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growth in faith and service to God



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From the Editors...

Hosea 14 is one of many places throughout the Old Testament where a prophet urged the people to return to God, who would take away their sin, receive them graciously, heal their backsliding, and love them freely (verse 2, 4). The prophet speaks for the Lord, saying, “will be like the dew to Israel, he shall GROW like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive like grain, and GROW like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon” (Hosea 14:5-7). When God’s people follow after Him wonderful things happen: their countenance becomes beautiful, their faith becomes deep, the reach of their influence becomes broad, the fragrance of their work becomes profitable and sweet. As the prophet declares – twice, they shall GROW!

We are thankful for the goodness of God’s word and for the effect it has in the lives of those who devote themselves to pursuing the Lord and His righteousness. We’re thankful for the writers who have participated in this issue of GROW magazine, for their good work intended to bring God glory and to urge GROWth among those who call upon the Lord. We thank you for being a GROW magazine subscriber and encourage you to share this e-publication if you deem it worthwhile. Send the notification email along to someone else, post a link of our website on social media, use the “printer friendly” button at the bottom of any article to get a printed copy, or send someone this PDF copy of this quarter’s issue.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender, chief editor
William Stewart, editor & designer



Mark's Portrayal Of Jesus

DAVID DANN | ATHENS, GEORGIA

“And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’ (Mark 7:37, NKJV). That is how Mark presents Jesus to the world. He truly is the One who “has done all things well.”

Mark is referred to at various points throughout the New Testament as, “John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25), “John called Mark” (15:37), or at times, simply as, “John” (13:5, 13). The record in Acts indicates that he was of Jewish heritage, was a relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), and along with his mother, Mary, was a resident of Jerusalem and a member of the church there in its early days (Acts 12:12). Although Mark was not himself an apostle, he evidently enjoyed an especially close association with the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13).

The general consensus among Bible scholars and expositors is that Mark's gospel was written to convince a Roman audience that Jesus is the Son of God. The evidence for this focus is abundant. Greek was the universal language of the Mediterranean world of the first century A.D., however, Aramaic was the language commonly spoken by the Jews in Palestine, while Latin was the official language of the Romans (Tenney, 54). Rather than taking for granted his readers' familiarity with the people and places of Israel and the prophecies of the Old Testament as Matthew does, Mark actually uses Latin terms instead of Greek words for various places (Mark 4:21; 12:14; 15:39), employs Latin terms to explain Greek words (12:42; 15:16), translates Aramaic expressions for the benefit of his readers (3:17; 5:41; 7:34; 14:36; 15:34), and explains the geography (1:5; 13:3) and



customs (2:18) of Palestine and the Jews to his readers (Gromacki, 97).

Like Matthew, Luke, and John, Mark provides an accurate record of the life of Christ, from the events surrounding His baptism (Mark 1:1-13), through the events of His ministry (1:14-14:42), to His death, burial and resurrection (14:43-16:20). However, Mark's portrayal of Jesus is tailored to resonate with his Roman target audience in specific ways. In order to reach the Romans with the gospel, Mark's inspired account portrays Jesus in the following manner:

The Active Savior

It is obvious that Mark's portrayal of Jesus places a heavy emphasis on His activity and actions. From the very first chapter, Mark stresses the continual action of Jesus' ministry as He moves rapidly from one event to the next. For example, when Jesus is baptized, Mark writes, “And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove” and, “Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught” (v 10, 21). Mark employs the Greek adverb *euthus*, which is

translated “immediately,” forty-two times throughout the book (cf. Mark 1:10, 20, 21; 2:8; 5:30; 6:45, 50; 8:10), which is more times than the word is used in all other new Testament books combined (Gromacki, 97). In so doing, Mark portrays the constant activity of Jesus in working toward the definite and predetermined goal of offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for man’s sins on the cross (Mark 10:32-34; 14:22-26). This emphasis on the activity and power of Jesus is by design. Mark’s Roman readers would have been more directly impressed by action than by words (Geisler, 70-71). Unlike the other gospel accounts, which include lengthy sections devoted to Jesus’ teaching, Mark focuses more on what Jesus did, rather than on what He verbally taught. The book includes numerous examples of His miracles, but only four parables (Mark 4:20-20, 26-29, 30-32; 12:1-9), and only one of His major discourses (13:3-37). Mark portrays Jesus as a Savior who constantly takes the action necessary to accomplish what He came to do.

The Perfect Servant

Along with his fellow gospel writers, Mark presents Jesus to the world as both Son of God (Mark 1:1) and Son of Man (2:10-11). However, Mark especially focuses on His role as the perfect Servant of God who came into the world in order to serve mankind by giving His life to save the lost (cf. Isaiah 52:13-53:12). When His disciples argued among themselves over who would be the greatest, Mark writes, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His

a ransom for many ’” (Mark 10:42-45). In keeping with the theme of highlighting Jesus’ role as a Servant, Mark foregoes providing any details regarding His birth or genealogy and instead introduces Jesus as an adult ready to begin His word following His baptism by John (1:1-15). As the perfect Servant, Mark portrays Jesus throughout the book as One who is constantly ministering to large crowds without turning away anyone (1:32-34; 2:13; 3:7-12, 20; 5:21; 6:30-44, 53-56; 8:1-10). However, unlike an ordinary servant, Mark’s portrayal of Jesus as the Servant of God describes Him as One who is possessed of great power and authority. He has power over disease (1:29-31, 40-45; 5:25-29), power to forgive sins (2:1-12), power over nature (4:35-41), power over death (5:21-24, 35-43), and the ability to do “all things well” (7:37). Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant of God who came into the world to give His life for the everlasting good of mankind.

