

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 22, Number 5

September-December 2013



*What Happened at
En Dor?*

september-december 2013

volume 22, number 5

3

PERSONAL from *John W. Ritenbaugh*
Ecclesiastes and Christian Living (Part Four):
Other Gifts

8

What Happened at En Dor?
BY RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

12

PROPHECY WATCH
The Symmetry of History (Part Two)
BY CHARLES F. WHITAKER

15

READY ANSWER
Do We See the Line?
BY MIKE FORD

23

WORLDWATCH
Coming: Dry Times in the U.S. and Israel
BY DAVID C. GRABBE

24

BIBLE STUDY
The Miracles of Jesus Christ:
Healing a Stooped Woman (Part Two)
BY MARTIN G. COLLINS

cover

I Samuel 28 records the story of King Saul's consultation of a medium, often called the Witch of En Dor, to speak with the prophet Samuel, who had been dead for five years. Some people believe this is biblical proof of life after death, but is it? Is the spirit that the medium sees really Samuel? A careful reading of the text reveals that it agrees with the rest of Scripture.

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This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

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Ecclesiastes and Christian Living

Part Four: Other Gifts

Ecclesiastes 3 makes clear that God is sovereign over time as well as over the flow of events He is overseeing in the outworking of His plan and purpose. God leaves no doubt that He is intimately involved in the lives of His children to ensure that they fit within the framework of the body of believers that He is preparing to rule over the earth under Jesus Christ at His return.

His aim is not merely that we generally fit but that we specifically fit, prepared for the responsibilities He assigns. We learn this principle from observations of God's creation, as King David testifies in Psalm 139:14, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well." Even as our physical bodies are marvelous creations, God's spiritual preparations of us for His Kingdom as the Bride of Christ is a more spectacular, fully functioning achievement. Thus, His work of creation continues.

Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:10-15:

I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that

nothing is better for them than to rejoice and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.

Among the mysteries that everybody must face is "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" Another version of those questions is "Why was I born?" A partial but probably unsatisfying answer is that, unless God calls and reveals Himself to a person, he will never find the clear, detailed answer. Thus, Solomon states in verse 11, "No one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end." So that the called, those to whom God has revealed Himself, are thoroughly convinced of the great gift God has given them, a fuller version of this declaration appears in Ecclesiastes 8:17:

Then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover

personal *Ecclesiastes and Christian Living*

it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

God undoubtedly planned much of this blindness. This does not mean that people will never hear the answer to “Why was I born?” in their lifetimes. But unless God is directly involved in calling them for His purposes, their hearing the simple and plain truth of it will not have the life-changing impact needed to change the direction of their lives. A person must be gifted by His calling (Matthew 13:10-17).

Three Invaluable Gifts

In the previous article, we focused on two specific truths regarding time and our trials: 1) God’s personal involvement in our lives and 2) the sense of eternity He has placed in our hearts. It began in the last three verses of chapter 2, which announce that God gives gifts. By means of some of those invaluable gifts, everyone born, called or not, can receive a measure of knowledge that can prove to be helpful to their well-being.

Paul writes in Romans 1:18-20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 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.

Clearly, mankind has been gifted with an awareness of God’s existence. Like most things in life, this awareness must be confirmed, developed, and lived by in greater detail, but the proofs of God’s existence are readily available through an honest observation of the creation. The evidence is so obvious that, in God’s judgment, it leaves humanity without justification for not knowing of His existence. What is really difficult is proving God does not exist! Most people merely accept His existence as a fact, but few appear to make it foundational to their way of life. On the other extreme are those who utterly reject it because they have faith only in what they call “science.” That faith is an impossibility because they have no scientific answer to where life came from in the

first place.

Romans 2:14-15 adds a second gift:

. . . for when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law unto themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also being witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them. . . .

Similar to the fact of God’s existence, in that it needs to be expanded upon and more precisely understood, is the truth that God has given mankind the basic elements of right and wrong to enable humanity to govern itself for the purposes of communal living.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 completes this trinity of invaluable gifts: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.” God has given everyone a spirit and a sense of eternity, enabling people to think both backward and forward in time.

Men innately know that there is more to life than what they experience physically. However, they do not grasp the precise connection between their awareness of eternity and their present physical lives. They do, however, vaguely grasp that somehow the immortality they envision has some connection with what they are experiencing in the present. Like the other gifts, this, too, is greatly botched, and misunderstanding is universal. The most common assumption is that we already possess it. But, if linked with revealed truth as God intended, it greatly aids people in thinking about the past concerning God’s creative powers, His purpose, His sovereignty over all things, and how the individual fits into the present and future.

God has given these and more gifts to all humanity, but only those called by Him are given more detailed and true explanations that will build their faith, enabling them to live by it. Unless God gives the details, we are all much like terribly near-sighted people who more or less feel their way along. Until they are called, the grand design that God is working out escapes their fuller comprehension, making the answer about who we are elusive.

The instruction in Ecclesiastes 3:10-15 encourages us to be content and patient. It is a reflection on and a reminder of the importance of what He already said about gifts in

“I know that whatever God does it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.”

—Ecclesiastes 3:14

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26. We should be thankful and rejoice in what we already have because what we have is wonderful. Without directly stating a clear “why,” Solomon gently implies that God will add understanding as we are able to make good use of it.

Accepting That God Sets the Times

Verse 14 adds helpful encouragement to the point he is making: “I know that whatever God does it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.” What God is doing will add to our awe of Him, and the fear of God is a great gift. There can be nothing negative about adding to our respect of God. Recall that Proverbs 1:7 states, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” However, the fear of God is the also the beginning of wisdom, understanding, joy, peace, and much more because these all flow from God as gifts to us because of our contact with Him after being called.

An earlier article covered contexts showing that God set

cause doing so is not beneficial to living by faith. When we do that, we tend to do foolish things.

Regarding timing within God’s purposes as He works with us, we cannot add to or take anything away from the past. The past cannot be changed; it is over. By the same token, we cannot add to or take anything from the future either, as it has not yet occurred and because God has His purposes to work out. What God wants to do *when* He wants to do it will invariably be done.

No human by his sheer effort can hope to alter the course of things. To seek to do that is evidence of pride. This is a major reason God sets the times even of our trials. He desires to remove every aspect of any argument we might have that might lead us to choose some other way of doing things than His. Resisting Him produces no good fruit.

This leads to the most helpful conclusion, which is also the secondary reason why we have covered the fact of God setting the timing of events. With God in control of time, we, through our experiences, gradually become aware of our sheer helplessness; we cannot manipulate time

*Whatever God does endures forever.
He schedules and performs everything at exactly the right time.
Thus we must grow in trusting God’s timing on everything in our lives.*

the times for many significant events, for example, when Jesus was born, when the gospel began to be preached, when He would be crucified, how long He was in the grave, and when the Kingdom will be restored. A secondary reason for this is that we must learn that the operations and times that God sets are thoroughly reasoned, permanent, and unchangeable. Whatever God does endures forever. He schedules and performs everything at exactly the right time. Thus we must grow in trusting God’s timing on everything in our lives. It is that important to our spiritual well-being.

Despite what events working out in our lives might *seem* like to us from our position as very limited and impatient mortals, God is running a tight ship. We can expand this concept of running a tight ship to envelop the entire period of the past—to all His sovereign operations beginning with Adam and Eve, the calling of Abraham, Jacob having twelve sons, the formation of Israel, and so forth. Everything was done at the right time, and in a way, doing so emphasizes His sovereignty and well-organized purpose.

God wants to impress on those living by faith that He truly wants us to know what He has done and what He is now doing to the degree we can understand. For our good, though, He does not want us second-guessing Him be-

nor manage the times we live and operate in. This intense understanding of our helplessness helps us grasp more deeply how totally dependent we are on Him to work out His purposes in our lives. The humility produced by this awareness is of tremendous value.

We are involved in the ongoing spiritual creation, and the Creator God is the Potter, fashioning us into His desire. Humility before Him is an absolute necessity. Recall what Jesus says to His disciples in John 15:5, “For without Me you can do nothing.” That is, we can do nothing toward *His* purpose. Our responsibility is to yield to His purpose. The sovereign God can exercise control of all things in the lives of His children, not just time. Notice how Jesus illustrates an aspect of this in Matthew 10:29-31:

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

His two illustrations show how penetrating and complete is God’s awareness of what is happening in His creation. Here is the practical point for us: If He is aware

personal *Ecclesiastes and Christian Living*

of a sparrow falling, and we are exceedingly more important than a mere bird, how can He not be aware of all that is occurring in our lives?

With this understanding, we can appreciate that we can move forward toward God's Kingdom only at the speed He deems is correct for us. This gives us far more reason to learn to be content because the speed that He moves us is perfectly good for us. God does nothing that is not in our best interests.

Has God Tossed Us a Crumb?

Some commentators describe Ecclesiastes 3:12 as negative because they understand the phrase, "there is nothing better," as implying something "second-best." They almost seem insulted that God has "tossed them a crumb." But look again at what God has counseled that we should do! In verse 12, He advises us to rejoice and do good in our lives, and in verse 13, to eat, drink, and enjoy the good of our labor because these things—the food, the drink, and the ability to labor—are gifts of God.

