

# Breaking the Silence

Discovery of the Principles of the Altar and the Remnant  
in relation to the Kingdom of God  
Volume 2 – Old Testament Continued

by

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# Table of Contents

	Preface	5
1.	The Snare of High Places	7
2.	The Compromising System of Mixed Worship	15
3.	Vulnerability of a Tolerated Worship	23
4.	A King's Courageous Statesmanship	29
5.	Strength from Trusting in the Lord	37
6.	Brightest Light After Darkest Night	45
7.	Heeding the Lost Book	55
8.	Warnings of the Prophets	63
9.	Judah's Final Four Kings	71
10.	Proud Catastrophic Rejection	79
11.	Limitations to the Patience of God	87
12.	God's Departed Glory	97
13.	The Crushing Stone	105
14.	The Suffering Remnant's Reward	111
15.	God's Kingdom on Trial	119
16.	Exiles Returning to the Promised Land	125
17.	The Chosen Few	131
18.	The Temple's Greater Glory	139
19.	Prophetic Help and Encouragement	145
20.	The Broken Wall	151
21.	Stones Brought to Life	157
22.	Builders and Fighters for the Kingdom	163
23.	God's Strength for a Great Work	169
24.	Complacent Symptoms of the Last Remnant	175
25.	Prophetic Answers to the Last Remnant	181
26.	Brighter Revelations, Unparalleled Blessings	189
27.	Present Rewards and Treasured Remembrances	195

# Preface

As I was proofreading the manuscript of this second volume of *BREAKING THE SILENCE*, which brings an end to the topic of the remnant in the Old Testament, I asked the Lord this question, “Lord, why did you give this message to me, an unknown person in Christian circles? Why not give it to a well-known, popular Christian author with a large readership? Why not give it to someone who holds crusades for millions of people and is recognized in Christian circles as an anointed special chosen vessel? Why deprive the majority from hearing this message?” Well, to this day I have not received an answer! I must, however, remain faithful to His call; the rest is up to Him.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank certain individuals who have stood by me in very difficult circumstances in my life and have made it possible for this book to be published. I would specifically like to thank my dear friends Barbara and Bill Mallon who, while going through serious health problems and spiritual battles, undertook to edit this book. With Bill’s permission, I will quote verbatim one of his e-mails to me as follows: *“It has been a joy and pleasure to work on this volume. Many times, it has stirred my heart deeply and my eyes to tears... It certainly is a message vitally needed for the believers in the church at large today. It appears to me that your first volume introduces the subject, but that this volume gets into the ‘meat’ of the subject. Most*

*Christians do not see how the 'high places' are defined and applied to today's Christianity. I pray that your book could lift the veil and give sight to the blind; it would be a shocking revelation. I pray that your book will be greatly used by the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit to reveal the Kingdom of God in its reality and glory... It gradually ends on a crescendo, with the last two chapters giving the book a most glorious ending and conclusion. The messages covering the post-captivity era are most crucial. Both Barbara and I are very excited about the message it contains. It truly is a most urgent message for the Body of Christ today in order to make herself ready for His coming. It has been such a privilege and joy to edit this book for the sake of His kingdom. I want to praise the Lord in a very special way for recovering my health for this task. For instance, the Lord has given me the grace and strength to pick up the book with chapter 4 on January 24th and reaching the last chapter yesterday, February 24th. So it has taken one month, working 10 to 16 hours a day. Spiritually, I took a Nazarite vow to separate myself from everything in order to consecrate myself totally to the Lord for the sake of this book. We pray that this book will raise up more potential overcomers for His kingdom — 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!'"*

The other person who has had a tremendous part in putting this book in your hands is my very dear niece, Nelly Safari. The numerous hours of work she has dedicated to finalizing this book, despite her own workload and health problems, leave me indebted to her for her devotion.

I also thank my church, my family, my children and their partners who have stood by me, believing that somehow the Lord will use this work to touch lives. Since I have promised my grandchildren, I mention them according to their age, Stephanie, 10 and Melody, 9 ½ years old.

Finally I want to dedicate this book to Edwin, my son in the flesh and a very special person, whom the Lord has called into His service through the most amazing and unbelievable circumstances. It is not that I love my other children less, but Edwin, I love you so much because...

All glory belongs to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*Fred Saleh  
September 2002*

# 1

## The Snare of High Places

*“The high places were not taken away.”* 1 Kings 22:43

In BREAKING THE SILENCE, VOLUME 1, we saw how Elijah, that blessed remnant man, ministered to God’s people in the northern kingdom of Israel during the rule of the wicked king Ahab, and his demonic queen, Jezebel. When Elijah encountered the forces of evil, he declared the kingdom of God by repairing the Lord’s altar and offering the burnt sacrifice. Then the Lord rewarded His faithful servant with the rapture in the whirlwind surrounded by chariots of fire.

### The Historical Fate of the Northern Kingdom

Let us recapitulate what happened to the northern kingdom of Israel. Each succeeding king became progressively deviant in his idolatry and his relationship with the Lord degenerated. Finally, in the year 722 B.C., Israel was attacked by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, taken captive, and exiled to Halak, Hara, and the river of Gozan.

## Breaking the Silence

In 930 B.C., Jeroboam rebelled against Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and formed the northern kingdom. His dynasty lasted until 722 B.C. when his kingdom went into captivity. From 930 B.C. to 722 B.C., the long succession of kings walked in the idolatrous ways of Jeroboam who had introduced calf worship to the ten tribes of Israel. This northern kingdom of Israel was also known in the Bible by the name of its capital, Samaria. The moral condition of this kingdom continued to decline until it went bankrupt during the reign of Ahab and his queen Jezebel.

During this dark period, God raised for Himself the prophet Elijah, who was empowered with such might that even Ahab and Jezebel trembled at the mention of his name. He represented the remnant of God's people during an extremely corrupt era of Israel's history. God, being rich in mercy, repeatedly warned the people of the northern kingdom to repent of their sins, return to Him, and receive forgiveness of sins. Over a period of 208 years, beginning with the reign of Jeroboam and ending with the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Samaria, God warned the people of Israel repeatedly through many prophets — to no avail.

Elijah was succeeded by the mighty prophet Elisha, followed by the prophets Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. Hosea was contemporary with Hoshea, the last king of Israel. But none of these prophets could turn the hearts of the people toward Jehovah, their true God.

The seeds of idolatry had been planted in the hearts of Israel by this one act of Jeroboam — the introduction of calf worship. Idolatry became so deeply rooted in the people that they decided unanimously to follow the pagan ways of their fathers rather than the ways of the one true God. They did this in spite of their awareness of the evil ways of their fathers.

God did, however, through these prophets, raise and reserve for Himself a minority out from the idolatrous majority — a remnant who had the heart to seek the one sovereign God of Israel. God let the

## The Snare of High Places

majority go into captivity and be given over to the suppressive reign of the enemy. Since they had decided to follow other gods and had yielded to their kings, they were then allowed by God to go all the way down the path of idolatry during their captivity. God had withdrawn His protection from the northern kingdom of Samaria.

## The Repeated Fate of the Southern Kingdom

The scene now shifts to the southern kingdom of Judah where we will continue to follow the line of God's remnant. The northern kingdom of Israel will no longer be within the range of our focus.

God expected the fate of the kingdom of Samaria to become a wake-up call for the southern kingdom of Judah who was also influenced by the ways of Jeroboam through its association with Israel's northern kingdom. However, the fall of Israel into captivity did not bring the people of Judah to their senses and, the same principle of failure repeated itself. Again, God spoke to the people of Judah through many prophets, such as Obadiah (not the same one as Ahab's court prophet), Isaiah, and Jeremiah. But again, to no avail. Again, all He accomplished was to raise and reserve for Himself a faithful remnant who followed Him wholeheartedly despite political and religious apostasy in Judah.

