

The Handwriting Is On the Wall (Part Two)

Waiting on God

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Last night we saw that God commands that humanly we are to look to Abraham and Sarah's example of living a life of faith, and to follow their example. Hebrews 11 shows us that Abraham believed God, feared Him, and chose to follow the vision given him to guide him in his choices in life. He did this to such a degree that he never purchased a plot of ground except for a burial plot, and he never built a permanent home, and he, *for one hundred* years lived life focused on the future, as an alien actually just passing through.

It was by that vision and sense of responsibility to the God he believed and feared that his choices were made. This brethren is what the CGG is attempting to do during this period of the church's scattering. It is this theme that we will continue to follow in this sermon.

Problems arrived in Abraham's life, and one particular one that I think deserves looking into during this time of scattering and the inner rivalries between the church of God groups.

Genesis 13:1-4 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning [that is, when he came into Canaan], between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

This series of verses adds emphasis by showing in one specific instance the way Abraham and Sarah were deliberately choosing to live under God's guidance. They were not perfect in this, but they did very well. It is helpful to remember that what drove Abraham and Sarah into Egypt in the first place was a famine. There is no indication anywhere that when they returned that the famine was over. There is also no indication that they sought God before going down into Egypt for famine relief.

They returned thoroughly chastened, badly embarrassed by that dreadful encounter where Abraham told a half-truth, that Sarah was his sister, that she was free for Abimelech to marry. It was half true. She was his half-sister. But he got chewed out by Abimelech for that, because Abimelech felt he was being led into committing the sin of adultery. He knew about the law of God, and he felt greatly relieved actually that God let him know he was not to mess with that woman.

The lesson is, that once one is under God's governance one does not seek the world for relief. You do not go back to Egypt. You do not go back to Babylon. You go to God for relief.

Notice that verses 3 and 4 show that before settling in this time, he first called upon God.

Genesis 13:5-9 And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you, and between my herdmen and your herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself, I pray you, from me: If you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

I think you can begin to see the reason why I chose these verses. There was strife between the brethren. In this case Abraham deliberately condescended to Lot, allowing him to choose first as to which direction he would go. Let us put this strife into a New Testament setting.

I Corinthians 6:7-8 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? No, you do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.

The *New Testament Commentary* translates verse 7 as: "It is already an utter defeat for you, that you have lawsuits against yourselves. Why not rather be treated unjustly? Why not rather be defrauded?" They made a comment that the word "defrauded" could actually be translated and be rendered correct as "swindled." "Why not let yourself be swindled?"

From a worldly perspective, Paul turned everything upside-down when he said that winning a lawsuit was a defeat for the Corinthians. Instead of telling them that they should demand their right, he rebuked the Corinthians for degrading fellow Christians by taking them to court.

Why is Paul saying this to the Corinthians? Even if a judge should rule in favor of the plaintiff, the court case has already had a detrimental effect on both the defendant and the entire Christian community. Do you understand that? When we become a part of the body of Christ we are part of the body, and the whole body is affected by the behavior, the conduct, and the attitudes of each member.

The bad attitude or the bad behavior of a single member may not appear to pull it down very badly. It may not be noticeable by most, but this is the Word of God. He is saying that it does affect the whole spiritual organism, and so the church demonstrates a lack of love in an atmosphere of hostility and is unable to be an effective witness to the world. That is what God is saying.

The effectiveness of the whole is reduced proportionally by the behavior of one, and so the plaintiff should not receive any praise for winning a lawsuit because he does so at the expense

of the entire Christian congregation. So Paul's wording at the beginning of verse 7 is unique. He does not say that the Corinthians had lawsuits against one another, but against themselves. It is like beating yourself with a baseball bat, if I can illustrate it that way. It is a defeat to deal in this manner with a brother, for the person who *brings* the charge, as well as the person who *causes* the charge are both injured regardless of whether the plaintiff wins or not.

