



Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Hundreds of sheep mill about, waiting to be examined by agricultural officials. Such a large flock, however, pales in number compared to the countless animals sacrificed down through the centuries to picture the ultimate Sacrifice, that of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This is only one of the heavy costs in lives that were given to help us understand and appreciate God's mercy and love for us, significant points to contemplate during the Passover season.

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The Awesome Cost of Love

During a recent trip to Trinidad, I read a newspaper account of a meeting regarding government-provided school education. During the meeting Labor Minister Rennie Dumas, the main speaker, said, “There is no such thing as free education.” This is a truth, but people tend to overlook this fact because at the time they receive their education, they do not make a formal payment each time they go to the school to be educated in some manner.

In such a system, it is easy to overlook the undeniable fact that somebody is paying for the buildings, equipment, books, teachers, janitors, and administrators. Those costs are being covered by the society through the taxation of its citizenry. Such a system tends to hide the costs, and so many forget the costs involved. In like manner, there is no such thing as free government-provided healthcare, military, libraries, or refuse collection.

Brethren, there ain’t no free lunch. Welfare systems cost “tons” of money. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment compensation, and transportation systems that include buses, trains, and highways are very costly. To be sure, there are benefits, and these perceived benefits motivate us to pay the taxes and buy the bonds to ensure these programs will be available for our use.

In these modern times, this is a fact of life. Nonetheless, we must keep the costs in mind, or because of human nature, there is a high risk that we will overlook the costs and fail to appreciate the benefits. We will gradually take the benefits for granted and use them without gratitude because they are accepted as due to us. As this reality influences us, irresponsibility in their care will also rear its ugly head.

Closer to home, rare indeed is the child who appreciates the gifts his parents give. Observe how a child treats a gift after his initial pleasure wears off. Appreciation is a quality that must be learned. Unfortunately, it is most often learned through deprivation unless the child has unusually wise parents who, when he is young, teach him appreciation and responsible, thoughtful care for gifts given to him.

Freedom Is Not Free

We hear the undeniable truth that “freedom is not free” more often these days as people awaken to the fact that many of our unappreciated but long-held freedoms are disappearing as the government widens its powers over the public. Are Americans going to retain their freedom, or will the ever-encroaching government continue to chip away at them?

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In an anti-slavery speech given in 1852, abolitionist Wendell Phillips said, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,” a truth confirmed by history. Nation after nation throughout history has found that liberty is largely a privilege that must be defended by those who receive it, or others who desire what they have will take it away. Whether liberties are political or religious, there is no doubt that they must be vigorously defended, or they will be lost. It is also true that the liberties that have been bestowed were costly to those who secured them and passed them on to us. If they are to be retained, their defense will also be costly.

A major part of conversion involves a moral and spiritual education by God and about God and His way that the convert believes and faithfully uses. However, what happens if that education is unappreciated and allowed to decay through ingratitude and irresponsibility into disuse?

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are largely about both political and religious freedom. To the Israelites in Egypt, the freedom God gave was largely political, as He broke their bondage to the Egyptians. Yet, in the larger purpose of God, the breaking of bondage is spiritual in nature. God intends the record of that event in His Word to be an object lesson to those being converted and prepared for the Kingdom of God.

The Egyptians paid an awesome cost for the Israelites’ freedom. Were the Israelites willing to pay the costs that accrued to them so that, once free, they would remain free? Notice what Jesus says regarding a cost of freedom in John 8:31-32: “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.’”

For the purposes of this article, the key word is “abide,” which can also be translated as “continue,” “dwell,” “remain,” “be present” and “endure.” It gives the sense of staying in a given place, state, relation, or expectancy. It does not indicate one merely inactively standing still but suggests consistently moving within a pattern. Jesus clearly states that truth makes a disciple free. However, He also emphasizes that the truth and the freedom it produces do not come in a moment of time.

The truth of which He speaks indicates a broad and deep reality, a package containing many individual truths not merely one. Thus, the package takes time to build, to accumulate, which is why a person must abide, pressing on, maintaining the freedom once it is given. The use of time is a costly investment that is not always easily made. Experience in Christian living proves that urgent needs arise in the defense of one’s standing before God, and they cannot be dealt with leisurely. In addition, there is the everyday maintenance of discipline in one’s life in securing our absolute need of study, prayer, and service to God and fellow man.

Truth and freedom go hand in hand, but truth will produce freedom only if it is used. This is why there must be a disciplined investment of time and energy by those who have truth and desire to protect and build their freedom. We might know something is true, but if we fail to use it, of what value is it? It would be like having money but never using it to buy or invest in anything. What good is it merely to possess it?

Truth and the freedom it produces accrue to those who press on, maintaining what they already have while simultaneously expanding and deepening it. The kind of freedom God is bringing us into comes progressively. We are to overcome, as Jesus admonishes us seven times in Revelation 2-3, and we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).

Israel’s experience in Egypt and in the wilderness is an object lesson that God desires us to reflect on frequently. These lessons are most forcefully brought to the fore during the spring as we begin rehearsing God’s plan of salvation in the annual holy days. Once freed from their slavery to Egypt, it took the Israelites but seven days to cross the Red Sea, breaking completely clear of Egyptian control. In dramatic contrast, it took them forty *years* to walk the remaining few hundred miles! During this trek, every man of war numbered in the first census after leaving Egypt—with the exception of Joshua and Caleb—died without reaching the Promised Land. Will we allow ourselves to match this miserable record by failing to maintain our liberty?

