


Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a silver flip phone. The phone is open, and the screen displays a text message. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white. The phone's keypad and navigation pad are visible at the bottom.

Tonight?
same place, same
time.

FAITHLESS

may/june 2009

volume 18, number 3

3

PERSONAL from *John W. Ritenbaugh*
The Seventh Commandment

7

READY ANSWER
Taking Care with the Tares
BY TED BOWLING

10

PROPHECY WATCH
To Watch and Keep
BY CHARLES WHITAKER

15

WORLDWATCH
Obama and the Muslim World
BY DAVID C. GRABBE

16

BIBLE STUDY
The Miracles of Jesus Christ:
Raising a Widow's Son
BY MARTIN G. COLLINS

cover

Sexual unfaithfulness between marriage partners is only the tip of the iceberg covered by the seventh commandment, which in principle proscribes any kind of sexual perversion. In our society, sexual sins have become so pervasive that even the institution of marriage is under serious assault. With the world full of sexual diseases, broken homes, and cultural chaos, we are living under the curse that falls as a result of breaking this commandment.

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The Seventh Commandment

In the previous article, we saw a small wedge of the statistical picture of how greatly the breaking of just one commandment—the sixth—impacts mankind. The conclusion is clear: Mankind must bear the weighty burden of the fruit of the major problems he brings upon himself. This article will reveal nothing statistically similar regarding the breaking of the seventh commandment, as there is absolutely no way that figures can be compiled showing how many times adultery is committed. This sin is done in secret and rarely creates major headlines.

However, the overall statistical picture is far worse because adultery touches only one aspect of this grave social sin. Within the spirit of the seventh commandment are numerous other sexual sins, such as pornography, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, as well as all the creepy, lecherous, psychologically destructive sexual attacks against weak and innocent children. Pedophilia is apparently far more common than we would like to believe.

The numbers of these sins added to adultery must be enormous beyond comprehension. Is there any way to compile figures telling how many divorces occur at least partly as a result of these sexual deviancies? We cannot delve into them deeply because, even with the common act of adultery, we have no way to number accurately how many of them produced the bitter fruit of

divorce. We must be content with knowing that we are looking into a seething snake pit of evil deliberately promoted by the twisted mind of Satan.

State of Calamity

Year after year, at least in the United States, sex and marriage are discussed in public print with undiminished, God-ignoring confusion and increased pessimism. Calamity always attracts attention, and in the United States, marriage is in a state of calamity. This calamitous state is so consistent that it is now accepted as normal. Serious cultural observers are now saying that we may be witnessing the end of marriage as it has been practiced in Western cultures, that is, as the foundation of our societies.

The rush to “live together,” the continuing march of feminism, and the push to legalize homosexual and lesbian unions are fueling these forecasts. In the late 1960s, the divorce rate was under 40%. By 1975, it had climbed to almost 50%, and in 1978, it was 51%. By 1988, it was back down to 49.5%, and it has held steady between 50 and 51% since then. However, San Mateo County in California had reached a 70% divorce rate by 1988. Nevada’s divorce requirements are so liberal that its rate is typically much higher than the national average.

However, today’s approximately 50% divorce rate is skewed by the fact that so many couples are

personal *The Seventh Commandment*

simply living together without any legal transaction taking place, so no public records are made of when they move in together or when they split. Yet, so large is the number that 40% of all births in America are outside of wedlock!

It used to be that the average divorcing couple was married for 7 years before splitting, but that number has continued to fall to as low as 4 years.

We live in a time when we are bombarded with information claiming that sexual compatibility is the all-important factor in marriage. But, as general public knowledge of sex has increased, and as mobility and ever-increasing numbers of women comprise the work force, so have opportunities to be promiscuous and experiment with many partners. Moreover, so have the curses of broken homes and an unstable society increased. Sexual incompatibility is not the major cause. It does cause divorce, but it is only one facet of a far deeper and broader national sin that America shares with the Israelitish nations of north-western Europe, Canada, and Australia. This national sin is shown many times in Scripture.

Israel's National Sin

Notice, as these verses unfold, a serious character flaw as compared to other nations.

Amos 1:3: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron.”

Amos 1:6: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom.”

Amos 1:9: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.”

Amos 1:11: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever.”

Amos 1:13: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory.”

Amos 2:1: Thus says the LORD: “For three trans-

gressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.”

Amos 2:4: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandment. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed.”

Amos 2:6-7: Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name.”

Notice first that the Gentile nations are guilty of the same basic sins—that of gross and vicious cruelties in warfare. In sharp contrast, God charges Judah with commandment-breaking, specifically lying. Israel's sins largely involve national and personal deceitful faithlessness in social, economic, and cultural circumstances. This is not to say that other nations do not have some of these same characteristics or that Israelites have no vicious streak in them. However, Israelites have the Word of God and most especially God's commandments more generally available to them and thus have less excuse, so God holds them more accountable than any other people (Amos 3:2). To whom much is given much more is required (Luke 12:47-48). Israelites should know better.

The book of Hosea's dominant theme is Israel's faithlessness: “When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: ‘Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and the children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD’” (Hosea 1:2). Hosea is especially creative in his use of metaphors to describe the relationship between Israel and God, but the two dominant ones are suggested in this verse. The primary one is Israel as a faithless wife, and the secondary one is Israel as a rebellious child (rebellious against God's law). Harlotry indicates sexual wantonness. If the person committing harlotry were married, it would suggest extreme faithlessness to his or her vows of marriage. In a spiritual covenant relationship with God, however, it indicates idolatry.

In tandem with the metaphors regarding Israel, the prophet uses two main family-relationship themes. In the first, God is shown as a faithful Husband, and in the second, as a loving and longsuffering Parent. In each case, Israel is faithless in carrying out responsibilities within the relationship, which God calls adultery and harlotry. God's judgment was occasioned by Israel departing from duties agreed to in a contract, the Covenant. Note Hosea 2:2-7:

Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink." Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now."

Israel is seen as faithless wife and irresponsible mother—so faithless that she chases after her lovers! A spirit of harlotry, an attitude of faithlessness, was created in the whole nation, causing many detrimental ramifications and results. In other words, the deceit and its resulting infidelity are not confined to the God/Israel covenant marriage but affects personal relationships within families and the community. It even has a negative effect on the keeping of contracts in business and upholding promises of quality workmanship.

