

Be Prepared

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I will not be giving as long a sermon this evening as I normally will when my sermon time comes up, but I want to build on something that John [Reid] mentioned in his sermon about people preparing to get here and that is going to be my subject tonight and that is: How prepared are you?

Now I suppose you came to the Feast of Tabernacles without giving any thought whatever to preparation for what you might need when you get here and what you may need after you get here. You picked up and just traveled. You did not think about clothing needs, money needs, or transportation needs. Did you think about your flight plans and the timing that might be needed for that? If you came by automobile did you plan on timing requirements for it? How about maps or some historical attraction that you would like to enjoy while you are here? Maybe there is some musical thing you feel you need to go to while you are in Music City, USA?

You gave no thought whatever about what the weather might be like here. Will it rain? What about the highs, or the low temperatures you might face. You gave no thought about anybody at all that you might see and what you would like to talk about with them after not seeing them, perhaps for a year.

Do you plan ahead taking into consideration what God reveals the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes, and give any thought about making efforts toward accomplishing what you need to do to be in alignment with God's purpose for commanding us to observe His feast?

Now the reality is that we all planned. That is most of us planned extensively to be here if only because we do not want to be burdened with problems while we are here. We try hard to anticipate needs that we attempt to meet before we get here. And those who do this best will probably, generally have the most profitable feast and that pleases God greatly because in this small way we give a measure of support to what He is accomplishing in creating us in His image. You are a planning, anticipating being like God, are you not?

God has shown even in the animal kingdom that many animals prepare for changes in the weather. Some animals migrate, some birds migrate, some butterflies migrate, some animals dig deep in the ground. Bears get themselves nice and fat so that they can hibernate all during the winter. Squirrels try to set things aside that they can eat during the cold weather.

It is in that spirit of preparation that all of my sermons at this Feast of Tabernacles are structured around. Preparations are made in almost every case in life that we anticipate, what we envision lies ahead, and we get ready for taking care of it.

We have to do this because life is lived lineally, that is in straight-line time. We live in the present and move toward the future. We cannot time travel into the future, catalogue what we see needed and then time travel back to the present and take care of the needs we saw so clearly when we went ahead.

And though we cannot literally do such a thing, God in His mercy has given us very good records of what has happened in the past and faithfully recorded them in His Book so that we might learn from others that went before us and thus make preparations to at least partly gain from their experiences.

He has also given us an additional major help. He has already told us in prophecies what is going to happen. Prophecy is history written in advance and in one sense God is a time traveler.

His prophecies are not always easily understood, but we can make an effort to try to sort them out so we know at least a little bit and plan accordingly. Not only that, we serve a God who knows the end from the beginning. How about that? Is He preparing? You better believe that He prepares for everything.

Now the first thing that we are going to do is look back on a project that God certainly was involved in and it is symbolically tied to what we are involved in right now.

I Chronicles 22:1-8 Then David said, “This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel.” So David commanded to gather the aliens who were in the land of Israel; and he appointed masons to cut hewn stones to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails of the doors of the gates, and for the joints; and bronze in abundance beyond measure, and cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and those from Tyre brought much cedar wood to David. Now David said, “Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD must be exceeding magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it.” So David made abundant preparations before his death. Then he called his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, “My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the Lord my God; but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have made great wars;; you shalt not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on earth in My sight.’”

I want us to notice a number of elements that are part of virtually every spiritual preparation that we make. Let us compare ourselves to a record that God gives and we are going to begin in verse 7. The first element there: “David said to Solomon, ‘My son for me it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the Lord my God.’” The first element needed that David had was that David had a desire to please God. That preceded everything else. Until there is a desire to please God, we are not going to build in the right direction and if we do not make plans to prepare to become what He wants us to do and be, then we are not going to move.

Without desire to accomplish, nothing moves because there is no motivation to build. And if there is no motivation to build there is no planning for the future. They go hand in hand. Desire breeds motivation. That desire arose in David because he knew God as a result of the relationship that God began with him when He called David.

David willingly participated in that relationship. This is something that is necessary for us to do. Very necessary. David willingly participated in that relationship. He sought God once God clearly revealed Himself to David and love for God became the fruit of that relationship. And as that love was building, so was the desire to please God—something that would leave a mark of the relationship that was building between God and David.

