the wine, which symbolizes the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

When He instituted this new Passover symbol, He explained it by saying, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many” (Mark 14:24). When we come under the blood of Jesus Christ upon our baptism and acceptance of Him as our Savior, we enter into that New Covenant.

Considering how important the New Covenant is, there are surprisingly few references to it within the New Testament—and even fewer explanations. What references there are—largely in the book of Hebrews—depend heavily on quotations from the Old Testament prophets. In fact, the New Testament teaching of the New Covenant relies entirely on one already having an understanding from reading the prophets. Without those prophecies, we would not understand what we actually enter into.

The New Covenant is mentioned in numerous places (Isaiah 54:9-10; 55:3; 59:20-21; 61:1-11; Jeremiah 32:36-41; 50:4-5; Ezekiel 16:60-63; 20:33-38; 34:23-26; 37:15-28), but perhaps the clearest description—and the one quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17—is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the

house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

One other brief but intriguing mention is found in the Seventy Weeks Prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). It puts the New Covenant in a context that is rarely focused on. The covenant is mentioned in the first half of verse 27: “Then [H]e shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week [H]e shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.”

CONFIRMING THE COVENANT

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy is perhaps best known for its descriptions of the future Beast. However, because of the poetic, non-linear style in which it is written, many are erroneously waiting for the Antichrist to make a peace treaty with the Jews for seven years. This misunderstanding results from the fact that the descriptions of the Messiah and the Beast are interwoven in verses 26-27. The Messiah is described in the first halves of verses 26 and 27, while “the prince who is to come” (the figure com-

monly known as “the Beast,” “vile person,” and “little horn”) is described in the latter parts of the same verses (see “Seventy Weeks Are Determined . . .” *Forerunner*, December 1994.)

But in the first half of verse 27, it is the *Messiah* who is prophesied to “confirm a covenant *with many* for one week.” Recall that Jesus told His disciples, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for *many*,” and Hebrews 9:28 confirms this connection: “Christ was offered . . . to bear the sins of *many*.” So, even though it is not specifically called the new, eternal, or perpetual covenant in Daniel 9:27, as it is in other places, this is the covenant that is being described. This covenant radically alters the lives of those making it, for under its terms sin is forgiven, the Holy Spirit is given, God’s laws are internalized, eternal life is granted (because it gives us personal, experiential knowledge of the Father and the Son; see John 17:3), and there are more instances of divine grace than can be counted.

A large controversy in the early church dealt with the fact that Jews and Gentiles were on equal terms under the New Covenant, since it made salvation available to anyone who is called and responds in faith. In fact, when the Messiah began confirming this covenant, Israelites in general did not want to have anything to do with Him. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11-12).

After the leaders within Israel rejected Christ, the apostles began to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Then, on the road to Damascus, Saul, renamed Paul, was appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles. Clearly, the prophecies regarding salvation for the Gentiles were coming to pass, showing that they were included in the New Covenant.

This is where we in the church are now. It matters not whether we are Israelite or Gentile—we are the firstfruits of God’s spiritual harvest and already beneficiaries of a superior covenant with extraordinary promises.

“SEVENTY SEVENS”

However, we often stop thinking at this point, which is understandable since this is what affects us personally. Yet the context of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy provides us a better understanding of the covenant we have made.

Daniel 9 opens with Daniel at the “tender, young age” of 87. He knew from Jeremiah’s writings that the desolation of Jerusalem was prophesied to last for 70 years, and they had been fulfilled. Since God is faithful, Daniel knew that it was time for God to act. So he prayed to God, confessing on behalf of the nation and beseeching God to turn away His anger toward Jerusalem, even though the nation deserved everything that had happened and much more. He asks God, because of His great mercy, to hear, to

forgive, to listen, and to act on behalf of His people (Daniel 9:4-19).

In response, the angel Gabriel comes to Daniel and gives him a prophecy (Daniel 9:20-23). God does more than just give the command for Jerusalem to be rebuilt: He actually outlines what He would do to solve Israel’s problems once and for all. The problems, of course, were sin and rebellion against God—unbelief—and so His response to Daniel is a promise that these things would be overcome. God, through Gabriel, tells Daniel that “seventy sevens” (of years; 490 years) had been decreed, and when that span of time ran out, some truly remarkable things will have happened, to say the least.