The Fruit of Faithlessness

Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed." (Hosea 4:1-2)

Hosea mentions a few of these ramifications. The major truth lost is that regarding God's Word and its importance to family, community life, and Israel's relationship with Him. However, it extends beyond that: Soon, there is no reliable basis for business or its relationships; there are no solid, unwavering moral standards; in general, people are consistently untrustworthy in all aspects of life; and dependability in anything is hard to find.

"No mercy" is the next valuable quality lost. In this context, *mercy* has the connotation of "steadfast love," rather than a singular act of kindness. Thus, as a people we blow hot and cold. When we are hot, we are hot, but we cannot seem to sustain it because our eye begins to rove onto some new interest that excites us. Dissatisfaction is an ever-present reality, and impatience simmers right beneath the surface.

Hosea adds that there is "no . . . knowledge of God." This knowledge contains two elements. The first is the general knowledge about God, that is, of His existence, Word, and way. As important as that is, the second—the

acknowledgement of God—is even more vital in terms of affecting relationships. This indicates commitment, a robust loyalty to a way of life in which He is the focus. Jesus says in John 17:3 that eternal life is to know God, and the context seems to demand this idea of acknowledging Him.

The apostle Paul confirms in Romans 10:2 that Israel had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. The Israelites had a general knowledge about God, but they did not seek Him nor know Him. At best, this suggests a very distant relationship.

The Hebrew word *zanah*, translated as "harlotry," is not the word used to indicate a single act of adultery. Instead, it means "sexually wanton," meaning something done repeatedly as a way of life. Ultimately, it is understood spiritually to signify idolatry. Hosea 4:11-12 defines it in this manner: "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from the wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God."

By linking *zanah*, harlotry, with wine and new wine, God is showing that this spiritual harlotry has addictive power. "Enslave the heart" illustrates that this faithless spirit bends the heart to obey its desires, and in the process, it destroys discretion and understanding. Recall that Psalm 119 repeatedly states that meditating on God's Word and obeying His commandments give understanding, indicating a major way in which we come to know God. However, if a person practices faithlessness, loss of understanding results. No constructive wisdom ever results from breaking any of God's commands.

Hosea 7:1-4 adds evidence to this description:

When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have committed fraud; a thief comes in; a band of robbers takes spoil outside. They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face. They make a king glad with their wickedness, and princes with their lies. They are all adulterers, like an oven heated by a baker—he ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened.

God charges that all categories of sinners are adulterers! He uses the normal word for adultery. He then provides insight into one way the spirit of harlotry entered into Israelite culture: "They do not consider in their hearts"! Is this not also true today? Despite all the evidence of how destructive sexual sins are, people will not change! Within marriage and society at large, we see syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, chlamydia, AIDS, broken homes, rebellious children, and children being raised by single parents. How many children are not even sure who their parents are? These sins are tearing the nation apart!

The Hebrew word underlying the word "king" in Hosea 7:3 is sometimes used to indicate leaders in business, education, and government, not just the head of the gov-

personal *The Seventh Commandment*

ernment. God is pointing an accusing finger at those whose own evil ends are to profit from this cesspool of faithlessness—to make money and gain power. This list can include doctors, lawyers, hospitals, pharmaceutical houses, pornographers, booksellers, moviemakers, etc.

A Faithless People

“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her. Though they say, ‘As the LORD lives,’ surely they swear falsely.” O LORD, are not Your eyes on the truth: you have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return. (Jeremiah 5:1-3)

Prophet after prophet records similar statements. Israel has trouble being faithful to anything: God, mate, country, employer, and contracts. Our national mind seems to be like quicksilver. As a people, Israelites are always trying to get the best for the self, willing to bend in any direction to obtain their pleasure. They really work at it. When we think of Jacob’s deceitful ways in his early life, we can almost believe that this characteristic is in the genes, though it is not. It is a characteristic absorbed by yielding to a culture saturated with the spirit of harlotry.

Syndicated columnist Sidney J. Harris once wrote:

Most virtues exist on a sliding scale, all the way from excellence to ineptitude, and most of us are tolerably somewhere in the middle, without too much damage to ourselves or others. But there is one virtue that is all or nothing: and that is reliability. You are either reliable or you are not; and, if not, it doesn’t much matter how nearly or how often you are reliable.

If I were an employer of any sort, I would be willing to put up with many kinds of personal or professional deficiencies, but never with this. A person who is not dependable is bound to fail you (and himself as well) at precisely the wrong time.

It reminds me of the debonair Viennese gentleman who, when asked, “Have you been faithful to your wife?” replied, “Frequently.” It is plain that a man who is frequently faithful is not faithful at all; he might as well never be.

Reliability is one of the hardest character traits to identify by testing or “screening” or anything except personal acquaintance. Some people are “rocks” by nature or training, while others are *papier-mâché* painted to resemble rocks, who crumble when sudden pressure is applied by circumstances.

If you are married to someone who cannot be

depended upon to pull his or her own weight, it hardly matters what other admirable traits your mate may possess, because you can never know when or where you will be let down. It is the same as being married to an alcoholic, who is only “there” part of the time—and usually not when most needed.

Consistency is what is required in the people we associate with: the confident knowledge of what we can rightfully expect of them, barring sudden illness or catastrophe beyond anyone’s control. Otherwise, there is no real relationship, but only a shifting accommodation to the winds of caprice and self-indulgence.

It is easy to feel affection for another; what is harder is to translate this feeling into acts, daily acts, that demonstrate steadfastness of purpose in a domestic routine that may not be as dramatic as some heroic rescue, but that keeps the craft afloat no matter which way the wind happens to blow. The deepest and most important virtues are often the dullest ones; they win no medals, and get no glory; but they are the glue that binds society together and makes it work, now and always.