If we reword these verses into the first-person voice, it reads, "There is nothing better than that I should be joyful and do good as long as I live, and to eat and drink and take pleasure in all my work—this is God's gift to me." How much good can be accomplished in a life lived with the attitude that He counsels us to live with? What does God more specifically mean by "do good"? What He means should be taken in a moral and ethical sense. To do good is to do good works, and that is our assignment all the time! God is most certainly not tossing us a crumb.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us that doing good is the very reason for our calling! "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before-

representing God in all aspects of life possibly be a crumb?

Time's Continuous Stream

Ecclesiastes 3:15 is another illustration, showing from a different point of view the breadth and depth of God's sovereignty over time and the events of life: "That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past." To picture this more clearly, we have to perceive time as a moving reality. It is as though it is coming toward us and moving away from us simultaneously.

Though time is involved in this statement, the emphasis is more on the *events* that happen within time rather than time itself. We can perhaps understand this verse better as saying that what is happening right now, *already* happened in the past, and what *will* happen has already happened. It is a way of saying that, in one sense, time cannot be broken into parts. Time and the events happening within it of and by themselves are a whole. Thus, Solomon is essentially saying, "Past, present, and future are bound together."

In what way is this so? Time and the events happening in it are parts of a continuous stream. Solomon's point is again that only God is in perfect control of both time and its events, and He can seek out and bring back into existence in the present what happened in the past. Thus, Solomon's comment in Ecclesiastes 1:9 is a parallel: "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (ESV). In plainer language, history repeats itself.

Names, personalities, ethnicities, locations, dates, languages, clothing, and weapons change, but the core of the events is essentially the same. We can learn from

Regardless of a trial God may have specifically assigned us, doing good works is always our assignment, whether within that specific trial or free from whatever particular discipline the trial might normally impose.

hand that we should walk in them." Regardless of a trial God may have specifically assigned us, doing good works is always our assignment, whether within that specific trial or free from whatever particular discipline the trial might normally impose.

Thus, in Ecclesiastes 3:10-14, God is telling us to take joy in His employment of us before the world in doing good at home for those we live with, doing good work on the job, doing good in serving the brethren, and doing good within our community as we have occasion, using our spiritual gifts to the best of our abilities. How can

history what works and what does not. Thus, we have the saying by George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This makes the Bible an even more valuable source of guidance in wisdom and right conduct because God gives true accounts of what happened, not ones embellished by men's prejudices.

One might wonder why God would essentially repeat what is said in Ecclesiastes 1:9 just two chapters later. The reason is that there is a major difference in the contexts. In Ecclesiastes 1:9, the statement is used nega-

tively, suggesting life is nothing but repetitious vanity. In Ecclesiastes 3:15, though, it is mentioned explicitly within the context of God's sovereignty—He is in control, and He makes positive use of history repeating itself for mankind's benefit.

Many alternative renderings of the last phrase of verse 15, "God requires an account of what is past," are quite hopeful:

mess of their past—that includes all of us. This verse provides evidence that by His grace He is seeking to recover and restore what seems from our point of view to be forever lost. Earlier, however, we learned that the work of God endures forever. This verse suggests that, since we are God's work, He will use His powers to make sure that our labors are not in vain. He will make things beautiful in His good time by enabling us to profit even

*Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there;
and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.
I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time
for every purpose and for every work."
—Ecclesiastes 3:16-17*

- *The New International Version*: "God will call the past to account."
- *The Revised Standard Version*: "God seeks what has been driven away."
- *The American Standard Version*: "God seeks again that which is passed away."
- *The New English Bible*: "God summons each event back in its turn."
- *The Amplified Bible*: "God seeks that which has passed by."

Though each translation is somewhat different, each has two elements in common: God is looking for something, and it involves time, an event that occurred in the past. Why is He doing this? What instruction is there for us here?

We tend to think that former days are gone forever. However, we have seen in Ecclesiastes 3 that this concept is not totally true because history keeps repeating itself. In fact, we are learning that God causes this repetition. Verse 15 confirms this fact once again, but it adds a positive twist to it. Why would God do this?

A prominent theme in Ecclesiastes is judgment. The book ends with the statement that God will bring every deed into judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14), pointing directly to a reason why everything matters. It is obvious that God, who is in control, brings up the past for His purposes. God always does things with good purposes in mind. In this verse, the language is quite positive: He does not bring the past up for the purposes of condemnation but for redemption. Our Savior God is a Redeemer.

He is seeking to help those who have truly made a

from our messes.

This is not to suggest that those messes will be completely resolved, and everybody is happy, happy, happy! No, but He has the power to bring experiences from our past to mind, facilitating us to sort through them with a great deal more clarity than we had when they originally happened. Thus, He helps us recall incidents with honesty that helps us learn what we should and should not have done or said, and resolve to conduct ourselves far better going forward. He helps us to grasp whether repentance should occur if a similar situation happens again.

Should we forgive and forget? Should we be more patient and kind? Should we sacrifice our pride? Should we be firmer, insisting that godly actions be done to uphold righteousness? He may reveal to us how an event's outcome could have been far more profitable for all concerned.

Our Lives Matter to God

Considering the inspiring revelations given in this chapter, how can we ever consider our lives monotonous and vain? We have had revealed to us, not merely that we are made part of God's eternal plan, but we have also been given some important particulars of operations within that plan. We are not a mere insect crawling from one annihilation to another. God personally knows us, and He is in control, shaping our lives and characters through our experiences with a glorious purpose at its end!

Our overall responsibility begins with a firm foundation of fearing Him, which provides us with solid footing for submission to Him. If we have given our lives to Jesus

(continued on page 20)

What Happened at EN

Human beings are a superstitious lot, and those who claim Christianity as their religion are no exception. Things that go bump in the night scare Christians and pagans equally. Some branches of Christianity seem to have a morbid fascination with the otherworldly, and this reality probably springs from the fact that the Bible does not hide the fact that Satan the Devil is alive and well and has hordes of demons ready to do his bidding. The dominant church throughout medieval times—and even some of its Protestant offshoots—delighted in dangling believers over the fires of hell to force conformity to its questionable doctrines and practices. Works like Dante’s *Inferno* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* are still quite popular among Christians.

Certainly, Satan and demons are real—they even play significant roles in the gospels, tempting Jesus and being exorcised from unfortunate demoniacs by Him. The book of Revelation is full of references to evil and diabolical forces arrayed against God and His people, causing wars and plagues and all manner of curses. The apostle Paul warns us of our spiritual struggle “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of

wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). God’s Word constantly reminds us that we have unseen enemies who want nothing more than to deceive us into giving up our crowns of life.

Superstitions also persist on the equally ethereal subject of the afterlife, a doctrine about which nominal Christians have differing ideas. Catholics, for instance, believe the evil go to hell and the truly good go to heaven, while the majority head to purgatory to work off their heavy load of sin. Most Protestants keep heaven and hell, but drop the idea of purgatory. If they are not nihilists, millions in the secular Western world, influenced by latent Christian teaching, accept as truth that they are bound for heaven or hell once they die.

These “Christian” doctrinal positions derive in part from the belief in the soul’s immortality—that the soul is the spiritual component of humans that does not die with the body but consciously exists elsewhere after death. These beliefs about the afterlife echo older beliefs—for example, the Greek idea of *hades*—that posited that the spirits of the dead go to a place, often the underworld, where they exist in a state of agony, limbo, or bliss, depending on the life they lived (or until reincarnated).

The church of God, however, does not accept the Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, instead believing God’s Word, which says indisputably, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). One of the very first things God taught Adam in the Garden of Eden was the consequence of sin: “you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17), a truth the serpent hastened to contradict (Genesis 3:4).

In the New Testament, Jesus teaches in Matthew 10:28: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [*Gehenna*, a symbol of the Lake of Fire (see Revelation 20:11-15)].” Paul writes, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Humans are mortal, and God must give eternal life; we do not have it inherently (see Romans 2:7; I Corinthians 15:53-54; I Timothy 6:16).

We believe, then, that man indeed has a spirit (Job 32:8), “the breath of the Almighty [that] gives him understanding,” but that it is not his soul. When combined with a human brain, the human spirit allows a person to have the powers of mind. When he dies, the body returns to the dust, but his spirit returns to God (Ecclesiastes

DOR?

12:7), who safeguards it as a record of his life.

Solomon also informs us that “the dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5), and “there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave” (verse 10), meaning that there is no consciousness in death. The person knows nothing, learns nothing, communicates nothing, does nothing—until the resurrection from the dead when God will unite that spirit with a new body, either a spiritual body or another physical body, depending on the resurrection (see Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 5:24-29; I Corinthians 15; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 2).

Can Mediums Consult the Dead?

Against this, many bring up the Old Testament story of King Saul visiting the “witch” at En Dor (I Samuel 28:3-25), in which she seems to raise the spirit of the prophet Samuel to foretell Saul’s demise. The narrative appears to show that necromancy is not only possible but has been successfully practiced, and that the disembodied souls or spirits of all who have ever lived are a medium’s summons away.

If this reading of the story is correct, it clearly contradicts the teaching of the rest of the Bible.

Theologians down through the centuries have had difficulty explaining this passage because it appears so blatantly positive on the powers of mediums to consult the disembodied dead, despite the very negative answer Saul received. Foolish and desperate people who see this story in God’s Word need little further encouragement to seek a medium for answers.