I Corinthians 10:6-11 gives us a brief overview of what they did to fail:

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

What a costly expedition! Hebrews 3:16-19 clarifies the cause of their failure more specifically:

For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not *all* who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with

those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. [emphasis ours]

Clearly, they did not make the right efforts to defend their God-given liberties. Instead, they exacerbated their circumstances by failing to discipline themselves to submit to God's rule over their lives, even though He freely rescued them from their slavery. They were unwilling to pay the costs of directing their lives as He commanded, despite knowing, through the many manifestations of His power, that He acted exactly as Moses had said He would.

Did Jesus Warn of Costs?

Jesus admonishes us in Luke 14:25-30 that responding to His calling will trigger some difficult circumstances in the new convert's life. Thus, He warns us to count the cost before committing ourselves as followers:

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes, and his own life also he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

This is not the first time in Luke that Jesus warns that following Him would be costly:

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

In these two warnings of possible costs, He says we

must expect the loss of the respect and association with those we feel the most affection for, family members. They are not going to appreciate the changes we have made in our lives. They are yet blinded because God has not removed the veil covering their spiritual perceptions. This happens to many of us. It occurred in my relationship with my parents.

Jesus warns that our lives may become seriously unstable, as outsiders might judge it. He suggests that the convert may become somewhat itinerant, seeming to have an unsettled existence. He also suggests that following Him would put demands on our lives and time that might cut close family members to the quick, perhaps even turning them into enemies. Christ makes plain that, despite God's well-known mercy, He wants our wholehearted, unreserved loyalty with no yearning ever to turn back to our former lives. It is in meeting challenges like these that the potential costs become realities.

Though not mentioned directly here, Hebrews 11 reminds us of those who were tortured by mocking and scourging, by imprisonment, by stoning, and even by being sawn in two. Others were forced to flee for their lives, wandering destitute and tormented, barely able to clothe themselves. This may not happen to many of us now, but as matters intensify, Jesus warns that people will eventually kill Christians, thinking that they are glorifying God.

Romans 12:1-2 charges us:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul makes a strong, urgent appeal to Christians to devote their lives to sacrifice. Sacrifice suggests the giving up or forfeiture of something or oneself for something or someone considered to be of greater value. In this context, the "Someone" is Jesus Christ and the "something" is God's way of life. The apostle is urging those of us who have had the revelation of God given to us to devote ourselves entirely to living it.

He urges us to sacrifice our bodies. He does not mean to imply giving up merely our skin and bones but the totality of what we are—our entire beings including our minds with all of their character, energy, knowledge, experiences, skills, perspectives, and attitudes—with nothing held back, since we are likely to hold a portion of our life in reserve just for ourselves. In other words, he is asking us to consecrate our entire lives to God. Note that Paul does not call this "extreme," but "reasonable."

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Why would one even consider taking on the potential for such costly pain? No one really grasps the fullness of what God asks of those who make the New Covenant with Him at baptism. This witness in Romans 12:1-2 is nonetheless part of His Word to testify against us. There is a good reason, succinctly given in Romans 5:5: “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” We do it because God’s love for His Son has been given to us and is growing. His investment in us, His grace, is beginning to be returned.

The love of God, the biblical love, is not a mere affection but an outgoing concern equal to or greater than self-concern. This love, which we do not have by nature but is given by God as a gift, will sacrifice itself for the well-being of others. It will pay the costs of forfeiture of self-interest for the well-being even of enemies. It will choose to lay down its life following the pattern shown in Jesus’ life.

The love of God is an unearned, dynamic gift from God that influences one who has it toward oneness with God and fellow man. It must be deliberately chosen, though, in order to be put to use.

At this juncture, its costs come to the fore because, despite conversion, human nature remains. Though considerably weakened, it still exerts its influences toward the self (Romans 7:14-23; Galatians 5:16-17). We must overcome human nature’s influences, but in virtually every case, we must make a sacrifice to fulfill the influences of the love of God. Sacrificing almost always involves the potential for loss, at times a considerable loss.

A number of verses reveal that, in one sense, choosing whether to sacrifice oneself in obedience to Jesus Christ is not a realistic option to anyone who claims to love Him. In John 14:15, Jesus says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” He adds in John 14:21, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” Verse 15 is a direct command and challenge to anyone claiming to love Him, and verse 21 says that one’s following through in submissive obedience is the proof that the claimant loves Him. I John 5:3 adds a resounding confirmation to verse 21 by providing the Bible’s definition of love: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

Love comes at a high price, but it is also rewarding because, as we make the sometimes costly choices to please God by following Jesus Christ, we transform more fully into His image due to following the pathway our Savior blazed before us. Becoming a living sacrifice is one of the costs that observing Passover should recall to our memories, giving us substance for sober reflection aimed toward revitalizing our understanding of the significance of this important day.

A Frequently Overlooked Cost

Earlier, we considered I Corinthians 10:6-11 regarding the examples of the Israelites’ destructive conduct in the wilderness. A parallel scripture, Romans 15:4, has broader significance and perhaps even more vivid application to us: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

The difference between the two is that I Corinthians 10 concentrates only on Israel’s wilderness experiences, while Romans 15:4 broadens its horizons. Within its scope, it includes God’s work with Israel and with other nations and peoples over the entire Old Testament. This should teach us that the scope of God’s salvation activities is far vaster than it appears on the surface.

II Peter 3:9 confirms this: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In I Timothy 2:3-4, the apostle Paul echoes Peter’s statement: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

God is preparing us for what is to come. He has caused these examples and principles to be recorded and preserved so that we would be equipped with the guidance to conduct our life in the right way. The scope of what God is working out in our lives is awesome! If we are to discern Passover and its costs rightly, this has to be considered deeply. When properly understood, every bit of what God is doing is out of love. We will not be able to observe Passover properly unless we can see its importance in its broadest sense.