Paul is saying that by bringing lawsuits before the world, the entire church becomes a defendant. The entire community is shamed. And why is it shamed? Because this course of operation ignores God and His sovereignty over His creation, and especially of His church that consists of His children.

Now back to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 13. The context shows that a famine was upon them, and it does not show there was any relief from that famine. But Abraham and Sarah were willing to suffer further loss in favor of peace—peace with a higher priority, peace with his brother Lot who was also physically his nephew. Peace with his brother there was more important to Abraham than any monetary loss he might have suffered as a result of getting the bad end of the deal. Where do you think Paul got his ideas about what he wrote in I Corinthians 6? It came from an illustration like this here in the book of Genesis.

Paul was really showing you and me that Abraham was willing to let God have rule over his life and determine the outcome of this strife; that he would just peacefully go off to the side. Lot could go his way, and Abraham would take what was left over, and if he suffered loss, so he suffered loss. Do you see that Abraham was trusting God to supply his need? That is living by faith.

Genesis 13:10-18 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you come unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly. And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now your eyes and look from the place where you are northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever. And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto you. Then Abram removed his tent and come and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

In that series of verses Lot is shown to be living by sight. He chose what appeared on the

surface to be the better land, but God spoke to Abraham, confirming that he had chosen the course correctly and re-confirmed His promise of eternal inheritance of the land. The chapter then concludes with Abraham building another altar in the area in which he was then living, thus showing his continuous contact with God.

Let us make what Abraham and Sarah experienced practical to our time, and at the same time continue to show why the CGG is doing what it is doing.

Let us go to the New Testament, to John 10:14. If you are familiar with the chapters and the context in them, this is the chapter of the shepherd and the sheep.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

This first area we are touching on here involves our relationship and attitude toward other church of God groups. By this first area, I mean I am going to cover two areas that show what the Church of the Great God is doing, and why it is doing it.

Now suppose all the church of God groups that have spun off the Worldwide Church of God are out looking at the available grazing lands. Are you aware that there are only so many sheep available? I mean Christ's sheep—church members. Such a thing is carnally attractive to a minister to reach out and gather as many as possible to be *in his* fold, and to take them, build fences around them so that they will not escape and go to another fold and become another man's sheep.

You should be able to clearly see why a minister would claim:

To be the only true church, . . . (There is a fence.), . . . That he had more high-ranking ministers with him, . . . (There is another fence.), . . . That he is the only one preaching the gospel, . . . (That is another fence.), . . . Or that he is an apostle, or "that Prophet," or Elisha, or say everybody else is Laodicean, and that he only is the true successor of Herbert W. Armstrong, etc., etc., etc.

Brethren, once the spirit of competition enters the picture, so does enmity, and so does division. Can you begin to see the wisdom in what Abraham did? He did not want any enmity with Lot. He wanted peace. He did not want division. He wanted harmony, and having those desires, he trusted God to supply. "Let Lot have what he wants. I am not going to fight with my brother. I am not going to compete with him over what is available in the way of grazing land." The way of the world is to advertise oneself in a competitive manner, but there are two major things wrong with this. The church is not the world, and most important of all the sheep belong to Christ, not to the minister, and not to the church group. He said, "I am the shepherd of the sheep."

John 17:5-6 And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was. I have

manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world: yours they were, and you gave them me; and they have kept your word.

The sheep originally belonged to the Father, and then the Father gave them to the Son.

John 17:7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever you have given me are of you.

We have a place where the ministry of the scattered churches of God ought to begin, and that is that the sheep belong to Christ. They are not the ministry's possession. The ministry is sent to serve the sheep. The sheep are not there to serve the minister. They help him in his responsibilities, yes, but the sheep do not belong to the minister.