Men seem to be particularly irresponsible and ambivalent regarding sex, but with the unleashing of the feminist movement, women are rapidly catching up. In the July 28, 1978, *Woman’s Day* magazine, an article revealed that 50-70% of all American men commit adultery at least once, while the Hite Report result was 66%. Yet, 67% of all husbands say that adultery is *always* wrong! The dichotomy between belief and practice is obvious. Clearly, they are confused: They feel it is wrong, but a large percentage is willing to do it if the opportunity presents itself!

This illustrates what God meant through the prophets. No wonder God calls us a faithless people! We are a self-seeking, opportunistic people who are willing to “bend” on principle, standard, tradition, or belief if we can see advantage for ourselves. Even if we can see that the “advantage” is at best short-term—and may even be very risky—we almost always seem to rise to the “bait.”

Back to Sex Sins

A *McCall’s* magazine article, “What Men Want From Women,” reports:

[Men] say they value the same things women do: loyalty, commitment, caring. At the same time, many insist they “need” the novelty and excitement of pursuing other women. Is there any way to make sense of these mixed messages and find new understanding between the sexes? (August 1981, p. 26)

As we saw, God says this “need” is being driven by a
(continued on page 12)

ready answer

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

Taking Care with the Tares

“The kingdom of
heaven is like a man
who sowed good seed
in his field; but while
men slept, his enemy
came and sowed tares
among his wheat and
went his way.”

—*Matthew 13:24-25*

In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, Jesus Christ gives His disciples an example of how to treat tares within the church. His parable contains important instruction applicable to our Christian lives today, growing together with the brethren of God’s church toward His purpose for us. In addition to the parable, Jesus Christ’s own life sets an example, showing us how to act toward tares. Both the parable and Christ’s life provide instruction that is defined by love, patience, wisdom, and diligence.

Jesus relates the parable in Matthew 13:24-30:

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

Later in the chapter, He explains the parable’s symbolism:

He answered and said to them, “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and

the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.” (Verses 37-40)

As Jesus says, the field is the world, in which He has established His church. The church is not of the world (John 17:14), but within it, just as a farmer may designate a specific plot of his land, separated from the rest, for a particular, unique crop.

However, Satan the Devil has also been at work, sowing his own seeds within the field. Using fragments of God’s truth, Satan has founded false religions and counterfeit Christianities that preach distortions of truth. Like the tare that grows masquerading as the wheat, members of these false churches may appear good, pious, and very generous. Worldly Christians may possess a seemingly good heart and act with fine intentions, but when the top layer of goodness is peeled back exposing their core, they reveal deceived hearts lacking understanding or true love.

Further, the world’s churches are in constant rebellion against God, refusing to keep His commandments and rejecting the absolute authority of His words. The world’s ministers even pervert the Word of God with infusions from such pagan religions as Buddhism, Hinduism, or other mystic or New Age faiths. Through syncretism and false doctrine, these churches accomplish the will of their evil father: deceit and destruction (see John 8:44).

Satan’s malignant influence is not felt only within the world. He has planted his own seeds, sowing false brethren and even ministers within the very church of God. However, as Christ reveals in this parable, God permits this intrusion of well-camouflaged counterfeits. Tares in God’s church will appear religious and devout, with no obvious warning-flag identifying them to unsuspecting church members.

Wheat v. Tares

God has seeded His church with vessels for honor—the wheat—while Satan has sprinkled in his own vessels for dishonor—the tares (see II Timothy 2:20-21). Jesus does not use the imagery of wheat and tares haphazardly to relate this important lesson. Instead, the physical properties of these two different plants reveal a depth to the parable’s symbolism that emphasizes how different in quality the wheat is from the tare, and how hard it is to tell them apart.

Wheat, which Christ uses to symbolize His true children, has always been a vital, life-giving substance, possessing both nutrition and healing properties. During most of human history, it has most commonly been used for bread, and it has long been called “the staff of life.” Herbert W. Armstrong even proclaimed, “The grain of wheat God causes to grow out of the ground is a perfect food.” The matchless quality of wheat serves as a symbol revealing how highly God regards His children.

In contrast, Christ uses the tare to symbolize counterfeits within His church. Tares are weeds diametrically

opposite to wheat in all their properties other than appearance. Even the botanical name of the weed, darnel, conveys its detrimental quality. *Darnel* comes from the French language, meaning “drunkenness,” having earned this name as a result of its intoxicating effect when consumed.

When darnel is ground into flour, baked in bread, and consumed while hot, the eater may experience symptoms similar to drunkenness, including trembling, followed by an inability to walk, hindered speech, and vomiting. In addition, darnel is commonly infected by the ergot fungus, which can cause hallucinations when consumed in small doses, but in large doses can do heavy damage to the central nervous system. The Greeks and Romans supposed the darnel and the fungus to cause blindness. The Romans even crafted an insult from darnel, *lolio vicitare*, “to live on darnel,” a phrase applied to a dim-sighted or shortsighted person.

The high value and health properties of wheat are opposite to the common and harmful properties of darnel, yet in Christ’s parable the owner of the field allows both to grow together. One reason is because wheat and darnel are exact in their appearances during growth. Both plants are lush green and can be distinguished only when they mature and produce fruit: Wheat berries are large and golden, while darnel berries are small and gray. Thus, if the farmer attempted to uproot the tares before maturity, he would wreak havoc on his wheat. Today, modern harvesting equipment easily sifts between the two because of their different sizes.

Spiritual wheat and tares grow alike within God’s church, identical in appearance, and to attempt to uproot the tares would result in uprooting some of the wheat as well. Just as the qualitative difference between the mature fruit of wheat and darnel is different, only by the fruit may the brethren be known (Matthew 7:15-20). Even after maturity, God Himself—and no one else—will have the tares removed and will destroy them in the furnace (Matthew 13:30).

The Warnings of the Parable

Christ’s parable contains at least two warnings that are important to how we deal with possible tares within God’s church. First, we need to be aware that tares—false members—are a reality. Counterfeit members *do* exist and are at work within God’s church; Christ Himself says so. The fact that they are present requires that we be on our guard, not allowing ourselves to be led astray. For example, do we measure our actions by the actions of others? What if that person by whom we measure ourselves is a tare? Instead, Jesus Christ is the one and only perfect model, as shown by Scripture (Romans 8:29). Paul says that if we measure ourselves among ourselves, we are not wise (II Corinthians 10:12)

In addition to counterfeit brethren, tares could also be false ministers, even false apostles (see II Corinthians 11:13-15). False church leaders, teaching false doctrines

that spread spiritual havoc, are a dire threat. Tares in the church spread destructive attitudes and ideas that can influence true brethren toward negativity, suspicion, cynicism, sarcasm, and doubt. Christ warns us of such deception in Matthew 24:24, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” Knowing that tares are in the church, we must be vigilant, clinging to the truth lest we be deceived.

