

A House Left Desolate

God's Core of Justice

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Please turn to Matthew 23. Up to this point in the context, Jesus had just finished castigating the Pharisees. And He said,

Matthew 23:37-39 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

Matthew 24:1-2 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

It is interesting to see this passage in its parallel in the book of Luke. We are not going to go there today. But, I want to tell you that in Luke, it does not appear together like it does here in Matthew. As a matter of fact, the first part regarding Matthew 23:37-39 appears at the end Luke 13, while the beginning of Matthew 24:1-2 appears at the beginning of Luke 21. They are separated by eight whole chapters in Luke from 13 to 21.

It is thought that Luke's version is a bit more chronological than Matthew's. Matthew has a habit of putting the teachings of Christ together by topics, rather than by chronological time. So that is why when you see the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, you will not find it all together in one place in Luke. You will only find it as a little bit here, and a little bit there.

Most of the sayings in Matthew are found in Luke, but they are spread out all over his gospel account. It is as if Matthew took them, and put them together all in one package, and then presented them as what we now know to be Matthew 5, 6, and 7 as one long sermon—and it could have been—but we do not know that. Most likely, Jesus said these things months or even years apart.

So Matthew has the habit of putting things together by topic. He is trying to teach us something in the manner in which he groups things.

And if this is the case, Matthew is telling us something here by drawing together this bit found in Luke 13, and this other bit found in Luke 21. By putting them back to back, he is trying to tell us something that we need to heed, because we understand that God presented the gospel story in four different ways. They are all true, but they all have different approaches. And in their different approaches, they teach us different things—all of them true too. So they round out the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

And so, God inspired the way that Luke did it just as much as He inspired the way that Matthew did his. So we have to get the understanding out of it that God wants us to have.

Another thing that we should remember in these four views of Christ idea, is that Matthew was a Jew (unlike Luke who was a Gentile) who wrote to other Jews about Jewish things, because he was trying to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, and lay the groundwork for their future conversion—to change their minds, to get them to repent. And so, he approaches things from a Jewish point of view.

That is why he begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ. He had to establish right away that Jesus was qualified as a son of David to be king over Israel. That is why throughout the first several chapters, and actually throughout the whole book, he is constantly referring back to the Old Testament, giving us bits and pieces of prophecy, and teachings from the Old Testament to help us to understand that what the Old Testament was saying was speaking about Jesus Christ. He was the fulfillment of prophecy, and Jews were always interested in fulfilling a prophecy.

And of course, there are other things throughout the book of Matthew that are also typically Jewish; he was writing specifically for Jews to understand the truth of God.

So, here we have Matthew 23 and 24. If we want to understand what Matthew is trying to get at, and trying to teach us, then we have to understand the context.

The context of this statement begins at least as far back as Matthew 21. So, we will need to go back a couple of chapters in order to pick up what it is that Matthew is trying to get us to understand.

Matthew 21 begins with the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem at the beginning of what is termed "holy week." We do not call it that in the churches of God. But, it is the

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first thing He did in the series of events during the last week of His life in Jerusalem, where He mounted a donkey, coming in to the shouts of the people shouting "Hosanna!" They laid palm fronds before Him, and proclaimed Him Messiah.

The Jewish leaders did not like this. The Pharisees told Jesus, "Stop your disciples from doing this!" But He replied, "No, because if I stop them from doing this, the very stones would cry out with "Hosannas." It was another fulfillment of prophecy.

After this, we see Jesus cleansing the temple again, even though He had already done this at the beginning of His ministry (John 2). But here, in Matthew 21, He does it again at the end of His ministry. And of course the Jewish leaders objected to this as well. He also withers the fig tree. And right after that His authority is questioned. "How can you do these things?"

After that, He gives three parables, The Parable of the Two Sons, The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers, and The Parable of the Wedding Feast. Notice that they are all connected things.

But then, we get to chapter 22, which is nearly an entire chapter of challenges by the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes, in which they try to trip Jesus up doctrinally. They give Him hard questions. And He answers them all. And the people end up saying, "No one has spoken like this man has."

And then we have the famous Matthew 23 where Jesus lambasts the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees for their hypocrisy and iniquity.

Then, it is only at this point that we have what is said there at the end of Matthew 23,

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate.