What a moment in time it was on that Passover in AD 31! God must have been filled with excitement about what was taking place. It was an awesome step toward what He is working out with us.

We must consider Romans 15:4 in light of the historical witness that God is making in our lives. Meditate on this: How many people have lived and died in the vast sweep of the history of each nation to prove a very important point—that there is *no way* but God’s way that will produce the environment that man greatly desires but has never achieved? We need to consider this before taking the next Passover because it is important to our thinking that we look at things from God’s point of view.

It is not necessary to recount everything, but from Abraham on, how many Israelites have lived and died without ever being offered spiritual salvation? The numbers become staggering as we expand our meditation further back in time. How many people were obliterated from existence at Sodom and Gomorrah? How many people lost their lives in the Flood?

How many people died in Egypt over and above the firstborn? That land was so devastated that it took generations to recover—and may never have truly regained its former glory! In the days of Ezekiel, God prophesied that Egypt would “be the lowliest of kingdoms” until the Millennium (Ezekiel 29:15), when He will raise it up to be one of three major nations with Israel and Assyria (Isaiah 19:23-25). Egypt must have been an awesome nation, a wonderful people, with plenty of ability, as their remaining architectural monuments testify. Yet, God decimated them to provide an object lesson for us! He can do that—He is God, and it is His purpose being worked out. He perhaps did not *have* to do it, but He did it to help us to understand and appreciate Passover more fully. God thinks so big that it is beyond our comprehension.

We can look at the Orient and see 1.3 billion people in China, 1.1 billion in India, 228 million in Indonesia, 128 million in Japan, 90 million in the Philippines, and millions more in Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Koreas, etc. Are they living their lives in vain? No, they are not because God is still on His throne, but neither is He offering most of them salvation at this time.

Who knows what God is recording for these people? When they wake in the judgment that Jesus speaks of in John 5, and they learn the history of their people from God’s perspective, who knows the depths of their minds’ meditations on the Passover in AD 31? They may appreciate it to a depth we cannot understand on account of the deprivations that we have not experienced but they have.

Contrary to what many believe, salvation has never been completely closed to the Gentiles. As early as Exodus 12:48, God reveals that Gentiles are permitted to make the covenant with Him. Following the formation of the church, the book of Acts records the expansion of the invitation to Gentiles in that the church was urged to take the gospel to them. Even so, the most thorough preaching was still pursued in Israelitish lands.

God’s Old Testament record of His dealings with them continued to be written right on through Malachi. Even among the Israelites, few seemed to have been called to conversion. From the days of Abraham to Jesus, how many lived and died just as the wilderness generation did so that this record could exist for our edification? What a costly operation!

When we take the Passover, we need to weigh these things so that they make a deeper impression on our minds than they did before. Even so, the cost of the Father and Son’s love, as shown by Passover, does not end here. It goes on.

Many Lives Deliberately Taken

Hebrews 10:1-4 states:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to

come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

This reveals another part of the cost. Perhaps we think of this as a rather minor affair, but God shows that He has, and we must have, respect for the life of an animal. In His instructions on the subject of the regular sacrifices, God commands us not to eat the blood! The blood must be drained on the ground and not imbibed by a human being. He does this out of respect for the animal, for its life is in the blood even as ours is.

Animals have at least a low level of feeling. They experience fear; situations can frighten them. And who will say that one’s pet, a dog or a cat, does not have a special relationship or feeling for him or her? Certainly, it does.

Can we extend that to include a bullock, goat, sheep, kid of the goats, or a lamb as having feelings too? To be sure, they do not have human feelings. Nevertheless, they have life, and in the sacrifices, they symbolize—every single one of them—the life of Jesus Christ. How many animals had to give their lives to make a witness and an example of His sinlessness, His approach to life, or His payment for our sins? We will never know; but just to give an approximate idea, Josephus records that, when he lived in the middle of the first century, the Romans took a census of all of the lambs that were killed in Jerusalem for Passover one year. They tallied 256,000 lambs killed for just one Passover observance—more than a quarter million lambs died to illustrate a lesson!

Perhaps it would help us to understand why God tells the Israelites in Exodus 12 that keeping Passover should be a family affair. It was not to be done at the Temple or Tabernacle. In His instructions, God specifies that nearly every family should kill its own lamb (Exodus 12:3-4). He desires to make the point to every individual that he is responsible for the death of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ!

However, consider this: The overwhelming majority of those Israelite families were not rich. Most of them had only small flocks and herds, so they had just a few sheep and very few lambs. In most cases, they lived with their animals, and whenever they put a lamb to death on Passover, it was quite likely the family pet! They killed something very close to them, a living thing to which they had emotional attachments. Millions of beloved pets died

(continued on page 14)

The Torment

PART ONE

God's people are a tormented people.

To understand what is meant by this, we need to consider Lot, Abraham's nephew who lived in Sodom, as the apostle Peter describes him in II Peter 2:7. Speaking of God's judgment of sin, the apostle portrays Lot as one "who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked." He continues in verse 8 to say: "For that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds."

Peter's description is really quite interesting. Lot was not tormented as if by demons or by fiendish persecutors at all, but it was what he saw and heard in the streets, homes, and businesses of the perverse and depraved city of Sodom that bothered Lot. He knew the inevitable consequences of sin or lawlessness, and it distressed him significantly.

A prophet of God has no pretty job. Of all God's people, the prophet may be the most tormented because he has insight into what is happening around him beyond what the average person understands. Out of so many examples in God's Word, we will concentrate on just one, the prophet Ezekiel.