Second, Christ’s parable warns us not only to take great care to avoid the false instruction and attitudes of the tares, but also to be mindful about how we treat young, immature “wheat” that we may mistake for tares. We must be slow to judge, remembering that church members are not all equally converted. Though they may be pure in heart, even the wheat may not always act properly. Likewise, some brethren may always act properly, may always seem to do the right thing, but their hearts remain unconverted or even corrupted.

God knows who belongs to Him and who does not (II Timothy 2:19), and He allows both to grow together. The interaction between wheat and tares, the true and the false, provides a constant test: How patient are we in our relationships with others? James sets the standard in James 5:9, exhorting, “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”

In order to endure to the end, we must develop the patient attitude described by James. We must grow to be thick-skinned, not easily offended in our dealings with young wheat or tares, never taking insults or affronts personally. When we deal with those coming to conversion, we all must be long-suffering, patient, having a great deal of love for one another. We must never contend with brethren, as the Scripture frequently admonishes (I Corinthians 3:3, Philippians 2:3).

Some may display their faults externally, while others hide their sins (I Timothy 5:24). It is easy to say about the former, “He is not living as he should,” while missing a corrupt heart in the latter. However, God works with His children on an individual basis; He works with us one-on-one. Each of us has his unique trials and is experiencing tests unlike others, whether it be the loss of health, a job, a home, or a friend. Through His personal relationship with each of us, God is refining us into the mature wheat that He wants to reap at His harvest.

The Example of Jesus Christ

Besides providing the instruction in His parable, Jesus Christ provides the perfect example of how to treat and interact with a tare. He had to deal with a tare close to Him throughout His ministry. In John 6:70-71, John writes, “Jesus answered [His disciples], ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’ He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.”

How Christ dealt with Judas sets the example for how

we ought to deal with recognized tares. Jesus knew Judas; He knew his character and heart after traveling with him throughout His three-and-a-half years of ministry. Yet, Judas was allowed responsibilities and given duties just as the other disciples were. Judas worked and prayed, appearing just as religious as the other eleven—but Judas was only like them in appearance, not in character.

However, Jesus never revealed to the other disciples that Judas was a tare. Even in John 6, specifically identifying who He meant, Christ only mentions the presence of a tare, forcing the disciples to look inward and evaluate their own hearts. It is clear the disciples were unaware of Judas’ corrupt character even after spending more than three years with him. At the final Passover, the disciples had no idea who would betray the Master. Each of them began to say to Christ, “Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:22). If He had revealed Judas’ nature to them, or had the disciples been wise enough to guess, they would have had no need to ask this question.

Instead of singling out Judas and treating Him poorly, Jesus showed love and kindness to him, His own disciple who would betray Him and cause His death. Christ showed His enemy courtesy, respect, and humility, and even in a position of servitude, washed Judas’ feet. He never revealed the tare among them, but instead allowed Judas to expose his own character through his actions. Perhaps Jesus knew that if He revealed Judas’ character, He would risk uprooting some of His other disciples. Loving the eleven so strongly, Christ would not risk losing one of them on account of Judas.

Our Responsibility

As we mature as Christians, it is our responsibility to judge. We are training to be priests and kings in the coming Kingdom of God, and in both of these positions, judging plays a major role. In preparation, we are constantly forced to evaluate and recognize sin in order to avoid it, though with care not to presume to know the heart of whoever sins. In addition, we must actively judge our own lives, recognizing the sin within ourselves. But when we recognize sin in others, and even correctly identify a tare in the church, we must still show love and kindness.

God has not given us the responsibility of removing the tares; He has reserved that job solely for Himself. In fact, from Jesus’ example, He has not even given us the job of exposing who they may be. God, in wisdom infinitely greater than our own, will separate the wheat from the tares. Besides, wheat cannot reap even itself, much less the tare—only the reaper can reap.

As wheat, our responsibility is to grow in kindness, patience, and godly love, producing healthy and good fruit. This requires an attitude of meek, humble, and godly service. Most importantly, we have the responsibility to grow into the perfect image of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

—Ted Bowling

TO WATCH AND KEEP

During his ministry, Herbert Armstrong stressed quite a few times that a third of God's Word is the word of prophecy. The question naturally arises, then, what is its purpose? How does God want us to use prophecy? What does He expect us to gain from it?

Before going any further, we should note that this article will focus primarily on God's prophecies for His church, and will not consider the use of Bible prophecies directed to the people of the world outside of the church. One of the purposes of prophecies to the world (Greek *kosmos*) appears repeatedly in the book of Ezekiel. For instance, the prophecy found in Ezekiel 6 concerns God's judgment on the idolatry of Israel. However, in verse 7, God says, "The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

This formula, expressing the ability of prophecy to reveal God at work in the world, is repeated in different formats throughout the word of prophecy. When prophecy is dramatically fulfilled, the wicked, who today deny that God is and that He is working, will understand that He is very much working.

However, God's Word is written for us, those called into His church. We already believe, and we know who God is. We also know that He is working in and through us, as well as to bring about His purpose on earth. The question thus becomes, "What is God seeking through prophecy from us who believe Him?"

WARNING, PROMISE, COMMAND

Consider what is written in Revelation 16:13-14:

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

Do we fully understand *any* part of Revelation 16? Do we really know the timing of this passage? Do we grasp how it will all work out? Has *anyone* in history ever really understood this particular prophecy? This is just one example; tens of other examples could have been cited.

We do receive some insight as we analyze this prophecy in context, and we can figure out some answers. We get the general idea, the essence of the prophecy. Yet, after reading Revelation 16, we are left to wonder, "How is it all going to work out? How will events move to turn out this way?"