Then He takes His disciples out, and He says, "Look at all this. Not one stone will be left upon another."

What we have seen here is that through Matthew, Jesus—God Himself—is building a legal case. It is as if He is presenting evidence at a trial. And, we have His notes right here.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of the prophecy that we find in Zechariah 9:9. There is also a bit of this in Psalm 118:25-26. This is the first piece of evidence. And what happened? The people proclaimed Him Messiah.

Jesus' mighty works, which He had been doing all along—the healings, the water into wine, the feeding of the 4000, and 5000, casting out demons, the raising of Lazarus—all and more prove that He is indeed the Messiah! And what do they say? "Stop this! This is unseemly!"

Jesus purges the temple in anger, saying, "You've made My Father's house into a den of thieves!" This was also fulfilling prophecy. And what do they do? They get angry, because He just tipped over all their money out onto the floor. He had just let all their animals go. They were making good money on all of that. He was rocking the boat.

He curses the fig tree. And do you not know or remember that the fig tree is also a symbol of Israel? And why does He curse the fig tree? Because it bore no fruit. It had been taking up space in the ground, and it needed to be cut down. That should key us into what is going on here. It is really the first big clue about what the judgment is going to be—why the legal evidence has to be provided in this case. The parables that He gives—The Two Sons, The Wicked Vinedressers, and The Wedding Feast—all have a similar theme of people rejecting God.

Remember the one about the two sons? That is where the one says that he will, but he does not, and the other says he will not, but then does. Well, that is just one attitude among the people. The wicked vinedressers are the ones who came up and killed the son of the owner. And then of course, the wedding feast is where God called all of them to the Feast. One came without the wedding garment, so there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. Yet this teaching does not faze them, because the leadership of the Jews continues to reject, challenge, and question Him all through chapter 22.

And so, when we get to chapter 23, it is essentially God in Christ pronouncing the eight woes on the Jewish leadership. Jesus, like a prosecutor, levels His charges against them—bam, bam, bam, bam.

You can picture it—"Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men! Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widow's houses, and for a pretense make long prayers! Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, but when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you blind guides" and it goes on and on.

This is God passing judgment—the woes. "Look, you guys had all this time. You've had God in the flesh instructing you. And you didn't listen, so these woes are for you." And then He gave them eight of them, which is a significant number. Seven would have been perfection, but eight means beyond perfection. This is beyond completion. They deserved this and more, in other words. They are going to get what is coming to them.

The summary is found in verse 33:

Matthew 23:33 "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"

That sounds like passing sentence to me. He means it. And thus, He says what He says, and remember the remark in verse 37? It is like the summation of His case. He is giving His final summation before the jury. And He begins plaintively. He says, "How I wish I would have been allowed to protect you, guard you, and guide you, but you were unwilling to have it. You didn't want Me. You kicked Me away."

And so He says that their descendants will fall, and

Matthew 23:38 "See! Your house is left to you desolate."

It is a horrible! The first thing they would have thought about, probably, was the temple. That was "the house." That was the nation's house. Here in America, we have the White House. That is the most famous house in America. It is also called the people's house. But in Judea, the house was the house of God—the temple.

So, immediately, they would have thought that He was going to destroy the temple.

What was one of the first things He said to the Jews? It had to do with the temple being destroyed. Now He meant the temple of His body, and they thought He meant the temple proper, the building. That would come. His body would have to go first, and then He would destroy the temple.

They would have also thought that the temple was a symbol of Jerusalem. Their capitol city would be destroyed. And then extrapolating out from there, the whole house of Judah—the whole nation—would be left desolate.

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What He means there is that it would be empty. The temple would be empty, the city would be empty, and then the nation would be empty. It would be deserted, and uninhabited. It would be barren, and bereft—bereft of all their people. It would be a wasteland. That is what He meant when He said, "Your house is left to you desolate."

This is a major pronouncement of judgment. They had blown their chance to accept the Messiah, and so He said, "Because I have come to My own, and they didn't receive Me, this will happen to them."

He had given them plenty of chances. Their nation would fall.

Now, we still have not gotten to that part in Matthew 24, though. Once He made this pronouncement, I could see Him turning in anger, and leaving the temple. That is what it says in verse 1. It does not mention the anger part, but He had just pronounced judgment against them, "You will see My face no more until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord'"—until they accepted Him; until they proclaimed Him Messiah. And they were not going to do that.