After the fall of Samaria — the northern kingdom of Israel — in 722 B.C., God patiently allowed Judah to exist as a kingdom for an additional 136 years (until 586 B.C.), with the hope of restoring them to Himself. But as history has proven, the roots of apostasy and idolatry were deeply embedded in the hearts of the people of Judah. And as with Samaria, God had no alternative but to allow Judah to fall into the hands of their enemies and taste the bitter tyranny of the kingdoms of this world. So in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, and the kingdom of Judah fell. The king, his royal family,



## Breaking the Silence

and the majority of God's people were taken into captivity, carried away as prisoners to Babylon.

### The Tragic Alliance of the Southern Kingdom

This was a brief review of the history of Samaria and Judah, which ended in their respective captivities. Now, we want to follow the line of the remnant in Judah. We need to look into and trace the history of the southern kingdom. We start at the juncture when Asa, king of Judah, died and his son Jehoshaphat succeeded him:

*“Jehoshaphat the son of Asa had become king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. **Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. Also, Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel**”* (1 Kings 22:41-44).

From the two statements highlighted above, we can learn a lot about this king. For one thing, Jehoshaphat was contemporary with Ahab. His father, Asa's reign overlapped Ahab's for only a few years. But Jehoshaphat ruled over Judah for twenty-five years, most of which was contemporary with Ahab's reign over the northern kingdom of Israel. This extended period of overlapping rulership with Ahab had a profound effect on him: *“Now the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and **not according to the acts of Israel** ... And his heart took delight in the ways of the Lord; **moreover, he removed the high places and wooden images***

## The Snare of High Places

*from Judah*” (2 Chron. 17:3-4,6).

The two passages quoted above from 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles seem to contradict each other. In the latter reference, we read about Jehoshaphat removing the high places, whereas in the former narrative, we are told that he did not remove the high places. Although seemingly contradictory, in actuality they are not. The latter passage covers the early years of Jehoshaphat’s reign in Judah, whereas the former covers his later years. This is explained in context by two verses — again, one from 1 Kings and the other from 2 Chronicles: “*Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel*” (1 Kings 22:44); “*Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab*” (2 Chron. 18:1).

In general, Jehoshaphat was a good king, but his alliance with Ahab was a serious mistake, and it almost cost him his life. It influenced and compromised his attitude toward the high places. As he was returning to Jerusalem, having escaped by the skin of his teeth from a war alongside Ahab (the time when Ahab was killed), he was met by a prophet called Jehu, son of Hanani, who said to him: “*Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore, the wrath of the Lord is upon you*” (2 Chron. 19:2). This statement explains the reign of Jehoshaphat. As stated before, his long, overlapping reign with Ahab had a profound, compromising effect on his behavior — especially after the marriage of his son to Ahab’s daughter, as a sign of alliance. This marriage eventually brought about grievous and idolatrous consequences for the next generation of the people of Judah.

## The Fatal Problem of Both Kingdoms

It is of interest to us at this time to take up the phrase “*high places*”. From the start, we have maintained that where God’s altar was

## Breaking the Silence

established, there a remnant worshiped. And where a remnant worshiped, there the fire was burning on the Lord's altar, a place which represented God's kingdom. Let us now look at the relationship between God's altar and His remnant with the high places.

The history of the Jewish people in 870 B.C. speaks of a culture and civilization quite foreign and unrelated to our twenty-first century. But it is the principle, not the external activities, behind this primitive mode of worship that is of importance to us. We can discover parallels between these high places and today's Christianity. But before we get into the antitype of today's church, let's first understand the types of the Old Testament.

The four books of First and Second Kings and First and Second Chronicles, cover the history of the children of Israel, including both Israel and Judah. It began with king Saul and ended with the captivity of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem — a period from 1050 B.C. to 586 B.C. The high places are mentioned in these Scriptures time after time. They were locations where Canaanites placed their altars for the worship of Baal. It should be understood, therefore, that in the Scriptures "*high places*," represent the altars of other rival gods.

The high places in themselves have no significance. Abundant in the land of Canaan, these high places represented the worship of idols, and the altars placed there, represented the sovereignty of Baal and other idols. On these high places, the Canaanite people sacrificed even their children as burnt offerings in order to demonstrate their allegiance to their pagan kings.

When God gave Moses the law to worship at "one central sanctuary," He specifically warned him and the Israelites against worship at these high places: "*These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the*

## The Snare of High Places

*earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall **destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden image with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place***” (Deut. 12:1-3).

Then the Lord stated that God’s people were to worship at a centralized sanctuary where the only true God would choose to put His name. Later on, this place was identified as Jerusalem. When the people of Israel first entered the land of Canaan, they often followed the local custom of setting up their altars on high hills, the idolatrous sites of the altars of Baal. The Israelites were clearly and strictly forbidden to use these pagan altars and high places for the purpose of worshiping Jehovah (cf. Num. 33:52; Deut. 7:5; 12:3).

# 2

## The Compromising System of a Mixed Worship

*“But the high places were not removed.”* 2 Kings 15:4

### The Infectious Plague Resulting from a Slight Departure

It is clear that Moses instructed Israel to build their altars only at sites sanctioned by Him (cf. Ex. 20:24; Deut. 12:5,8,13-14). Later, the Jewish people did not follow these stated conditions, not even during the time of Solomon: *“Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh’s daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall all around Jerusalem. Meanwhile **the people sacrificed at the high places**, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days. And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, **except that he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places**. Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: **Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar**”* (1 Kings 3:1-4).

## Breaking the Silence

This text clearly shows that shortly after the death of Joshua, the children of Israel conformed to the ways of the Canaanites and started to worship Baal. Even if they did not worship Baal, at best, they built an altar to Jehovah on the same site as the altars of Baal and other idols: *“The people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days”* (1 Kings 3:2). Their excuse for offering sacrifices on the high places was that as yet, there was no temple built where they could sacrifice to the Lord. But the text makes it clear that their action was not justifiable, and it only exposed the true condition of their hearts.

Solomon tried to walk in the ways of David, *“except that he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (1 Kings 3:3). This does emphasize one important truth about David — He never offered sacrifices to the Lord on the high places, not even on *“the greatest”* of all the high places, such as Gibeon. But the kings of both Israel and Judah all worshiped at high places, with the exception of two, who represented the remnant of God’s people in their own generation. But this will be discussed later.

Even after the temple was built, Solomon still worshiped at the high places and enticed all the children of Israel to do the same: *“King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites — from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David”* (1 Kings 11:1-4).

## The Compromising System of Mixed Worship

In these verses, we see the continued comparison between Solomon and David. Solomon, under the influence of his foreign wives, gave in to the temptation of worshiping on altars other than the altar of the Lord. All the kings of the northern kingdom and the majority of the kings of the southern kingdom followed in the footsteps of Solomon. From among all these kings, only two remained faithful to God with all their heart, as did David.

Solomon departed *only a little bit* from the whole truth. He built a magnificent temple for the Lord God of the children of Israel, but he also built high places for the gods of his wives. This is exactly what Satan wanted: just a foothold. Solomon's slight departure from the whole truth, became a fatal disease in succeeding generations. Solomon's great achievement was to build a temple for Jehovah in Jerusalem; but unfortunately he also, "*went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods*" (1 Kings 11:5-8).

## The Divided Heart of the Southern Kingdom

The high places became a matter of intense contention and constant battle between the Lord and His people. Repeatedly, God prohibited them from worshiping at these places, but Israel continued this chronic practice.

Immediately after the separation of the northern and southern kingdom, Jeroboam introduced a system of idolatry pervasive in

## Breaking the Silence

Samaria. Judah, on the other hand, resorted to a system of mixed worship at the altar in the temple as well as at the altars of the high places. The high places became a tremendous issue before God. Neither did the northern kingdom repent from their idolatry, nor did the southern kingdom give up their system of mixed worship. The Lord could not be God and King over the idolatrous Israel, nor could He be the divine sovereign over the divided heart of Judah. God's expectation from His people was that they would completely remove the high places with their altars and would totally acknowledge His sovereignty by worshiping exclusively at His altar in the temple in Jerusalem.