The sheep belong to Christ. They were given to Him by the Father, and by the Father giving the sheep to the Christ, it became Christ's responsibility to get the sheep into the Kingdom of God. That is another big point. It is not the minister's place to get the sheep into the Kingdom of God. He only assists Christ. It is Christ's responsibility to get the sheep into the Kingdom of God. The minister cannot save anybody, and if the minister has any character at all, he cannot do what *you* are supposed to do in *your* responsibility within the body. The minister has *his* responsibility, and that is to serve Christ in serving the sheep.

Let us go back now in thought to Lot. Was Christ able to save Lot even though he made a bad decision and went to live and work in an area he should have stayed away from as far as he could? He made a dumb choice, and yet God was still able to save him. Does that not tell us something?

The minister really has no permission from God to exaggerate his responsibility. He is called to help point the way, and there is not much beyond that in his responsibility. Now is there a lack of faith in the greater church of God—a lack so deep that ministers will compete for the available sheep because they perceive that their fellow ministers are in reality a shadowy form of an enemy? I might be blunt, but that is exactly the way it is.

So brethren, the Church of the Great God does not run other groups down. We do not prohibit attending other group's services, and a pretty fair number of them are attending other groups' Feast sites. Why do we permit these things? Because, by faith, we see those other groups as our brethren, and we are not competing with them.

I have to admit that I fret about some of these things because I too am learning to trust Christ; and I fret, because I think we have a lot to offer. I fret, that in the long run, these people are hurting themselves, more or less flitting all over the place as if they have no home. But brethren, the reality is, it is their life and they have the right to choose. Christ knows what they are doing, and He knows far better than I do how and what to do about it.

There is a second area that involves trusting God, and that has to do with church government.

John 14:15 If you love me, keep my commandments.

Following the death of Herbert Armstrong in 1986, Evelyn and I became aware fairly quickly that the Worldwide Church of God was degenerating spiritually. However, we did not leave its fellowship until 1992, and when we left we did not leave to begin another church organization. We had done absolutely no seeking out of others whatever to do such a thing. We had indeed conversed with others about what was happening. We talked with John and Delores Reid a lot, but no plans whatever were made to do anymore than just leave and to get a job out in the business world while at the same time continuing privately to observe what we had learned under Herbert Armstrong.

While in the Worldwide Church of God I think I learned a fair amount about how it was governed, and some of what I perceived I did not agree with. My disagreement was not with the hierarchical form, because I believe that is what the Bible shows is the correct pattern. The problem seemed to be in the policies, and in some cases, the attitudes that were exhibited. It may have never been intended to operate that way, but I felt that the fruit of that system's operations being produced was showing me that it was not entirely of God.

Shortly after the Church of the Great God began, one of the first sermon series I gave was on government. The series concluded with what I titled "Self-government." To me this means that each person is individually and personally responsible directly to God to control and direct his life in order that his relationship with God is developed to its highest.

The practical effect of this is that no amount of coercion from the ministry or from the church in general is going to produce the right fruit. The coercion may indeed produce submission, but never forget the proverb that "He convinced against his will remains unconvinced still." Faith and character *must* come from within, and if it is not there it cannot be exhibited.

Faith and character exist in a person to the degree of the quality of the relationship with Christ, not the minister, not the congregation. The individual *must* have the vision, the faith, and the love for God to motivate him to pray, to study, to meditate, to sacrifice, to discipline himself, to endure and to overcome in seeking God. There is no such thing, brethren, as group salvation, and even as we are called individually, we are *saved* individually.

So I came to believe that the scattering was not only a punishment, not only a course-correction (because the church was clearly headed in a wrong direction both in attitude and in doctrine), but also that being scattered afforded God a way to work with people without the influence of a large group of people in a friendly social atmosphere. If that friendly social atmosphere exists without character, it becomes awfully difficult to resist going to services, because that is where your friends are.

If the character and the discipline and everything is there in place, then friendly people are really wonderful, but we always have to be on guard that we are not going to services because there is a nice group of people there. That is not the reason we go. It helps, but it is not the reason. The scattering placed those who remained faithful into a spiritual environment in which each is virtually alone.