Because this is God's Word, we believe it will work out, but we do not know all the answers.

At this point, we come face to face with verse 15. Christ Himself is speaking: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Here is an explicit warning: that Christ will come as a thief. In the midst of disaster upon disaster and global war, some in God's church will be surprised by it. It seems ironic how that could happen, but it is apparently going to happen that way.

Here also is a conditional promise: Those who watch and keep their garments will be blessed.

Revelation 16 does not just reveal prophetic information about the future like some type of crystal ball. No, the prophecy is capped with a command to act: to "watch" and to "keep." Choosing not to remain vigilant, choosing not to guard our spiritual condition from atrophy, we can become complacent. We can become neglectful. Our obedience to the commands to watch and to keep is what is truly important to this particular scripture—not a full understanding of every nuance of this chapter.

In fact, what God wants to see—and in fact, expects to see—is our obedience in faith to the commands of this passage notwithstanding our lack of understanding of the details. In this sense, the blessing promised in verse 15 comes in spite of our full understanding of this prophecy, or lack thereof. Knowledge is not a pre-

requisite to receiving the blessing. Obedience is.

We believe God's word of prophecy, though we may not always necessarily understand it. Nevertheless, God wants the prophecy to motivate us to obedience, and our obedience will bring a blessing with it.

HEAR AND DO

In James 1:22, the apostle admonishes us to be obedient doers, not just hearers, of the Word. In the context of this subject, it means acting and doing the commands so often embedded in the prophetic word. James' command to act, rather than just to hear, is frequently echoed in prophecy, as in Revelation 1:3: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words [*logos*] of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near."

The "and" in this verse is very important. God does not say that we are blessed simply if we hear and if we read. This is not to suggest that we should not study God's prophetic word; of course, we should. All Scripture is given for our edification and our inspiration (II Timothy 3:16). It is all inspired for that purpose. However, we are to read or hear *and* to keep.

What do we keep? Do we keep predictions about horsemen and beasts? How does one do that? What we are to keep are those commands that are liberally sprinkled throughout the word of prophecy—in the book of Revelation and in the prophetic sections of the gospels and epistles, as well as in the prophecies of the Old Testament. For instance, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 contain several commands to repent and repeated commands to overcome.

The prophetic word is not just a collection of mind puzzles that we are somehow supposed to unravel. God's prophecies are not that at all, but they are calls for change. They are calls for our growth. Remember, the blessing comes to those who keep, who *do* what God commands whether or not we understand the details of the prophecy.

God is faithful. A Christian reading

this passage a thousand years ago, who had no idea of what we know of history or of the technology that we understand now, could receive the blessing through obedience, just as we can. Again, knowing is not the issue, but obedience is.

The word "keep" is a command that appears ten times in the book of Revelation. It is the same word that is translated in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." We will notice just a few of its appearances. The first three are written to three of the seven churches: Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia, respectively:

Revelation 2:26: ". . . keeps My works until the end. . . ."

Revelation 3:3: ". . . hold fast and repent. . . ." [Here, "hold fast" is the same Greek word as "to keep" in the other examples.]

Revelation 3:8: ". . . have kept My word. . . ."

Revelation 12:17: ". . . who keep the commandments of God. . . ." [This is written to the remnant of the seed, that is, to God's elect.]

As we can see, God has sprinkled this command to "keep" all over the prophecies of Revelation.

NOT SEEING AND BELIEVING

The apostle Paul himself, as intelligent as he was, as inspired as he was, admitted that he lacked complete and full understanding, claiming according to the Phillips translation in I Corinthians 13:12, "At present we are like men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror." Only a highly deceived person would claim that prophecy is transparent to him. Those who are wise among God's people understand that we see the future through translucent glass, through fogged glass, not clearly. The question is, can we believe even when we do not see clearly?

Thomas, not yet having seen Christ after His resurrection, doubted the

resurrection's reality. But upon encountering the risen Christ, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and My God!" Christ's reply to Thomas' statement is very telling: "Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:28-29).

The second appearance of the verb "seen" here is the same Greek word that is often translated as "know," as it is in verse 14. Mary is outside the sepulcher, and she saw Jesus and did not *know* that it was He. It could just as easily read that she "did not see that it was Jesus." In English, we often connect the idea of sight with knowledge or with knowing. We do it all the time. We can be staring at a formula or a concept straight in the face, as it were, and not understanding it or not agreeing, and we simply say, "I don't see it." And when the light finally dawns, we say, "Oh, yes! Now I see it. Now I understand."

Yet Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen"—those who lack full understanding and knowledge—"and yet have believed." "Believe" here is the verb form of the Greek noun that is often translated as "the faith." Christ promises the blessing to those who do not see, who do not have full understanding, but who nevertheless believe. We often expect to know and understand so much, yet we are to live by faith.

Believing the prophetic word and putting into practice the commands to repent, to keep, and to watch that appear so often in God's prophetic word are walking by faith rather than by sight or by knowledge. Paul mentions this in II Corinthians 5:7.

"IMAGINATION OF DISASTER"

Novelist Henry James claimed, "Those who lack the imagination of disaster are doomed to be surprised by the world." By "imagination," James is not referring to a fake disaster, that is, an imaginary disaster, but he is using the word in its dictionary sense, "the formation of visual images of things not present." Writers present these

types of images—these imaginations—to the public all the time. They appear in movies and in horror stories. They are called *science fiction*. Neither the writers nor the public believe these images. To them the imagination of disaster is understood to be unreal, fantastic, incredible, just another movie or just another book.

Those of this world reckon God's prophecies, from God's Book, to be mere fantasies and myths—just another book. They count them to be the imaginations of a long-gone and highly superstitious people. However, we of the holy truth do not think this way; we believe the word of prophecy. We believe these “visual images of things not yet present,” images formed by God Himself and given to us in the Scriptures. These are images of disaster, dreadful judgments on the unrepentant. They are also images of blessing, word-portraits of the World Tomorrow, the Kingdom of God on earth, and of life in eternity, our hope.