The Powerful Son

Mark’s portrayal of Jesus is intended to convey that He is the uniquely divine Son of God (Mark 1:1; 15:39) who possesses divine authority (2:1-12) and demands absolute commitment from those who would follow Him (8:34-38). Mark accomplishes this goal by presenting a series of episodes in the life of Christ which emphasize that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God (8:29). By giving considerable attention to the miracles Jesus performed, Mark demonstrates the power and authority of the Son of God over nature (4:35-41), demons (5:1-20), death (5:21-24, 35-43), and disease (5:25-34). In addition to his detailed description of Jesus’ works as evidence that He is the Son of God, Mark also vividly describes numerous personal reactions of the people who encounter Him throughout the book. Mark includes the amazement of the people at the display of Jesus’ power: “Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? What

new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him” (1:27). Mark includes the fear of His disciples upon witnessing His power: “And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!’” (4:41). Mark also includes the astonishment of the people due to the completeness of His miracles, recording that “they were astonished beyond measure” (7:37). In addition to these examples, Mark also includes the bold declaration of the centurion who witnessed the events surrounding His death on the cross: “So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, ‘Truly this Man was the Son of God!’” (15:39). Mark portrays Jesus as the powerful Son of God who acted with the authority and approval of heaven in all that He did.

Conclusion

Just as is true of Matthew, Luke, and John, Mark’s gospel would be incomplete without portraying Jesus as the risen Lord who conquered death. Therefore, Mark concludes

his account with the crucified Savior rising on the first day of the week (Mark 16:1-8), appearing to His disciples (v 9-13), commissioning His apostles to preach the gospel message to the world, emphasizing belief and baptism as conditions that must be met in order to receive salvation (v 14-16), promising to confirm their message through miraculous signs (v 17-18), and finally, ascending to the right hand of God in heaven (v 19-20). The active Savior, the perfect Servant, and the powerful Son of God portrayed so clearly by Mark as the risen Christ who reigns forever.

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The Church in Corinth: Congregational Profile

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“There’s no such thing as a perfect church.” This idea can be espoused as nothing more than an excuse for sin and the overlooking of sin. While all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), one cannot help but notice something about various local congregations mentioned in scripture. In Revelation, for example, some of the churches are rebuked. Others are not, with the Lord recognizing their faithfulness (Revelation 3:7-13). Does this mean they never had problems? No, but apparently, they had dealt with any issues they faced in a scriptural manner. And now? The Lord does not tell them they need to repent. Instead, they conduct themselves in a way that Jesus commends.

How many local congregations would stand on this same ground? Consider the churches in Philadelphia and Laodicea. Are most congregations like the church in Philadelphia, or are they more like the lukewarm church? We know what answer is possible. We also know what answer is probable. Problems do happen. How a congregation collectively and individually addresses those problems is the question. So before we leave the seven churches of Asia, let us ask a question. Is there a church in scripture that suffered from a lack of love? Faced persecution? Tolerated false doctrine and sexual immorality? Had dead and dying members? Had a few faithful members, but overall were just proud of themselves in the most sickening way? If that does not fit Corinth, nothing does.

Look at the city and the congregation and notice what applications we can make.

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The City

Corinth is located roughly 60 miles west of Athens, near the isthmus that joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland. While there is a canal across the isthmus today, none existed in the first century. There are remains of a road/rail system that transported ships overland in Corinth, called the *diolcus*. The construction of this road and rail system was necessary because of the dangerous seas around Greece. What did this mean for Corinth? It was a hub, and where there is a hub, there is commerce and people from different backgrounds. It is not difficult to see these factors in Paul’s time in Corinth and his letters to them.

Corinth has been described as a working city, contrasting with Athens, where the philosophers gathered. While there were differences, there were similarities as well. If Athens was given over to idols (Acts 17:16), it is not difficult to imagine the same in Corinth. Paganism was strong here. Temples to Apollo and Aphrodite were prominent, with the oft-cited hordes of temple prostitutes in the latter. Corinth became a byword in other cities for an immoral lifestyle because of the rampant sexual immorality and debauchery in the city of Corinth. Anything went in Corinth. Given this, it is little surprise that the church tolerated sexual immorality “not even named among the gentiles” (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paganism affected the early church with its sexual immorality and its pick-who-you-follow approach.

While paganism abounded, there was a synagogue in Corinth. In Acts 18, we read of Paul coming to the city and reasoning there. Given the commercial nature of Corinth, it helps us to see why Aquila and Priscilla may have come there, whom we meet in the same chapter. As they had come from Italy due to Claudius commanding all Jews to leave Rome, it seems improbable that they were the only ones in and on that boat. We will say this: Corinth was a metropolitan city. There were people from different backgrounds and different classes. Again, this manifests itself in various issues addressed in Paul's letters.

The Church

The church begins in Acts 18, as Paul came there from Athens. How long did Paul stay in Athens? He didn't. Given the environment of Corinth, how long would one guess he stayed there? It is interesting. Looking backward from Acts 18, we see the brevity of some of his stays. Who would have ever imagined that in a city like Corinth, Paul would have been able to stay for an extended amount of time (Acts 18:11), comparatively speaking? There is a great lesson for God's people here. If the gospel can take root in Corinth, the gospel can take root anywhere. Man's wisdom would think it would be the deep-thinking philosophical Athens that would be the most receptive to the word. They had their opportunity, but Greek wisdom spurned the call (1 Corinthians 1: 18-26). Give people a chance, and what happens may surprise us.