You people came from all over the United States, and in most cases there is no Church of the

Great God near you. You are alone. There may be another family, and that is fine, and we rejoice in that, but there are hardly any Louisburgs around where there is about 30 people. There are hardly any Fort Mills around where there are about 70 to 75 people.

Do you know that we started out in Anaheim with about 60 people? Now they are down to about 9 or 10—nine or ten faithful people. But it seems as though one by one they got picked off by the world, and most of those people are nowhere to be seen in terms of the church of God at all.

One time we lost 50 people in one crack, just like that. Those 50 people got together and kept the Feast of Tabernacles up in Oregon. They had a cause. It was the calendar. The following year they tried to get back together again. Do you know what happened? They needed three starting dates for the Feast of Tabernacles because they could not decide which calendar to use, and so they split three ways. As far as I know, out of that there is only one family that is close to the church of God

Brethren, God has in most cases put us into a position where it is Him and us, or where it is Him and our family, and that is it. I would say that one of His purposes in doing this is to make sure that you love *Him*. Jesus said, "If you love *ME*, keep My commandments." Last night we saw that God said to Abraham, "Now I know that you fear *Me*." It is the relationship that matters, and if God adds the blessing of others around you that are of the same mind, well great! It is the relationship with Him though that counts in the long run, and that is going to be our salvation, because He is going to respond to us.

I want you to think for a moment about Abraham and Sarah. What kind of a congregation did they fellowship in? Zilch. None. Zero. Nada. They had no church to support them. Then along came Isaac and Rebecca, and then along came Jacob and Esau, and their wives of course. Esau went off on his own. Their fellowship was only within their family. There was no church to support their relationship with God.

I want you to think about the first century church. I do not know whether you have done any research into things of that time period. Those congregations—Corinth, Galatia, and the Philippians—were *small* congregations. I have seen guesses that there were only a dozen or two people in them. They had no Internet. They had no telephone. They had no radios. They had no television. They had no electronic support. Probably the biggest congregation was in Jerusalem.

Do you understand that through the centuries the situation the church of God found itself in, and is in right now, has been the normal state of the church? It is the Worldwide Church of God that was the anomaly, where there were tens of thousands of people at least united in one body for a period of 40 or 50 years. The church, brethren, has always been scattered.

This has been somewhat of a shock for us, and it has been difficult to make the adjustment to the scattered condition because we were given all the ice cream first, and then came the peas or the broccoli. Now here we are, eating broccoli. It is a steady diet. We are scattered all over the place and we have to deal with it.

Please brethren, I hope you will understand this scattering is a blessing. Everything God does is to bless His children. Yes, there may be correction with it, but the blessing will be, if we use it in a right way, that our relationship with God will improve far greater than it ever would have in a

great big congregation. We will know that our relationship is with Him, and that we cannot just slide by on dad's or mom's righteousness, or whatever. The relationship has to be with Him.

The church, its fellowship, and the ministry are still important to the salvation process, but the concept of managing the church's operations and place in the members' lives requires giving the membership a great deal of space to prove to God that they are seriously self-motivated.

This administrative policy has a tendency to make the Church of the Great God appear liberal. But brethren, it is not. God still requires the same keeping of His commandments. If you love Him, you will keep them whether you are in a big congregation or in a small congregation.

What this administrative policy does is it puts the requirements of meeting God's demands where they belong: on the individual. What it subtly does is force each person to use his space to develop his relationship with God. I will tell you, brethren, you are never going to have to honestly say, "My church made me do it," or "My minister made me do it." The motivation to express your love for God must come from within your own heart, from your own trust, that He not only exists, but that He is doing what He says He is doing, and we want to please Him and be part of that work.

The Bible provides many clear examples of people—in fact heroes of the biblical narrative—who sometimes wandered from the path God outlined for them because of ignorance or of character flaws within them. Even though they wandered, that did not stop God from reaching out to them.

I Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, as the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

I just read that verse to introduce the personality that we are going to look at here.

I Kings 18:1-2 And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show yourself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria.

I Kings 19:1-4 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

I want us to see God's reaction to this major biblical personality. Elijah is a good example to begin with by explaining the second reason why the Church of the Great God is operating in the manner that we do, and it directly involves my part. Most assuredly it involves faith, and it also involves a major concept of government. In addition, it involves a specific awareness of God's sovereignty, and therefore it involves what the CGG is doing as a work.

I think we will all agree that Elijah was zealous in God's behalf, and within the pages of the Bible he is held as a model of zeal. But one must be careful, because James 5:17 says of Elijah "that he was a man subject to like passions as we are." Which means he had to cope with his fears, with periods of depression, physical limitations, and "a sky-high," as we would say today. He was human and therefore subject to human strengths and weaknesses.

More plainly stated is, that just because he was sent directly by God and zealous *for* God, he did not always do everything right. In fact a man of great passion is also capable of making great mistakes, and do it all thinking that he is doing God's will. Now zealousness must be rightly directed, or havoc is its result.

God directly assigned Elijah to represent Him before King Ahab and all of Israel. Elijah did this in spectacular fashion with the episode in which the 450 priests of Baal died in one fell swoop during Elijah's taunting, mocking challenge against them on Mount Carmel. Shortly thereafter, as we just read in chapter 19, he had to flee for his life, and he became very depressed.

Now God upheld Elijah during this confrontation primarily because he was God's representative, and the reputation of God's name was at stake. Those people indeed were evil, but that most certainly did not mean Elijah had God's full approval for what he did.

I Kings 19:8-18 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What do you here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake: but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What do you here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars and slain

your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you come, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi shall you anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shall you anoint to be prophet in your room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.

I do not know whether you realize it, but we have just read of God's course-correction of Elijah. He rebuked Elijah in a spectacular, and yet gentle fashion, and then essentially removed him from most of his responsibilities, replacing him with Elisha.

God directed Elijah to Mount Sinai where He had given Moses His law. Perhaps He sent him to the very cave in which Moses stood when God passed by him. He then gave Elijah three strong indications of His power, two of which accompanied His presence when He gave the law at Sinai. There was a terrible tempest, an earthquake, and finally fire all about the mountain. They occurred one after the other, apparently with barely a break between them.

The wind tempest was so strong it tore rocks into pieces, but in this case the Bible explains that God was not *in* any of them. The inference was clear to Elijah. God was saying to Elijah, "I would not have done it the way you did." (Talking about all that spectacular thunder and lightening Elijah performed.)

Then came the fourth phenomenon. It was so quiet. The quiet voice could not be misunderstood. God *was* in that phenomenon. It was as though God said, "This, Elijah, is the way I would have done it. I still would have confronted them, but not with savage, bloody, horrific embarrassing violence. I would have allowed them a way to repent and to live."

The lesson is clear. God was near to Elijah when those spectacular demonstrations were done, but God was rejecting their use. It was a condemnation of that sort of fierce, vengeful self-exalting zeal. Instead, what God would have done would have been a gentle approach that was so contrary to Elijah's harsh and stern nature. Indeed, brethren, when Jesus came, it is said of Him, "You shall not hear His voice crying in the streets." In other words, He would not be a rabble-rousing revolutionary, publicly demonstrating to get people behind Him in order to throw out the bums. Instead, Jesus said of Himself that He was "meek and lowly."

In his zeal, Elijah was guilty of exaggerating his circumstances to himself, and thus, what we might term, "getting out in front of God." In other words, Elijah did not defer to God's sovereignty, waiting for God to lead him. Instead, Elijah took too much into his own hand, thus helping create this bloody havoc in Israel.