We may not fully understand in detail all of these images of disaster and images of blessing, but we believe them. We are not of those who scoff at the visual images that God gives us (II Peter 3:1-4). They are real to us. Having the same faith as the Speaker

of this prophetic word—the same faith that operates in Jesus Christ—we, like Him, are able to call “those things which do not exist as though they did” (Romans 4:17), so sure are we that the word of prophecy will ultimately come about.

With that faith of Christ that works in us, we share the mind of God (I Corinthians 2:16), and we look at time in many ways just as He does, through the eyes of faith. The word of prophecy has great value, yet it lies, not in our understanding of it, but in our belief of it. We believe often in the face of our lack of understanding.

The prophetic word works as a kind of counterweight to complacency. Believing it to be sure, we are motivated to watch and to keep and to repent. It motivates us to obey. The imagination of God—those images of blessings and disasters that He provides in His Word—keeps us from falling into complacency if we believe His prophetic word and follow up that belief with obedience.

However, the engineering metaphor of a counterweight is troublesome because it is so static. It is closer to the truth to say that the word of prophecy, when believed, when acted on in obedience, is a *dynamic* force, not a static one.

In I Peter 1, Peter speaks about Christ. Note that the word “seen” in the first phrase is the same word mentioned above that is often translated as “know.”

... whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you. . . . (I Peter 1:8-10)

Peter goes on for some length writing about the work of the prophets and prophecy. The point, however, is that the end, or the result, of our faith is salvation. The word of prophecy, because it gives us opportunity to exercise our faith by putting it into action, is a dynamic force, motivating us toward salvation. So often simply a static counterweight, the prophetic word, when believed on and acted on, *drives* us to God's Kingdom.

What is more, God's Word does all of this even when we do not fully understand it.

—Charles F. Whitaker

personal *The Seventh Commandment*

(continued from page 6)

culture enveloped and enslaved in unfaithfulness and steeped in a spirit of harlotry. God thunders in His Word, “You shall not commit adultery” and “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.” Notice this vivid illustration of its destructiveness:

After this Absalom the son of David had a lovely sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her. . . . However, he would not heed her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Arise, be gone!” (II Samuel 13:1-2, 14-15)

The strong desire to be unfaithful to one's clearly stated and understood responsibilities is a drive we have to deal with and overcome. We must learn that there is a living principle that God activated and still enforces in His creation. When this drive controls a person, retribution will automatically follow. Thus, the person is considered faithless. Any time a thing—in this case, sex—becomes an end in itself, it creates an idol, which will provoke a response from God. In addition, as this illustration shows, it also ceases to give the satisfying pleasure God intends. Like a drug, the individual constantly needs more to achieve the satisfaction he desires.

Solomon shows clearly in Ecclesiastes 1:8 that human nature cannot be satisfied. It says, “All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” This is not the way God made us; it is the way we have become as a result of Satan broadcasting his spirit and us following its promptings. We have become perverted in our tastes, and our tastes have

to be converted in order to enjoy the benefits God intends.

The *Woman's Day* article mentioned above listed the reasons, from most to least frequently mentioned, that men gave for remaining faithful:

1. *The fear of being caught.* They avoid adultery, not because it is sin, but simply to avoid the pain of possibly losing respect socially or financially. People fear scandal more than they fear sin because they want to be well thought of.
2. *The inability to deal with guilt and deception.* It is not the adultery and all the evil it produces that is the burden, but having to bear something personally that can no longer be hidden.
3. *The lack of opportunity.* Frequently, an occasion never arises because the man's wife or an authority figure is always looming in the background, but he is open to it!
4. *The belief that husbands should be faithful.* This is not necessarily belief in God, but usually a societal more that a man believes he should conform to in order to fit in.
5. *The personal desire to be faithful.* This is a notch stronger and purer than the previous reason.

However, there was not one mention of God in these five reasons, perhaps because it is not fashionable to talk of God. Yet, it could also be because God is not in all their thoughts and what He thinks is rarely considered.

Lessons From David

Regardless of how successful a person might consider himself in getting away with his adventure into sin, he could learn a few things from David. First, however, we must note Numbers 32:23: "But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out." Interestingly, the context of this verse is a warning to those who may not be faithful to their words of promise. Regarding David, II Samuel 12:9-14 reveals:

"Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel,

before the sun.'" So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

Overall, this story is a quick study into cause and effect. First, it teaches that, regardless of one's status, adultery cannot be committed without damaging relationships any more than murder can be committed without damaging relationships. It does not matter whether the perpetrator is a prince or pauper. The only variable is the speed with which the effect takes place. We should never forget the warning given in Genesis 2:17: "In the day you eat of [the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] you shall surely die." The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) no matter which commandment is broken.

Second, besides death, sin produces two effects that may also manifest slowly:

1. *A damaged relationship with God.* Isaiah 59:1-2 shows that sin creates division between God and us because of the breach of trust. Sin is a breaking of the terms of the covenant agreed on by both God and us. After committing a sin like adultery, can the individual be trusted any longer? This effect is not easily seen, but God's Word nonetheless reveals it does occur. As this episode shows, with repentance and God's merciful forgiveness, the division can be healed.
2. *Evil results in our life in this world.* Even with God's forgiveness, this second effect remains and must be borne by the sinner—and tragically, by those sinned against. For example, the evil effects of David's sin brought death—either directly or indirectly—to five people. It directly caused the deaths of Uriah and the newborn son of David and Bathsheba. In addition, it greatly intensified the ultimately deadly competition between Absalom, Amnon, and Adonijah, all of whom died violently. With the dishonorable example of their father before their eyes, it could only teach disrespect, even for those closest to them.

Thus, the throne fell to Solomon. He never had to live through the kind of family life that David's older children did. When he committed similar sins, he could never say that he saw his father do the same things.

This act indirectly helped produce yet more family devastation. II Samuel 16:21-22 records:

And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

personal *The Seventh Commandment*

This led to David's actions in II Samuel 20:3:

Now David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, his concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood.

While this was as much a political act as anything, it clearly conveys Absalom's disrespect for his father, a disrespect that was at least partly rooted in his father's notorious sexual life. Were these women's lives affected for the better by Absalom's extremely insolent adultery? Now defiled, but still young women, they lived the remainder of their lives as widows.