### The Judean Succession of a Mixed Worship

However, king after king in Judah failed to accomplish God's expectation. As we saw earlier, Rehoboam, Solomon's son, gave in to the mixed and compromising worship in the southern kingdom: *"Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah... Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord... They also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill"* (1 Kings 14:21-23).

After Rehoboam, his son, Abijah, became king over Judah: *"He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David"* (1 Kings 15:3).

Then Asa, Abijah's son, succeeded him as king over Judah. He was a good king who restored worship at the Lord's altar. But he did not finish his good work, because he failed to remove the high places:

*"Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David. And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made... **But the high places were not removed.** Nevertheless Asa's heart was loyal to the Lord all his*



## The Compromising System of Mixed Worship

*days*” (1 Kings 15:11-14). Asa occupied a peculiar position among the kings of Judah. Although he did not remove the high places, he can still be considered a remnant statesman, because he began to set into motion the fight against idolatry and against the altars on the high places. Thus, he became an example, though only in part, for the remnant of God’s people.

In chapter one, we summarized the reign of Jehoshaphat, Asa’s son. By his military alliance with Ahab and by arranging the marriage of his son with Ahab and Jezebel’s daughter, Jehoshaphat disqualified himself from a privileged position with the remnant, even though he did partially restore a true worship in Judah: *“And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places”* (1 Kings 22:43).

After Jehoshaphat, his son Jehoram became king over Judah. His father’s alliance by marriage brought about disastrous consequences for Judah. Jehoram turned out to be a wicked king. He restored idol worship in Judah and did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

Next, Jehoram’s son, Ahaziah, became king over Judah. He also was an evil king. His mother was Athaliah. In other words, Ahab was his grandfather and Jezebel his grandmother on his mother’s side: *“And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of Ahab, for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab”* (2 Kings 8:27).

Then after Ahaziah, for a period of seven years, his wicked mother, Athaliah, usurped the throne, became queen of Judah, and ruled the land.

But later, Joash, Ahaziah’s son, became king over Judah, through the help of the high priest and his wife Jehosheba (who was king Ahaziah’s sister). During the process of this takeover, the commanders

## Breaking the Silence

of the army killed queen Athaliah. We read this about Joash: *“In the seventh year of Jehu [king of Israel] Joash [Jehoash] became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem.... Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (2 Kings 12:1-3).

Succeeding Joash, his son Amaziah became king: *“Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, became king.... And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like his father David; he did everything as his father Joash had done. However the high places were not taken away and the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (2 Kings 14:1-4).

Replacing Amaziah, his son Azariah (Uzziah) became king over Judah: *“Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king.... And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (2 Kings 15:1-4).

Following Azariah (Uzziah), his son Jotham became king: *“Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign.... And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”* (2 Kings 15:32-35).

In the lives of these kings of Judah, there was a constant, loud and discordant refrain — *“However the high places were not removed.”* Each of the kings of Judah, with rare exceptions, starting with Solomon and continuing to Jotham, had made efforts to rid the land of idolatry. Almost all of them had re-established true worship at the Lord’s altar in the temple, but they failed to remove the high places. Each had, to a

## The Compromising System of Mixed Worship

certain extent, compromised with the wishes of a certain segment of society to worship at the high places.

Consequently, they offered a mixed worship to God's people. It was as though they had told the people of Judah, "You may worship as you wish; you may offer sacrifices either on the Lord's altar in the temple, or at any other altar on the high places." These kings allowed people freedom to choose their way of worship. Almost all of them removed idolatry from Judah, but maintained the *sites* of idolatry. Eventually, so much idolatry took place on these sites that Judah became overrun with idols.

God cannot be a 'half-God.' He does not want a 'half-kingdom.' Israel to the north was completely corrupted. They had totally and thoroughly rejected the kingdom of God. They were about to be taken captive by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. And Judah was supposed to learn a lesson from the fate of Israel — but did it?

# 3

## Vulnerability of a Tolerated Worship

*“He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.”* 2 Kings 16:4

### Product of a Religious Mixture

*“Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah... did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, as his father David had done. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel. And **he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree**”* (2 Kings 16:1-4).

Ahaz was a product of mixed worship, the outcome of the partial, half-measured reforms of previous kings. Despite God’s clear command to remove every trace of idolatry, the kings of Judah cleverly devised the restoration of Jehovah’s altar by allowing other altar sites to remain in the land. The result gave the ground to Ahaz, who resorted to idol

## Breaking the Silence

worship, bowing down to the diabolical altars of other gods. He finally fell prey to the high places that his predecessors had failed to remove.

Sometimes we think that these repetitions — “*The high places were not removed*” — are unnecessary and wearisome, but they hammer the point into our minds. Not every truth in the Bible is presented in simple, categorical statements. Many biblical truths are referred to in patterns of repetitive phrases, and God has left it up to willing hearts led by the Spirit to derive many lessons from them.

God wanted His people to acknowledge His lordship and sovereign kingdom by worshiping at His altar in the central place He had designated at Jerusalem. But the resistance to remove these Baal idols of high places lured the people of Judah to fall into the trap of the adversary once again. Clearly, the Scriptures (cf. 2 Kings 17:7-23) have summarized the sins of the northern kingdom of Israel which were the chief cause of the nation’s eventual captivity.

So, the Lord wanted to see how the kings of Judah, who had been warned by the downfall of Israel, would deal with the high places. The major issue of contention between God and His people was the high places and foreign altars, which represented opposing kingdoms hostile to God’s kingdom. God could not tolerate those idolatrous objects. He waited to see whether the kings of Judah would follow the way of David and bring about a complete reform. However, partial reforms were only ‘band-aid’ solutions, and finally produced a wicked king like Ahaz. The Scriptures evaluate every king of Judah based on his attitude toward the high places, which represented alien altars of a foreign kingdom. And Ahaz, king over the southern kingdom of Judah, woefully plummeted into the depths of gross idolatry.

## Vulnerability of a Tolerated Worship

### Fascination with an Outrageous Altar

*“Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, and saw **an altar that was at Damascus**; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern according to all its workmanship. Then Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Urijah the priest made it before King Ahaz came back from Damascus. And when the king came back from Damascus, the king **saw the altar; and the king approached the altar and made offerings on it**. So he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. He also brought **the bronze altar** which was before the Lord, from the front of the temple — from between **the new altar and the house of the Lord** — and put it on the north side of the new altar. Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying: ‘**On the great new altar** burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king’s burnt sacrifice, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice. And **the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by**.’ Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded” (2 Kings 16:10-16).*

Here is a classical example of a religion which has an appearance of godliness without the presence of the only true God. Judah’s King Ahaz, during his Damascus trip, was fascinated by an altar of the enemy of God’s people. He sent all of its architectural details to his personal priest — not God’s priest — and had him build an exact replica. A king and a priest conspired together to replace the Lord’s altar with a foreign replica. They placed this pagan monument of Satan’s kingdom in the Lord’s temple and offered on it all sorts of sacrifices for themselves as

## Breaking the Silence

well as for the people of the land. King Ahaz made a blood alliance with the devil. However, he knew that he might need guidance and help from the only true God in an emergency; so he kept the bronze altar. He bowed to an alien power, but sought sporadic help from Jehovah.

The pseudo-Christians of today have the exact same attitude: they worship the gods of their own making and imaginations on their modern-day altars which have replaced the 'old original bronze altar' of the cross; but in times of need, they cry out to the only true God for help and guidance.

Notice that the bronze altar was relocated to the north side of the Damascus altar; which enabled the priests to enter into their "holies" without going to the bronze altar first. To them, this meant that God could now be approached through a foreign, Assyrian altar.

In the present-day 'crossless' Christianity, anyone can approach the holiness of God without going through the cross of His only begotten Son, the antitype of the bronze altar. This is the religion of the world, of the Antichrist. This is the religion of the universal brotherhood of all mankind, without the pre-requisite of redemption through the blood of the Lamb.