One of Elijah's justifications, twice given, was that somebody had to do the job. "I, only I, remain." Well, God wiped away that false premise when He revealed that He had seven thousand others who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah was not alone. There were seven

thousand others God could have sanctified to do the job.

Do you see what I am getting at? Some of our church of God ministers are very zealous, and that is good, but is it possible that appointing themselves as apostles or "that prophet," or whatever, they are getting out in front of God and doing a job that God has not called them or appointed them to do?

Well, after God did this, He told Elijah to go to Damascus and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. Then he was to return to Israel and to anoint Jehu as king of Israel, and then finally he was to go to Elisha and anoint him into Elijah's prophetic office. God essentially sacked Elijah, but He did it in a way to allow Elijah to know that though a course-correction was necessary, he was not cut off from God despite the rebuke.

Elijah was not the only servant of God who has gotten out in front of Him. In fact, it has happened fairly frequently. I am going to give you a string of them. I think you can easily follow the sequence here. The first one is going to be back in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 1:13-14 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

This pattern of getting out in front of God had its beginning right here. Satan was the forerunner, the prototype, of getting out in front of God. He went off on his own from the purpose for which he was created and assigned, and then others—one-third of all angels—were persuaded to follow after him on the same destructive unity-destroying violent attack. That is where it began. He took it upon himself to do that. He was supposed to be a ministering spirit to serve *us*. Instead, he appointed himself as our enemy.

Let us go now to Genesis 16. Here is the father of the faithful.

Genesis 16:1-2 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar: And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing: I pray you, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

I do not think we need to go any further. You know the story. This was Abram and Sarah's seemingly simple solution to Sarah's child-bearing problem. Almost 4,000 years later it is still reverberating in the lives of the descendants of that sinful collaboration to produce an offspring. They did this on their own. It was not appointed of God. So like Satan, Abraham and Sarah took it upon themselves to do this.

Numbers 16:1-2 Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliah, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses,

with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown.

Numbers 16:8-9 And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, you sons of Levi: Seems it but a small thing unto you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

That was their assignment. You know what happened. A special note here in this episode is Korah—the man who appears to have been the leader of this rebellion and any other Levite who allied himself with him. But they had already been honored with great office responsibility before God, even as Elijah, Abraham, and Sarah, but their discontent drove them to go off in their own direction which would have created chaos in Israel's leadership. In order to stop them and leave us with another witness of what doing this sort of thing produces, God turned the chaos right back on their own heads. They got out in front of God. There was hardly anybody in Israel who had a higher responsibility than they did.

This next one is really interesting to me. There is hardly a more appealing person in all of scripture than King Josiah.

II Chronicles 34:1-2 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father: and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left.

It seems that Josiah had all the potential to be a second David. He received good guidance when he was young, and he put it into practice in his important office as king of Judah. He restored the worship of the true God to a height that had long been absent so that it seemed many golden years lay before the nation; but there was a flaw in Josiah's character.

II Chronicles 35:20-24 After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Charchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with you, you king of Judah? I come not against you this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear you from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy you not. Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they

brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

Brethren, it seems as though Josiah got too big for his britches. There was a hubris in him that came to the fore, and God let him and the nation suffer for Josiah's insolence. He forced himself into a battle that was not his. Even though being clearly warned, he would not turn aside, and he paid the ultimate penalty. As he aged, some humility that he had in his younger years must have evaporated away. Hubris is a synonym for pride; however, it expresses pride as being presumptuous, or pushy, as we might say. It assumes, with not enough thought, that it is acceptable for them to do as they do.

Each of these examples illustrates one who assumed, presumed, and then did. Now how many of us know that we are about to do something wrong because our conscience is warning us, and yet we do it anyway? Human nature is ever impatient, and the hubris is just below the surface. There is a solution to this, and it lies in the area of faith, but it is not an easy solution because of pride.

Turn now to Psalm 27:14. I am not going to do much in the way of expounding upon this, because it becomes very clear what the solution is.