So, He turns and goes out, and His disciples go with Him out of the temple precincts. They are headed for the Mount of Olives, most likely, because it says in verse 3, "Now He sat on the Mount of Olives." So, between verse 1 and verse 3 they are on their way from the temple area through the valley and on up onto the Mount of Olives where they often went.

At some point along the way, they all turned back, and looked at the temple and all of the buildings around it. It must have been a magnificent sight. The temple itself was one of the architectural wonders of the world. It was absolutely beautiful with all the white stone, gold, and pillars, and all the other things that were there—the great sea, the altar—just a magnificent place, a magnificent building. It had become proverbial to say all around the Mediterranean that one had not seen anything beautiful unless he had seen the temple at Jerusalem.

There was the Fortress Antonia to the north, and there were many, many associated buildings, colonnades, and stairways, and pools, and arches, and walls, and porches, and various other things that made this place just shine. It was dazzling—stunning. It was a spectacle in itself just to see the temple, so solid, and beautiful, and wondrous to behold, showing the glory of God in that one building.

And what does Jesus say? "Don't you see all these things?"

Now I think that He did not mean just the buildings. I think He had a double meaning to what He was saying. Yes, He meant, "Don't you see these magnificent buildings," because obviously they had eyes and could see. But I believe that He also meant, by hearkening back to what He had just said up there (over the past several chapters), "Don't you see the corruption, and the rejection of God in your countrymen?"

He was saying, "Did you figure out what I have been saying about these people?" To put it yet another way, I think He meant, "Don't you see the wicked heart behind this remarkable façade? Don't you see the hypocrisy and the iniquity behind all those whitewashed tombs (as it were—the Pharisees)?" Then He hits them between the eyes, "Not one stone here shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

I mean, to say that your house will be left to you desolate is one thing, but to say that this place will be scraped clean, and it will just become a barren hilltop [is something else altogether]. And with that, all the people, all the religiosity, all the hypocrisy, all the iniquity—it will all be gone, and swept clean. And this happened between AD 68 and AD 70 when the Romans came, finally having it up to here with the Jewish rebellion, and they just cleaned house, as it were. They took everything. Melted everything. Took the people, killed the people.

Now, as Christians living in the 21st century, far removed from that time by almost by 1940 years, we must be sure not to miss the object lesson for us. God destroyed His chosen people. God destroyed His own house, and left it desolate. He razed and burned the cities, and brutally allowed hundreds of thousands to be killed, and sent the rest into captivity because they rejected His Son, and became corrupt even while maintaining a veneer of religious conviction and a veneer of faithfulness to the covenant.

It is frightening because in the Bible it is said several times, "God is no respecter of persons." Yes, He told Israel to go into the Promised Land, and kill all those terrible Amorites, and Canaanites, and such. But, on the other hand, He did the same thing to His own people. There is no unfairness with God.

So as Christians we have to be careful that we do not fall under a similar condemnation by allowing ourselves to stray from the faith once delivered to the saints, back into the world. If we stray, His judgment will fall.

We must never get caught in the mindset that infects much of the Christian world today, the one that makes God out to be some soft-headed pushover who will put up with anything from us, and accept us, sins and all ["just as I am"]. We know God desires

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mercy, and He is very willing to extend it. However, He has a stiff core of justice in Him that will not bend unless we repent.

Remember a few weeks ago I talked about the concept of equity? God is a great believer in equity. This means that He is truly fair and upright in everything. He is fair in giving good things, and fair in giving bad things if we deserve it. And just because we are who we are, just because we have been called out of this world, does not make us any less responsible. In fact, it makes us much more responsible, and perhaps the rope is a lot shorter for us because we should know better.

Do you remember what Jesus said in Luke 13:3? This was His remark after the Tower of Siloam fell. He tells us that unless you repent, you will likewise perish. Now, this may be kind of shocking—it should not be—but, we normally do not preach sermons like this, but it is a good reminder every once in a while—because God treats His church fairly.

I want you to go to Revelation 2. Obviously, we are going to the section of the letters to the seven churches. But, what I want you to see the threats that Jesus Christ makes against His own church, and specifically, if we understand the letters correctly, to the end-time church.