We will consider a few of the visions that God gave to Ezekiel. What did he see? How did he respond? Reading the scriptures, can we catch the same vision? Can we respond in the same way? We had better! We must, like Ezekiel and Lot, become tormented people—tormented by what we see and hear in the day-to-day activity around us.

VISIONS OF GREATER ABOMINATIONS

As most students of the Bible know, the prophet Ezekiel was among the first group of captives to be taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's army, and more captives would follow later. In the following passages, he is in his home in the area by the River Chebar where the Jews had been exiled, and the elders of Judah, he writes, are "sitting before me" (Ezekiel 8:1).

He recounts in verse 3 that he is "lifted . . . up between earth and heaven in visions of God to Jerusalem." Remember that the prophet and his audience are representatives of an early group of deportees, so we can certainly say that Jerusalem still exists as a functioning city. It had not yet been destroyed.

Carried there in vision, he sees a series of scenes:

In verse 5, he sees the "image of jealousy" that had been set up in the Temple, an image that had caused God to go far away from the sanctuary (verse 6). This is probably some type of abomination that makes desolate, a pagan idol that had actually been set up in the gate of the Temple courtyard in Jerusalem.

At the end of verse 6, God tells Ezekiel he will see "greater abominations." He spies a hole in a wall in the court of the Temple (verse 7) and obeys God's command to dig around that hole (verse 8). Behind it, lo and behold, he finds a doorway. The door admits him into a very private, hidden inner chamber, the walls of which are engraved with pagan idols, which are, as it says in verse 10, "all the idols of the house of Israel."

In this idol-bedecked room are seventy elders of Israel, "each man had a censer in his hand."

of the Godly

Ezekiel is witnessing some kind of pagan worship service going on behind closed doors right there in the Temple! It is very clandestine. Note that the worshippers are not extremists on the fringes of Israelite society, but they are the elders, the leaders of the land! They might be considered the preachers of Judah.

Did Ezekiel witness the movers and shakers of American society in a satanic Skull-and-Bones-type service attended by the President of the United States? That would be a modern, contemporary version of this type of vision, for the leaders of Ephraim and Manasseh today are deeply involved in the occult, witchcraft, and pagan practices to this day. They are all abominations, all very furtive, secret, and surreptitious.

In verse 14, Ezekiel expresses his “dismay” at yet a greater abomination: “women . . . weeping for Tammuz.” This is another pagan practice, a very sexual one involving ritual prostitution. Ezekiel saw them involved in a rite in which they were mourning the death of a Mesopotamian god whose myth said he was resurrected to new life, a mockery of the redeeming death and life-giving resurrection of the true Son of God. This vision reveals that paganism had deeply affected the women in Israelite society as well.

In verse 16, the prophet sees a fourth vision in the inner court of the Temple—“about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping the sun toward the east.” This is obviously some sort of pagan sunrise service, in which they honor the sun more highly than God, to whom they contemptuously show their backsides.

Each abomination is described as being greater in wickedness than the one before. In verse 17, God asks, “Is it a trivial thing to the house of

Judah to commit abominations which they commit here [in the Temple!]? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger.”

These leaders displayed no social responsibility whatsoever. They led their society to become one of rape and rapine, murder and violence in every quarter. Yet these hypocritical leaders dared to return to God’s Temple, retiring furtively to its inner rooms to practice their pagan rites “in the dark” (verse 12).

GOD’S JUDGMENT

Ezekiel’s blood must have run cold when he heard God’s judgment, which appears in verse 18: “Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.”

Continuing the vision in Ezekiel 9, it relates a partial execution of that judgment. It is important to note here that the prophet witnesses God actually leaving His portable throne (described in detail in Ezekiel 1). At this point, “the glory of the God of Israel” actually demounts from it and removes, as verse 3 records, “to the threshold of the temple.” So He has taken His place in the Temple, but not on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. He is, in effect, in the gate, a place of judgment.

And this is a momentous judgment. In verses 5-6, God commands some of the angels, “Go . . . through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women.” This is a summary judgment on the entire populace of Jerusalem!

When Ezekiel heard this command, how did

prophecy watch *The Torment of the Godly*

he respond? Certainly not in a self-righteous, I-told-you-so manner. When he is alone with God, the angels having left on their mission, he falls on his face in apparent anguish, crying out: “Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?” (verse 8).

This is a vital question. Ezekiel is concerned about the people and about the scope of God’s judgment. Like Lot, he lived in his own kind of Sodom, in his own type of Gomorrah, and he felt anguish over the sin that he saw and heard and over its consequences—as it were, tormented by what was happening around him. Ezekiel was emotionally and spiritually tormented or tortured, not by what the pagans were doing around him, but by what the leaders and the people of Israel were doing in his immediate environment—and even in the Temple! Their wickedness and what they were about to suffer for it are what tormented this righteous man. In vision, he must have witnessed a terrible slaughter, and the trauma and shock of that vision affected him most acutely. Indeed, a prophet of God has no pretty job.

Moreover, this does not end the visions God gave him! Moving into Ezekiel 10, God is still in the Temple’s court, and in verses 6-7, He commands an angelic being:

“Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim.” . . . And the cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that was among the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed with linen, who took it and went out.

This is a very interesting passage. It makes no mention of the Babylonian troops who would later descend upon and lay siege to Jerusalem, who were going to slay and burn. Spiritually speaking, those who died in that catastrophe died at the hands of the angels whom God had sent, and Jerusalem burned with the fire of God!

Herbert Armstrong taught that the book of Ezekiel is for modern Israel, which is presently led by the United States of America. Truly, it is a vision, but it points to a reality: that America’s fall will be the greatest of any nation in the history of the world. Yes, and the vision seems to tell us that when she burns, America will burn with very fire of God.