So what really happened at En Dor? Did the woman truly have otherworldly powers? Did Samuel really appear to her? Was what she saw the prophet’s ghost? Are the dead alive and aware of what is happening here on earth? Or do people insert ideas into the story from their own preconceptions that are not warranted from what the text actually says?

Perhaps a more insightful question is, “Who is immediately behind all of the action in this chapter, God or Satan?”

Three Truths for Context

Before looking at the details of I Samuel 28, we would be well-advised to review three foundational, biblical truths to construct a necessary background for this story. If we try to evaluate what happened at En Dor without fitting it in its proper context, we will reach wrong conclusions. With

these truths in mind, the true story will be apparent.

First, the Bible is not in the least ambiguous about what God thinks on the subject of the occult. It plainly condemns the practice of witchcraft and similar sorceries. Notice Leviticus 19:31, for instance, which condemns consulting mediums: “Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.” A few verses later, God adds, “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” (Leviticus 20:6). This is as good as a prophecy of Saul’s demise. See also Deuteronomy 18:9-14, which names practitioners of witchcraft, soothsayers, interpreters of omens, sorcerers, conjurers, mediums, spiritists, necromancers, and diviners as abominations to the LORD.

The New Testament is just as condemnatory as the Old. However, instead of legislating against sorcery and the like—except where Paul lists sorcery as a work of the flesh, mentioned between “idolatry” and “hatred” (Galatians 5:20; see I Samuel 15:23)—the writers recount experiences of Jesus and the apostles battling against it. For

instance, on the island of Paphos, the apostle Paul stood against Elymas the sorcerer, really a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus, saying, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10). The episode in Acts 16:16-18 reveals that a slave girl diviner, who greatly annoyed Paul by following him around for many days, was in fact possessed by a demon, “a spirit of divination.” The second-to-last chapter of Revelation states plainly that sorcerers will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 21:8; see also 22:15).

This is sufficient proof that God considers the practice of all forms of occultism to be a moral outrage. He is not by any means involved in them and wants His people to avoid them, forbidding them to consult them or dabble in them in any way. This most important point indicates that God had nothing to do with the events at En Dor, except to allow them to move His purpose along, removing Saul to emplace David on Israel’s throne.

Second, the Bible does not typically portray practitioners of the occult and the demons behind them in a particularly macabre way. We moderns have been conditioned to imagine Satan, his demons, and their human minions as dark beings of pure ugliness, bearing attributes of horror and death. We have swallowed this deception from our historical culture and from the images presented by the media to entertain the masses and make millions of dollars.

Yet, while God’s Word warns us against Satanic deceptions, it does not provide the standard horror movie images. In fact, it often does just the opposite, cautioning us with the fact that the Devil and his demons do their best to appear as *appealing* to our senses as they can be. From what we see in Genesis 3, the serpent did not repulse Eve; to her in her

innocence, he was logical and quite convincing. In Ezekiel 28, the description of the king of Tyre, a type of Satan, lauds him as “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (verse 12). It describes a creature whose beauty and magnificence turned his heart proud and corrupt (verse 17).

Though he and his demons have been cast down, at least some of their beauty remains, for Paul tells us in II Corinthians 11:14-15: “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers [servants] also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” Demons do not always look like snakes, dragons, gargoyles, or goblins but have the ability to appear good to us when it suits them. If accosted by a ghoul, we would shrink in horror and flee. Demons, though, are all about deception, and appearing as good and beautiful is far more subversive. People are far more likely to trust a physically appealing person than an old hag or troll.

Thus, while the tone of I Samuel 28 is at times stressed, suspicious, and fearful—as one would expect when encountering demonic powers—there is nothing blatantly horrifying or even ugly in the narrative. This tells us that a demon, being manipulative to the extreme, will appear to a person in a way that he thinks will work best for his purposes. A demon will stoop to whatever trick he deems necessary, even to appearing as a minister of righteousness.

Third, we must consider King Saul’s state of mind. Early in his reign, under the tutelage of Samuel, Saul had been the great champion of Israel, pushing its enemies back and making good progress in forging a nation out of the twelve tribes. Yet, just about the time David came on the scene, he began to display severe emotional

problems, exacerbated by “the Spirit of the LORD depart[ing] from Saul” and “a distressing spirit from the LORD troubl[ing] him” (I Samuel 16:14). Evidently, God allowed a demon to cause Saul distress—perhaps severe melancholy and fits of sullenness and anger—and only David’s playing of his harp drove the demon away (verse 23).

Once David had slain Goliath and begun to receive acclaim from the people, Saul became murderously jealous of his young servant. Saul’s distress soon warped into real anger (I Samuel 18:8) and suspicion (verse 9), and the next time David came to play his harp for Saul, the king cast a spear at him, shouting, “I will pin David to the wall!” (verses 10-11). The younger man escaped, only to have the scene repeated sometime later (I Samuel 19:9-10). Not long thereafter, David had to flee and hide in the wilderness.

We see, then, that Saul was highly susceptible to demonic influence and emotionally unstable. The distressing spirit that God allowed to torment him had played with his emotions for years, and it is likely that as he aged, as David eluded capture, and as the Philistines grew in strength, Saul only became more depressed and fearful. By the time he was camped on the slopes of Mount Gilboa, brooding over the advance of the Philistine army into a camp on the opposite hillside, he was in a state of severe misery and near-terror, knowing that no happy ending awaited him the next day.

These three factors provide the background for the story in I Samuel 28: God is always against those who practice sorcery; Satan and his demons can appear as ministers of righteousness; and Saul himself, emotionally unbalanced, was predisposed to the sway of a demon. Knowing these things makes all the difference in how we understand the events at En Dor.

Saul's Terror and Trouble

As the story opens in I Samuel 28:3, the author fills the reader in on a couple of background details vital to his tale:

1. The prophet Samuel had died, probably about five years before, when David was hiding in the wilderness from Saul. The king could not have seen the real Samuel in the flesh, as it was well after the prophet's death.

2. Sometime before, Saul had gone to great lengths to rid Israel of mediums and spiritists. Apparently, his agents had not done a thorough job, but his decree had driven those practices underground, and their practitioners feared the punishment of violating the law—death (I Samuel 28:9).

More than anything, these details provide insight into Saul's state of mind.

The next verse puts the story on the map. The Philistines encamp at Shunem, a town that sits at the southern foot of the hill of Moreh at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley. At this location, not only has the Philistine army effectively cut the northern tribes of Israel off from the southern ones, but if it could defeat Saul's forces, it would also have easy access to the Israelite highlands to the south along the Ridge Route. For this reason, Saul places his troops on the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa, directly opposite the Philistine forces. He probably hopes that the rocky hillside will limit the famed chariots of his enemies and stop the Philistine campaign in its tracks.

The two armies stare at each other across the valley. "When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly" (I Samuel 28:5). The king

fears so much because the Philistine army seems invincible. No count of soldiers who took part in the battle is recorded, but it seems plausible that the Israelite forces were greatly outnumbered, bore inferior weapons (see I Samuel 13:18-22), and lacked horses and chariots to counter those of the Philistines.

Adding to Saul's ill-concealed terror is the fact that God has refused to answer any of his supplications (I Samuel 28:6). In earlier days, he had been able to inquire of Him through Samuel, but since the prophet had been dead for five years, all communication had stopped. Saul has had no inspired dreams to guide him, and he had gone to the Tabernacle to beseech the high priest to use the Urim and Thummin but to no avail. All other prophets in the land had proven themselves useless, giving him not one word from God.

So, Saul reasons absurdly, if God had spoken to him only through Samuel, he would seek the prophet, dead or not. He would try to find a medium, if one were nearby, so she could put him in touch with the dead prophet and receive an answer. Saul seems not to have realized that, if God would not speak to him in the approved ways, He would surely not answer him through one of the forbidden ways! His dementia and fear are such that he can no longer reason. He would act contrary to God's and his own law to get an answer to a question that his heart already knows the answer to.

He asks his servants to find him a nearby medium (verse 7), and they have what seems to be an immediate answer: "One is not too far away, just in En Dor!" How convenient! How do his servants know about this nearby medium-in-hiding? Did they expect to be asked such a question? Were they in the habit of consulting mediums? Could this be the reason such practitioners had not all been expelled from Israel, that they had high-level protection at court?

Whatever the case, En Dor is not as convenient as it appeared. The village, about ten miles away, lies north and a little east of Shunem on the other side of the hill of Moreh—that is, the Philistine army's lines stretch between Saul on Mount Gilboa and the medium's house. Going through the Philistine lines, even disguised (verse 8), is out of the question, and so, either walking or riding in the dark of night, Saul and his two guards are forced to take a circuitous route around to the east, probably doubling the distance over the hilly terrain.

"Bring up Samuel for Me"

When the three men arrive in En Dor and find the medium's house, Saul immediately asks her to conduct a séance for him. One look at the men tells the woman—who, by the way, is never called a "witch" in the account—that they are Israelite soldiers. Israelite soldiers fall under the command of Saul, whom she knows is in the area, and Saul is the one who had banned her livelihood. She perceives a trap. She crosses her arms and refuses, saying, in essence, "I'm not putting my head on the chopping block!"