Notice what He says to the church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen. [They had at some point been much more righteous than were at this later point.] Repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

That sounds an awful lot like "your house will be left desolate." "I will remove your lampstand from its place." That is pretty scary. That is one of the worst ones among the seven churches.

Please go down to verse 16, and the church at Pergamos.

Revelation 2:16 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Meaning, those who had turned away unto Baalism and Nicolaitanism.

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Then, for those who find themselves in bed with Jezebel,

Revelation 2:23 "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

God does not pull punches, not even with His own people.

Revelation 3:19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

God is just not going to be pushed over and allow us to traipse into the Kingdom of God with the sins of this world hanging on us. It is very scary, actually, to think that we could in any way try to fool God.

In Hebrews 10 in the context of the unpardonable sin, this is what happens when His people fail to repent.

Hebrews 10:30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

He is less worried about those people out in the world than He is about you!

Hebrews 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Herbert W. Armstrong, many of you will remember, used to thunder in His sermons, "God does not compromise one inch with sin." God is still that very same way today. And he was talking to all of us, Herbert Armstrong was, and not to the people of this world.

Turn to Hebrews 8 so I can show a principle so that we can see just how God works. This is the principle of the "Divine Pattern."

Hebrews 8:1-6 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true

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tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

Verse 5 is the one I was aiming at. There is a principle in the Bible that says that there is a correspondence between the physical and the spiritual. This is the "divine pattern." Paul quotes this from Exodus 25:40. And, if you will recall, we covered this in my sermons on the tabernacle furnishings.

So, essentially, this principle reveals that the physical or earthly imitates or mimics the spiritual reality in heaven. So, we have in this case, the physical priesthood on earth represents the far greater spiritual priesthood of Jesus Christ, especially the office of high priest. The mercy seat in the tabernacle, and later the temple is based on God's throne in heaven. That is why it is called the mercy seat, because God sits on His throne and He gives out mercy.

The incense altar before the veil of the Holy of Holies, represents the intercession of Christ for us before God in heaven. There is all sorts of things like this where there is a physical/spiritual or an earthly/heavenly correspondence one toward the other.

Now, this principle can be extrapolated to help us understand the correspondence between physical Israel—the nation, and spiritual Israel—the church of God. We know this principle very well. What happened to the children of Israel in the wilderness is a type or figure of our spiritual testing on the way to the Kingdom of God. So what happened to the physical Israelites is a type of what happens to the spiritual Israelites. So then, we are able to take lessons out of those stories and apply them to ourselves. It is very basic. We all know this very well.

What we see, though, if we would look further into this idea is that God will work with us the same way He worked with them. And what this does is that it creates patterns of behavior and character that we can recognize and apply to the church, as well as our individual Christian lives. I am talking about patterns of behavior and character in God Himself. Those are the patterns that are the most important for us to learn, because we see how God acts and reacts to various situations. And that makes them very valuable to us is because we know from Malachi 3:6, and Hebrews 13:8, that God does not

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change. And so if God reacts one way with the children of Israel, if a similar situation came up among His spiritual children, we can have faith that God is going to react the same way. That is actually one of the greatest foundations of our faith that we have. That we can look in this Book, and see how He acted, and know for sure that He is going to act the same way again, because He does not change.

So we have a great faith building principle here. You can call it a major undergirding of our faith in God, because we know how He will act, and react—because He does not change.

That sets up the principle. Turn to I Corinthians 10. Here we will see just how Paul worked this into one of his epistles. And notice how Paul goes back and forth between the church and Israel so that we understand the point that he is making. He wants us to understand this correspondence as we go through the various examples.

I Corinthians 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea.

He is talking to Gentile converts here. Their fathers were not among the children of Israel, but they are spiritual Israelites. Do you see how he is going back and forth already? He is including the Corinthians in spiritual Israel and saying that they were their fathers—the physical Israelites. So, he is showing this correspondence between spiritual Israel and physical Israel already in the first few phrases.

I Corinthians 10:2-4 All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

So we have the Rock back there in the wilderness, and now we have the Rock that we know of as the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Savior—back and forth so that we understand this correlation.