The Lord told Paul, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent, for I am with you..." (Acts 18:9, 10). That is what Paul did. Within the chapter, we read how Paul reasoned (vs. 4), persuaded (vs. 4), testified (vs. 5), and taught the word of God (vs. 11). In the same chapter, Apollos, "vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (vs. 28). While Paul performed the signs

of an apostle in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:12), the church was founded upon the gospel of Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2, 15: 1-10). "So we preach and so you believed (1 Corinthians 15:11). If a church is going to have any chance of pleasing the Lord, it must appreciate and utilize God's word. Staying on the narrow way is difficult enough. When congregations appeal to comedy hour, life experiences, I-thinkers, or some other form of self-help or entertainment, it is nothing but a recipe for disaster. In reality, their goose is already cooked. The foundation must be the message of the cross (1 Corinthians 3:11). Paul had laid the foundation, but there was an issue. Someone else was building on it (3:10). The Corinthians, like the Galatians, had started well but were now being hindered (Galatians 5:7). Let God's people return to the word if they have left it. It is the only way to be pleasing to God.

Problems and Solutions in Corinth

The issues in the congregation are easy enough to see, especially as we look at Paul's first letter. There were divisions, envy, and strife (3:3). There was a lack of judgment (ch. 5) in some matters and an appeal to the courts for judgment (ch. 6) in other matters. There were marital issues. There were issues involving meat sacrificed to idols and issues of submission. There were issues surrounding the Lord's supper, spiritual gifts, and doctrinal questions involving the resurrection, namely that some were denying it.

What gave rise to these problems? Several things come to mind. We have already considered the different backgrounds, as far as Jew or Gentile. The Christians had been sanctified and justified (6:11), but that may have given some the misconception they could sin. Also, the widespread debauchery many Christians had formerly participated in, along with the fact that many still had unbelieving spouses, could have led to widespread divorces

(7: 10-16). Even the gifts that God gave them caused jealousy, which makes us appreciate what Paul calls “a more excellent way” (12:31). There were many problems, and as Paul warns them (4:14), the Corinthians would heed many of these warnings. They would repent (2 Corinthians 7: 9-12). In their newfound zeal, another problem arose, though. They had not forgiven the repentant (2 Corinthians 2:7).

While each problem is addressed throughout the letter, there are underlying principles and solutions. The obvious one is love. How many of the problems would vanish if the Corinthians truly learned to love the Lord and others? The contentions would stop, and faithfulness would resume. The lawsuits would cease. Marriage vows would be kept. Liberties would be respected. The Lord’s supper would not be abused. They would appreciate each other even as the various gifts continued for the time being. In the second letter, forgiveness would not be an issue.

If pride was at the center of many problems in Corinth, there needed to be submission along with love. Love facilitates humility and submission. Most issues would be resolved if the Corinthians would humble themselves and esteem others as better than themselves. This will be necessary, not just when it is easy but also difficult, as Paul addresses the lawsuits (1 Corinthians 6:7). In the first half of chapter 11, we read about the covering. Many brethren love to argue about the what’s, when’s, where’s, and why’s of the passage. They somewhat miss the underlying principle. The passage is about submission. “The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (vs. 3). Throughout the letter, we see how love and submission are necessary.

We also see that a solution to their problems would be their relationship with the truth and sin, otherwise known as discernment. Love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1

Corinthians 13:6). The Corinthians needed to learn how to judge (1 Cor. 5: 9-13). Liberties needed to be judged as such. The strong brother needed to know discernment. The weak brother did as well as they considered the conscience of others and whether or not something was sinful (1 Cor. 8,9, 10). Not everything was a liberty, though. Paul had already judged the man in chapter 5, and the Corinthians needed to judge (vs. 1, 11-12). Of course, all judging begins with ourselves, and in taking 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Corinthians 7, we see Paul’s intent. The Corinthians judged themselves, which led to them judging the immoral man. Judging will be required with the lawsuits (6:5), the Lord’s supper (11:21), the gifts (14:29), and in matters dealing with those who were denying the resurrection. “Do not be deceived; Evil company corrupts good habits. Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame” (15: 33,34). Those who were teaching false doctrine needed to be judged.

Conclusion

Yes, the Corinthians had problems, but remember where we began. It is not the issues but how we react to those issues that matter most. “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Cor. 11:19). A good amount of housecleaning needed to be done, but they had good brethren there that could spearhead it (1 Cor. 16:15). The church had a zeal for the gifts and passion for helping others (1 Cor. 14:12, 2 Cor. 9:2), with the latter stirring up even other congregations. One of the noblest things they did was this: they accepted Paul’s rebuke and changed. Yes, they had problems, but what congregation would not want to have the following said about them by the Lord: “What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in

this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:12).

We may be on this side of the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 13:12), but we can still be immature from time to time (1 Corinthians 13:11). We need to love, have faith, and have hope as we love the Lord, each other, and the truth as we look forward to the resurrection. We need to self-examine, individually and collectively, and make sure the building is made from the right

stuff with the proper foundation. Sin and liberties have to be recognized and dealt with scripturally. As we have been blessed, we need to bless others. If there is a take-away from all of these things, it is this: it’s one thing to start well, but it’s another thing to finish well. Israel had to learn this lesson. Corinth had to learn this lesson. Finally, we need to learn this lesson (1 Corinthians 10: 1-13). Let us love and be faithful as we look to our reward.