Daniel 9:24 shows the scope of what God will accomplish by the time the seventy sevens of years are complete:

Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

God presents six elements that He will accomplish within the 490 years. It is His outline for what will happen in order for Daniel’s people to be spiritually restored. In verses 25-27 He tells, in general terms, how that will happen:

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then [H]e shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week [H]e shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.

Verses 26-27 show that all six of verse 24’s elements will be accomplished through the arrival of the Messiah, His being cut off, and His confirming the New Covenant with many. Though much could be written about each of these six, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* summarizes them:

I. To finish (to restrain) the transgression,

prophecy watch *Finishing the Week*

which was effected by the preaching of the Gospel, and pouring out of the Holy Spirit among men.

II. To make an end of sins; rather, “to make an end of sin-offerings”; which our Lord did when he offered his spotless soul and body on the cross once for all.

III. To make reconciliation (“to make atonement or expiation”) for iniquity; which he did by the once offering up of himself.

IV. To bring in everlasting righteousness, that is, “the righteousness, or righteous ONE, of ages”; that person who had been the object of the faith of mankind, and the subject of the predictions of the prophets through all the ages of the world.

V. To seal up (“to finish or complete”) the vision and prophecy; that is, to put an end to the necessity of any further revelations, by completing the canon of Scripture, and fulfilling the prophecies which related to His person, sacrifice, and the glory that should follow.

VI. And to anoint the Most Holy, “the Holy of holies.” . . . Here it means the consecration or appointment of our blessed Lord, the Holy One of Israel, to be the Prophet, Priest, and King of mankind.

Notice in particular the fifth element, “to seal up vision and prophecy.” What it means is *to make an end of* vision and prophecy *by fulfilling it*. In other words, when the seventy sevens are finished, the visions and prophecies will *all* be wrapped up. What is not certain is the scope of the phrase “vision and prophecy.” It may refer to just those found in the book of Daniel, or it could refer to *all* the visions and prophecies given to that point. What is significant is that, at the end of the 490 years, a majority, if not the entirety, of the Old Testament prophecies will have had their fulfillment.

BLOCKS OF TIME

It is also important to understand that these 70 prophetic “weeks” do not happen all at once. Verse 25 shows that there will be a span of seven weeks, and then a second span of 62 weeks. Yet historically, the second block of time did not happen right after the first.

Obviously, 7 + 62 equals only 69 weeks, so one

“week”—a span of seven years—still remains after verse 25. Verse 27 fills that in, showing that the Messiah’s confirming of the covenant covers that final week: “Then [H]e shall confirm a covenant with many *for one week*.”

Combining verses 26 and 27, we see that, in reality, the first half of that final week has also already taken place: It was the 3½ years during which Jesus Christ confirmed the New Covenant with the church, was cut off in the middle of the week, and brought an end to animal sacrifice and offering.

Perhaps this explains why, after Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples ask Him if He would now restore the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They were probably thinking, “Wow, what a week! And it’s only half over!” Knowing the prophecies, they could see that many of the elements of Daniel 9:24 had been or were being fulfilled. Realizing that they had just made the New Covenant, they probably expected that the second half of the week was about to come to pass, too, and that the Israelites and the holy city would be the beneficiaries. No wonder they assumed it was time for the Kingdom to be restored! Instead, Jesus tells them that it was not for them to know the times or seasons—meaning the timing of when the prophecies would all be fulfilled—and instead they would receive the Holy Spirit and become witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

We, too, should recognize that 3½ years are still left of His confirmation of the covenant—the same one we have made—and what remains of the prophecy relates to Jerusalem and the people of Israel, as Daniel 9:24 shows.

Thus, there will be a span of 3½ years at some point in the future, during which God will fully accomplish those six elements found in verse 24, and the beneficiaries will be physical Israelites. Though we will not know for sure until it happens, those 3½ years may correspond with the time of Jacob’s Trouble, the reign of the Beast, the treading down of the holy city by Gentiles, and the persecution of the woman’s offspring, as related in Revelation 12.