In verse 1: “Then David said, this is the house of the Lord God and this is the altar of burnt offering.” David had desire and he had vision. And at that the time verse 1 occurs, not a trench had been dug, not a stone had been laid and yet he proclaims, “this is the house of the Lord.” Those who move ahead have a vision of what they are going to accomplish. They do not do things haphazardly; they

do not build houses like Jack does. They have a vision and in that vision, as it forms, then the preparations that need to be made begin to become clearer.

I am beginning to think that you understand that I am talking about a relationship with God. But we see even in something material that is built the same general steps are followed, and so David explains “This is the house of the Lord.” Those who prepare and look ahead and plan for their future do so accordingly.

The apostle Paul formed this word picture into a spiritual metaphor for our benefit. We are eventually probably going to get back to I Chronicles but I want us to go back to II Corinthians 6.

II Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, “I will dwell in them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

We are talking about a temple in I Chronicle 22. It is a physical temple, built to honor God. We are the temple of God's Holy Spirit and the spiritual building of this temple is under way right now. Paul adds something to this that helps to clarify just a little.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

However, in the spiritual metaphor David has been literally replaced by Jesus Christ as the one preparing.

Let us go back to I Chronicles 22 again. In David's case the site had already been chosen even as we have been chosen, and plans for the Temple already drawn. And thus it is almost as though the future was already realized.

In verses 3-4 “David prepared iron in abundance for the nails of the doors of the gates and for the joints, and bronze in abundance beyond measure, and cedar trees in abundance; for the Sidonians and those from Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.” These two verses shows David prepared, not only in abundance, but also in detail—all the way down to the nails that would fasten things together.

That gives you a pretty good idea that they had drawings. As we should say today—blueprints. But they had drawings that they were following and everything was put down on papyrus or paper or whatever it was what they used, and everybody was working together following the same set of plans so that the building was done as perfectly as possible.

Is God planning what He is putting together through Jesus Christ? Is every single part right down to the last nail already planned for? You better believe it! God knows the end from the beginning and God has been building it from before the foundation of the world. And that is why David said: “This is the house of the Lord.” It was formed in his mind already and committed to drawings.

Where did David ever get an idea like that? That is what builders do and they are following the example of God who knows before He even started the end from the beginning. Everything was all plotted out. Now just because He plotted it out does not mean we do not have free moral agency and that we cannot do things wrong. We can. We can make bad mistakes.

I was in construction a good bit of my life, and builders make bad mistakes. Engineers make mistakes once in a while. So, what happens then? You just tear it out and start all over again and you do it right. Do you think that God does not do that when we make mistakes, when we sin, when we fall short of His glory? Once in a while He has to correct things, does He not? We are a building project.

But what I want to get across this evening is: ***God prepares*** . Are you preparing, while you are working with God, the things that you want to accomplish in your part of the building project?

So in verse 5 it says, "Now David said, Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD must be exceeding magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all the countries."

This is the last point that I believe that I am going to draw from this but it is a very important point in David's preparations. The purpose of the building of the Temple was such that it was to be magnificent in order to glorify God.

David wanted it to be of such high standards that anybody that would look at it would eventually think beyond, "Why did they build such a magnificent building?" Well, it was built to bring honor to God, and they put their heart and soul, as we might say, into their part of building the building.

We need to move on from that. The thought that Christ's preparations of us for the Kingdom of God are following the same general line. Preparing us is His responsibility to the Father's purpose. But we must understand that because we seem to be standing right on the doorstep of the Tribulation and the return of Jesus Christ, the frequency and intensity of the trials that we must go through in order to participate in the building of this building are growing harder.

There is a reality that we can learn from Israel and I want us to turn to Deuteronomy the 8th chapter. These are very familiar scriptures but I want us to see what Jesus Christ our Savior did as He was leading the Israelites through the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shalt remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know and which your fathers did not know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

What I want us to thoroughly get and to keep in mind is that the increase of intensity and frequency that is building in our lives is not punishment, but testing the quality of our workmanship. We are the ones that are being worked on and we are participating in our workmanship as we are placed and prepared to fit into the building.