Give Thanks To The Lord (Psalm 136)

MARSHALL McDANIEL | ATHENS, ALABAMA

Ingratitude is a symptom of idolatry. Those who reject the Lord do not give thanks: *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened”* (Romans 1:21, **NASB**; see 2 Timothy 3:2). It is sad when people fail to acknowledge the divine source of their blessings! Yet, the people of God know better (or at least, they should). They have experienced the goodness of God and hopefully respond with grace. The short admonition at the end of Colossians 3:15 says it all: *“be thankful.”* So, what instills within us a sense of authentic gratitude and motivates us to express our thanks to God? An ancient Hebrew song supplies the answer.

Psalm 136 – A Psalm of Thanksgiving

Psalm 136 has no title, the author is anonymous, and the date of composition is unknown. But, the sentiment of the psalm – particularly the opening line, *“give thanks to the LORD, / For He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting”* (Psalm 136:1), along with its like phrases – is common in Scripture. David, for instance, appointed Asaph to sing the same words when the ark came to its abode in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:34, 41; see also 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3, 6). Jehoshaphat likewise commanded the worship leaders of his day to invoke God’s protection with a similar expression (2 Chronicles 20:21). Jeremiah predicted the use of these words at the time of the restored temple service (Jeremiah 33:11). Various psalms employ identical thanksgivings (see Psalm 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29). What sets Psalm 136 apart from these other psalms is its emphatic repetition of *“give thanks”* and *“His lovingkindness is everlasting.”* The first of



these phrases relates to the charge of true worshipers (gratitude), and the second, the reason (God). Psalm 136 honors God and invites communal worship of Him. What, then, can Christians learn about thanksgiving from Psalm 136?

Give Thanks for Who God Is

We learn, first, that God deserves our thanks because of who he is (Psalm 136:1-3, 26). In its opening lines, Psalm 136 refers to God as “LORD” (*Yahweh*), “God” (*Elohim*), and “Lord” (*Adon*). The first of these descriptions is the personal name of God. It suggests that he is eternal and faithful. The others – *Elohim* and *Adon* – are generic but appreciate the divinity and preeminence of God. The psalmist does not limit his portrayal of God to names only. He also emphasizes three divine characteristics: goodness, sovereignty, and lovingkindness. The psalm opens, *“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good.”* The word *good* (Heb. *ṭôb*) is simple but significant, especially when it describes God. *Yahweh* is not evil or disagreeable. He is pleasant and caring. Psalm 119:68 says of God, *“You are good and do good.”* The modest, contemporary hymn echoes this concept: *“God is so good. / God is so good to me.”* The goodness of God is real

and personal. The psalmist next highlights divine sovereignty. God, according to Psalm 136, is *“the God of gods,” “the Lord of lords,”* and *“the God of heaven”* (v 2, 3, 26). The little word of in English translation conveys the supremacy of God over any other so called gods/lords, over the whole spiritual realm. God is above and beyond anything and everything. He is God. Yet – amazingly! – God chooses to connect himself to humanity. The repeated phrase “His lovingkindness is everlasting” (22x in Psalm 136) captures the essence of who God is. The term lovingkindness (Heb. *hesed*) is personal (“his”) and eternal (“everlasting”). It suggests that God is faithful to his covenant and his people. The apostle John echoes the sentiment of Psalm 136 with his short, profound statement: *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8, 16). When we consider who Yahweh is (the good, sovereign, and loving God), how can we not fall on our knees before him and give thanks?!

Give Thanks for What God Does

We, next, learn that God deserves our thanks because of what He does (Psalm 136:4-25). Psalm 136:4-25 stresses three significant events in biblical history: the creation of the cosmos (v 4-9), the exodus from Egypt (v 10-15), and the conquest of Canaan (v 16-22). These events demonstrate that God is the creator, deliverer, and sustainer of humanity – particularly of his people.

Creation

Creation exhibits the miraculous power of God. Psalm 136:4-9 poetically rehearses the events of Genesis 1: God fashioned the skies (Psalm 136:5), formed the land (v 6), and filled the former with the great lights – the sun, moon, and stars (v 7-9). The God who created the heavens and the earth is indeed a glorious God, as David affirms in Psalm 19:1: *“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; / And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”* Creation confesses its source and

sustainer. We can infer certain qualities of God from what he has made. Paul avows that *“since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they [people] are without excuse”* (Romans 1:20). The physical creation assumes the eternity, omnipotence, and spirituality of God. The appropriate response is thanksgiving (v 21). We ought to give thanks to God because He created the heavens, the earth, and everything in them – including us!

Exodus

The exodus shaped the history and theology of Israel. God and Israel often bound their identities to this event. God, for instance, started his Ten Commandments with *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”* (Exodus 20:2). The exodus from Egypt connected Yahweh to Israel and Israel to Yahweh. Little wonder, then, that the psalmist underscored this incident in Psalm 136! Psalm 136:10-15 begins with the first Passover and ends with the Red Sea victory. (For other psalms that emphasize the exodus, see Psalm 77, 78, 80, 81, 105, 106, and 135). For the psalmist, the exodus manifested the lovingkindness of God and called for thanksgiving from His people. It proved God to be an awesome savior. God rescued Israel from physical oppression; He rescues us from spiritual oppression. We ought to give thanks to God, because He delivers His people from adversaries, slavery, and death. He spiritually does the same for us today.