OLIVE BRANCHES

God’s annual holy days reveal that this is not the only “day of salvation”—that He is working with only a relative few right now, and the rest of mankind will have an opportunity for salvation either during the Millennium or after the Second Resurrection. Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost

(continued on page 13)

ready answer

“Be ready always to give an answer . . .” I Peter 3:15

The Cursed Tree

Poet Edgar A. Guest once wrote a poem entitled “The Dead Oak Tree”:

An oak tree died the other day
Despite my constant care;
Now men must carry it away
And leave my garden bare.

It came to leaf in early spring,
To live 'twas guaranteed;
Man is so vain and proud a thing,
He vaunted God, indeed.

For how can mortal guarantee
The breath of life, and say
That he can keep within a tree
What God may take away?

It cannot be that man can sense,
As do the sun and rain,
What living trees experience
Of loneliness and pain.

I think they never heard it sigh,
Nor ever dreamed a tree
Could, broken-hearted, pine and die,
Who wrote that guarantee.

Mr. Guest's thoughtful poem brings to mind an incident in the life of Jesus Christ, in which He cursed a fig tree that had not borne fruit. This scene occurred quite late in His ministry, just after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem before His final Passover. Matthew 21:18-19 relates what happened:

Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Immediately the fig tree withered away.

Mark also records this story, providing more detail:

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.” And His disciples heard it. (Mark 11:12-14)

ready answer *The Cursed Tree*

Many readers of God's Word have found this incident to be very disturbing, and it has been a stumbling block to more than a few. The idea that Jesus would become angry and curse this tree to wither and die—just because it had no figs at a time when figs were not even in season—seems completely unreasonable to a great many people.

But surely there is more to the story. The Jesus we know from the rest of the gospels is not One who, in a fit of temper, would do something so impulsive and cruel. He is the same Man who healed many people suffering from disease and demon possession throughout His ministry. He took little children in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16). He let the woman caught in adultery go with only a warning to repent (John 8:11). He wept at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35) and grieved over Jerusalem's unwillingness to seek God's help (Matthew 23:37). He even asked God to forgive those who put Him to death (Luke 23:34)!

Do these examples portray a Man who would unjustly curse an insensate tree to death? Was Jesus' cursing of the fig tree an unreasonable act?

A Fruitless Tree

Over the years, we have come to learn that God put everything in the Bible for a purpose. We are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). Nothing is there that has not been inspired! The apostle Paul writes in II Timothy 3:15-17:

[T]he Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In addition, as we saw, Jesus Christ was no egomaniacal, out-of-control hothead who went about "shooting from the hip" and speaking His mind whenever it pleased Him. He was thoughtful and caring, willing to help those who needed it, and even those who deserved justice He treated with mercy.

To the contrary, His purpose was not to please Himself but to follow God's will in every act and word. He says of Himself in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." He says something very similar in John 5:30, "I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

Therefore, we know what happened on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem was not a reaction from disappointment or anger, but it was apparently God's will for Him to curse the tree. God inspired it to be included in the Scriptures for our edification.

Before we progress any further, we need to address this

question: Why would a fig tree fail to bear fruit? This gets to the heart of the matter of why Jesus thought it necessary to curse the tree, since both records of this incident give the tree's lack of fruit as the reason for Jesus' action against it.

A website called GardeningKnowHow.com features an article titled "Why a Fig Tree Is Not Producing Fruit" by Heather Rhoades. She provides several reasons:

The most common reason for a fig tree not producing fruit is simply its age. Trees, like animals, need to reach a certain maturity before they can produce offspring. Fruit is how a fig tree creates seeds. If the fig tree is not old enough to produce seeds, it will also not produce fruit.

Typically, a fig tree will not fruit until it reaches 2 years old, but it can take some trees as long as six years to reach the right maturity. . . .

Another common reason that a fig tree is not producing figs is because of too much nitrogen. This commonly happens when you are using a fertilizer that is too high in nitrogen. Nitrogen causes the plant to have lush growth in leaves and branches, but very little if any fruit. . . .

If a fig tree is suffering from water stress caused by either too little or too much water, this can cause it to stop producing figs or never start producing, if it is a younger tree. Water stress will send the tree into a survival mode and the fig tree will simply not have the energy needed to invest in making fruit. . . .

These are the most common reasons that fig trees will not make fig fruit. There are many other less common reasons that are mostly tied to the nutrients in the soil. (<http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/fruit-gardening/fig-tree-is-producing-fruit.htm>)

Even if the tree was suffering from one of these problems, why curse the fig tree? We can hardly fault the tree, since it was merely growing in accordance with the instructions God had placed in its DNA at creation.