## Survival of the Faithful Minority

Judah was now paying an inescapable price for its mixed worship. The kings, through their association with the northern kingdom of Israel, had introduced many worldly ways into Judah's pure and holy way of worshiping Jehovah. And now they had to reap the results of their compromise. Yes, Ahaz had gone as far as exchanging the Lord's altar for a worldly altar which he deemed. The offices of king and priest had now become utterly corrupted; hence, the necessity for a remnant to strike back at the root of the problem. Judah, like Israel in years past,

## Vulnerability of a Tolerated Worship

was now sullied. Their claim to be God's people, was mere words, void of meaning.

So, God raised up prophets to rebuke the nation for its complacency and to encourage the remnant to stand up and fight. These prophets promised the remnant of God's people that if they stood up and resisted — or at least refused to participate in the nation's apostasy — they would be blessed and preserved by the Lord.

Isaiah was a prophet contemporary with four kings of Judah — Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Rebuking the people of God for their apostasy, he predicted that the nation as a whole would perish and only a remnant would survive. Listen to his prophecy:

*“And it shall come to pass in that day that the **remnant** of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The **remnant** will return, the **remnant** of Jacob, to the Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a **remnant** of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord God of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land”* (Isaiah 10:20-23).

In very clear and plain terms, Isaiah prophesied the destruction of the majority and the survival of a faithful minority called “*the remnant.*” A remnant of the nation of Israel may be defined as one who always worshiped at Jehovah's altar. In Elijah's time, there were seven thousand who did not bow down to Baal. But in Isaiah's time, toward the end of the history of Judah, the remnant had been reduced to only a few godly men: “*Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah*” (Isaiah 1:9).

For the sake of the remnant, the Lord hesitated to execute the total destruction of Israel and Judah. During the reign of king Ahaz in Judah,



## **Breaking the Silence**

and later during the reign of his son Hezekiah, the northern kingdom of Israel was attacked, besieged, and conquered by Tiglath-Pileser. All the inhabitants of Israel (Samaria) were taken captive and relocated. Regrettably, even after witnessing the tragic fate of Israel, Judah did not come to its senses, save for a very few of God's people — the remnant.

# 4

## A King's Courageous Statesmanship

*“He removed the high places.”* 2 Kings 18:4

### His Removal of All Idolatrous Objects

Near the end of Judah's confusing history, two kings stepped forward to do what God had long waited for. Boldly, they took their place among God's remnant in their own generation. The first of these two kings was Hezekiah, the son of king Ahaz:

*“Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.... And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. **He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel [both the southern and the northern kingdom] burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart***

## Breaking the Silence

*from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went*” (2 Kings 18:1-7).

What high praise do these remarks bestow upon Hezekiah! And justifiably so. In comparison with all the kings of Judah, from Rehoboam to Zedekiah, Hezekiah stands out as an example of the Lord’s ideal king. This fact is quite remarkable considering his ancestry: he was the son of the most corrupt and evil king in the history of Judah — king Ahaz.

We must remember that, his whole life, Hezekiah was under the influence of the great prophet Isaiah. And the secret of his greatness was his trust in the Lord, the God of Israel. Trusting deeply and ever-increasingly in the Lord, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and he carried out many widespread and effective reforms in the southern kingdom.

God’s assessment of this remnant king is bright and shining! And the reason for Hezekiah’s high and unique status in God’s eyes is given very clearly in the few verses above — *“He removed the high places.”* This was the reform God had been waiting for throughout all the preceding generations. By his action, Hezekiah *“like his father David”* had declared God’s sovereignty over His people.

The extent of the people’s spiritual demise is demonstrated by the fact that they had carefully preserved the brass serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness and turned it into an object of worship. Hezekiah called this idol by its right name — a piece of brass (*Nehushtan*) — and *“broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made.”*

This bronze snake was one of the highly-esteemed religious relics of Israel. But religious pride or no religious pride, traditional relic or no traditional relic, the brass serpent had to go, because it had become an idol. The Word of God says, *“for until those days the children of Israel*

## A King's Courageous Statesmanship

*burned incense to it.*” Instead of obeying the commandments God had given to Moses about idolatry, Israel had turned this bronze snake into an object of worship. Who, other than Hezekiah, would have dared to destroy this venerated relic?

In the antitype of Israel, the church, we can now observe similar objects: relics, crosses, statues, candles, pictures, icons, buildings, etc. These religious memorabilia are worshiped simply because they are tangible and visible objects of religion, many of which are even cause for national pride. Many such high places and objects of idolatry can be found in both ancient and contemporary Christianity. God's people often settle for mixed worship without asking themselves whether or not their action is in accordance with God's Word, or if it's what God wants them to do.

### His Reversal of His Predecessors' History

If Hezekiah had followed in his father Ahaz's footsteps, he would not have become the outstanding king he turned out to be. His father had acted foolishly, for he had become idolatrous and even served the king of Assyria by bowing down at his pagan altar. Not only did king Hezekiah return to God, holding fast to the Lord, and not only did he destroy the high places (including all the idols and the bronze serpent), but he also *“rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him”* (2 Kings 18:7). Of such a man God's Word says, *“The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went.”*

For further clarification, we can look at a brief comparison between king Hezekiah and his father Ahaz recorded in 2 Chronicles. During the latter years of Ahaz, the Edomites and Philistines caused serious problems for Judah. They pillaged cities and villages and took many prisoners. The Scriptures state clearly the reason for these attacks and

## Breaking the Silence

the inability of Judah to defend themselves: “*The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord.... Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord... he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus.... But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel*” (2 Chron.28:19- 23).

Later, “*Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, **shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars** in every corner of Jerusalem and in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers*” (2 Chr. 28:24-25). The conclusive summary of this man’s reign is that he closed the doors of the temple, depriving the people of Judah access to the Lord’s altar, while placing idolatrous altars on every street corner in Jerusalem and in every town of Judah.

Ahaz’s actions became the culmination of all the kings before him, who had refused to abolish mixed worship. But upon completion of his wicked reign came king Hezekiah, a blessed, non-conforming representative of the remnant. He was one of two outstanding kings in the history of the southern kingdom: “*Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old.... And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, **he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them***” (2 Chron. 29:1-3). In simple terms, he made the Lord’s altar available to God’s people. Notice the narrative that follows: “*Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea [last king of the northern kingdom] the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.... And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. **He removed the high places***” (2 Kings 18:1,3-4).

## A King's Courageous Statesmanship

How beautiful! This outstanding king fulfilled the desire of God's heart by leading God's people back to Him. When Hezekiah took over his father's throne, a great change came over the national and spiritual life of Judah. For a brief period, the process of corruption and degeneration halted. Hezekiah initiated a national reformation. He made no reference to the miseries and calamities which had befallen the people; rather, he traced the history of their sin and the wrath of God that had come upon them as a result.

He then started the work of restoring the true order of worship. His first business was cleansing the temple. The extent of the chaotic condition of Judah's national life is demonstrated by the fact that it took the Levites sixteen days to remove and cleanse the accumulated filth from the temple of the Lord. The ceremony of rededication followed immediately.

### His Restoration of the Lord's Altar

2 Chronicles chapter 29 enumerates the steps Hezekiah had to take in order to reform and bring God's people back to Him. After the lengthy process of cleansing the temple, the priests reported their accomplishments to Hezekiah: "*We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, **the altar** of burnt offerings with all its articles.... Moreover all the articles which King Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression, we have prepared and sanctified; and there they are now, before **the altar of the Lord***" (2 Chron. 29:18-19). Notice the emphasis the Scriptures place on the Lord's altar which stood in opposition to the altars of other gods. The remnant had the responsibility to get rid of all other altars and to worship at the Lord's altar exclusively, whatever the cost may be, thus declaring the kingdom and sovereignty of God.

## Breaking the Silence

*“Then King Hezekiah rose early, gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord.... He commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them [animals] on **the altar** of the Lord.... and they presented their blood **on the altar** as a sin offering to make atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel”* (2 Chron. 29:20-24).