Ezekiel, as verse 19 indicates, watches as the cherubim “mounted up” and left the earth. God

returns to His throne in heaven, but the impact of the visions remain on Ezekiel’s psyche. Thousands in Jerusalem had perished, and the city was in flames. Ezekiel must have been absolutely terrified to see God leave, to see such utter devastation in advance and probably in living Technicolor, to witness the destruction of God’s Temple, the slaughter of myriads of people, and the end of his homeland as he and his forefathers had known it for centuries.

He may have asked, “Could Israel have become so decadent? Could this happen to the city of God?” He must have wondered, but he knew the answer. He had seen it in visions from God Himself.

Similarly, we could ask today, “Could America drift so far from the principles of its founding?” and “Can the destruction of America as we have known her really be happening right before our eyes and her final dissolution be so relatively close?”

We, too, know the answer, for we have seen it in God’s Word.

THE INKHORN VISION

Are we tormented by what we see around us? Are we spiritually tortured by the evil that we hear and see?

Ezekiel 9 contains a few matters that were skipped over previously. One of the spirit beings who had “charge over the city” (verse 1) carried, not a battle-axe like his fellows, but a writer’s inkhorn (verse 2), and he was also dressed differently, in linen. His is a different purpose. God charges him to go ahead of his fellows, saying in verse 4: “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.”

The others follow him, obeying God’s command to go through the city killing and not having pity (verse 5), but in verse 6, God warns, “but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark.”

Those people who sighed and cried somehow found a place of safety from the conflagration and the terror. They had God’s mark on them, protecting them from His judgment. Sighing and crying over the abominations and the sins of the larger society, then, must be enormously important to us too, as we also stand on the brink of similar tribulation. We will see just how important it is in Part Two.

—Charles Whitaker

ready answer

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

Mercy: The Better Option

“Blessed are the
merciful, for they shall
obtain mercy.”

—*Matthew 5:7*

Have you ever said the wrong thing and wished with all your heart that you could retract the statement?

Have you ever gossiped, revealed a confidence, or passed on a rumor that caused a problem for others?

Have you ever misjudged a person or situation and later came to see that your judgment was wrong, and because of your wrong judgment, the individual felt separated from others and hurt?

Have you ever judged another correctly as being wrong, but failed to consider the individual’s background and what they have had to overcome?

Have you ever taken God’s job and passed a condemning judgment on another person?

Have you ever had a poor attitude that caused you to be unforgiving toward a fellow member of the church?

Have you ever looked down on someone who seemed never to be able to get things right and who continually slipped in the same areas over and over, and because of this, you felt free to be critical of them?

In all of the above questions and more, I would have to admit to being guilty on all counts. We are likely all guilty of these sins many times over.

As a lay member, deacon, and elder through the years, I have made incorrect judgments of people and circumstances, revealed confidences, and passed on gossip and rumors, resulting in hurt feelings and worse situations. Though the results were painful, and I wished with all my heart I had not been so stupid and thoughtless, the experiences were instructive! Perhaps I can pass on a few lessons learned over the years.

Learning to Judge

The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:1-3:

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints [members of the church]? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

In a broad sense, Paul is teaching that we are to learn to deal with situations as God would, and our training ground is here in this life and in the church. We are undergoing extensive hands-on training for the profession of judge, which, as Paul implies, will be among our duties as children of God in His Kingdom. This is no minor matter!

Earlier in my conversion, I clearly left out one of the most important elements needed for making right judgments. Jesus points out which one in His Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Had I shown more mercy in those situations, their outcomes would have been far different—and definitely better.

Generally, the merciful are those people who are affected by the suffering of others. They are affected in a manner that causes them, not only to offer encouragement to one who is experiencing a rough spot in his life, but also to work to lessen his suffering.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary defines *mercy* as “a form of love determined by the state or condition of its objects. Their state is one of suffering and need, while they may be unworthy or ill-deserving. Mercy is at once the disposition of love respecting such, and the kindly ministry of love for their relief.”

A secular dictionary, *The Reader's Digest Encyclopedic Dictionary*, concurs: *Mercy* is the “kind, compassionate treatment of an offender, adversary, prisoner in one's power; compassion where severity is expected, or deserved.” Among its synonyms are “leniency,” “compassion,” “forgiveness,” “pity,” “kindness,” “tolerance,” “charity,” “benevolence,” “clemency,” and “forbearance.”

The primary idea behind mercy is rendering a kindness when harshness or condemnation is expected or even deserved. A merciful person looks beyond the present state of affairs to the potential good that may result from his compassionate handling of the matter. He is willing to forgo the other's punishment, his “just deserts,” or his own desire for revenge in an attempt to produce good fruit from a bad situation.

Following in Christ's Steps

The nature of God is to be merciful to those He calls. We know that He calls the weak, foolish, and base (I

Corinthians 1:26-28), those who are undesirable in society's eyes and guilty of sin in His eyes. He extends great mercy to them, redeeming them from the death penalty and setting them on the path toward eternal life in the Kingdom of God. In doing so, He sets us an example to follow!

Jesus teaches this in Matthew 9:10-13:

Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard that, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

In saying that He desires mercy and not sacrifice, Jesus is teaching that He prefers it when people practice mercy and not blindly follow ritual. He is not condemning the laws of sacrifice He set up for Israel to practice until He fulfilled them, but explaining that He is more pleased with acts of forgiveness and kindness than strict external compliance to the law.