Again, like I said, I spent a lot of my early life in construction work, and there were times that the foreman had to straighten us out because we did not do the job correctly. That is what God is doing. He is helping to straighten out the work that we are doing and it is not intended to be punishment but rather testing.

That is going to be far different from what the nations under Satan's dominion will be experiencing during the Tribulation and most especially during the Day of the Lord. Will some of the correction during these tests be very difficult? Yes, of course. But to me it is more like removing a minor imperfection, like a burr or a scratch or a bit of a twist to a piece to be installed in the completed Temple before it is actually, literally, permanently fitted into place.

The next thing that we are going to do is look briefly at what the nation that we live in is like and thus make plans to move forward. We are beginning to build toward something because we are participating in building this temple under Jesus Christ in what is going to be some very grievous times.

Once again we look into a time in Israel's history that God records for us and I want us to think about this because I think that much of it pertains to what life is like or building toward in the United States of America now.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We are rapidly building in that direction here in the United States of America. This last verse in this bloody and tumultuous book appears in one other place, actually it is two. I found another one. Two places in this book but the one that I am going to draw on besides this one here is in Judges 17:6, and there it appears following the recording of a blatant example of idolatry.

Here in chapter 21 and verse 25 it follows a bloody civil war in which the men of the tribe of Benjamin were virtually wiped out by that war. I am going to give you some figures that are really hair raising.

The blatant example of idolatry, the one in chapter 17, though seemingly unique in the sense that the man began his own religion, is in principle not far different from the huge number of Americans who have backed away from every version of the Christian religion that has been the spiritual backbone of this nation since its founding.

That backing away has been done through what is politely called secularism or humanism, and those who have backed away have not joined a competing sect with all the forms of a denominational group as with pastors and choirs and spiritual services, but they have essentially appointed themselves as the setter and arbiter of moral standards, complaining that God's standards are too restrictive for their permissive ideas. Those people have become idolaters just like the Levites. They have become the setters of moral standards. Each of these people has in a sense formed his own religion.

Now the verse in this context here in Judges 21 shows the tribe of Benjamin was down to only 600 men when the other tribes of Israel relented in their attacks against Benjamin. The attacks were in

retaliation for the despicable sexual acts of the men of Gibeah there in Benjamin and what they did to the concubine of a Levite. You can read through it later but 65,000 Israelites died in three battles between the eleven tribes on one side and Benjamin on the other.

Let me give you something that you might not realize. In three days of battle in Gettysburg Pennsylvania, during the American Civil War, the Confederates and the Yankees together had a total of 51,000 killed and wounded. Did you hear what I said? *Killed and wounded* added up to 51,000.

The Israelites in this civil war between the eleven and the one, 65,000 **dead** in three days of fighting! And, brethren, they were not fighting with cannons and rifles and bullets—they were fighting with swords, bows and arrows or whatever, hand-to-hand combat. That is how bad it was when that went on. The eleven tribes finally decided to call it off because they were afraid they were going to wipe Benjamin out—which they would probably would have.

That sounds shockingly messy until one compares those figures against this nation's disastrous experience in killing over 50 million absolutely defenseless babies by means of abortion to satisfy a mere lifestyle preference performed for convenience' sake.

It is no wonder that Ezekiel said that to make a chain, you know to link people together as slaves, because the land is filled with bloody crimes. This is the land that we live in now. And not only that, it all takes place in the surgically clean atmosphere of an operating room and is done by a hired killer, the abortionist. Just like it is done in the movies so that we Americans do not have the blood directly on our own hands, as this tiny innocent baby's life is taken because the adults really do not want to be responsible to have the blood on their own hands.

How incredibly, callously hard-hearted we are and yet I am sure many modern Americans would look down upon what the Israelites did in this warfare described thinking these people are really savage. Consider though that the Israelites at least gave their enemies a fighting chance because they had swords and knives and bows and arrows to fight back.

It says that the root cause of all of this bloodshed was in those days there was no king in Israel and that every man did that what was right in his own eyes. The king is mentioned in order to help us understand that there was no highly respected central leadership that people could look to provide righteous direction.