Psalm 27:14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the LORD. (emphasis ours)

I am just giving you a smattering of these verses.

Isaiah 25:8-9 He will swallow up death and victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD has spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have *waited* for him, and he *will* save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. (emphasis ours)

That is a prophecy. That is what the people who are going to be in the Kingdom of God are going to say. They will say, "We waited for God."

Proverbs 20:22 Say not you, I will recompense evil: but wait on the LORD, and he shall save you.

Romans 8:25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Galatians 5:5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

These five scriptures will give you an overview of a command that appears very, very frequently. We just barely touched on them. The command is given, because carnally we have a very strong proclivity, a natural bent, toward impatience. Waiting is a confident, dependent, and expectant trust in God, but it resists in getting out in *front* of God.

Now let us look at this waiting concept, but from a somewhat different direction. We will do this with one New Testament book which is going to give us an idea of how frequently this command to wait in some form occurs. We are going to go to Matthew 4:19. There is something that is tied to all this, but I felt it needful to give us a pretty good background.

Matthew 4:19 And he said unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

We are going to be looking at the word "follow." "Waiting" and "following" are inextricably linked together in the Bible. In other words, what I am saying is that "waiting" is not passive. It is doing something while it is waiting. It is actively following while it is waiting.

Matthew 8:22 But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Matthew 9:9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

"Following" expresses the same concept as "waiting," but it implies more activity. To follow is to go, or to come after another person or thing relative to time. It means to conform to, adhere to, be guided by, comply with, and obey another who goes ahead. Yes, we are to wait. When you are following, you do not get out in front of Christ. You continue to do what He has told us to do all the while we are following after Him.

"Waiting" is not passive. It is actively doing what we were already assigned, told, and commanded to do in the past, and we do not deter—do not turn to the left nor to the right—until we are given a new command to go in a new direction. We keep doing what was assigned to us in the past. I think if you understand Christ, that all along the way, as we are following, He is going to be upgrading the responsibility He is giving to those who are following, and so the responsibilities become more complex.

Did Satan, did Abraham, did Korah, did Josiah wait for God? Did they adhere to His leadership? Did they comply with His plan and His way of life? Did they follow after the patterns He

established? No, brethren. In each case they pushed themselves forward into activity that He had not assigned them.

Let us make this more pointed. We are going to go to the book of Jeremiah. I actually have five places in the book of Jeremiah alone that God said this through Jeremiah. We are only going to look at one of them for the lack of time.

Jeremiah 14:14-15 Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land: By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed.

Like I said, five other times God said this through Jeremiah, and this is spoken against false prophets, but as I have just shown you, the same failing can occur to those directly-chosen servants of God—people that God has specifically dealt with and even directly spoken to. Did not God have face-to-face contact with Satan, and with Abraham and Sarah? Yet they got out in front of God and did something He did not want them to do—something that had not been assigned to them.

I bring this to your attention, because with some measure of thoughtlessness perhaps one might even include ignorance as part of this mix, combined with another measure of hubris. Surely we are capable of making the same sort of tragic mistakes of sticking our nose into an area we have not had an appointment from God to do.

You will find in Matthew 9: 37-38, and several more in the book of Matthew, something Jesus said that was extracted from Jeremiah, and it is very similar to "They ran; but I did not send them."

Matthew 9: 37-38 Then said he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.

How many times does God have to show us that He oversees the entire operation of His work and assigns responsibilities to all involved? How many times did Jesus give parables or instructions within a sermon in which He said that "He sent forth laborers"? "I send you." "I send My messenger." And on and on it goes.

In I Corinthians 12: 14-15 and 27-30, the apostle Paul shows an analogy that the church is like a human body. The human body has many parts, and God has assigned each of those parts to carry out a responsibility that enables the body to do whatever needs to be done. The church is that way as well.