### His Return to the Passover Celebration

2 Chronicles chapter 30, which follows the above events chronologically, describes Hezekiah’s celebration of the Passover. This chapter sheds further light on the character of Hezekiah, showing the greatness of his remnant status. For a long time the Passover, this ordained feast of the Lord, had been neglected, both in Israel’s northern and Judah’s southern kingdoms. When Hezekiah was making arrangements for the celebration of the Passover, his heart was going out to the whole nation, just as Elijah’s heart had gone out to the whole nation. He sent out messengers throughout Israel and Judah, inviting people to come to Jerusalem and participate in this great feast. But they laughed at these messengers and mocked them, which goes to show the deep corruption of Israel in the northern kingdom. However, Hezekiah’s intention was rewarded, because a remnant actually responded and gathered in Judah to celebrate the Passover in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.

There is a lesson for us to learn from the life of this blessed remnant statesman. By their scornful attitude toward the Lord’s redemptive Passover, the northern kingdom demonstrated their irreversible corruption. This is a proven principle: when people fall into utter corruption, they question and ridicule God’s Word. Is this not a distinct sign of our times? In certain Christian circles, the inerrancy of God’s

## A King's Courageous Statesmanship

Word is questioned and the messengers of truth are mocked and laughed at. They should repent, return to the crucified and risen Christ, gather with the Lord's people in His house, and submit to His sovereignty and lordship.

Despite the corruption of the northern kingdom of Israel, Hezekiah refused to be deterred. He knew that "*seven thousand*" had not knelt down to Baal when Elijah had served these people as God's prophet for the remnant. And the attendance and participation of Israel's remnant at the Passover celebration in Jerusalem vindicated Hezekiah.

This is always the case. As the trumpets of truth are sounded for the faithful remnant of God's people to gather, the majority will laugh and mock. But the feast will be observed and carried out, and the remnant will rally and assemble together.

Those who gathered were not the noblest and the best of the people. In fact, they were quite ignorant of the necessary arrangements and preparations. But Hezekiah, full of sympathy for his people, prayed that God's mercy be on them. His prayer was answered, and the people's imperfect ways and incorrect methods of celebration were not punished, because those who came were seeking the Lord with all their heart. Hezekiah's actions could have been misinterpreted by the majority, just as we are sometimes misunderstood. However, whenever opportunity is given to those who are thirsty for the living Word, results are produced.

## His Reconstruction of their National Life

As we continue to review the life of king Hezekiah, we see the account of the remnant's works which followed their worship. The reconstruction of their national life was the result of a national return to God, which had been expressed in the great celebration of the Passover feast. It is very significant that the remnant from Israel became the first



## Breaking the Silence

to further the work of destroying all that remained of idolatry throughout Judah and Israel. The king also set in order the duties of the priests and the Levites. He arranged for the offerings according to the law, and he called for the payment of tithes. The response was general and generous. The thoroughness with which Hezekiah carried out the work demonstrates the value he attached to it:

*“And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered”* (2 Chron. 31:21).

These words reveal Hezekiah’s **purpose**, his **method**, and his **result**. They form a revelation of an enduring example to all who determine with resolve in their hearts to be a part of God’s remnant. His **purpose** was that *“he sought his God,”* an expression exactly equivalent to the Lord’s words in the Gospels: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matt. 6:33). His **method** was the complete devotion of his heart — *“he ... worked whole heartedly.”* His **result** was his success — *“he prospered.”* **A right purpose and a true method** will invariably produce **the desired result**. So Hezekiah faithfully led the remnant of Judah and Israel back to the Lord and His altar.

# 5

## Strength from Trusting in the Lord

*“Thus says the Lord, ‘Do not be afraid’.”* 2 Kings 19:6

### Derogatory Attacks from the Enemy

One of the outstanding events in Hezekiah’s life as king of Judah was Sennacherib’s attack and invasion of his country. A former king of Assyria had already destroyed the northern kingdom and taken the Israelites captive.

Considering Hezekiah’s faithfulness, it would be strange if God were to allow this menacing enemy to invade his kingdom. This story is more extensive than what the writers of Kings and Chronicles could provide in their narratives. But we do know that Hezekiah had flung off the yoke of the Assyrian king — the yoke that his father Ahaz had willingly borne when he had installed the altar of Damascus in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. Subsequently, during Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib invaded Judah. At first, in a moment of weakness, Hezekiah had paid him a heavy tribute, thus yielding to the enemy’s rule in an

## Breaking the Silence

effort to buy him off with a bribe. The result was not what he expected, because Sennacherib now demanded unconditional surrender.

Through this hour of crisis resulting from his own doubts and mistake, Hezekiah's faith and courage became renewed. He took immediate steps to embarrass the enemy: He stopped the water supply, strengthened his fortifications, mobilized his army, and assured his people that "*there is a Greater with us than with him.*" Then in response to further threats, he took refuge in prayer and fellowship with the Prophet Isaiah.

Satan always has his ways and means to torment God's people. Although he knows he is a defeated foe, he fights back anyway, just because his kingdom is threatened by God's remnant. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's rule, king Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem and railed accusations against king Hezekiah, especially about the altars. Sennacherib sent his emissaries to the gates of Jerusalem and declared the charges to the dignitaries and army leaders of Judah who were posted and stationed on the walls around Jerusalem. One of the charges was: "*But if you say to me, 'We trust in the Lord our God' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem'?*" (2 Kings 18:22).

Sennacherib was deliberately trying to confuse the people of Judah. He was sowing seeds of doubt in the minds of the people of Judah, trying to make them think that Hezekiah removed 'the Lord's altars' from the high places. The point is that these altars represented Sennacherib's sovereignty, and he was especially dissatisfied with Hezekiah's removal of his Damascus altar from the temple of the Lord placed there by his apostate father, king Ahaz. We then read that Hezekiah "*rebelled against the king of Assyria*" (2 Kings 18:7). The Assyrian king was on a mission to re-establish his rule and sovereignty

## Strength from Trusting in the Lord

over Judah. He wanted an altar in Jerusalem, not an ordinary one, but one which characterized his rule in the temple of the Lord. Hezekiah was accused and attacked for removing this Damascus altar out of the temple of the Lord.

Furthermore, Sennacherib's emissaries went on to say to the people of Judah the following: *"Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, 'The Lord will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'"* (2 Kings 18:29-30).

In the face of such a massive army, which had successfully destroyed the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel and was now poised to devastate Judah, what could king Hezekiah do? Although frightened, he was on the right track and made the right decision: *"When king Hezekiah heard that, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord"* (2 Kings 19:1).

Throughout the history of God's people, whether of Israel or of the church, God's remnant will endure to the end and will not compromise on anything that is not in accord with His Word. They will not compromise with any mixed worship which allows sacrifices at the *"high places."* The remnant of every era who read the Word of God carefully and prayerfully will realize the awful hatred of the enemy. The remnant will pay any price to uphold God's cause and to refuse the devil any foothold in the temple of the Lord. Opposition will arise, whether from the inside or outside. Since the remnant is usually a small minority, they may obviously become distressed, discouraged, and even alarmed. But they have learned from the Word of God, that there is but one place to go to receive help. And this is exactly what king Hezekiah did as a representative of the altar. He withdrew into the temple of the Lord, for

## Breaking the Silence

he was helpless before such a formidable foe. Jerusalem, the capital, was under siege.

### Victorious Word from the Lord

King Hezekiah and his faithful officials were all standing on the ground of the remnant. Their confidence and hope was grounded in the altar of the one sovereign Lord. Hezekiah was also expecting direction and guidance from the Word of the Lord, because he sent his officials to the Prophet Isaiah to see if there was a word from the Lord:

*“Then he [Hezekiah] sent Eliakim, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said to him, ‘Thus says Hezekiah: This is a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the Lord your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left’”* (2 Kings 19:2-4).