Ironically, "Saul swore to her by the LORD" (verse 10), promising that no harm would come to her. Perhaps his authoritative voice convinces her that he means what he says. Perhaps she sees that, despite his disguise, he is a man of some means and therefore able to pay her well. Whatever it is that persuades her, she quickly agrees to do as he had asked. "Whom shall I bring up for you?" she asks, and he replies, "Bring up Samuel for me" (verse 11).

The narrative tells us nothing about the procedure the woman went through in conducting the séance for Saul. We might imagine the classical setting of a fortuneteller's dark room, a few

(continued on page 18)

The Symmetry

Part Two

Last month, we looked at Karl Jasper's concept of an Axial Period in history, spanning roughly 800-200 BC. He viewed it as an unstable age characterized by a sea change in ideas as people abandoned old, long-standing ideas in philosophy and religion, replacing them with ideas that came to underpin the culture of late antiquity, particularly the Grecian and Roman civilizations. This thorough-going substitution of old ideas with different ones destabilized the period, leading ultimately to the death of even long-established empires like those of Egypt and Babylonia. For us, this period saw the fall and deportation of the House of Israel and the forced exile of the Jews at the hands of the Babylonians, attendant with the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple.

If history repeats itself, we should find, somewhere, sometime, a Second Axial Period, presumably of about the same length and with a matrix of characteristics and ramifications corresponding to the first one. That is, any Second Axial Period should exhibit a transformation of foundational ideas and a consequent gross destabilization of governmental structures.

Is there such a period in history? Is there a Second Axial Period, a reduplication of the first?

IT STARTED WITH THE RENAISSANCE

Such a period did in fact begin in our era, about AD 1450, with the beginning of the Italian Renaissance. To see the march of events after that time as the Second Axial Period, we need to 1)

demonstrate how different the Renaissance (and its aftermath) was from the Medieval Period just preceding it, and 2) show how relatively unstable the Renaissance (and its aftermath) was in terms of governments.¹

If this supposition of a Second Axial Period is valid, and if this second era is about as long as Jaspers' Axial Period, then it will end about 600 years after it started, or around the year AD 2050. That would place contemporary history—us—near the end of an Axial Period, on the cusp of a new civilization.

DIFFERENT IDEAS

Let us first look at the topic of the transformation of ideas. The ideas that arose during and after the Renaissance were indeed vastly different from the ideas that prevailed in later antiquity (in Greece and Rome), as well as from the notions operating in the Medieval Period. We will limit our discussion to the Medieval Period.²

Two defining characteristics of this time in history were its peoples' 1) widespread allegiance to the concept of authority, and related to this allegiance, 2) their commitment to structure in virtually every milieu. If it was anything, the Medieval Period was a time of authority and structure. Considering all its vast challenges (for example, the seemingly unending pandemic of the Black Death, the economic suffocation brought about by Catholicism, and the sometimes overt threat of the invasion of Islam at the hands of the Ottomans), it was a remarkably stable period.

The people of the Medieval Period were almost fixated on the idea of structure. They

OF HISTORY

perceived this structure in terms of various hierarchical models. They had hierarchies for everything—hierarchies within hierarchies. An example is their view of the cosmos, embodied in the Harmony of the Spheres, a highly ordered—and, by that token, psychologically pleasing—conception of the interplay of sound, light, and geometry.

Graphically, they depicted the order of the universe (which was based on a geocentric model of the solar system) as a hierarchy. At its apex was God. Importantly, man was *not* the focus or centerpiece of their universe. God was. Not the true God, we understand, but God anyway, as distinct from man. The focus of the Medieval universe was on another world, heaven. The period's focus was not secular at all.

A hierarchical arrangement does not imply only order and structure; it suggests *authority* flowing from the top down. God is the highest authority. The Medieval man was absolute ruler of his household. The Medieval king possessed what was called a divine right and was answerable to no one except God. The Medieval popes, as vicars of Christ, were the final authority in everything religious.³

All this began to change drastically during the Renaissance. As that era progressed, the concept of authority and structure at all levels fell under attack. Man gradually replaced God as humanists denied Him as the final Authority.⁴ That act of presumptuous usurpation put people in a bind: How, in the face of the fact that there are lots of men, all with different ideas, talents, and ambitions, do you constitute a viable government?⁵ People living during and after the Renaissance thrashed that question around for

decades and even centuries, posing different—and often conflicting—answers. The Constitution of the United States is one answer. Marx later had another answer.

The point is this: None of the answers mankind put on the table came even close to the concept of centralized authority and structure as *practiced* in the Medieval Period. They were different answers, different approaches. This was true in every discipline, not just that of political philosophy.

It may be useful to state the breadth of the change in ideas from the Medieval Period to the Renaissance in this way: The great works of the Renaissance and its aftermath could *not* have been created two centuries before the Renaissance started, say, in AD 1250. As examples, Michelangelo's statue of David, the music of Mozart, or the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* simply could not have been created in 1250. The ideas that undergird these cultural artifacts had not been developed by 1250. Those ideas may have existed in isolation in someone's mind in 1250, but they lacked currency then. They also lacked critical mass, that is, the broad-based societal support needed to permit them to grow and flourish. Therefore, these ideas got nowhere until they began to grab traction after about 1450—not until their time had come.

Because of this sea-change in ideas that started with the Renaissance, the Roman papacy came to lose much of its authority. Kings came to lose their authority with the rise of what is properly called liberal democracy, and so today, few monarchs hold any real power. The Bible came to lose its authority with the ascent

prophecy watch

of the so-called “higher criticism.” All this change took place as a result of different *ideas* that became current during and after the Renaissance.⁶ In short, this Second Axial Period *has* indeed been marked with huge changes in thinking. The seminal minds of our time, Einstein, Marx, Darwin, and Freud, belonged to individuals who deeply questioned traditional authority and the value of a highly structured society.

Over time, Medieval ideas about religion, science, ethics, the individual, and society came under attack. They were knocked down one after another as ideas buttressing the brave new world, ideas about secularism (which is really just atheism), socialism, and communitarianism, grabbed traction. These three—secularism, socialism, communitarianism—are the three legs of the stool we call the New World Order, now abuilding.

INSECURE EMPIRES APLENTY

How did this tsunami affect governments? Did the fall of the idea of unquestioned authority and of hierarchical structure destabilize the world of business and commerce? Yes. This maelstrom of changing ideas transpired in a context of unspeakable violence in the form of vast wars, genocides, pogroms, and dislocations, from the hideous and protracted wars sparked by the rise of Protestantism to the “Reign of Terror” caused later by the French Revolution. Inarguably, the twentieth century was the most violent in post-Deluge history, considering the two World Wars and the loss of life and property caused by dictators of the ilk of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao.⁷

Here is a partial list of the empires that have fallen since the Renaissance, since about AD 1450:

- The Byzantine Empire fell in 1453, as if signaling the start of the Italian Renaissance. It had been around for some 1,200 years, since the days of the later Roman Emperors.
- The Ottoman Empire (or Turkish Empire), which conquered the Byzantine Empire, itself fell in 1923, after strutting on the world’s stage for some six centuries. A person living in Germany or France in the 1400-1500’s would have been worried about being overrun by the Sunnis, the

branch of Islam that the Ottoman Empire had forced on the Middle East and Northern Africa. The Ottomans, rivals of the Hapsburgs, penetrated central Europe, conquering as far north as Hungary. The Empire’s two attempts to take Vienna failed, however. The French actually were allied with the Ottomans for a time.

- The vast Spanish Empire spread through much of South and Central America, with territories in Florida and the Philippines. Its far-point in North America was the Presidio at the mouth of the San Francisco Bay. Through royal intermarriage with the Hapsburgs in Austria-Germany, it became a rival to the Ottoman Empire.

- The Russian Empire fell in 1917. It actually had settlements in Hawaii. Its far-point in North America was Fort Ross, located only 150 miles north of San Francisco.

- The Portuguese Empire, which included Brazil and various holdings in Africa, was the longest-ruling European colonial empire, its last vestige becoming independent as recently as 2002.

- The Inca Empire.

- The Aztec Empire.

- The Mayan Empire.

- The Holy Roman Empire.

- The German Empire.

- The Italian Empire.

- The Prussian Empire.

- The Austria-Hungary Empire was one of a number of empires that bit the dust as a result of World War I.

- The British Empire, on which the sun supposedly never set.

- The Japanese Empire fell in 1945, to the ear-splitting sound of the detonation of nuclear weapons.

(continued on page 22)

ready answer

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

Do We See the Line?

*“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful.
All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”
—I Corinthians 6:12*

I am a fan of Western novels and movies, and one of the best of that genre is *Lonesome Dove*. Originally written as a movie script by Larry McMurtry in 1972, it was to be directed by Peter Bogdanovich and would have starred James Stewart as Gus McCrae, John Wayne as Woodrow Call, and Henry Fonda as Jake Spoon. Wouldn't that have been something? Well, the story goes that John Wayne turned it down on the advice of John Ford, causing Jimmy Stewart to back out, and the project was shelved.

Mr. McMurtry came back in the early 80s and reworked the script into a full-length novel. It won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and then became a miniseries on television, winning seven Emmys.