Conquest

Psalm 136 lastly summarizes the conquest of Canaan. It abridges the pre-conquest narrative of Exodus 15b through Numbers 20 in a single phrase: *“To Him who led His people through the wilderness”* (Psalm 136:16). The psalmist next describes the Israelite victories over the kingdoms east of the Jordan and the invasion and

and conquests of Canaan (v 17-22). The section centers on the providence of God. God led (v 17). God smote/slew (v 18, 19). God gave (v 21). God preserved His people in the wilderness. He protected them from their adversaries in Trans-Jordan and furnished them their inheritance in Canaan. While Psalm 136 liturgically repeats the phrase *“for His lovingkindness is everlasting,”* the journey to and the conquest of the land clearly display the mercy and faithfulness of God. God kept His promises to Abraham – even though the descendants of Abraham frequently proved to be faithless! The psalmist urged his fellow worshipers to thank God for His constant and continual care. Even now, we ought to give thanks to God, because He sustains us now and will provide the ultimate victory and inheritance.

Summary

Psalm 136:23-25 summarizes and personalizes the work of God in the creation, the exodus, and the conquest. The psalmist affirms that God *“remembered us in our low estate”* by

creating a people for His own possession – Israel, that He *“has rescued us from our adversaries”* by delivering His people from Egypt (and others), and that He *“gives food to all flesh,”* thereby proving His care for humanity. In like manner, God recreates us in Christ, delivers us from the power of sin, and provides an eternal inheritance to His faithful ones. If the psalmist called national Israel to give thanks because of what God had done for them, how much more should we do the same today!

Conclusion

Yahweh is God. He is the creator, deliverer, and sustainer of His people. He is good and gracious. Are we ever negligent to express our gratitude to God? If so, we need to spend more time in Psalm 136 (and other similar psalms). It reminds us of who God is and what He has done and is doing for us. When we recall these truths, we join the chorus of ancient and contemporary worshipers who shout and sing, “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. For His lovingkindness is everlasting.” Will you give thanks to God today?

Put On The Whole Armor Of God

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In Ephesians 6:10-20, we find the instructions given by the apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus for them to put on the whole armor of God. What a great section of Scripture for us to consider especially with a mind to how it applies to us. It is not enough to just know what these verses say but we need to apply the things revealed here to our lives so we can be strong and faithful in services to our Lord. Through the years I have seen many fall prey to the devices of Satan, being overcome in sin and rendered useless in the kingdom of God. If only they would have clothed themselves with this armor, the results would have been totally different.

Armor of God. The Lord supplies the armor for us to clothe ourselves with. In this text the apostle speaks of the gospel (v. 15), salvation which is our hope (v. 17), the word of God (v. 17), and prayer offered up before His throne (v. 18). He does not leave us alone to fight a battle with such a formidable foe but gives us what is needed to be victorious. Likewise, He promises to never leave nor forsake us when fighting our battles in life (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Put on. Each individual is responsible for putting on the armor. No one can put it on for us, it is our duty. The phrase “put on” is defined as, “*To put on as a garment, to cause to get into a garment, to clothe, dress; in the pass., to be clothed; in the mid., to clothe oneself. Spoken of armor*” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament, p. 587). It takes time and effort to clothe oneself with this armor. If we are not careful other things will consume our time and the opportunities to study the word of God and pray as we should are diminished (Luke 8:14). We are not to just put on some of the armor but all of it. By so doing we can be a



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people of honesty, integrity, righteousness, strong faith, filled with hope, always praying, able to stand strong and firm in the face of such opposition.

Wiles of the devil. Peter describes Satan as an adversary and a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). The apostle warns in this text of his wiles. “Wiles” is defined as, “to follow craftily, frame devices, deceive” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 395). Notice some of the words used by other translations instead of wiles – schemes (NASB &

ESV); tricks (NCB, ETRV, TEV, & CEV); strategies (GW, ISV, NLT2); tactics (HCSB & NAB); and deceits (BIBE). Paul spoke of his “devices” in 2 Corinthians 2:11, which means “*especially for evil plans and purposes as here*” (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). And this same apostle warned of the snares of the devil in 1 Timothy 3:7 & 2 Timothy 2:26, defined as “*the allurements to sin by which the devil holds one bound*” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 472). This should make us fully aware of what Satan will do in an effort to turn us away from our God to a world of sin.

The armor. Let me just give you a brief definition of the words used in describing this armor.

Girted your waist with truth – “(subjectively) *truth as a personal excellence; that candor of mind which is free from affectation, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit: sincerity of mind and integrity of character, or a mode of life in harmony with divine truth*” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 26).

Breastplate of righteousness – “*integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting*” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 149).

Shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace – “*By metonymy, the gospel work, i.e., the preaching of the gospel, labor in the gospel*” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament, p. 669). The word “gospel” is the glad tidings or the good news of salvation offered through Christ.

Shield of faith – “*in the N.T. of a conviction or belief respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and conjoined with it*” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 512). One’s subjective faith which comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Helmet of salvation – “*simply, equivalent to the hope of (future) salvation*” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 612).

Sword of the Spirit – word of God – “*The sword given by the Spirit to be wielded as offensive weapon (the others defensive) by the Christian is the word of God*” (Robertson Word Pictures in the New Testament). Thayer says of the word “sword” – “*the sword with which the Spirit subdues the impulses to sin and proves its own power and efficacy (which sword is said to be ρημα Θεου (word of God – JRM))*” (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 393).