Some Relevant Information

The various commentaries provide a wealth of additional information to help us better understand this event, as the Bible leaves out a great deal that its authors expected their contemporary readers to know. With many years and thousands of miles of geography between us and the area of Jerusalem in AD 31, it behooves us to seek out expert help in this matter. With these added pieces of information, we can understand that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree was reasonable and an example for us.

Gill's *Exposition of the Entire Bible* explains that the tree that Jesus cursed was a peculiar fig tree among the many that could be found in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives. There were so many fig trees in that area that it was known as Bethpage—"House of Figs." This particular tree was unique because of the abundance of leaves—an indication of abundant fruit—but it had none. It was all show.

Adam Clarke's commentary on Mark 11:13 points out that the phrase "the time of figs was not yet" would be better translated to emphasize that the time for *gathering* figs had not yet come. Clarke cites a similar phrase in Psalm 1:3 as support. He also indicates that the climate in the area of Jerusalem was such that figs could be found throughout the year, especially in March and April, making it not unreasonable to expect to find fruit then. However, figs are not usually harvested until after Passover—all the more reason to expect to find some on this tree.

Clarke further contends that this fig tree was supposed to represent the state of the Jewish people—"that they professed the true religion and considered themselves the special people of God—but were only hypocrites having nothing of religion but the profession—an abundance of leaves but no fruit." Thus, he continues, "Jesus' cursing of the fig tree was intended as a warning of what was to come in the absence of repentance; the total destruction and final ruin of the Jewish state at the hands of the Romans."

Clarke concludes that Jesus did not curse the fig tree out of resentment for disappointing Him by not having any fruit, but to emphasize to His disciples just how devastating God's wrath would be on the Jews, "who had now nearly filled up the measure of their iniquity." Further, it is an object lesson to everyone that God expects us to bear the fruit of righteousness, showing us the consequences of failing in that task.

Matthew Henry echoes this last lesson in his comment on Mark 11:13:

Christ was willing to make an example of it, not to the

trees, but to the *men*, of that generation, and therefore cursed it with that curse which is the reverse of the first blessing, *Be fruitful*; he said unto it, *Never let any man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever!*

These relevant facts inform us it was not a case that Jesus was annoyed and cursed the fig tree out of anger or disappointment as many have supposed. In fact, it was not an unreasonable act at all. No, the cursing of the fig tree turns out to be an act of God performed as a witness—like all the object lessons Jesus performed throughout His ministry. It was a stern warning to all who would fail to bear the fruit of righteousness, including—perhaps especially—us today!

The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:11, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Jesus was following this principle in giving us an illustration of His words in Matthew 7:19, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (see also John 15:6). The cursing of the fig tree is a pointed exhortation from our Savior not to be found fruitless at His appearing because the dreaded Lake of Fire awaits those who taste of "the heavenly gift" of God and failing to grow, fall away (see Hebrews 6:4-6; Revelation 20:15; 21:8).

Basil, a fourth-century theologian, wrote in part, "A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. . . ." The deeds—the fruit—that God wants to see are the expressions of His Spirit working in us as we interact with others (Galatians 5:22-23). As Christ Himself instructs us, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:8).

This is what the Christian life is all about: growing and producing fruit that glorifies God. Thanks to that fig tree on the way to Jerusalem, we have a vivid example to keep us on the straight and narrow path to the Kingdom of God.

—Dan Elmore

prophecy watch *Finishing the Week*

(continued from page 10)

hold great significance for the firstfruits who have already made the New Covenant, but they have little spiritual meaning for the Israelites who have not. Next, the Feast of Trumpets, the pivot point in the holy day calendar, is meaningful for firstfruits, for Israelites, and for all of mankind because it pictures the return of Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth.

After that are the holy days associated with the second harvest, the fall harvest—particularly the Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the Millennium when the resurrected and glorified firstfruits will have responsibilities. Yet, the greater meaning concerns Israel. The remnant of Israel—those who survive Jacob's Trouble—will then

have the opportunity to make the New Covenant, even though, as a nation, they will not be a part of the First Resurrection.