The story is set in 1876 Texas, and Gus, Woodrow, and Jake are former Texas Rangers. Gus and Woodrow run a small cattle ranch in south Texas and see life clearly in black and white. Jake, not so much. He does not really have a job; he just likes to drink and gamble and carouse.

As the story opens, Jake shows up at the ranch after an absence of ten years. He had had a misunderstanding up in Arkansas over a game of cards and shot a man. Jake talks Gus and Woodrow into taking a herd of cattle to Montana, and he says he will go along. But he soon decides that is too much work and runs off again.

The story follows Gus, Woodrow, and their cowboys on the drive north, cutting away from time to time to follow Jake as he wanders. While gambling and drunk, Jake falls in with the three sadistic Suggs brothers and becomes a party to their murdering and stealing. He does not really participate in their crimes, but he is present when the crimes are committed.

ready answer *Do We See the Line?*

Even though they are no longer lawmen, Gus and Woodrow, still on their cattle drive, end up capturing Jake and the Suggs brothers and decide to hang them. As the cowboys are throwing the ropes over the tree limbs in preparation for the hanging, Jake Spoon says, “Oh, you don’t need to tie me up, I didn’t kill anybody! I just fell in with these boys to get through the Territory. I was gonna leave ’em first chance I got!”

Gus replies, “I wish you’d taken that chance a little earlier, Jake. A man who’ll go along with five killings is takin’ his leave a little slow.” As they talk, Jake begins to realize that his old friends are intent on hanging him along with the outlaws. Finally, Gus says, “You know how it works, Jake. You ride with an outlaw, you die with an outlaw. I’m sorry you crossed the line.”

Jake responds in a pleading voice, “I didn’t see no line, Gus!”

Gray Areas?

We talk about “gray areas” in life, but where there is a line, there is no gray area. On one side is right, on the other is wrong. For a Christian, it is critical to see the line. It is possible for people to see that line in different places, depending on their faith, depth of knowledge, experience, and so on. We all seem to be very good, experts in fact, in seeing where the lines should be for others but not so much for ourselves.

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 14:23, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” This indicates that there is more to Christian living than merely following rules. It is key for a Christian to understand the *principles* involved in God’s laws, not just the letter-of-the-law wording.

Those in the world argue that the law is done away altogether, and believing this, they find numerous gray areas. To support this belief they will use, for instance, I Corinthians 6:12, where the apostle Paul writes, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” However, just a few verses earlier, he seems to say something totally different! Notice verses 9-10:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul does not intend for this list to encompass every sin possible, but he does cover a lot of ground. In addition, he begins verse 9 with “the unrighteous will

not inherit the kingdom,” which casts a wide net. So if fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, the covetous, and drunkards will not enter the Kingdom of God, how then can all things be lawful?

Verse 12, we find, is a poor translation. Paul is paraphrasing what some people were saying—and still say today. Notice that he repeats “all things are lawful for me, but . . .,” following each phrase with an objection. *The Contemporary English Version* renders verse 12 as, “Some of you say, ‘We can do anything we want to.’ But I tell you that not everything is good for us. So I refuse to let anything have power over me.” *The New International Version* is similar: “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but I will not be mastered by anything.” Clearly, Paul is telling us what others have said and giving his response.

We are free-moral agents, in other words. We can make our own decisions. We can sin, if we wish to, but there are consequences. This may seem to be off-point, as to “do we see the line,” but it really is not. Paul says he refuses to let “anything have power over me.” He implies that he keeps a close watch on his thoughts and actions.

Notice verse 9, again from the *Contemporary English Version*:

Don’t you know that evil people won’t have a share in the blessings of God’s kingdom? Don’t fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual . . .

Are there gray areas here? Not to God, but our definition of “evil people” might be different. Certainly “immoral” is open to wide interpretation these days in the world. To “worship idols” can be looked at in different ways. Is “unfaithful in marriage” just an affair or is it more? Each of us knows exactly what these things mean to us, and that is as it should be. We do not need an exhaustive list, or we should not, of all the possibilities of each category. We should know the principle involved.

This is one reason we do not see many lawyers as members of the church. They are taught to see *everything* as a gray area. “It depends on what the meaning of the word ‘is’ is,” as the lawyer Bill Clinton once said. It seems that, as we grow in the faith, gray areas disappear, and the line becomes clearer. Satan and his world, on the other hand, are busy blurring the lines, trying to make us feel guilty or prudish if we judge something to be sin and choose not to participate.

I have known ministers who thought they were the

town sheriff and had to be in on all decisions in our lives. Others, though, taught the principles involved and left it to church members to make decisions for themselves. Undoubtedly, there are still some Marshall Dillons out there, but once our teachers have taught us God's way, the burden is on *us*, not them, to know right from wrong. We must know where the lines are.

Thirty-Nine Sabbath Rules

An interesting example here is the way Orthodox Jews keep the Sabbath and the 39 forbidden Sabbath activities (*melachot*) that they have come up with. Rather than learn the principles involved in Sabbath-keeping, the attitude seems to be, "Let's just have a rule to cover every conceivable development." For instance, ancient Israel was told, "You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day" (Exodus 35:3). This command directly follows a command not to *work* on the Sabbath, so in saying not to kindle a fire, God was speaking of a fire employed in work, such as one used by a smith to shape metal, not a home heating fire.

However, the Orthodox Jews take it to an extreme, teaching that it includes the modern analogy of moving electricity through a circuit. If a person opens his refrigerator door on the Sabbath and the light inside comes on, in their judgment, he has "kindled a fire." So, the Orthodox Jewish solution is to unscrew the bulb in the refrigerator on the Preparation Day so that no light comes on when the door is opened on the Sabbath.

On the Sabbath, a Jew cannot turn the lights on in the house or the burner on the stove. To get around this, Jews use timers. Note that they do these things to "get around" the law. To this end, their sages have come up with the concept of *grama*, and this has nothing to do with the nice older lady who gave you cookies as a child.

In Jewish law, there is a difference in direct and indirect action on the Sabbath. For instance, a Jew cannot intentionally extinguish a flame, but if he opens a window and the wind blows out the candle, he has not violated Sabbath law. Such an indirect action, whose result is not guaranteed, is called *grama*, which comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to cause [something to happen]." If a fire breaks out on the Sabbath, a Jew cannot put it out, but he can fill water jugs and place them in the path of the fire. When—or if—the heat bursts the jugs, the water may put the fire out. There are more subtleties to *grama*, but that is the short explanation.

So, in this modern, technological world, the Jews use the *grama* principle in numerous ways. Opening and closing electrical circuits would be work. But if the

switch has a delay so that, when a Jew presses or turns it, nothing immediately happens, yet a few seconds later something does happen, that is not considered work.

Since they do not drive on the Sabbath, Orthodox Jews live within walking distance of the synagogue, but this still poses a problem for those Jews who have trouble walking. We have all seen the scooters that have become so popular for those with disabilities. At least one brand of scooter is now approved for Sabbath use. Mike LaBrake, Director of Operations for Amigo Mobility International, writes this about his company's kosher scooter:

There is a Shabbat/Normal switch on the Amigo. It is spring loaded and the toggle lever must be lifted before it can be switched to a different position so the user cannot accidentally switch the Amigo back to Normal mode during the Shabbat period.

Once the switch is activated (and the key switch turned "on"), the software is designed so the start up signal goes through a timing circuit. The timing circuit is where the Gramma [sic] principle of an indirect action comes into play, thus the user is not activating the motor circuit directly. Once the timing circuit is complete the Shabbat module will close the motor circuit and the system is programmed so the Amigo "crawls" at a very slow speed without the user touching the throttle lever. . . . During crawl speed the goal is to be able to stall the Amigo by turning the tiller all the way to the right or left. If the user feels that they are in physical danger at anytime they can depress an emergency brake switch and the Amigo will come to an immediate stop.

Once the Amigo is in the crawl mode, if the user wants to go faster they pull on the throttle lever and the Amigo picks up speed just like normal. I'm told that this action is approved because the user is not opening or closing a motor circuit, they are just modifying the amount of current going through it.