Various interpretations might be rendered for this last verse. However, we know what Hezekiah had in mind. Others might tell us that Hezekiah had the remainder of God’s people in mind — those who had survived the fall of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom and were taken captive. Or, they might tell us that the word “remnant” refers to the southern kingdom of Judah which was comprised of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, and the odd refugees from the northern kingdom who were also besieged in the city of Jerusalem.

Although on the surface, this is not a wrong interpretation, yet I believe king Hezekiah had the true remnant in mind. We are looking at

## Strength from Trusting in the Lord

a spiritual warfare, not merely a physical battle. It becomes necessary therefore that a ‘spiritual remnant’ be in view. Not one word in the Bible is used haphazardly. The remnant Hezekiah had in mind was the group of people who absolutely depended on the Lord, the God of Israel, with all of their hearts and who sought to do His will at any cost. It was from this perspective that we come to the following verse: “*So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said to them, ‘Thus you shall say to your master: Thus says the Lord, Do not be afraid.’*” (2 Kings 19:5-6).

Was this direct word from God only for Hezekiah, or was it also good for the whole remnant for all time? There are many voices in the world through which Satan says many things. Even Sennacherib’s field commander stood before the gates of Jerusalem and shouted, “*Thus says the king, the king of Assyria.*” Hezekiah in his despair ran to the temple of the Lord and sent word to the prophet Isaiah, saying, “*Thus says Hezekiah: This is a day of trouble and rebuke, and blasphemy....*” In his plight, Hezekiah asked Isaiah, “*Therefore, lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.*”

To all of this, God’s reply came to Isaiah, “*Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid....*” Satan is known for saying many alarming and intimidating words in the ears of God’s people. In our desperation and human frailty, we may also say many things, but as long as we stand on the ground of God’s remnant, the Word of the Lord to us is, “*Do not be afraid....*” To whose voice should we listen? Satan’s? Our own? Or God’s? Hezekiah’s trust in the Lord’s Word was rewarded: “*And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses — all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was*

## Breaking the Silence

*worshipping in the temple of Nisroch, his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place” (2 Kings 19:35-37).*

It does not pay to blaspheme God! Sennacherib threatened the remnant and paid for it with his life. God’s Word to king Hezekiah proved to be right, which is also recorded in another account: *“King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven. Then the Lord sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there. Thus **the Lord saved** Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and **guided them** on every side. And many brought gifts to the Lord at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter” (2 Chr. 32:20-23).*

What a faithful Lord and God! King Hezekiah certainly had his human weaknesses. But one thing was registered to his name in the Word of God, which positions him as a great heroic statesman of the remnant for his generation: *“he removed the high places....”* Thus, Hezekiah, one of two outstanding kings in the kingdom of Judah, fulfilled his God-given responsibility for the kingdom of God.

## Unholy Alliance with the World

Towards the end of his life, a significant incident occurred which contains an important instruction for all the children of God. Hezekiah contracted a fatal sickness, but God in His mercy healed him and added

## Strength from Trusting in the Lord

fifteen years to his life. He was delivered from this severe illness in answer to prayer. But as he was recovering, a Babylonian envoy arrived in Jerusalem to congratulate him on his marvelous recovery. But Hezekiah acted unwittingly in weakness:

*“Hezekiah was attentive to them [the messengers], and showed them all the house of his treasures — the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory — all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them”* (2 Kings 20:13).

The Word of God later discloses that Isaiah sternly rebuked him for doing this. The prophet told him that Babylon will carry away everything they had seen. The reason for the Lord’s disapproval of this action must be investigated. The **apparent** reason for the visitation of the Babylonian envoys was to congratulate the king of Judah for the marvelous recovery of his health. However, the **real** purpose of their visit was political. Babylon desired to throw off the yoke of Assyria, the strongest empire at the time. The nation most likely to assist them best as an ally was the one who had just conquered them. Let us not forget that shortly before this incident, Sennacherib had been completely defeated at the walls of Jerusalem.

The natural deduction from Babylon’s viewpoint was that Hezekiah had defeated the enemy, whereas, in fact, it was the Lord who had conquered them. The Babylonians, without any spiritual insight, sought an alliance with Judah against Assyria. When they came, Hezekiah, flattered and pleased, received them with all cordiality and exhibited before them all of his treasures. Evidently, taking credit for defeating Assyria, he agreed to an alliance with Babylon. This statement gives us a better insight into his action: *“His heart was lifted up”* (2 Chron. 32:25). He responded to an impulse of pride. He was not seeking the glory of God; neither was he looking for God’s guidance. He failed to realize that



## Breaking the Silence

an alliance between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan should not be formed.

How many of the honest children of God, by means of politics, are trying to change the world for the better by fashioning an alliance between God's and the enemy's kingdom? The result can only be absolute failure and total disaster. Hezekiah's story emphatically urges us to see the necessity for persistent watchfulness in all of our relationships with the various elements of the world.

Lastly, this is the final recorded words concerning Hezekiah in the Bible: "*Hezekiah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the upper tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death. Then Manasseh his son reigned in his place*" (2 Chron. 32:33).

# 6

## Brightest Light After Darkest Night

*“Now these things became our examples.”* 1 Cor. 10:6

Biographical accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah are beyond the scope of this book. What we do intend to evaluate, however, is their spiritual effect on the Jewish nation. These kings either led their nation into idolatry and away from God, or they were instrumental in making God’s people acknowledge God and His sovereignty over their nation. After Israel was divided into two kingdoms, only one king in Judah — Hezekiah — acted according to God’s expectation and “*removed the high places.*” All the other kings of Judah who preceded him failed to remove the high places. Hezekiah was succeeded by his son MANASSEH (2 Chron. 33; 2 Kings 21).

*“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.*

## Breaking the Silence

*For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said: 'In Jerusalem I will put my Name.' And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.... But they [the people] paid no attention [to God's commandments], and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.... Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, beside his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 21:1-6,9,16).*

## Negating a Great Reformation

Manasseh was the son of King Hezekiah, an outstanding leader for God's people — one of two kings in Judah who executed all of the Lord's expectations. How could such a great king produce such an evil offspring as Manasseh, who turned out to be 'the Ahab' of Judah? Manasseh rebuilt the high places his father had destroyed and erected idolatrous altars throughout the nation, including the detestable ones in the courts of the Lord's Temple. In this passage, the Scriptures put Manasseh side by side with Ahab — "*as Ahab king of Israel had done*" (v. 3). Manasseh reminded God of Ahab, because he was as evil (v. 9). He became a major cause of the devastating downfall of Judah.

This portion of the Scriptures explains that the sin of Manasseh consisted not only of his own **wrongdoing**, but also of his deliberate

## Brightest Light after Darkest Night

**undoing** of what his father had accomplished at a great price. He seduced God's people to commit considerable evil — even more than the nations which the Lord had destroyed. His long reign of fifty-five years, followed by the two-year reign of his son Amon, had such a deep negative impact on the people of Judah that nothing could bring them back to God. Before the reign of Hezekiah, the people of Judah had been already corrupted by a deep rooted history of mixed worship, endorsed and promoted by their kings. Apparently, Hezekiah's great reforms in overturning this mixture were only superficial; because when opportunity was given to them by Manasseh, the people manifested symptoms of corruption that had been fermenting in their hearts. They returned to all their former evil ways and brought upon themselves an unforgettable ruin. God eventually was justified in allowing His righteous judgment to befall Judah.

The kingdom of God is the only realm where man can be protected from things that can lead to destruction. No human kingdom, no matter how righteous, can protect our hearts from the evil that threatens to destroy us. Even Manasseh, who lived under the influence of his father's reformed kingdom, could not refrain from disobeying God's commandments.

God had explicitly commanded His people to resist the practices of the nations in the land of Canaan: *“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead”* (Deut. 18:9-11). Manasseh committed most of these evil sins. The Scriptures also tell us that he shed much innocent

## Breaking the Silence

blood. Tradition maintains that it was Manasseh who had Isaiah killed by sawing him in half.