The apostle Paul goes to great lengths to explain this phased approach to salvation, using the metaphor of an olive tree with natural branches, representing Israel, being broken off, and wild branches—Gentiles—being grafted in (Romans 9-11). To summarize, Paul explains that God will use the Gentiles, and by implication, those making the New Covenant now (including individual Israelites), to make the majority of Israel jealous, to bring her back to Him when she sees the spiritual blessings. Paul shows that God has not at all disowned Israel. Even in his day, a small believing minority of

Israelites had been chosen by grace, of which Paul was a part.

Only the elect—whether Israelite or Gentile—have obtained God’s favor at this time, while the rest of Israel has become callously indifferent to it. Israel was broken off the olive tree because of unbelief, and others were grafted in because of true belief. But, Paul warns, there is no room for pride, because if God did not spare the natural branches when they fell into unbelief, neither will He spare us if we do the same thing. Now notice Paul’s conclusion:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:25-29)

When Christ confirmed the covenant during the 3½ years of His earthly ministry, the covenant was not just for

those alive at the time. The firstfruits have been making that covenant for nearly 2,000 years now. Similarly, there will be *another* 3½ years, finishing out that final week, during which Jesus will complete the confirming of the covenant. This will set the stage for the salvation of all mankind, but in particular the salvation of Israel.

If we use Jesus’ earthly service as a guide, most of the 3½ years were spent in preaching and in preparing His servants. This is how He “confirmed” the covenant, even though it was not actually sealed until the end of the 3½ years, at that last Passover. If this pattern holds, it indicates that the final 3½ years of “confirming” will also consist of preaching to, and a rigorous and even violent preparation of, a remnant of Israel. Then, at the end, they will enter into the covenant.

At that final Passover, Jesus said that He would not drink the fruit of the vine again—that symbol of His shed blood and of the covenant—until He drinks it with His disciples (and, by extension, all of the glorified firstfruits) in His Kingdom (Matthew 26:29). That joyous occasion corresponds with the time when Israel will also drink of that cup of the New Covenant, but for the first time. That covenant, then, will be available throughout the Millennium and into the time of the Second Resurrection. The Seventy Weeks will have been fulfilled, but the effects will continue.

—David C. Grabbe

personal *Living by Faith and Human Pride*

(continued from page 7)

“The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; but the house of Esau shall be stubble; they shall kindle them and devour them, and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau. For the LORD has spoken.”

He pronounces this against the nation of Edom, but it could be pronounced in principle against anyone who comes to believe and act as though he is invulnerable by ignoring the reality of God and the consequences of sin. II Corinthians 5:7, 9-10 reminds us of this:

For we walk by faith, not by sight. . . . Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

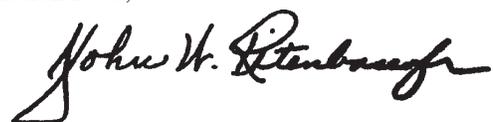
These verses state a reality we all face: We are accountable to the Creator for our conduct. We know that standing between us and God is an internally generated

pride that, if allowed, will greatly hinder our desire to please Him by submitting.

We must understand that God’s calling of us, His granting of repentance to us, and His providing us with His Spirit have given us a valuable power, an “edge.” He has not given us an impossible challenge. Receiving the Holy Spirit has given us the wherewithal, the powers, to meet our responsibility to submit voluntarily to Him. What is the solution? In short, it is to exercise humility before the Holy One of Israel. Humility can defuse pride’s power.

There is a major difference between pride and humility. Because of exposure to Satan and the world, pride is within us almost from birth. Humility, though, is not part of us from birth. Spiritual humility is most definitely a developed characteristic, derived because of contact with God and our choosing to be so before Him. God willing, we will address this extraordinary quality in the next issue.

In Christian love,



Seven Billion and Counting

Back in 1968, author Paul Ehrlich, along with his wife, Anne, wrote a book, *The Population Bomb*, which became the seminal work for population alarmists all over the world. The book posits that human population is increasing so rapidly that the earth will soon be unable to provide enough food to feed everyone. Ehrlich simplistically suggests, “We must rapidly bring the world population under control, reducing the growth rate to zero or making it negative. Conscious regulation of human numbers must be achieved. Simultaneously we must, at least temporarily, greatly increase our food production.” Much of the book covers population-reduction schemes, including progressively taxing families for having additional children, giving tax incentives for men to agree to sterilization, adding “temporary sterilants” to municipal water or staple foods, increasing and improving contraceptives, advocating prenatal sex discernment, and legalizing abortion.