He is telling the Pharisees that, though they were exacting in keeping the letter of the law, they had completely missed its intent. In Matthew 23:23, He reminds them of this very point: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

It is good and right to tithe to God, even to be exacting in our accounting, but not at the expense of the far more important matters of justice, mercy, and faith! These weightier matters are a Christian's priorities, so if a question of “What do I do?” ever comes up between practicing them and keeping the strict letter of the law, our judgment should lean toward these Christian virtues. If we can do both, all the better!

Jesus Christ is the personification of mercy. Exodus 25:17-22 describes the Mercy Seat constructed in the wilderness. Essentially, it was the golden lid of the Ark of the Covenant, on which were figures of two cherubim facing each other with their wings stretched out, covering the Mercy Seat. God, the pre-incarnate Christ, says in verse 22, “And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony.” The Mercy Seat represented God in His dealings with sinful humanity, and the chief element He employs is mercy.

Now notice Romans 3:23-25:

. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the

redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed. . . .

This passage tells us that Jesus Christ is our Mercy Seat, but the translators have hidden it. “Propitiation” (Greek *hilastērios*) in verse 25 is literally “place of conciliation or expiation” or “Mercy Seat.” The Septuagint used *hilastērios* to translate the Hebrew noun *kappōreth* (“Mercy Seat”). This Hebrew word’s root is *kapar* meaning “to cover” or “to conceal.” This illustrates that the nature of God is to be merciful.

The apostle Peter writes in I Peter 2:21 that we are to follow in Christ’s steps, thus as Jesus Christ is merciful, we also are to show mercy in our judgments.

Mercy Conquers All

This is so important that we are given a warning in James 2:12-13 concerning this: “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” A divine judgment is coming, and it will be done fairly. However, God will be disinclined to show any mercy to those who have not exhibited mercy and kindness to others. This is the law of reciprocity: God will judge us according to how we have judged others (see Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:37-38).

James also says that “mercy triumphs over judgment.” Indeed, the laws we have broken demand our death, but the mercy of God through the sacrificial death of His Son has made a way for us to be accepted. In the end, it will be clear that God’s mercy prevails.

The kind of mercy that God wants to see from us is illustrated in passages such as Matthew 25, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. . . . Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:34-36, 40)

When we show pity, compassion, and kindness to those in difficult straits, we are practicing the merciful attitude that God expects each of His children to exhibit at all times. Of course, He does not want us to be so soft-hearted that we become an easy mark for those who would take advantage of us, but He does want us to develop a keen sense of discernment that realizes

when mercy is a better option than the strict application of rules.

Undoubtedly, each of us would lend a helping hand to another who was in physical need, but there are other situations in which a physical need is not apparent that also require us to extend mercy. Particularly, we need to learn to employ mercy in our dealings with each other on a daily basis. To put it into today’s language, everyone has bad-hair days, and on some days, even a normally lovable person can be very difficult to live with.

Age differences lend themselves to misunderstandings. We may still carry prejudices that rear their ugly heads from time to time, causing friction. Oftentimes, we just do not think before we speak. Mistakes made in the past can seem to hang over us like a cloud and never go away, and thus we do not feel forgiven, affecting our attitudes. And of course, we all have different backgrounds and came from situations in which we perhaps lived our lives in certain shameful ways. Each of these problems can ignite trouble with our closest family members and friends.

The problem that all of us face in making righteous judgments is that we cannot see into the other person’s heart; we do not really know their intentions and attitudes. We have a hard enough time understanding ourselves, let alone someone else! In Jesus’ comments about judgment in His Sermon on the Mount, He cautions us about being too critical: “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3). Therefore, if we have to make a judgment call, it is far better to lean toward patience, forbearance, and mercy.

So, when we find ourselves offended by anyone, rather than responding in kind, we should apply the principle of giving a soft answer (Proverbs 15:1), turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39), and extending tender mercies (Colossians 3:12).

Satan would like us to hang on to evil thoughts about another, to hold a grudge against a brother, or to arrive at church with a resentful attitude toward a fellow Christian, but Jesus Christ wants us to remember Matthew 18:35: “So My heavenly Father will [pass judgment against] you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” Just as He forgave each of us from the heart, He wants us to learn to forgive others in the same generous, merciful way.

In my forty-plus years in the church, I have made almost all of the mistakes a person can make with his mouth, and realizing this, I have truly appreciated those who have extended mercy and forgiveness to me. They have taught me a great lesson by their spiritual maturity: that I, too, had better extend mercy and kindness to others.

What does God require of us? He tells us plainly in Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

—John Reid

personal *The Awesome Cost of Love*

(continued from page 7)

over centuries! Perhaps this can provide us more insight to see that nothing is too great a price for God to pay for us.

The Greatest Cost of Loving of All

I Corinthians 11:25-29 says:

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Verse 25 reads, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." It employs a figure of speech in which the word "cup" is a metonymy, meaning that the cup represents what it contains: literally wine. The wine symbolized His blood, thus, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood."

A covenant is an agreement, a contract, between two parties. It is a device to bring people into a binding relationship to accomplish some undertaking. This particular covenant is unusual in that it is in His blood.

In his commentary on I Corinthians 11:23-34 (p. 104), William Barclay makes a very interesting comment on this. He changes a few words and provides proof that the change is grammatically legitimate. He paraphrases it in this manner: "This covenant cost Me My life." This agreement, the New Covenant, is made at the cost of the most precious, the most valuable and dearest Life that has ever lived on the face of the earth, that of our sinless Creator. It did not come cheaply.

Barclay's paraphrase is justifiable because the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:14). The giving of that specific Life by His shed blood made possible the establishment of a covenantal relationship with God. This relationship is the fruit of Christ's sinless life and subsequent death. Passover portrays what makes salvation a reality for us because justification before God is its fruit. We can consider Christ's making this relationship possible the most important accomplishment of all that He has done through His death.