I Corinthians 10:5 [Here is where the lessons start coming,] But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Now let us remember this was the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church was full of sin, especially sexual sins. There were others as well, such as they could not get along very well with each other either. They were going to war against one another. They were going to court against one another. So, Paul is not very gently saying, "Let us examine this correlation here."

I Corinthians 10:6-11 Now these things became our examples, to the intent [God's intent] that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul is saying, "Watch, look at, and consider the pattern of God working with ancient Israel. He is, indeed, working with us in the same manner." And Paul says that if we become idolaters, if we give in to lust, if commit sexual immorality, if we tempt Christ, if we murmur, the same exact punishments are going to come upon us. And this is because God does not change. He worked with them in this certain manner, and so He will work with us in the same way.

We are warned and instructed from what is found in the Old Testament about what God requires, and how He reacts. And so, we have Paul's warning, there, in Hebrews 8:5 to make sure that we follow the pattern that God has revealed to us on the mountain as exactly as we can.

See what happened here? There was a bit of change, you can think of it as a kind of change in the way that mountain is thought of. God gave Moses instructions regarding the tabernacle on the mountain. But, what other instructions did He give at that time too? The Ten Commandments! So, make sure that you follow the pattern that God gave on the mountain.

God has revealed to us the way in which He works, acts, and reacts. And the warning here is to make sure that we are not crushed by the negative side of this pattern, but rather follow the positive side of obedience to God and His ways—His law.

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Let us take some time to see how God worked with Israel. Turn to Deuteronomy 7. Israel is sitting at the edge of the Promised Land. And, God, through Moses, is laying things out for the people of Israel. He tells them,

Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the LOORD your God; the LOORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

He is not buttering them up here. He is telling them truthfully how He feels about them. He loves them. They are special to Him. They are like diamonds and gold to Him. He has great feeling for them.

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 "The LOORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LOORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LOORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LOORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Oh, but if only He would have stopped there, right? It all sounds so wonderful.

Deuteronomy 7:10-11 And He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. [This is also part of Him being a faithful God!] He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments, which I command you today, to observe them.

Again, God pulls no punches here. He is brutally honest with them. He tells them both sides of the coin—how much He loves them, and cares for them, and how faithful He will be to them; yet He flips the coin over and holds nothing back in telling them that He will destroy them if they come to hate Him, which He defines as commandment breaking.

The good, the bad, and the ugly are all spelled out here unambiguously. The Israelites from the beginning knew the terms, and knew the stakes. And what ultimately happened

to them is entirely upon their own heads, because they were warned.

Our next passage is about the golden calf in Exodus 32. And what is so amazing about Exodus 32 is that this happened within the first 40 days of the covenant! Moses was delayed coming down the mountain, and so they got Aaron to make a golden calf. And they declared some feast to the Lord, and did horrible things before Him and it.

God knew, of course, what was going on, and tells Moses,

Exodus 32:7-10 And the LOORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" And the LOORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

They were not two months into the agreement, and they had already taken God's patience into the red. He was this close to sending His lightning down upon them, and just annihilating the whole 2.5 million of them.

Perhaps if Moses arguments had not been quite so persuasive, He would have done it. He was to within a smidgen of doing it. Israel seemed to always tempt God to blast them out of existence.

Even so, even though Moses was able to remind God, and beseech Him on their behalf, saying, "Look, the nations will think badly of You if You do this, and you made a promise to our fathers," and God quieted down, and said that He would not do this, He still allowed the Levites to kill 3000 that day, and sent a plague upon the people. It does not say how many them died of this one. However, let us look at verse 31.

This verse is right after the 3000 killed by the Levites.

Exodus 32:31-32 Then Moses returned to the LOORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."

This is a wonderfully humble prayer of repentance by Moses on behalf of Israel. And now, listen to the Lord's reply, here.

Exodus 32:33 And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

God basically said, "Moses, your life is not enough to cover the sins of this people. I must blot out the ones who actually did the sin." Moses was blameless in this. He was up on the mount with God during this time getting the instructions from God.

Exodus 32:34 "Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin."

Do you know what He meant? All these people are going to die just like I said. "They have tempted Me up to here, so they are all going to die for this." They did not repent, according to the way that they behaved throughout the wilderness wanderings, and they all eventually died. He did not do it all at once. But, they constantly provoked God so that He sent plagues, serpents, and all sorts of things of destruction upon them.