In 1968, world population stood at 3.5 billion people. When first published, Ehrlich’s book began, “The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate.” (This opening was changed in later editions.) Yet, just this fall, the planet’s current population crossed the seven billion mark, double the figure that made Ehrlich’s knees quiver in fear of imminent famine and mass death. Somehow, the world has found a way to feed twice as many people as were alive in the late ‘60s.

About India in particular, he writes, “I don’t see how India could possibly feed two hundred million more people by 1980.” Even so, India now has nearly 1.2 billion people, three times the number counted in the 1960 census. The reasons for the nation’s increased ability to feed many millions more are simple: 1) India’s political situation stabilized; 2) the stable government rooted out the most egregious forms of corruption; and 3) Western agronomists figured out how to increase crop yields, which they shared with developing nations. No population-reduction plans were necessary.

Even so, fears about over-population still exist, particularly in liberal, globalist institutions, led by the United Nations. As Stratfor explains in a recent “Geopolitical Diary” on the world’s demography:

Conventional wisdom tells us that the increase in population is putting pressure on the global ecosystem and threatening the balance of power in the world. As the story goes, the poorer states are breeding so rapidly that within a few generations they will overwhelm the West and Japan—assuming the environment survives the rising tide of people. (“The Earth at Population Seven Billion”)

Singing this same tune, *The New York Times* published a front-page story on world population on May 4, 2011, titled “UN Forecasts 10.1 Billion People by Century’s End.” It begins, “The population of the world, long expected to stabilize just above 9 billion in the middle of the century, will instead keep growing and may hit 10.1 billion by the year 2100, the United Nations projected in a report released Tuesday” (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/world/04population.html>).

The lead is intended to startle or even to scare the reader into believing that world population must be reduced immediately. Deeper into the article, it soothingly reports that “well-designed programs” of birth control are bringing birth rates down in the developing world, “but at a snail’s pace.”

However, what the *Times* is not saying is that this frightening article is based on a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report that presents a statistical worst-case scenario. The nose-counters at UNFPA and its sister agency, the UN Population Division, actually developed *three* different population scenarios—high-, middle-, and low-variant projections. The graph printed in the published report reflects the high-variant forecast, while the wording of the press release, summarized by the *Times* article, echoes the middle-variant. Totally ignored is the low-variant model.

Yet, it is this low-variant projection that most closely resembles reality. It shows world population rising to about 8.5 billion by 2040 and then declining to around 7 billion by the end of the century. Why is this projection more likely? Because it assumes that birthrates will continue to fall, as they have been doing for more than a century as industrialization and urbanization have spread around the globe. As the Population Research Institute reports:

Some 80 countries representing over half the world’s population suffer from below replacement fertility—defined as less than 2.1 children per woman. The populations of the developed nations today are static or declining. . . . Europe and Japan are projected to lose half their population by 2100. . . . Even in the developing world family size has shrunk, from around 5 children per woman in 1960 to less than 3 today. . . . High fertility rates are becoming rare. The UN numbers for 2010 show only 10 countries with population increase rates at or above 3.0 percent. (<http://pop.org/content/baby-seven-billion-welcome>)

Thus, while population continues to rise, it is rising more slowly, and in a generation, it will level off and begin to fall. The long-range problem, then, is not over-population but *under*-population. If these trends continue, after 2050, there will be increasingly too few people to maintain the world’s economies at their accustomed levels. With human lifespans increasing, a far smaller number of young adults will be asked to support a huge mass of senior citizens, resulting in a vastly lowered standard of living for everyone.

However accurate their assumptions, these are only forecasts—ones that leave God and the prophecies of His Word out of the picture. Should Christ return in the next few years or decades, all of this angst over population will be for naught, since the Bible predicts that, because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), the troubles of the end time will reduce humanity to a remnant, perhaps a tithe. But who knows what devilry population control advocates will do in the meantime?