Our relationship with God *is* our salvation. We could have no salvation unless the relationship existed because we would still be cut off from God. Once established,

this relationship *must* be developed and to be developed, it *must* be continued! "If you continue, you will become free," says Jesus. This begins the process of truly coming to know God, and to know God is eternal life (John 17:3).

Within the context of I Corinthians 11, a major point deals with people not properly discerning the sacred gravity of what the symbols represent. Some in Corinth were making a mockery of the Passover. The church members gathered for a meal, and some were getting drunk, others ate in a gluttonous manner, while a few received little food because others were hogging it all. What they did edified the body not at all! They experienced very little of the right kind of spiritual fellowship.

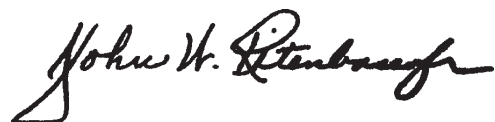
The apostle writes his epistle to correct a corrupt situation. His point is that, in doing what they did, they were not discerning the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. If they had truly understood their significance, they would not have acted in this manner. They were not properly interpreting and applying the meaning to their own lives. In treating Christ's sacrifice in a frivolous manner, their application especially went awry. They went through the motions of taking the Passover but without appreciating the reality that the symbols represented.

The word "unworthy" in I Corinthians 11:27 means "lacking in merit or worth." The Corinthians had no appreciation of the precious value of what the symbols represented to their personal salvation. They were missing the eternal character of what they were observing, caring little about who had died and grasping almost nothing of the love that went into His act. They were truly profaning the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ and putting Him to an open shame.

A major point of understanding about observing Passover is that our attitude toward Christ's sacrifice affects our approach to life in general. Above all, it will affect our relationship with the Father, as well as with one another, because the strength of our obligation to submit to Jesus Christ will be diminished. We will not feel it all that important to submit in obedience.

If God wants us to understand anything by our observing the Passover, it is 1) the tremendous costs it took to free us and to maintain that freedom, and 2) how far Jesus Christ, our Example, was willing to be "pushed" without giving in to sin in even the smallest of matters. Let us take Passover soberly, with the serious significance of what it represents at the forefront of our minds.

In Christian love,



An Islamist Vision

As previously explained in this space, Turkey—heir of the Ottoman Empire—is reawakening and stretching its geopolitical muscles after lying dormant for 90 years (see “Turkey: a Resurging Pivotal Power,” *Forerunner*, November-December 2007). But in reasserting itself and spreading its influence, it is also having to determine what it wants to become. This question of identity and direction is creating a constitutional crisis with profound implications for Europe and the Middle East.

To understand what is occurring, one must go back nearly a century. In 1923, in the aftermath of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) led a secular revolution that established the present Republic of Turkey. In doing so, he abolished the caliphate (Islamic empire) that had existed for centuries and removed Shari’a (Muslim law) courts, as well as other elements of Islamic legal and religious orders. An admirer of the Enlightenment, Atatürk sought to transform Turkey into a progressive, democratic, and secular nation-state. Because Islamism had been such a strong feature of the Empire, and would likely return if left unopposed, Atatürk made the Turkish military the guarantor of the secular state, grounding this in the republic’s constitution.

For the last few years, though, the debate over Islam within Turkish government and society has grown increasingly louder. Approximately 98% of Turkey’s 74 million citizens are Muslim (of varying degrees of orthodoxy), and it should be remembered that Islam is more than just another religion. In Koranic Islam, there is no concept of a “separation of mosque and state.” Thus a secular Islamic state is ultimately a contradiction in terms, and a large portion of the populace is not content with a governmental system that does not rule according to Islamic law or support Islamic ideals.

Turkey’s current ruling party is the Islamist-rooted Justice & Development Party (AKP). While the AKP and Turkey’s Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, pay lip-service to the country’s secular tradition, it is no secret that they are trying to move the nation away from said secularism. “You cannot be secular and a Muslim at the same time,” Erdogan said in a speech in 1995. In the same speech, he revealed that his vision is not limited merely to placating the Turkish populace: “The world’s 1.5 billion Muslims are waiting for the Turkish people to rise up. We will rise up.”

The AKP has been positioning itself as a bridge between the Western and Islamic worlds. While expanding its influence toward all compass points, it is having the most success in the Muslim world. Since Turkey has made little headway in being accepted into the European Union, it has turned its gaze from the West—and the secularism inherent within it—back toward the East, where it previously held great sway in the Turkic countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It is likewise increasingly active in the Middle East, warming up to Muslim nations like Syria and Iran, and slowly distancing itself from its historical ally, Israel.

Part of Turkey’s changing heart stems from the passing of the generation most familiar with—and supportive of—Atatürk’s

ideas, while the younger generation is not so vehemently secular. Much of this is because of the Gülen Movement, part political machine and part shadowy Islamist sect that backs the AKP (though some contend that it is the ruling force behind the AKP). Founded in the 1970s by Fethullah Gülen, a charismatic preacher who now lives in the United States but remains popular in Turkey, the movement aims to reshape secular Turkey in its own image by securing the supremacy of Gülen’s version of Islam over Turkish life.

The core of his network is educational. An estimated 75% percent of Turkey’s two million preparatory school students are enrolled in Gülen institutions, and he also controls thousands of top-tier secondary schools, colleges, and student dormitories throughout Turkey—and 110 other countries. While these educational institutions are not technically *madrassahs* (Islamic theology schools), neither are they secular. While they are not stocked with fire-breathing imams convincing children to detonate themselves, they have played a large role in systematizing Islamic instruction in Turkey, as well as schooling an entire generation (or more) in Gülen’s anti-Atatürk vision.