Other manufacturers have also installed "Sabbath" modes on their appliances. On some new refrigerators, unscrewing the light bulb is not so easy. So now, more than 300 types of ovens, stoves, and refrigerators can be set to "Sabbath" mode, which, when enabled, means lights stay off, displays are blank, tones are silenced, fans are stilled, compressors slowed, etc. To quote

(continued on page 21)

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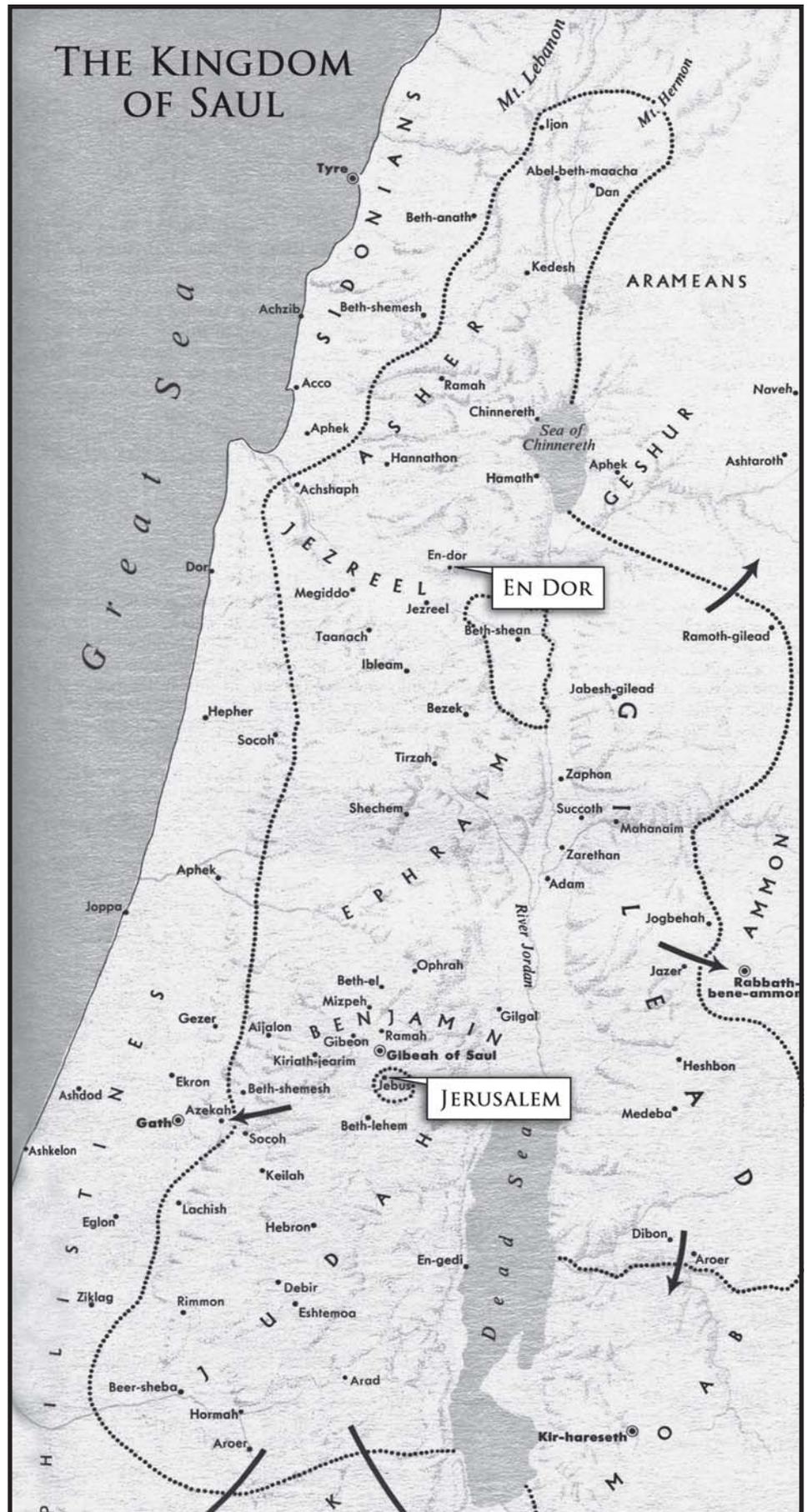
chairs around a table, a crystal ball sitting atop the table, and perhaps a lone candle flickering off to the side. Saul's séance was probably nothing like this. She may have pretended to scry in a bowl of water or maybe she gazed in the fire or perhaps she burned some incense in a censer and sought images in the smoke. She may not have done any of these things, but simply closed her eyes and fell theatrically into a trance.

All we really know is that, this time, the woman really sees something—Samuel, she thinks—and cries out at the sight (verse 12). Immediately, she turns to Saul and identifies him by name, asking, "Why have you deceived me?" The details of this verse confirm that the woman is a fraud: She pretends to be a medium, but she never really contacts the dead. Yet, this time is different, and it scares her.

Her client, she guesses, must be someone special, and who but Saul has enough pull with God and the prophet Samuel to cause him to appear—to her!—so long after his death? In addition, she suddenly realizes that, like the king, this man is tall—taller than any other man that she had ever seen in Israel (I Samuel 9:1-2). She immediately fears again for her life, thinking that Saul had tricked her into revealing herself as a medium.

That the woman is afraid of the apparition is a clue that she does not see a friendly spirit. Scripture contains a number of instances of people seeing angels, and in nearly every case, the angel speaks positive, soothing words (see, for example, Judges 6:12; 13:3; Daniel 9:22-23; 10:11-12; Luke 1:12-13, 29-30; 2:8-10; Revelation 1:17; etc.). On the other hand, when Job's friend, Eliphaz, has a demon-inspired dream and sees a spirit pass before his face, he feels extreme fear and receives no comfort (Job 4:12-21).

The text says that "the woman saw Samuel," but upon further



The MacMillan Bible Atlas

study, it is clear that she only *thinks* she sees Samuel. She had called for Samuel at Saul's request, and a spirit rose before her, so she *assumes* that it is indeed Samuel. However, when Saul presses her, "What did you see?" she replies more vaguely, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth" (I Samuel 28:13). Note that Saul sees nothing; he has to ask her what she sees.

The fact that the spirit rises "out of the earth" is a telling detail. The Bible consistently indicates that spirits that come from the earth are not from God, as His messengers come from Him in heaven (see Galatians 1:8; Revelation 10:1; 14:6, 17; 15:1; 18:1; 20:1; etc.). Spirits associated with the earth are demons, who come from Satan, the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4; see Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2; Luke 4:5-7; Revelation 12:9; 13:1-2, 11; 16:13-14). The writer of the book is indicating that this spirit is not Samuel but a demon impersonating him.

In Hebrew, the woman describes this being as *elohim*. She may have meant that the spirit was one of the "strong ones," which is the meaning of its root, *el*, but that is unlikely. Here, the word is accompanied by a plural verb, so her actual words are, "I saw gods ascend out of the earth." When *elohim* is paired with a plural verb, it is a scriptural indication of pagan gods (see Psalm 96:5; 97:7). Most likely, several spirits rose with the one she thought was Samuel. Would not the great prophet be accompanied by a retinue of angels?

Saul is not content with her vague answer, so he seeks more detail. She replies that she sees "an old man . . . covered with a mantle" (I Samuel 28:14), and from this scanty description, Saul *perceives* that the spirit is the dead prophet and prostrates himself. Why is her scant description so convincing?

Samuel had indeed been an old man when he had died (perhaps as old as 92), a fact everyone knew. However, what sways the king is the mention of a mantle, a loose

outer cloak (like an overcoat) that, it appears, had already become associated with prophets. Less than two centuries later, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, a prophet passing his mantle on to another would indicate the transfer of the office (see I Kings 19:16, 19). That Elisha later duplicates one of Elijah's miracles with the mantle verifies his status as prophet (II Kings 2:8, 14). Perhaps Samuel himself had begun this tradition by wearing such a mantle.

Whatever the case, Saul wants the apparition to be Samuel so that he could get some answers. These two nebulous details prove to be enough to sell him on the identification.

A Cruel Answer

The internal evidence from the narrative reveals a number of significant details to conclude that the spirit the medium saw was not Samuel but a demon impersonating him. One of the most obvious clues is that the text tells the reader outright—twice!—that the Lord would not answer Saul (I Samuel 28:6, 15-16), and there is no way that God would answer him through a lying spirit during an abominable séance! One of the points of the story is to show what desperate people will do when they are cut off from God, in fear for their lives, and without hope.

Yet, this does not mean that the demon does not give Saul a truthful answer. Acting as if it were Samuel, the demon wounds the king with the cruelest words it can use, complaining about being disturbed in his rest, mocking Saul for seeking him, and rubbing it in that God had left him and become his enemy. It reminds him of one of Samuel's prophecies—given when Saul had disobeyed God's instruction about the punishment of Amalek and its king, Agag (see I Samuel 15)—foretelling that the kingdom would be torn from him and given to another, David (I Samuel 15:23, 26-

28). Finally, it predicts that both he and his sons would die in the next day's battle against the Philistines, a reasonable assumption considering how overmatched Saul's forces were.

The demon's words have the desired effect: "Immediately, Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night" (I Samuel 28:20). Playing on Saul's fears and weakness, the demon succeeds in bringing the big man low, destroying any remnant of hope. Later, after finally eating and resting (verses 21-25), he leaves the medium's house a completely broken man.

So, what happened at En Dor?

1. At the end of his rope and highly susceptible to suggestion, Saul was ready to clutch at any straw of hope for a better outcome.
2. The medium was a fraud, bilking people of their money by preying on their superstitions. The spirit's appearance shocked her.
3. At most God allowed a demon to impersonate Samuel and pronounce Saul's doom to him, to give him the truth from the only source he had ever trusted to speak straight to him.

In the end, the story of Saul and the medium at En Dor is a morality play of sorts, an object lesson to teach how dangerous it is to forsake God and turn to the counsels of demons through sorcery and divination. It is a path of fear, despair, lies, curses, and death. It records the sad and tragic end of a man who had shown such great potential but who had allowed jealousy and pride to bring him and his house to ruin.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

personal *Ecclesiastes and Christian Living*

(continued from page 7)

Christ, these truths should provide virtually every incentive to do everything in our power to submit to whatever responsibilities He lays out for us. Even so, life must be lived, and the road may be quite bumpy at times. But if we firmly believe our Creator controls both time and events, we can endure the bumpy parts with hope and confidence, knowing He is ever with us.