Praying, prayer & supplication – “*On every occasion.*” Prayer is needed in this fight. The panoply of God is necessary, but so is prayer” (Robertson Word Pictures in the New Testament).

If we fail to stand, withstand, and persevere our life will be a failure (vv. 11, 13, 18). Satan will have defeated us, and we will lose the only thing of value we possess, our souls. Yet if we will trust our Lord, put on the whole armor provided us, continue to press forward, and keep our focused upon the goal set before us, then heaven can be our home. Remember the warning sounded by Paul, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

“I Was Afraid” – Facing Our Fears of Rejection

MICHAEL STEPHENS | WELLANDPORT, ONTARIO

In Matthew 25, Jesus compared the Kingdom to a man who entrusted his wealth to his three servants. Two of those servants worked for their master. One of the servants made the situation about himself. This “Parable of the Talents” tells us how the master gave varying amounts to each servant and then left for a long time. Upon his return, the man settled accounts with each servant. The first two servants put their funds to work and doubled their master’s money. Even though their starting amounts were different (5 and 2), and their final amounts were much different (10 and 4), the first two men in the Lord’s illustration were equally praised. Matthew 25:21 and 23 read the same. “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”

However, the tone abruptly changes at the accounting time for the one talent man. Matthew 25:24-29 says, “Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would receive back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.’”



The one talent man displeased the master with his excuse, “I was afraid.” The full answer essentially being, “I was afraid ... therefore I did nothing.” The servant made it about himself. Even worse, the answer tried to justify the inaction and shifted the blame with, “I knew YOU to be a hard man ... therefore I did nothing.”

Note to self: Blaming the Master never works in your favor. Just ask Adam.

When Jesus used this lesson of talents, He was not talking to fearless superhumans without doubts or worries. Instead, we are shown how ordinary people are to be workers in the Kingdom to the best of their ability. We are encouraged to say to ourselves, “It’s not about you, it’s about the Gospel.”

Fear of rejection can open the door to hesitation. How many familiar Bible stories would read differently if the fear of rejection ruled the day? What if Daniel, or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, had not prayed or just gone along to get along? They would inspire no one to put God first. Yes, their actions had consequences, but their inaction would have been worse.

What if Joseph had kept quiet when called before Pharaoh? His family may have starved. God would have still kept His promise to Abraham, but the story would be different. No deliverance from the famine. No thriving in the land of Goshen. When called upon, his courage to speak up and give God the glory set in motion the history of the Israelites.

What if Queen Esther had not told the king of Haman's plot to kill her people? Her uncle, Mordecai, reminds her God's plans will be accomplished, but the consequences of her inaction would be far worse on her family. Esther 4:13-14, "And Mordecai told them to answer Esther, 'Do not think in your heart that you will escape the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'"

What if Moses was allowed to stay in Midian with his sheep and his excuses? Would the Israelites still be in Egypt? Would the Books of Moses be written by someone else that went before Pharaoh? Moses certainly tried to make the situation about himself ... and his fear of rejection. After hearing God say deliverance from Egypt was about to happen, Moses says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" God's answer was "I will certainly be with you." Basically saying, "It's not about you, Moses! You are just the messenger." After questions about what to say, Moses continued, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice?" Even after being given a rod that turned into a serpent, Moses said, "I am slow of speech." Again, God said its not about Moses or any messenger when He declares, "Who has made man's mouth?" Just like Moses, we all need to learn that God knows our weaknesses, our inadequacies, and especially our fears, and STILL sends us to declare His message in spite

of those shortcomings.

In the New Testament, what if Joseph of Arimathea had continued to keep his faith in Jesus a secret? What if he had hesitated because of fear? John 19:38 says, "After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus." Joseph's actions provided the tomb for Jesus; the site of the resurrection. If Joseph had decided to stay home instead of go to Pilate, the gospel might read differently. Mark 15:43 reads, "Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." When we compare John 19 and Mark 15, we see the past fear that produced secrecy contrasted with the courage that produced a voice for Christ at a time when all others had fled.

It may seem harmless, but how often have we missed opportunities to talk to others about the gospel because we have worried about their reaction? When Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25, the one talent man was rebuked for doing nothing. He was called wicked and lazy. When he was told, 'So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest,' (Matthew 25:27), the lesson for us is that even a little something is better than nothing!

We may not often find ourselves in a situation like Paul on Mars Hill in Acts 17, in an intimidating forum of intellectual critics, but we may very often find ourselves with opportunities like Philip in Acts 8, asking someone, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Whether our opportunities to tell others about the Gospel are large and numerous, or whether they are merely "a cup of water to drink in My name" (Mark 9:41),

may we not hesitate from fear of rejection. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), not the messenger. While we may endure consequences for our actions, the result of our inactions may change our story for eternity. Matthew 10:32-33 says, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

May we speak up and give God the glory when we have opportunities. May we speak the truth in love. May we never make it all about me. May we set aside our excuses, especially, “I was afraid.” May we take courage and stand up for Christ, even when it seems others have fled. When our Master returns, may He say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