God has assigned responsibilities within the church, and every part of the body must, by faith, cooperate with God to accomplish this or the operations of the body become weakened through confusing disorganization, or at a worse case scenario, rendered totally inefficient. This brethren, is the reason why we are scattered. The various parts of the body were breaking down in carrying out the responsibilities given to it.

Let us really update this to our time.

II Chronicles 15:1-4 And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa and said unto him, Hear you me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you while you be with him; and if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel had been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.

What I want to extract from that is this. I want you to see that the biblical record clearly shows that there are times when God, for His purposes, does not send an apostle or a prophet. For example, as far as we know, from Malachi to Christ was 400 years that He did not send forth any prophets. What should we do now that there is no apostle sent? I have already given you the answer. The answer is to go right on in faith performing the last responsibility He gave until He sends another apostle or prophet.

Does any one of us ministers have the right to take to ourselves the job of an apostle? I do not think so, and yet some have done that. Brethren, we are tools. However, we are unique in that we have a great deal of latitude. We can think, and we can choose, and we can cooperate, compete, or obfuscate (meaning to confuse, make vague or difficult to understand).

A hammer is a great tool for driving nails and bashing things, but it is clearly misused if we try to use it as a screwdriver. The same principle is true within the body of Jesus Christ. God assigns the responsibilities and the offices. Romans 13:1 shows very clearly that God rules all the way down through everything, and that includes within the church, and if for His purpose He decides to take an apostle away and see what is going to happen to the church without an apostle, what do we do? We do not assume and presume that God has appointed us to do a job He has not given to us. We just keep right on doing what He established through the apostle. If we did that, most of the problems within the church—the competing with one another and the rivalries—would disappear.

This gets right down to me, because I consciously made the decision to do what I have done. When Evelyn and I left the church in 1992 I had to make a decision as to what we would do. My decision was this. It was so simple. What had I been *ordained* to do? I went through three ordinations. I was ordained as a local elder. I was ordained as a preaching elder. I was ordained as a pastor. My job was to help prepare people for the Kingdom of God. That was my appointment, and so I decided that was what I would do. My appointment was not to perform the acts of an apostle.

John Reid can tell you. We had a meeting. We had four or five other elders besides John. They all left except John, because they wanted to do things I was not appointed by God to do, and I was not about to push myself into that position and risk what happened to Josiah, risk what happened to Satan, and risk what happened to Abraham. I would just keep doing what I was appointed to do until He will change it.

I do not know whether He will ever change it, or how He will change it. I might go to my grave doing what I am doing now, but at least I will have the satisfaction of knowing that I did not turn aside from the job He gave me to do. We would just trust Him to supply our need, that we would trust Him to bring people to us. We make no effort to steal or rustle sheep from anybody else, because I was not called to do what Herbert Armstrong did.

The scope of Herbert Armstrong's work under God was awesome! It was worldwide. *Nobody* had done that, as far as I know, ever since the time of Christ. That was a huge responsibility. He did not call John Ritenbaugh to do that. I am a little guy working in a corner. That is all. I did not have, and I do not have the gifts Herbert Armstrong had, and I am very thankful I recognize that. My gift is teaching specific things and expanding on our understanding. So I wait.

Earlier I mentioned Numbers 16 and the awesome responsibility that God had given to the Kohathites. Of all of the sons of Levi they had the closest connection to God. That was an awesome responsibility that was given to them, and yet they wanted to get out in front of Him. Those of that group wanted more.

I want you to go with me to the book of Revelation because we have been given an awesome promise of an awesome responsibility.

Revelation 14:1-4 And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women: for they are virgins These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. (emphasis ours)

What an awesome future! There is none greater that can be given to us common clods. Who will be closest to Christ in the Kingdom of God? The 144,000. Let us not do anything to push ourselves out in front of what God has given us. We will just patiently wait for Him, and continue to follow what He has given us to do in the past, and that is to prepare for His Kingdom.