The term “moreover” beginning verse 16 signals a subject change away from God’s control of time and its events to earthier, more immediately serious, day-to-day subjects that have frequent, negative effects on life. Solomon makes sure that we understand that the events he is about to describe are happening in an under-the-sun manner. His description begins with a brief mention of corruption, especially in government.

Before tackling Ecclesiastes 3:16-17, we can get a brief overview of where he is headed from Ecclesiastes 4:6: “Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.” In this, he summarizes how to avoid the influence of the corruption. The answer lies in rightly facing sinful drives that urge us to follow the world in its evil quests. Those living by faith will face the pulls of the corruption and endeavor to resist them as they strive to live above-the-sun lives by faith. They will value contentment over grasping for more.

Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:16-17:

Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every purpose and for every work.”

How can God be in control when the world contains so much evil? How can God be in control with the evil prospering in their sins and the righteous suffering in their obedience? Does that not seem backward from the way that we would think of God operating things? How should a Christian react to this?

Certainly, Solomon was not the first to ask this question. As much as we might dislike having to deal with this, it is nonetheless a reality. In His wisdom, God chose to deal with humanity in this way, and perhaps most especially, to allow His own children to face these same circumstances.

Solomon was comforted by two godly realities that we also should understand and use. First, he assures us that God will judge. The timing of His judgment is in God’s capable hands. Therefore, we must remember that nobody among humanity will get away with the evil that he does. The wages of sin—death—is a reality (Romans 6:23). We cannot allow ourselves to forget that God is judging. It is a continuous process, and in many cases, we simply are not aware of present, unseen penalties that the evil person may already be paying.

Second, human nature naturally thinks that the way God handles things is unfair, a judgment that is the work of the spirit of this world (Ephesians 2:2-3). However, God’s perception of timing and judgment is a much broader and more specific picture regarding each person than we can see. We are not walking in others’ shoes, nor are we aware of what God is planning for them to experience. Therefore, the thing that we must know and properly utilize is the fact that, in a major way, other people are none of our business. That is God’s concern, and He will take care of things in His time.

Are Men Like Beasts?

Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 expresses a conclusion when comparing God’s wondrous instruction to this point with the realities lived in the world around us:

I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals.” For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them; as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

Solomon certainly does not mean that men are beasts in terms of potential. He limits this expression to the fact that sinners will die in their sins, and without being called at this time, it appears that they have gained

“So I perceived that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”
—Ecclesiastes 3:22

nothing truly valuable. Therefore, at least on the surface, they live and die on the same level as animals.

However, he also says that God tests men that they may see that they are like animals. The most likely time that they will grasp this is after they are resurrected, when their minds will be open to God and His truth. Only then will they be able to see that, morally and ethically, they had lived no better than animals. Therefore, he is suggesting that what is truly valuable in the lives of many people lies beyond the grave. In addition, if a person is not living a life that is glorifying to God or preparing himself for living in God's Kingdom, then he has gained nothing despite all the wealth and power he might possess.

Thus, his conclusion is that our image of life must be more penetrating and broader than that. The life of a wealthy and powerful sinner, though it may seem attractive on the surface, may be as vain, meaningless, and profitless as a beast's life.

Ecclesiastes 3:22 is penetrating advice because we all

tend to let our minds wander from God's purpose into envy of those of this world who do not seem to have the difficulties we face: "So I perceived that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?"

We must learn to live each day by faith, contentedly accepting it as it comes. This is possible because a foundation of faith and understanding enables us to know that we have been greatly blessed with knowledge far more valuable than money. God has revealed Himself to us; He knows us personally. He is overseeing our lives, and we are growing in knowledge of Him and His purpose.

In Christian love,



ready answer *Do We See the Line?*

(continued from page 17)

WIRED magazine's Michael Erard in "The Geek Guide to Kosher Machines":

In a kosher fridge, there's no light, no automatic icemaker, no cold-water dispenser, no warning alarm for spoiled food, no temperature readout. Basically, [Sabbath mode] converts your fancy—and expensive—appliance into the one your grandma bought after World War II.

The Law and Its Spirit

If we have to jump through these mental and physical hoops to follow God's laws, have we really learned the principles involved? During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God draws a clear, physical line for us—do not eat leavening for seven days. We can make gray areas for ourselves—what about baking soda in toothpaste? Or yeast in beer? and more as well—but these are not really gray areas if we adhere to principle. We are taught that leaven symbolizes sin. Leaven makes bread rise just as sin causes us to puff up through our pride. That line is fairly easy to see.

Anything questionable comes back to "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). This will vary a bit for each of us. Just as the Feast of Unleavened Bread makes us concentrate on everything we eat, and it is hoped, makes us concentrate on our daily actions as

well, we must carry that attitude through the year. We have to make our judgments as simple as asking ourselves on the last day of Unleavened Bread, "Can I have a doughnut today? No. Can I have one tomorrow? Yes."

In Matthew 5:20, Christ says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." As we saw from just one area of the law, the Sabbath, the "scribes and Pharisees" have literally come up with a long list of dos and don'ts to keep from sinning. What does it mean that we have to exceed their righteousness?

The rest of Matthew 5 is Christ explaining just how to do that. If we learn the principles behind the law—the spirit of the law—we will know just where the line is. For example, if our "Yes" must be yes and our "No," no, then adding a crude four-letter word in front of or behind our answer is sin. Adultery is not just "cheating," as we like to call it, but includes anything that causes a person to divert his or her love and attention from his/her mate. It is not enough to love our friends; we must also not hate our enemies but do them good.

We have been given the law and the principles behind the law so that none of us can stand before God and say in the pleading voice of Jake Spoon, "I didn't see no line."

—Mike Ford

prophecy watch

(continued from page 14)

- The Soviet Empire fell a couple decades ago.

Additionally, the Quig Dynasty of China (established in AD 1644) gave way to the Republic of China in 1912, which in turn gave way to the Peoples' Republic of China in 1949.

This seismic violence of the Second Axial Period⁸ will culminate in the establishment of

a New World Order. That order will be so abusive of the environment and so destructive of human life that Christ will have to intervene to end it, lest there be none left alive, as Christ Himself pointed out in Matthew 24:22 (see also Revelation 11:18).

When that happens, the Second Axial Period will finally end. The World Tomorrow will have arrived.

—Charles F. Whitaker

ENDNOTES

¹ In point of fact, Jaspers' idea of an Axial Period of history has caught the imagination of a number of later writers. For example, Karen Armstrong, a religious historian of some controversy, has argued that the Age of Enlightenment, starting about AD 1650, represents the start of another axial period. Yves Lambert has written less cogently on the matter.

² As an interesting and pertinent aside, it is noteworthy that European and North American weather patterns changed markedly about AD 1250, at which time the Medieval Warm Period (also called the Medieval Climate Optimum and the Medieval Climate Anomaly) came to an end. Afterward, mean temperatures began to decrease in Europe and North America, throwing both areas into the Little Ice Age (AD 1500-1700). In the Medieval Period, the Vikings built agricultural colonies in Iceland, but by the late 1600s, the climate had cooled so much that these colonies were drawn down, as it had become too cool to grow crops. The Pilgrims, arriving in what is now Massachusetts in late fall 1620, experienced an unusually cold winter associated with the Little Ice Age. Historical climatology, which studies historical changes in climate and their effect on civilization, is a fascinating subject.

³ Often, the Pope's power superseded that of kings. Practically speaking, however, it needs to be said that strong popes, like Innocent III (1161-1216), were more effective in enforcing their role as Vicar than weak ones, as exemplified by the seven successive popes of the Avignon Papacy (1309-1378), all of whom resided in France rather than in Rome. During this period, the French Crown progressively became influential in papal matters. Because this period lasted (just short of) 70 years, it is sometimes termed the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy.

⁴ Finally, it came to the point that one philosopher, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), told us, "God is dead."

⁵ Remember how Herbert Armstrong used to speak about the fall of governments? This was one of the signs of the times he recognized, a sign of the end.

Why does a government fall? Bottom line: It loses its authority in the eyes of the governed.

⁶ For lack of space, this discussion has purposefully sidestepped the areas of science and technology. Yet, even in these areas, we see the fall of ancient authority. Consider the case of Galen of Pergamon, an ancient Greek doctor and anatomist whose works were "required reading" by ancient and Medieval medical students. Galen recognized that the image falling on the retina was inverted, so he mentally "manufactured" a device in the eye that turned the image right-side-up again. Of course, no such device existed (except in Galen's "mind's eye"), yet Galen was the anatomical "authority" for centuries. Hundreds of medical students, dissecting human cadavers over the years, came to "see" this device in the eye, even though it was not there. It was left to Renaissance medical men to debunk Galen's fabrication. The same type of thing happened to the geocentric model of the solar system—a model that was promulgated in the ancient world. The Catholic Church firmly subscribed to it. Only as the authority of the Church "eclipsed" did the heliocentric model advance, especially after the formulations of Nicolaus Copernicus around 1543.

There are many examples of science (so-called) butting heads with the authority of the Catholic Church in the 1500s and following.

⁷ There were other despots after them, more locally, leaders like Pol Pot and Idi Amin.