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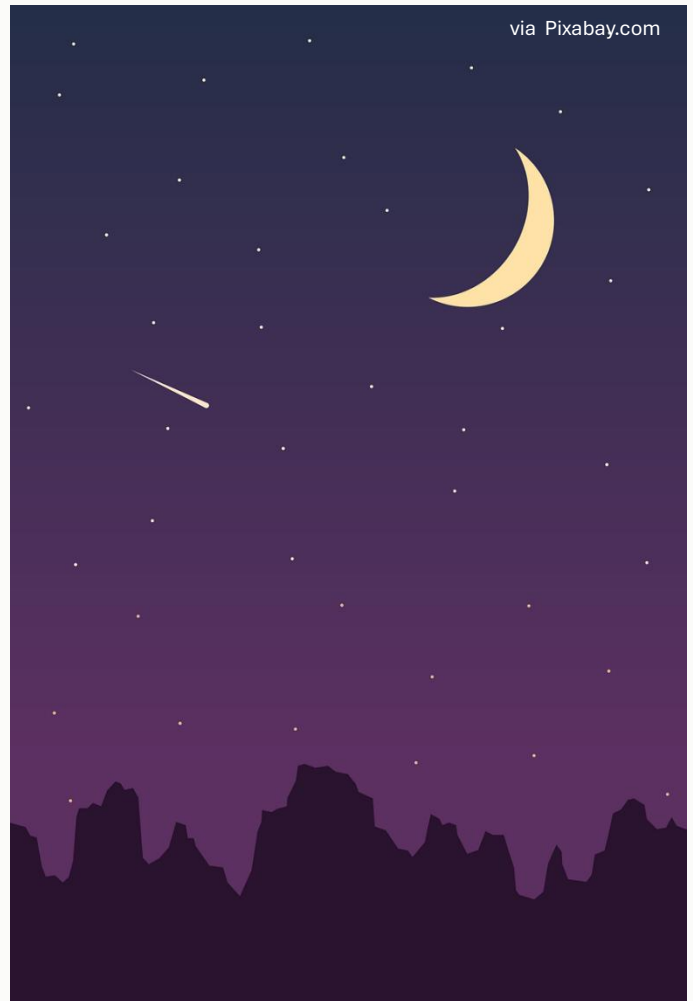
I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning From Heaven

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven!" Imagine how exciting it must have been to hear Jesus make such a declaration. The assertion was made to the seventy persons whom Jesus had appointed and sent to go before Him among the people (Luke 10:1). As He had given instructions to the apostles before sending them out (Matthew 10:5-15), our Lord also gave directions to this much larger contingent of disciples for their journey (Luke 10:2-16). They were sent to "*heal the sick*" and to proclaim "*The kingdom of God has come near to you*" (Luke 10:9). We do not know how long they were gone, but Luke reported the excitement of their return. Filled with joy they announced, "*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name*" (Luke 10:17). Jesus' statement about Satan falling from heaven was in response to their remark.

So, what does this mean? Did Jesus literally see Satan tumble out of heaven when the seventy were casting out demons or was this a figure or symbol? Did Jesus refer to something which had already happened, something which was happening at that time, or something which would happen in the future? And how do the Lord's words here fit with what the rest of Scripture tells us about Satan and his fall?

Before we look for understanding and application of the statement, it may be helpful to consider the words which are used. Thayer defines the word "saw" as "*...to be a spectator, look at, behold ... to see ... to perceive with the eyes ... to discern ... to ascertain, find out, by seeing ... to get knowledge of...*" It is commonly used of what one visibly sees (ie. Mark 12:41; John 2:23; etc.), but can also refer to what someone might perceive or consider (ie. John 4:19; Hebrews 7:4; etc.). Thayer gives the



following on the word "*fall*," "*...descent from a higher place to a lower ... to be thrust down ... descent from an erect to a prostrate position ... to be cast down from a state of prosperity ... to perish, to come to an end ... to lose authority, no longer have force...*" The LORD said Satan's fall was "*...like lightning from heaven.*" When lightning strikes it is sudden, it is startling, and it is noticeable. The question is how and when did Satan fall, and what did the Lord mean in response to the seventy disciples with this statement?

There are multiple texts in Scripture which speak of Satan's fall, the earliest being Genesis 3:15. The LORD said to the serpent,

"...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

We are not given many details in this early prophecy, but it clearly reveals the Seed which was to come (Jesus, Galatians 3:16, 19) would bruise (*"overwhelm, break, bruise,"* Strong's) the serpent's (Satan's, Revelation 12:9; 20:2) head. Moses did not record how or when this would come to pass, simply that it would.

As we come into the New Testament, we find Mark 3:23-27, where Jesus addressed an accusation made against Him by the scribes – namely that *"He has Beelzebub,"* and *"By the ruler of demons He casts out demons."* The Lord pointed out the foolishness of their allegation – Satan was not battling against himself. He stated:

How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. (Mark 3:23-27)

Jesus affirmed Satan "...has an end." not because the devil worked against himself or was in league with Jesus – nay, Satan's end would come because the Lord would defeat him. The brief parable or story of the plundering of the strong man's goods explains it. Jesus would bind the devil, limiting his strength and destroying his work (1 John 3:8). The Hebrew writer specifically says Jesus would "...destroy

him who had the power of death..." and thus "...release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). This would be accomplished through our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. The power of death held people captive – Jesus would conquer death. The crucifixion had the appearance of defeat, but in reality it resulted in Jesus' victory and Satan's defeat. On the third day, He arose. In Acts 2:23-24, Peter spoke before the Pentecost crowd and said, Jesus,

...being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

This victory over the devil, the demise of his power, was foreshadowed in the casting out of demons accomplished by Jesus (Matthew 8:16; 9:33), the twelve apostles (Mark 3:14-15), and the seventy disciples (Luke 10:17). The casting out of demons was not the point at which Satan fell or was cast out, but it served as evidence of his eventual defeat.