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Exorcising a Syro-Phoenician (Part Two)

In this miracle (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30), Jesus uses His meeting with a pagan woman from beyond the borders of Judea to illustrate the future potential of the Gentiles. While Christ spent most of His time ministering to Israelites (Matthew 15:24), on a few occasions He did mercifully intervene on behalf of Gentiles. The Gentile identity of the woman who sought exorcism for her daughter is emphasized three times in the accounts: in Matthew 15:22, she is “of Canaan”; and in Mark 7:26, she is called both “a Greek” and “a Syro-Phoenician,” a person from Phoenicia, then regarded as part of Syria. Jesus performs this miracle in the coastal area of Tyre and Sidon, the same area where Elijah performed the miracles of providing meal in the barrel and raising the Gentile widow’s son from the dead (1 Kings 17:8-24).

Later, the apostle Paul stopped at Tyre and met with some Christians there (Acts 21:3-4), showing some of the influence Christ had on these Gentiles. Not only was this miracle part of that influence, but Luke 6:17-20 also tells us that many from that area came to Judea, bringing their sick and demon-possessed to Christ for healing.

Regarding the exorcism of the daughter, we see that Christ declares the girl to be healed, and it is so. Clearly, the woman believes that distance does not matter regarding Christ’s power to heal, for when Jesus tells her to go home and that her daughter is healed, she leaves Him with complete confidence that His word is true and omnipotent. She is another of Jesus’ “other sheep” (John 10:16), a Gentile, not an Israelite to whom He had primarily come. She undoubtedly made this miracle known to other Gentiles, opening the door for the apostles to proclaim Christ’s purpose for coming into the world: to bring salvation one day to all humanity.



1. What does the woman’s boldness teach? Matthew 15:28.

COMMENT: The woman receives a two-fold reward: She is commended for her great faith and receives healing for her child. Christ shows that He approves of her boldness and honors her faith, which—along with her persistence and humility—earn her blessings. She keeps knocking at the door of opportunity until it is opened. From this, we should learn a lesson about prayer. Initially, she seems to be rejected and denied access to Christ’s power, but then, having seen her faith, Jesus opens His grace to her. Christ commends her for “great” faith. She takes the lowliest place, but her faith in Christ earns her His highest praise.

Her faith is tested by His silence and then by His discouraging reply, but it is necessary for Him to see the strength of her faith, as well as for her to realize what it takes to follow Him. He is pleased with what He finds in her. Ultimately, the Lord sustains our faith and gives us hope to strengthen it (Psalm 138:3). Her faith was built on hope of good things to come, and what she had heard of Christ and seen of His power motivated her. Her unparalleled trust in Him proves that it is not blood lineage through Abraham that identifies his children in the faith, but faith itself. Although a Gentile by birth, she would become a spiritual Israelite through belief and conviction (Galatians 6:16). The strength of her faith is manifested in what she overcame—not physical obstacles, but mental and emotional barriers.

2. What is the most outstanding feature of her pleading? Mark 7:26.

COMMENT: The term translated “kept asking” (NKJV) or “besought” (KJV) is in the imperfect tense in the Greek, implying continuous action. Her persistence is seen in her constant pleading with Him and is emphasized by the fact

that she pleads continuously in spite of the various rebuffs she receives. Few people would have continued praying after the first few rebuffs, as most of us are prone to quit if we do not receive a swift answer.

Christ says, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1)—and this woman did not lose heart! She faces four rebuffs that required great persistence to overcome to obtain help for her daughter: deafness to her plea (Matthew 15:23), discouragement from the disciples (verse 23), demotion of her position (verse 26), and deficiency in her opportunities (Mark 7:28). Are these rebuffs any different in principle to the ones we experience in our prayers?

Even though it seems that Christ sometimes ignores us, He does not really, merely delaying His response to strengthen our faith and resolve. Answers can give great encouragement, but delay checks our sincerity and forces us to be more fervent, strengthening our faith. Christ’s turning a deaf ear to the woman’s prayer should encourage us in our prayers when they are not answered immediately. Even the most sincere and faithful prayers, as this woman’s was, can be delayed by God. Because we give up so quickly, delay exposes many of us as having little faith, so Christ frequently tests our faith to improve its quality.

We can never allow ourselves to be satisfied with our faith because, as God knows, we need more faith if we are to do more for Him. He rewards persistent faith that includes a full assurance of hope. Faith overcomes obstacles, personal trials, and the world. The apostle John writes, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5). That is the faith we need!

—Martin G. Collins