### Tolerating a Tragic Direction

Sometime during his reign, Manasseh was taken captive by the king of Assyria, who put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles, and extradited him to Assyria. It was during this time that the Word of God tells us: “*Now when his was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. **Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God***” (2 Chron. 33:12-13). What wickedness on Manasseh’s part, and what love and grace on the Lord’s part! The Lord is ready to listen and forgive even the most sinful people such as Manasseh. When we become aware of our sins, confess them and humble ourselves before the Lord, He is willing to forgive (cf. 1 John 1:8-10).

Paul asked the Roman believers: “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” (Rom. 6:1-2). Manasseh repented, and the Lord in His mercy and grace forgave him. The Word tells us that “*He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city. **He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel***” (2 Chron. 33:15-16). This seems good and noble — a forgiven man making restoration. But read the next verse: “*Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the Lord their God*” (v. 17)!

## Brightest Light after Darkest Night

The problem with sin is that it not only affects us, but also influences all those around us. Manasseh was personally reconciled to the Lord, but did not, and possibly lacked the courage, to rectify all the damage that he had caused Judah. Contrary to his father Hezekiah who “*removed the high places,*” Manasseh allowed the high places to remain, even though he repented and was personally restored to God. Hezekiah had eradicated mixed worship, but Manasseh left Judah with this religious mixture, even though he himself had repented of the idolatry he had reintroduced. Consequently, Judah relapsed to the state it had been before the reformations of King Hezekiah. The effect of the idolatry and mixed worship under Manasseh’s long reign lingered and its damage was irreversible; Judah never recovered. Manasseh saved his ‘own skin’, but tolerated a mixed system of worship which led to the impending national desolation of God’s people.

After Manasseh’s death, his son Amon succeeded him as king over Judah. Only 4 verses in 2 Chronicles (33:21-25) and 6 verses in 2 Kings (21:19-24) cover Amon’s life.

*“Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem.... And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshiped them. He forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the Lord. Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house”* (2 Kings 21:19-23).

Basically, that is all we know about the two-year reign of Manasseh’s son over Judah. He too was a product of idolatry and mixed worship.

## Breaking the Silence

### Discovering a Missing Book

Nevertheless, as we proceed in the history of Judah, we come to the life of the second of the two ‘remnant’ kings — first, Hezekiah and now, Josiah. Josiah stood unwaveringly on the ground of the remnant, and became well pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, the God of Israel.

*“Then the servants of Amon conspired against him and killed the king in his own house. But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place.... Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and **walked in all the ways of his father David**; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left”* (2 Kings 21:23-24; 22:1-2).

Finally, a most blessed remnant king was born to Judah — a birth that was prophesied some 290 years earlier (1 Kings 13:2). Josiah’s reign was a final opportunity for reformation before Judah would be swept into captivity. This would mark the end of an era, the close of a dynasty of human kings.

The story of Josiah’s life and reign shines with a testimony full of brightness in a time when the dark conditions of Judah’s national life were appalling. As this boy-king developed into manhood, he bore witness to the higher government of the kingdom of God. He ascended to the throne when he was only eight years old. At the age of sixteen, he began to seek after God. Four years later, he set himself to the actual work of reformation. At age twenty-six, he turned to the greater work of repairing the temple, the house of God. Then everything that ensued, both in his and in the national life of Judah, resulted from these repairs to the house of God. During the course of this work, the Book of the

## Brightest Light after Darkest Night

Law was discovered: *“Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.’ And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word...”* (2 Kings 22:8-9).

The discovery of the Book of the Law may give us some insight into the state of affairs in Judah. The nation had become utterly corrupt during the fifty-seven years of the reign of Manasseh and Amon. The temple had been neglected and abandoned. Apparently, both the kings and the priests were unaware of the whereabouts of the Book of the Law — the constitution of God’s kingdom. Undoubtedly, everyone knew that it existed but the people and their leaders had flagrantly refused to recognize God’s kingdom and His government. Hence, the Book of the Law was so despised that the actual temple copy was lost.

## Connecting with Jewish History

At this juncture, we might ask: What does the history of the Jewish people, with their kings and their high places, have to do with us who call ourselves Christians? Is there any connection, any relationship, between those old national events and today’s global Christianity? I believe there is, because the Word of God establishes this connection and relationship. The Apostle Paul exhorts us to connect with it, and makes a point of relating it to us. The Old Testament is not just a history of the Jewish people, but goes further to set this history as a type and example of church life. Although a record of events in the physical realm, it also tells us how the church is engaged in a battle against spiritual principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and hosts of wickedness in heavenly places (Eph.6:12). These opposing forces fight against the kingdom of God, and attempt to deter the children of God from manifesting His sovereign reign.



## Breaking the Silence

My intention is not criticize the church at large. But, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, I want to expose the work of Satan so that the saints can be equipped against the snares of that old serpent, the devil. He has always used, and will continue to use anything in his arsenal to prevent the furtherance of God's kingdom in God's children, preventing them from qualifying for the crowns which are preserved for the faithful remnant warriors.

My focus is not on the salvation of the saints, because salvation is eternally guaranteed by the blood of the Lamb and the seal of the Holy Spirit. Rather, my focus is on qualifying the saints for entry into the blessed kingdom of heaven. If we have done our part in establishing this heavenly kingdom, then we will have part in its demonstration during the Millennium. The imperative and determining issue here is whether or not we will qualify to reign with our Lord. The Old Testament was penned by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not only as a history of the Jewish nation, but also as an example to the church.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to run the race for the sake of the crown. It is the reward of a faithful remnant and of every Christian who overcomes. Paul writes: *“Do you not know that those who run in a race **all run, but one receives the prize**? Run in such a way that you may **obtain it**. And everyone who **competes for the prize** is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I **run** thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I **fight**: not as one who beats the air. But I **discipline** my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

What is the Apostle Paul speaking about? Salvation or a crown? Salvation is not “obtained”; it is a gift of God. Paul tells us that by running, competing and fighting, we will “obtain” something — a crown which represents the reward for a kingly rule. He even speaks

## Brightest Light after Darkest Night

about the possibility of being disqualified. If Paul's doubts were about being qualified or disqualified for salvation, then we would be in a most miserable situation. What he refers to is not salvation, but **the reward**.

Paul immediately continues in 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 to show the historical record of Israel's rejection, their disqualification from entering into the land of Canaan. These eleven verses explain certain experiences that the Israelites had under the leadership of Moses **after** their salvation from Egypt through the death of the Passover Lamb. He says: "*But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our **examples** [literally, 'these things happened as **types** for us']*" (10:5-6). And again, "*Now all these things happened to them as **examples** [literal, 'for **types**'], and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*" (10:11).

We must recognize that the Scriptural treatment of the Israelites under the leadership of Moses and the Law is **the type**, while the Scriptural treatment of Christians under the leadership of Christ and His Grace is the **anti-type**. This same treatment is the basis for the first few warnings in the book of Hebrews. As we study the Old and the New Testaments to establish the relationship between the altar and the remnant and between the kingdom of God and the faithful overcoming remnant of His people, we understand more and more what Paul meant when he wrote to Timothy that "**All** scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). We sometimes forget that the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to Timothy when the New Testament was not yet compiled. He was not referring to his own letters as "scripture," but to the Old Testament.

We will later see how the enemy, through deceit, has penetrated Christianity over the centuries with idolatry, false altars, high places,

## **Breaking the Silence**

Asherah poles, and every green tree. In both Israel of old and Christianity of today, there has always been a remnant who has stood on the principle of the truth, and has fought without compromise to the end, thus being qualified for the crown and the throne.

# 7

## Heeding the Lost Book

*“The king heard the words of the Book.”* 2 Kings 22:11

Shaphan the scribe brought the Book of the Law found in the temple and read it to King Josiah: *“Now it happened when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes”* (2 Kings 22:11).