In John 12:31-32, we again find Jesus speaking about Satan being cast out. Notice:

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

The Lord was not referring to the final judgment when all mankind will appear before Him. It was the judgment of this world, more specifically of the ruler of this world – the devil (see John 16:8-11). The devil's defeat was eminent. When would this be? The phrase, *"if I am lifted up from the earth"* gives the answer. John used this term a few times in his gospel (see John 3:14; John 8:28). It is a reference to Calvary – Jesus was

lifted up and hung on a tree. When He endured and overcame death, the fall of Satan would be accomplished.

The fall of the devil is mentioned a few more times in the New Testament. In Revelation 9:1, we read:

Then the fifth angel sounded: and I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.

Some may be inclined to say the angel mentioned is the devil. I don't think so. There are seven angels sounding seven trumpets, each bringing a measure of affliction from God intended to cause repentance (Revelation 9:20-21). Satan does not work for the Lord; he does not afflict people to provoke repentance. This angel, like the other six, is from the Lord. The fifth angel was given the key to the bottomless pit. When he opened the pit all manner of destruction and turmoil was unleashed. Rather than repent (9:20-21), the wicked simply sought to die (9:6).

Satan is mentioned in the text very briefly. John "...saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth." This is like other verses we've seen about the devil. He is pictured as fallen, cast out, or cast down. He is not the angel, he did not receive the key to the bottomless pit, but the devil is introduced in the text in preparation for the next time we meet this angel with the key to the bottomless pit.

Revelation 12 also pictures the fall of Satan:

...war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth,

and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:7-9)

The devil was cast to the earth, just as pictured in Revelation 9:1. Revelation 12 gives details about the timing or circumstances which surrounded this. In the first several verses of the chapter, we see a woman (Israel) who was with Child (Jesus) and the dragon (Satan) sought to destroy Him (Revelation 12:1-5). A wonderful proclamation is made from heaven, "...now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come..." (v 10). However, there is an acknowledgement of the trouble the devil brings, for he is "...the accuser of our brethren..." who "...has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (v 10, 12).

When the devil was cast down to the earth, seeking to destroy the Child and the woman who gave birth to Him, he brought all kinds of suffering and oppression. During the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, Satan ravaged the people upon the earth with manifold demon activity, something which was not seen before that time nor since. He pulled out all the stops, as we might say, for his time was short and the battle against the Son of Man was pressing. We know the end of the story – he loses.

Revelation 20 brings the angel with the key to the bottomless pit back into view. But this time, not only does he have the key, but he also has a great chain in his hand (Revelation 20:1). With it,

He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. (Revelation 20:2-3)

This pictures the fallen enemy. He is no longer permitted to roam about causing havoc and destruction as he once did. The Lord is now reigning in His kingdom (Mark 9:1; Acts 2:30-33; Colossians 1:13). John used the image of a thousand years (Revelation 20:4) for His reign. NOTE – this is not a literal time frame, but a figure to represent a perfect or complete time (numbers in Revelation are images and figures, not literal). Though temptation and sin are still in the world, the enemy of God's people is portrayed as restrained and bound. He has been cast down; he has fallen. He can no longer deceive the nations and accuse the brethren as he once did. That doesn't mean he cannot do us harm – a vicious dog that has been chained poses no threat to you so long as you keep your distance. However, if you approach it, he is dangerous. The same is true with the devil, who is chained and restrained.

Back to our primary text – Luke 10:18. Jesus, speaking prophetically to the seventy saw in their work of casting out demons the promise of Satan and his power being overthrown at Calvary. But notice what the Lord states in the next two verses:

Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.
(Luke 10:19-20)

What a wonderful statement! He had given them power, amazing power. And they were joyous for the abilities He had given. However, the Lord wanted them to focus on the greater gift – salvation. Authority over serpents and scorpions and spirits is great, but how much greater is it for one's name to be written in the Lamb's book of life? Rejoice in that!

One final note – some, when discussing Satan's fall, may be inclined to go to Isaiah 14:12-13,

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations. For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...'

Though the name Lucifer is commonly applied to the devil in some religious circles, the Scriptures do not identify Lucifer as Satan. In Isaiah 13:1, where the context leading into chapter 14 begins, we read, *"The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw."* Again, in Isaiah 13:19 it is *"...Babylon, the glory of kingdoms..."* which is under consideration. In Isaiah 14:4, the immediate context says, *"...take up this proverb against the king of Babylon."* This text is about the king of Babylon, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar who was immensely arrogant; it is not part of the discussion of the fall of Satan.

OCTOBER 2022 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Reagan McClenny will pen the third article in our series looking at pictures of Jesus through the gospels. His article will focus on Luke's portrayal of Jesus.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Chad Brewer brings us a congregational profile for the Lord's church at Jerusalem.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Tim McPherson will provide the next article in our Psalms of worship series – Psalm 63.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Sean Sullivan begins a three-part series on the Fruit Of The Spirit. Article one will focus on love, joy, and peace.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Sean Cavender discusses sharing the gospel of our Lord with a view to defining what the gospel actually is, and conversely, what it is not.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Jeff Smith will help us with what can be a difficult text, Matthew 10:34, where Jesus said, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword."



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