⁸ As with the first Axial Period, it is hard to designate an actual pivot point in the Second Period, although some might cogently argue that the founding of the American Republic might be one. I prefer the tipping-point metaphor, positing two crucial tipping points in the Second Axial Period: first, God's removal of the 2,520-year punishment on the House of Israel, around AD 1800, and second, His removal of the 2,520-year punishment on Judah and the concomitant founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

Coming: Dry Times in the U.S. and Israel

When God instructed His covenant people, He specified the tremendous blessings that He would give for obedience, as well as the curses that He would bring to pass for disobedience. Because of the agrarian nature of Israelite society, many of the blessings and cursings relate to natural resources—water in particular. While the land promised to Abraham and his descendants was “well-watered everywhere” (Genesis 13:10) and “a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills” (Deuteronomy 8:7), such a blessing of water was conditioned on faithfulness to God. Unfaithfulness, though, would result in national calamity, and drought is a frequent example of what God does both to punish His disobedient children and to bring them back to Him (Leviticus 26:19-20; Deuteronomy 28:23-24; I Kings 8:35; II Chronicles 6:26; Hosea 13:5; Jeremiah 14:1-6).

Today, both the United States and the state of Israel are on the cusp of significant water problems. America’s High Plains Aquifer, for example, is being steadily depleted as a result of drought and mismanagement. Located under portions of Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, the High Plains Aquifer is crucial for irrigation in the central U.S., commonly referred to as the “breadbasket of America.” The grain production from this area not only feeds much of the country, but because the U.S. is the world’s largest wheat exporter, a decrease in grain production here would have reverberations across the globe. Kansas alone produces about 22% of U.S. wheat, and it exports nearly \$2 billion of wheat and feed grain each year. Not surprisingly, roughly 75% of the groundwater pumped in Kansas is used for irrigation.

The High Plains Aquifer is being depleted as a result of extreme drought during the last 15 years, combined with growing populations and allocating more water from the aquifer than can be supported. Part of the increased demand for water is a consequence of the surge in the planting of corn, which requires more water than most other crops. In addition to normal demand, the price of corn has tripled since 2002 because of financial speculation and a federal mandate to produce biofuels such as corn-based ethanol.

In parts of Kansas and Texas, groundwater pumping since the 1950s has brought aquifer levels down by almost 150 feet, and the rate of depletion is increasing rapidly. Already, there are instances of water shortages reducing agricultural output. As wells must be dug deeper and more energy is required to pump from deeper depths, water is becoming more expensive. A 2013 study by researchers at the Kansas State University reports that, at current usage rates, 69% of the aquifer will be depleted within 50 years. Once depleted, the study estimates it would take between 500 and 1,300 years of rains to refill. While there is no *immediate* crisis, the overall trend for the High Plains Aquifer shows a major predicament

down the road, as the rate of depletion continues to outpace the rate of replenishment.

Further west, the Colorado River Basin is suffering from legislated over-allocation of water. Like the High Plains Aquifer, agriculture accounts for more water usage from the Colorado River than any other industry. The Colorado River irrigates approximately 15% of U.S. crops, and it provides water to major cities such as Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, San Diego, and Tucson.

In 1922, the states in the Colorado River Basin—Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and Wyoming—established a compact to govern the allocation of Colorado River water, including the amount that would be available for Mexico. At the time, the amount allocated was far above the amount being used, but it was still an unsustainable amount for the indefinite future. When the compact was made, the flow of the river was above normal, meaning the expected amount for allocation was too high. The compact was based on an estimated annual flow of 21 billion cubic meters per year, while the long-term average is closer to 18 billion cubic meters per year. Though the various parts of the Colorado River Basin are not yet using their full allotment, a 2012 study by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation projects a possible shortage of 3 billion cubic meters by the year 2035.

Nearly halfway around the world, Israel is faced with its own water concerns. The United Nations defines “water poverty” as anything less than 1,000 cubic meters per person per year; Israel comes in with only 265. More than half of Israel’s 1.8 billion cubic meters of natural, renewable water originates outside its borders, a situation that Israel sees as a security risk. The plummeting level of the Dead Sea—which has lost 14 cubic *kilometers* in the past thirty years—is indicative of both how much has been drawn off in recent times, as well as how little the Jordan River and other tributaries are able to replenish it after their own overuse. In particular, the salty Dead Sea water is used for the potash industry, as well as municipal water and irrigation after the salt is removed through desalination.

Israel has plans to increase its desalination capacity on the shores of the Mediterranean and Red Seas so that as much desalinated water can be produced each year as is available from naturally occurring sources. Desalinating is energy-intensive, but seems to be Israel’s only hope for water security for the near future. Incidentally, desalination has also been put forward as a possible remedy to the depletion of the High Plains Aquifer.

Even though God promises to bless the food and water of those who serve Him (Exodus 23:25), the modern descendants of ancient Israel and Judah are choosing to reject God and seek their own solutions.

—David C. Grabbe

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Stooped Woman (Part Two)

Luke 13:10-17 relates the story of Jesus' healing of a deformed woman who had endured a debilitating infirmity for eighteen years. What began as a slightly bent posture developed into a stoop so profound that she could no longer look up. Every year increased her suffering, and after all those years, her situation became extremely severe. In this, we see a parallel with sin. Its effects begin slowly and almost unnoticeably, but with the passing of time, its influence increasingly corrupts the sinner. The longer the sinner continues in his sin, the more his heart hardens.

While teaching in the synagogue, Jesus sees her in the audience and is immediately moved with compassion and grace to heal her (Luke 13:10-12). She does not appeal to Him for help, but He takes it upon Himself to help her, expressing His deep compassion. It is inherent in God's character to take special notice of the needy.

What He saw would certainly not have been attractive, but, unlike men, Christ does not aid just the beautiful but those who truly need His help. Sinners sometimes feel they are too repugnant to God to be saved (Psalm 44:24-26), but Christ's healing of this disfigured woman emphasizes that His ability to help is determined, not by the state of the needy person, but by the limitless power of God. Christ's blood is able to wash away even the greatest of sins!



1. How important is it to follow God's instruction carefully?

Luke 13:10-13.

COMMENT: Luke describes the woman as crippled by "a spirit of infirmity eighteen years" and "bound" (verse 16) by Satan. Without denying the historicity of the event, Luke's placing this miracle at this point in his narrative has obvious symbolic value. Jesus' mission among the Jews was to "loose" them from crippling influences and bring them to uprightness. This miracle is a graphic example of Jesus making a literally crooked woman upright.

Jesus healed her by His words and by touching her. He could have healed her by a word only, and as seen in other miracles, He did not even need to be in the same place, city, or country. However, in laying His hands on her, He shows everyone the value of her obeying God and coming to Him. Had she refused, He could not have touched her. Nothing good comes to those who disregard God's Word (Romans 2:8; II Thessalonians 1:8; I Peter 4:17).

People often pray for the "touch" of God upon their lives, which is not a bad prayer. Yet, if we want God to touch us, we must draw near to Him. We cannot keep our distance from Him in fellowship. We must walk closely with Him at all times if we want His influence upon our lives.

2. Why do those present have such a contrast of attitudes? Luke 13:14, 17.

COMMENT: While the woman and common people respond to the miracle positively—she, with *praise* (she "glorified God"; Luke 13:13), and they, with *pleasure* (they "rejoiced"; verse 17)—the ruler responds with *provocation* (he speaks with "indignation"; verse 14). He appeals to the crowd to reject the miracle. "Indignation" is a strong word, indicating the extreme quality of the ruler's wrath. His anger causes him to condemn Jesus of having committed a great sin in healing the poor woman. His attitude illustrates Jesus' criticism about religious leaders keeping others from entering the Kingdom (Luke 11:52).

Because evil hates good (Proverbs 29:27), it is not surprising that some become angry over good works. It is

Satan's nature to oppose God, and the greater the work and the more it glorifies God, the greater his opposition. Some of the most severe persecutions of Christians have come from other "Christians" rising in indignation. Satan sends his minions to infiltrate and corrupt churches to try to destroy God's people from within (see II Corinthians 11:13-15). But Christ says, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

3. Why do the gospels show so much conflict over the Sabbath? Luke 13:15-17.

COMMENT: This healing is one of seven performed on the Sabbath. Jesus' adversaries closely scrutinized Him on the Sabbath in hopes of trapping Him in a breach of the law. A person's Sabbath conduct was the Jewish religious leaders' litmus test of conformity. Their tests followed their burdensome and humanly reasoned Sabbath rules (I John 5:3). While their rules bound people to unyielding strictures, Christ loosed the woman from Satan's bond.

Their rules against healing on the Sabbath gave them ammunition to attack despite His compassionate healings. Jesus later points out that a person is far more important than an animal, and even His enemies see no wrong in helping distressed animals on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5). The hypocrisy and foolishness of the religious leaders is obvious.

As a result, Jesus' opponents are humiliated, but the crowds are delighted. Having dishonored Christ and done the people great disservice, "All His adversaries were put to shame" (Luke 13:17). Shame will always be the result of sin. If a person does not repent of his opposition to Christ, shame will be his reward.

When sin and its curses are dealt with properly, good people rejoice. Dealing with sin in a lenient and lackadaisical way does not bring true happiness. David writes, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity" (Psalm 32:1-2). When sin is forgiven and overcome, people find true joy.

—Martin G. Collins