Fornication Is Also Faithlessness

Paul writes in I Corinthians 7:4: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." The spirit of God's law reveals that all unchaste sexual conduct before marriage, commonly called fornication, is infidelity, unfaithfulness committed against the future mate. Our bodies are not our own. Could God have someone marked out as a mate for those who are single? The fornicator is denying him or her a pure gift. A vital, spiritual reality underlies this principle, for sexual purity is a type of our spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, our promised Bridegroom.

Where does the Bible show that all this culture's sexual experimentation leads? Hosea 10:13-14 makes it plain:

You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle—a mother dashed in pieces upon her children.

A very troubling, fearful time lies ahead of us. Sin may be entered into happily, but because people trust in liars who deny the penalties for sin, the consequences will be horrible. "The New Scarlet Letter," which appeared in *Time* magazine, August 2, 1982, describes another penalty:

After chastity slouched off into exile in the '60s, the sexual revolution encountered little resistance. Indeed, in the age of the Pill, Penthouse Pets and porn-movie cassettes, the revolution looked so sturdily permanent that sex seemed to subside into a simple consumer item. Now, suddenly . . . herpes, an ancient viral infection that can be transmitted during sex, recurs

fitfully and cannot be cured . . . has emerged from relative obscurity and exploded into a full-fledged epidemic. "The truth about life in the United States in the 1980s," says Dr. Kevin Murphy of Dallas, one of the nation's leading herpes researchers, "is that if you are going to have sex, you are going to have to take the risk of getting herpes." . . . An estimated 20 million Americans now have genital herpes.

The figure has now climbed to 45 million—roughly one of every five Americans now has a disease that cannot be cured, one that is increasing at the rate of 500,000 new cases each year in the U.S.

Recall the "mighty men" from Hosea 10:13. They include the sex gurus of this age such as Larry Flint, Alex Comfort, and Hugh Hefner, the latter with his insidious "Playboy Philosophy," who set the tone for contemporary moral standards. It also includes the entertainment figures who make homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and other perversions appear so "attractive" on the silver screen.

The Charlotte Observer published this statistic on June 28, 2008: "Maybe it's a sad side-effect of AIDS fight success, but the number of young gay men diagnosed with HIV infection is rising almost 12% a year, a new report says." AIDS, like herpes and chlamydia, remains incurable. Medications may slow the death rate, but death still hangs over the heads of those infected.

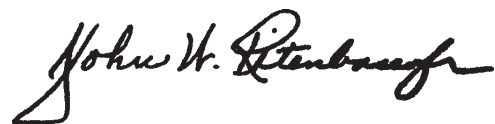
Romans 3:4 reads, "Let God be true but every man a liar [false or faithless]." The "mighty men" can say all they want, but God's Word remains faithful. Just because God's law does not exact an immediate penalty for violation, the hucksters of hedonism think and proclaim that there is no penalty. Despite their claims, there has been a wild explosion of incurable sexually transmitted diseases over the past forty years. How much easier it is to learn truth by obeying God's law rather than through painful experience!

God gives unequivocal counsel in Leviticus 20:10, 22:

The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. . . . You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out.

This is the Bible's way of saying nature will rise up against those who break God's seventh commandment and become their enemy. We are witnesses to this happening in our lifetimes.

In Christian love,



Obama and the Muslim World

“To the Muslim world: we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect.” So spoke President Barack Hussein Obama in his inaugural address, signaling his intent to rebuild the bridges burned by his predecessor and to rehabilitate America’s image in the eyes of Muslims. In the months following that speech, Obama did not disappoint. Within a week, he gave his first foreign Presidential interview—to a Saudi-owned satellite channel, al-Arabiya. In March, he sent a message to the people of Iran on the occasion of their New Year. In April, Obama dazzled the Turkish parliament with an address meant to solidify a growing relationship with Islam’s largest economy and resurgent power.

Finally, on June 4, Obama delivered an address in Cairo—not just to the nation of Egypt, but also to the greater Muslim world. In it, he delivered both praise and censure to friends and opponents in the region. He covered a spectrum of topics, including Islam’s place in America, Islamic extremism, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nuclear weapons, democracy in the Middle East, religious freedom, women’s rights, economic development, and the ever-present Arab-Israeli conflict.

On this last subject, Obama continued the approach of previous administrations: working toward the elusive two-state solution of a Palestinian homeland (which would bisect the state of Israel). He vowed “to personally pursue this outcome with all the patience that the task requires.” However, as a starting point for Israel, Obama made specific demands:

Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel’s right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine’s. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop.

Obama chose to focus on the West Bank settlements for several reasons:

First, previous accords included stopping the settlements, so it is not making a new demand. (Previous U.S. administrations have held the same line verbally, but have not pursued it.)

Second, while the settlements are a hotly contested political issue, they are not a national security issue; while Obama was asking Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for something that will cost him politically, stopping the settlements does not endanger Israel’s security. Though Obama was pushing a U.S. ally, he was not pushing him too far.

Third, the settlements are something that, in general, only the most hard-line supporters of Israel care about—at home and abroad. Only a small handful of Obama’s constituents would oppose such a request. It would be different if he were to ask, for instance, that a security fence be dismantled to advance the creation a two-state solution.

The settlements issue is an opening move toward establishing the West Bank as Palestinian territory. If he can force the Israeli coalition government to give in on this, the door would theoretically be open to negotiate a two-state settlement. But

more than this, Obama is demonstrating to the Islamic world that, though Israel is an ally, he is ready to force the Jewish state to make concessions. The more that the U.S. and Israel disagree on this issue, the more it appears the U.S. is amenable to Muslim concerns.

By pursuing the settlements issue, Obama scores points either way: If Israel gives in, he has shown that he can extract concessions from a “right-wing” Israeli government. If Israel resists, it sets the stage for a dramatic showdown in which Muslims would root for the U.S. In all this, Obama is seeking to gain Muslim support that can be used ultimately to form a union against Iran.

However, not all has gone as Obama planned. On June 14, Netanyahu gave his own speech in which he essentially said the settlements were not the real issue, but rather it was the failure of the Palestinians and other Arabs to recognize Israel’s right to exist. He pointed out that no peace existed before the 1967 Six Day War (when Israel took possession of the West Bank and Gaza Strip), nor was there peace when Israel withdrew from Gaza (or offered to withdraw from the West Bank). In other words, the settlements issue is not holding up the peace process, but Arab intolerance of Israel’s existence is.