I believe that this nation has not had a highly-respected leader since Ronald Reagan and the one that we have right now has the lowest approval rating I have ever seen printed for president of this nation. And this nation is in my opinion barely limping along with its people badly divided along many lines.

I have been giving a series of commentaries on the Nones, as they are called, because when questioned as to their religious affiliation they reply: "none." But the reality is that they do indeed have a religious affiliation and Jesus and Paul show us who is their king and god. Let us check in there in II Corinthians 4. You all know who it is.

II Corinthians 4:3 -4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Now what Paul stated in II Corinthians and Jesus also adds in John 8:38-44 lays a clear and a solid foundation for a major reason why and what we must prepare for in the coming months leading to Christ's return. The intensity of what we see even now will certainly rise. The Nones illustrate what has been building quietly, seemingly out of sight for at least the past 70 or 80 years but it is now out in the open.

One out of five Americans, that is over 60 million people or more of our population, has drifted from all contact with God and they have established their own religion. As a result they are also drifting from godly standards, and since they have drifted from His standards, they have in principle appointed themselves as the standard.

Since they no longer feel compelled that they must answer to God, they feel justified to do what is right in their own eyes, and I guarantee you brethren it is going to get worse. There is no indication whatever on the horizon that there is going to be a change in the conduct of American citizens.

Romans 3:10-18 As it is written [Listen to this description. Here is the United States of America]: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none [I want you to note how many times the word none appears here] who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they are together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

A vivid picture of today's America. More and more of the population will do whatever acts they desire when the circumstance seems necessary to them to continue to maintain the standard of life they believe they need. That is why there is so much abortion. Huge numbers of people in the United States have decided that it is perfectly right to put a baby to death because they are uncomfortable with the baby. And whose standard are they following? Well, it is their own.

Surveys have shown that these Nones are frequently well educated. They are not educated though in what really matters. In addition they hold high and many middle management positions in government, corporate establishments, and education. And they are looked upon as leaders in America. It is this mass of people at the forefront of the wave of abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage, feminism, same sex marriage, shacking up, the movement to open the doors to massive immigration, persecution of Christianity, political correctness, political liberality, black on black crime, the destruction of black family lives. They lead the way towards unjust court decisions by bringing lawsuits against prayers used in town council meetings, minimizing and even trashing the Constitution, attempting to block any display of the Ten Commandments, and on and on.

The leaders of this nation are deciding whether to attack the Syrian government and thus proving in their twisted thinking that they believe that killing people by means of rockets is somehow more righteous than killing them using gas.

All the while, we dropped the only two atomic weapons in the history of modern warfare killing around a quarter of a million people in one fell swoop—twice! The "land of the free and home of the brave" did that. "But it was necessary." [People say.] See, in our twisted thinking, when you break it down, it is the same basic reason a woman gets an abortion. They convince themselves that it is

necessary. And they feel justified in doing it but then later on the psychological effects are not so good.

In addition to that block of 60 million or so people, there is a much larger block of the population who though they retain some contact with a church really do not care all that much about what is right and good in God's sight and who will do nothing to straighten things out within the nation.

What I want us to understand is that almost everything that we witnessed in this display of the degeneration of life in the United States is an expression of the hatred of God. If they loved Him they would not do anything like this.

Now the table is being set for even more intense persecution against Christianity and it will explode into more bitter confrontations as these things occur. Now we are going to finish in II Timothy 2.

II Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands [regardless of what is happening in this nation, in Canada, in Britain, in South Africa, in Zambia, in China, it matters not.], having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His." . . .

You have read it, have you not, in Ezekiel 9 where God tells the angel to go out and mark all those people on the forehead whose are His? God knows how are His. And I am sure that every one of us that are here wants to stand in that position that God knows us. And we want His mark, His seal on us.

II Timothy 2:19-21 "The Lord knows those who are His," and "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [this is what we are interested in, cleansing ourselves from the latter,], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful [a useful part of the building that Christ is building] for the Master, prepared for every good work.

And thus the question as we close this opening sermon of the 2013 Feast of Tabernacles is: Are you preparing spiritually by intensifying the steadfast practice of God's way of life in *your* life as we head towards the return of Jesus Christ?