In the episode of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, He opened up the earth and took many more. There were wars, and all kinds of attrition. They all died before any of them could step into the Promised Land—except Caleb, and Joshua (and maybe their families). God is not mocked, it says in Galatians 6:7-8. What we sow, we reap. And that is exactly what happened here. He will repay the sinner to his face.

Now, notice just how far God will go in order to punish sin, and encourage repentance, because that is why He punishes sin so severely. He is trying to get people to change—to repent.

Turn to I Samuel 4 and look at the story found there. The tabernacle, after they had come into the Promised Land had been set up in Shiloh. It was a small town about 20 miles due north of Jerusalem in the territory of Ephraim. Eli was the high priest and judge at the time, and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas were evil men. They would take by force more than their allotted share of the sacrifices, and they also had a habit of fornicating with the women who assembled before the tabernacle door. They were evil,

wicked, carnal men. Eli warned them one time, but really did nothing about it, "Now you boys have been bad." And God was quite upset with Eli for that, because he did not step in. He was the judge. He was also the high priest. He could have stopped it. He had the authority. But, he did not.

And so God sent a man of God to Eli to tell him that He was going to punish his house. He said, "All your male descendants will die in the prime of their lives" (I Samuel 2:22-36). And then, as we know the story, He sent Samuel with the same message. He was going to destroy the house of Eli. Samuel at this time was just a small boy. He did not like the fact that he had to go deliver a message of doom to the high priest and judge, his friend, and living in his house. But he did it anyway, and this confirmed to the entire nation of Israel that Samuel was the prophet that God was working through, even at this young age.

I Samuel 4:1-3 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? [They were clueless.] Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."

Now we see how off-base they were by just reading this passage, because the Ark of the Covenant was not intended at all to be at the head of the army. The Ark of the Covenant was always supposed to be in the tabernacle. It was God's throne. What was it doing out there on the battlefield? Well, they thought that the divine power would save them, and preserve them from their enemies.

I Samuel 4:4-11 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And

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they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before." [There you have it, from the mouths of their enemies.] "Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

And when the news was told to Eli, he fell over backwards, breaking his neck, and died too. (I Samuel 4:12-18)

So, what just happened here? This was another judgment of God. Do you realize that with this action here, that God basically decapitated the nation? He took the high priest and judge; the two sons who were also priests who were in line to be judges over Israel; 30,000 men in the flower of their age; and the Ark of the Covenant.

And unspoken here, Shiloh would be soon destroyed, and there is also some indication that parts of the tabernacle were also destroyed. The tabernacle does come back into the story about I Kings 8, that whatever was left was stored in the temple when it was dedicated.

But do you see how far God is willing to go to make His point about sin? He allowed His own throne on earth to be captured. That is the extent that God is willing to go through to punish sin and to encourage repentance. It is pretty sobering. It is pretty drastic too. But He did it in order for them to change.

And there was a revival under Samuel's leadership, because he was a righteous man, but Samuel's sons ended up being bad too. And then Saul came, and he was not all that great. And finally, things turned around under David. But, in order to keep the nation alive for a while, He had to go do these measures. Otherwise, they would have turned totally away from God like the nations around them.

You might want to jot down to read later Leviticus 26, which is the blessing and cursing chapter, to see that God did not leave them without a warning about the way that He works among His people. He says, "If you don't listen to Me, if you don't keep My

commandments, I'm going to punish you in this manner. And if you still don't reform yourselves, I'm going to punish you seven times more for your sins. And if you still don't get it, I'm going to punish you seven times more again for your sins." It keeps growing, and increasing in severity, until the people are eating their children, and wandering around destitute in the land where there is no one.

God is making a very strong point here about how He wants to be obeyed.

Turn to II Kings 17 because I think it is important that we understand. This passage is about the fall of Israel. And, I want you to hear what happened, and why God decided to take this measure of completely removing Israel from the land.

II Kings 17:5-18 Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LOORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LOORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LOORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LOORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LOORD to anger, for they served idols, of which the LOORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."

Yet the LOORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LOORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they

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followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LOORD had charged them that they should not do like them.