Netanyahu made his own proposal: a completely disarmed Palestinian state with Israel retaining security rights in Palestinian territories. After defining the problem as Palestinian hostility, he proposed a defanged Palestinian state as the solution—and essentially called Obama’s hand. The U.S. President does not yet appear to be ready to force the issue: According to Reuters, the White House responded by announcing mildly that Obama “believes this solution can and must ensure both Israel’s security and the fulfillment of the Palestinians’ legitimate aspirations for a viable state.”

But while Obama was considering his cards, the election in Iran melted down, leaving him in a tenuous position. He had already spoken of, and demonstrated, his willingness to negotiate with Iran, regardless of who won the election. Now he is on the horns of a dilemma with his constituency because U.S. conservatives are pointing out the futility of talks with an unrepentant Iranian regime, while liberals are aghast that the President would negotiate with a state that violently suppresses protests—a melee visible to the whole world thanks to the Internet. Whereas Obama had hoped to use the settlements issue to gain Muslim support against Iran, he now has larger problems at home, taking the pressure off Israel—for the time being.

Being a multilateralist, Obama’s approach is to seek broad consensus rather than to go it alone. Already courting Turkey as a counterweight to Iran in the region, he also seeks broader Arab support against Tehran. Yet, of special interest is that he has just demonstrated an eagerness to “sacrifice” an ally (albeit in a non-fatal way) to gain political advantage. Though he was rebuffed this time, the Arabs he is courting will probably not let him back down. Thus, we can anticipate that Israel will continue to receive pressure from President Obama as he strolls through the minefield that is the Middle East.

—David C. Grabbe

NEWS AND TRENDS

WORLDWATCH

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Raising a Widow's Son

The most profound of all the miracles Jesus performed during His earthly ministry are those in which He *resurrected* someone. The New Testament records three of these resurrection miracles, including the raising of a widow's son, of Jairus' daughter, and of Lazarus. Luke the physician is the only one to record the raising of a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). It is interesting that each of the three resurrection miracles reports the dead person in a different stage of death from the other instances. When Christ raises Jairus' daughter to life, she is still in the bed where she had died only a few hours earlier. The widow's son lies in an open coffin on his way to his grave when Jesus performs the miracle. Finally, Lazarus is already in the grave and has been dead for four days by the time Christ arrives and raises him from the dead (John 11:39).

The varying length of times they had been dead and yet were still resurrected shows that Christ can raise the dead no matter what. His miraculous power to resurrect is not dependent upon whether a person has just died, has been dead for days, or is already decomposing. The same principle holds true regarding spiritual salvation: God and Christ can save any sinner no matter how old he is, how long he has been a sinner, or how badly he has sinned.

In the account of the resurrection miracle in Luke 7, the young man who has died is the only son of his widowed mother (verse 12). His death is twice as traumatic for the woman because she is now sonless as well as spouseless.



1. What trait of Christ is prevalent in this miracle? Luke 7:13.

Comment: In six of the approximately 33 miracles of Christ, His compassion is specifically mentioned as a factor in them. Besides this one, the miracles that speak of His compassion include the feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:14), the feeding of the 4,000 (Matthew 15:32), the healing of the two blind men (Matthew 20:34), the healing of the leper (Mark 1:41), and the exorcism of the demons in Gadara (Mark 5:19). His compassion is present in every miracle He performed, but only in these six is it mentioned.

Jesus was the most compassionate of all mankind (Hebrews 4:15). Often when things do not go well for some people, they complain that Christ does not care. Yet, that complaint is unjustified: Scripture shows abundantly that He *does* care—a great deal more than we realize. It is not Christ who is uncaring, but humans. We lack compassion for God the Father, for His Son, and for one another.

When Jesus has compassion on the widow, saying, “Do not weep,” He is not merely asking her to cheer up. Instead, it is a foreshadowing of His power. He will remove the cause of her tears and simultaneously give His disciples a preview of God wiping away all tears (Revelation 21:4).

2. How personally involved is Jesus in performing this miracle? Luke 7:13-15.

Comment: First, He knows all the specifics of the case. His disciples see only a funeral as they pass, but He understands the circumstances of the corpse stretched out in the coffin. He knows that the deceased is a young man, the only son of his mother, and that she is a widow!

Second, He does not wait for anyone to plead with Him. Isaiah prophesies of this in Isaiah 65:1: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me” (as quoted in Romans 10:20). Sometimes, before we call for help, He answers—what a

special blessing that is (Isaiah 65:24; Daniel 9:20-23).

Third, when He sees the widowed mother, He has “compassion on her.” Christ’s concern is apparent in His expression of His mercy and tenderness.

Fourth, He says to her, “Do not weep,” to provide comfort and encourage her.

Fifth, Jesus is not pretentious when He touches the coffin, but in humility He offers hope (Jeremiah 17:7). The widow thinks that all hope is gone, but even these dire circumstances are not enough to remove the hope found in Christ (Lamentations 3:26). Christ also shows great tenderness when “He present[s] him to his mother.”

3. What is Christ’s chief purpose in performing this resurrection? Luke 7:16.

Comment: This miracle produces fear in those who witness it, but this fear turns into a deep feeling of awe for His compassion and power. As a result, Christ’s fame among the people grows, while the hatred of the Jewish leaders increases, as they reject His claims to be the Son of God.

However, His primary purpose is to glorify God. The people glorify God when they say, “A great prophet has risen up among us” and “God has visited His people.” Christ is the Great Prophet of Israel (Deuteronomy 18:15; Luke 3:16; John 6:14). The tragedy in this situation is that, though a number of people look upon Jesus as the promised Prophet, few give Him much devotion.

In the original Greek, the word “visited” means “to oversee,” as well as “to visit in mercy or in judgment.” In this context, the meaning is that of favoring the people by sending this great Prophet, Jesus Christ, who blessed the people by raising one of them from the dead. In their praise, we see gratitude as they glorified God for favoring them with this great blessing.

—Martin G. Collins