Gülen’s vision of Islam is more philosophical and humanistic than militaristic—“we are first human, then Muslim”—but even so, he has his eye on overturning the status quo in Turkey. Though his writings sound moderate, even agreeable, to many Western progressives, all is not as it seems—he told followers in a 1999 TV broadcast that “every method and path is acceptable [including] lying to people.” Over time, his followers have penetrated every stratum of Turkish life, many into the highest positions: governors, judges, military officers, police commissioners, security directors, and other high-ranking officials. Now Islamists in Turkey’s government are indirectly beginning to challenge the military—the secular state’s protector.

In 2007, the AKP devised an elaborate conspiracy theory that allowed the arrest of about two hundred AKP critics, including military officers, under accusation of plotting to overthrow the elected government. After a second alleged military coup was “uncovered” in early 2010, hundreds more critics of the AKP and active and retired military officers were arrested, including former heads of the air force and navy—many simply for the sake of intimidation. The AKP and Gülen’s followers have thus gained the means to harass the dominant secularists and silence critics of the Islamist vision.

The military is at a crossroads: Either quietly submit to the AKP’s direction and hope for a different government in the next election, or else stage a real *coup d’état*, which will likely increase the Islamists’ electoral strength. Either way, momentum favors the Islamists—and a Turkey whose government is again Islamist will change the dynamics throughout Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. As history shows, an Islamist vision sets its sights on the whole world.

—David C. Grabbe

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Two Demon-Possessed Men Healed (Part Three)

In this miracle, (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; and Luke 8:26-39), Jesus Christ commands unclean spirits to come out of two men. Demons must obey Jesus even if people do not. Even so, the demons do not obey Christ's command immediately. They object, unwilling to abandon their victims. Christ could have compelled them to come out of the men immediately if He had wished, but the men may not have been able to survive the exorcism on their own strength.

In a separate incident, Mark 9:26-27 informs us, "Then the spirit [*one demon*] cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." Here, the exorcism had induced convulsions in the man as a single demon left him. Both exorcisms were under Christ's control; He used His great power but with wise, gentle, and cautious concern.

Jesus addresses the men as if they are possessed by a single spirit, but the demon's answer, giving his name as "Legion," shows that he led a company of demons. Mark records that the swine that the demons entered after their exorcism numbered about two thousand (Mark 5:13). If this was the number inhabiting the two men—each with its own personality, all under the power of one will, animated by one purpose and united in operation—then the plight of the two men must have been horrific in the extreme.

1. Why does Jesus accept the demons' request to enter the swine? Matthew 8:31; Mark 5:12; Luke 8:32.

COMMENT: Actually, Christ does not send the demons into the swine but merely out of the men, nor does He drive the pigs into the sea through a divine miracle, but the demons themselves do it by divine consent.

There may be an element of judgment here on the owners for raising the swine as food (Leviticus 11:4-8). While Jews do not eat pork, Roman soldiers did, and providing unclean meat for others does not seem to have bothered the Jews' consciences. Thus, the destruction of their swine is deserved punishment for violating God's law.

The Bible tells us of demonic powers entering into only two species of animals: the serpent—a symbol of deception and shrewdness—and the swine—a symbol of uncleanness. What more appropriate place is there for unclean spirits to be contained than in swine?

2. What changes take place in the men? Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35.

COMMENT: At least five significant changes occur:

First, the exorcism left the men with a new posture, that of sitting and resting, in direct contrast to the constant roaming and wandering about the tombs and mountains and wilderness day and night. Christ says in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." A problem of sin is discontentment, the lack of peace and rest (Isaiah 57:20-21). However, that all changed when Christ entered the lives of the demon-possessed men to deliver them from the evil adversary.

Second, before the exorcism, the possessed men want nothing to do with Christ, but afterward a tremendous change in attitude occurs: The delivered men want to go with Christ out of reverence and respect for their "Savior." Jesus, though, has something else in mind: It is more important that they witness to others of what happened. Jesus instructs His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). The man wants to follow Jesus

physically, but Jesus wants him to take up his cause for Him.

Third, before their deliverance they wear no clothes, yet afterwards they are clothed (Luke 8:27, 35). Sin makes people shameless and immodest, a natural development due to their separation from the righteous God. The men's spiritual cleanness is indicated by visible changes; modesty, cleanliness, and appearance improve, as it does when anyone is delivered by Christ. Wherever God's truth is received, people's morals improve, reflected in modest clothing.

Fourth, they regain their sanity. Fools, not wise men, reject God (Psalm 14:1), and sin invites Satan into a person's mind. Ultimately, his influence causes madness. Jesus explains: "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order" (Luke 11:24-25). When a demon is removed, a person's mind is cleaned of chaos and made orderly. To avoid being possessed again, he needs to replace what was swept out with God's Spirit and truth.

Fifth, the words "right mind" (Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35) suggest the controlling of thoughts and actions, so it indicates, not only sanity, but also self-control. The demons in the men are uncontrollable ("neither could anyone tame him," Mark 5:4), but when Jesus comes, they recognize God's authority over them. Evil people cannot control their desires, and society cannot control them, so crime rages on. Living God's way of life as revealed in the life of Christ is the answer. God provides the right mind to produce the fruit of the Spirit, including self-control (Galatians 5:23).

Jesus instructs the healed man to tell people about his deliverance, particularly those who were familiar and intimate with him. He wants him to be an example of God's grace, first among his own family and friends, so that they can come to repentance. A Christian is first responsible for witnessing to those closest to him, who will see the greatest difference in him as he lives God's way of life.

—Martin G. Collins