So they left all the commandments of the LOORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LOORD, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the LOORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

And Judah was not very much better. As a matter of fact, God through Ezekiel said that Judah outdid Israel in her sins.

While God's patience is long—He had borne with their disobedience for centuries—since the time of their coming out from Egypt, as we saw in Exodus 32 above, He will reach a boiling point. There comes a time when He says, "I've had enough," and He cleans the slate. This is when He pronounces "woe." And that is what Jesus did in Matthew 23 and 24.

I am afraid that many people in the church of God have taken on this attitude that is shown here in Jeremiah 7, and that is that God will not destroy His church; God will not destroy His people, that they can do whatever they want as long as they remain in the church. It is stupid to believe such things. We have all of this evidence from God's Word that says that God will take very extreme measures against His very own people whom He loves in order to get them to repent—to get a small number of them to repent.

Jeremiah 7:1-2 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LOORD, saying, [notice] "Stand in the gate of the LOORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LOORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LOORD!'"

Who, pray tell, is he speaking to in a New Testament sense? You and me. We have passed through those gates.

Jeremiah 7:3-7 Thus says the LOORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend

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your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to [continue to] dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LOORD, the temple of the LOORD, the temple of the LOORD [the Church of God, the Church of God,] are these.' For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

Is that not interesting? "I gave it to them for ever and ever, but you yourselves can be thrust out of it."

Jeremiah 7:8-10 "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?"

God has redeemed us to be sinful? That is what that means. God has saved us in order for us to be able to practice whatever we feel like doing? People trust in lying words like these.

Jeremiah 7:11-15 "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LOORD. But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these works," says the LOORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren—the whole posterity of Ephraim.

That was the warning to Judah through Jeremiah.

What did God do? He went back to the pattern that was shown in the book of I Samuel,

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and He is telling all of us now that we need to do the same thing. We need to go back to the pattern, and understand how God works. He will not put up with sin.

He is a God of mercy, but as was said before, He has a stiff core of justice too, that will not bend unless we repent. He wants to give mercy. But if we push Him to the wall, woe be to us!

Remember, Jesus said in Luke 12:48, "To whom much is given, from him much is required." Do you know what He said in 12:47? "To those who knew the Master's will, will be given many stripes." He is saying the same thing that I have said in this sermon.

We know better. Of all the people on the earth, only we have been given insight into God's plan, insight into God's way of life, redemption, and grace. We have been given the Holy Spirit, and many gifts to help us along the way toward the Kingdom of God. But if we reject that, knowing full well what God expects of us, we are gonna get it. It is very sobering.

Like that minor battle before the major destruction at Shiloh—remember they lost 4,000 men first—I think in a similar way, God gave us a warning in the destruction of the Worldwide Church of God when it swerved away from the doctrines of Jesus Christ. We thought that was big! But, what is coming is even bigger, like what happened at Shiloh when 30,000 were lost. That is almost 8 times more than the first.

Can we avoid a larger destruction that may lie ahead in the deceptions of the end time? Remember what Paul says that evil men—imposters—are going to get worse, and worse. The Great Tribulation is a time that has never been seen before on the face of the earth. It is going to become very bad. We do not have any clue about how bad it could be, except looking back to the things like what happened in WWII, or like the things that have happened in Rwanda; or any other place around the world where men's depredations against other men have been unmentionable—holocaust-like.

But Jesus tells us that there has been no time like the Great Tribulation, and it is going to be awful—I just do not have words for it.

The faith of the people of God is going to be severely tried. Will we have the faith to survive this? Are we building that faith now by obeying God? Are we faithful to Him?

I hope we are. And we can do it if we continue to reject Satan's traps in this world, if we stay true to the teachings of God's Word, if we continue before God in a humble attitude of repentance. There is hope that we will not fall under this sword. But, we must be

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faithful to Him.

To conclude, turn to Joel 2. This is at the end of his prophecy about the Day of the Lord, and a call to repentance. At the end of this chapter, he gives us some hope:

Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem [two names for the Church of God] there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

Fortunately, God always spares a remnant to carry on His ways. They are often the faithful few who have held on to what is good and right, despite all the sins and destruction going on around them. We have to strive to remain loyal to God, to repent of all our sins, so that when the day of trouble comes, we will be found righteous, and faithfully seeking Him.