### A Woman’s Prophetic Counsel

Then, the king issued the following order: *“Go inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us. So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Ackbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess...”* (2 Kings 22:13-14).

From this passage, we realize that King Josiah had been unaware of the contents of the Book of the Law. Suddenly, he discovered how far

## Breaking the Silence

the nation had wandered from God's holy standard, and how terrible a consequence they would have to suffer because of the curses pronounced upon them. Because his conscience was quick and sensitive, King Josiah realized at once both the cause and the imminent consequence threatening his nation. He therefore turned to the prophetess Huldah for advice.

The fact that Josiah felt the urgency to send for a prophetess to advise him is revealing. Historically, any time the Lord had wanted to show the low moral and spiritual condition of His people, He had raised up **women** to act and speak on His behalf, because the Jewish society was predominantly a male-oriented culture. The prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah were contemporaries of Josiah (Jer. 1:1-2; Zeph. 1:1), but apparently they were not available for counsel. Therefore, Josiah's advisors, five men, were compelled to inquire of a woman, a prophetess. In this manner, God was showing His people how low they had sunk in their relationship with Him. The prophetess, speaking on divine authority, stated the following important passage, which is quoted verbatim: *"Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, 'Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants — all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read — because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore, My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.'*

*"But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Concerning the words which you have heard — because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes*

## Heeding the Lost Book

*and wept before Me, I also have heard you, says the Lord. Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.’ So they brought back word to the king” (2 Kings 22:15-20).*

Speaking by God’s authority, Huldah the prophetess pointed out two different aspects of the situation — the sincerity of the king, and the corruption of the people. She declared that the people’s outward signs of reformation were just a pretense. Josiah’s various reformations mentioned in 2 Kings 23 prove the depth of the corruption of the nation’s heart. Even in the temple, they had set up altars and vessels for the idolatrous rituals of Baal and Ashtaroth. However, because of his tender heart toward the Word of God and because of his sincere repentance demonstrated in the act of tearing his clothes, Josiah would escape God’s anger. On the other hand, the nation would have to face God’s wrath. God knew very well whose heart was pretentious and who put up merely an appearance of godliness. He was not concerned with appearances, but with the heart. God’s Word had been lost to people for 57 years during the reign of Manasseh and Amon, and during all that time, no one had had the desire to look for it. Consequently, the society had become sick beyond hope. Doom and judgment were imminent because of the disregard for the Word of God, on the basis of which the Holy Spirit convicts of sin.

After consulting with Huldah the prophetess, Josiah realized that reformation could not bring about an inherently deep and lasting change in the corrupt hearts of the people. This realization did not however deter him, because his conscience could not refuse the light he had received. He knew that there were others, like himself, who remained obedient to the Lord — a remnant whose heart had not yielded to false gods, a remnant who was searching for the Lord’s altar to offer sacrifices, a

## Breaking the Silence

remnant who would declare allegiance to God's kingdom. And, for the sake of this remnant, Josiah carried out his work with enthusiasm and energy.

### An Urgent Prerequisite Reading

The details of the process of Josiah's reformations are listed in 2 Kings 23. Since this passage shows us clearly the extent of reformation necessary to eradicate every trace of idolatry from God's people, it is important that we look at it in detail: *"Now the king sent them to gather all the elders ... The king went up to the house of the Lord ... And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. Then the king stood by a pillar and **made a covenant** before the Lord...*

*"And the king commanded ... to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the hosts of heaven; and he burned them.... Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in all the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem.... And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the Lord ... burned it.... Then he tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the Lord....*

*"And he ... defiled [desecrated/destroyed] the high places ... from Geba to Beersheba.... He defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man may make his son or daughter pass through the fire to Molech. Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord ... and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.*

*"The altars that were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made*

## Heeding the Lost Book

*in the two courts of the house of the Lord, the king broke down and pulverized there.... Then the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, which were on the south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images....*

*“Moreover, the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar...” (2 King 23:1-16).*

Then Josiah came across the gravestone of the man who had prophesied against Jeroboam and the Bethel altar, the same prophet who had predicted Josiah’s own birth and even his name almost 290 years earlier. About this tomb, Josiah said: *“Let him alone; let no one move his bones...”* (2 Kings 23:18).

*“Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel. He executed all the priests of the high places....*

*“Then the king commanded all the people saying, ‘Keep the PASSOVER to the Lord your God....’ Such a PASSOVER surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this PASSOVER was held before the Lord in Jerusalem. Moreover, Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols....*



## Breaking the Silence

*“Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his might, according to the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him. Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the Lord said, ‘I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there’” (2 Kings 23:19-27).*

### Two Loyal Heroic Men

As the Holy Spirit unfolds the significance of 2 Kings 23 to us and as we begin to see the extent of the reformation that God expects from His Church, we are awestruck. First, Josiah arranged for definitive public readings of the Book of the Law. Second, he made a covenant between the people and the Lord. Third, he proceeded to purge the temple of all false religious vessels. Fourth, he swept away all idolatrous shrines and altars from one end of the land to the other. And then, he recovered the long-neglected Passover Feast for which many from Judah and Israel came together to celebrate.

Truly, this reformation was the outcome of Josiah’s own consecrated sincerity and absolute loyalty to the Lord. The people, however, were merely following the king’s leadership without any inner sense of penitence of their own, for they were not actually returning to Jehovah their God. Therefore, God felt no compulsion to withhold the impending judgment He had decreed upon Judah.

It was during the reign of Josiah that God raised up Jeremiah to be His prophetic voice. But, regrettably, neither the reforms of King Josiah nor the prophecies of the Jeremiah could turn the corrupted hearts of the

## Heeding the Lost Book

people towards God. History was repeating itself, because only a remnant minority, from among the popular majority, would respond to these life-changing reforms and heed the dynamics of the living Word of God. Jeremiah began his ministry when Josiah was twenty-one years old (Jer. 1:2), and this fact may account for most of Josiah's actions. The sweeping reforms as well as the prophetic words proved, once again, that there is no pathway of service more difficult than that of bearing witness to God, both in word and in work, especially in the midst of people whose corrupt condition made them unresponsive and indifferent. The actions of King Josiah, and the prophecies of Jeremiah, were heroic in that they were both loyal to the will and the Word of God, though their accomplishments brought about no lasting results in the national life of Judah.

Josiah was truly the greatest of the kings of Judah, as recorded in 2 Kings: “...before him there was no king like him ... nor after him did any arise like him” (23:25). Why did the Lord bear such an honorable testimony to His servant? Obviously, because no one before or after him had attempted such a significantly widespread reformation. Josiah's accomplishments, enumerated in 2 Kings 23, leave us wondering whether these reforms could have had any profound effect on the deeply corrupted people of Judah. By a prayerful study of this portion of Scripture, we come to see the same corruption in today's Christendom, and we realize the extent of dedication necessary on the part of the remnant in order to satisfy the demands of God. How can the remnant uproot the problem, satisfy God, and ultimately receive the commendable testimony that God bore to Josiah?

# 8

## Warnings of the Prophets

*“O Altar, Altar! Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places.’”* 1 Kings 13:2

### Prophetic Judgment

This prophecy, which I mentioned briefly in previous chapters, was spoken 290 years prior to its fulfillment. Josiah fulfilled it in 2 Kings 23: *“Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he [Josiah] broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words”* (2 Kings 23:15-16).

Why did Josiah undertake the destruction of the altar and the high

## Breaking the Silence

place in Bethel? Why bother going to outside the borders of Judah, to the northern kingdom, in the territorial sovereignty of Assyria? Why risk the wrath of the Assyrians by demolishing this altar in Bethel and destroying its high place?

A look at the history of Israel and its kings shows us that the onset of their distress was when they allowed Satan to interject his own altar in the form of idolatry. It all began when Jeroboam erected the counterfeit altar at Bethel. He was instrumental in introducing idolatry in the northern kingdom, and later spreading it even to the southern kingdom of Judah. The consequences of his action were so disastrous to God's people that the Lord had to send a prophet immediately to warn everyone of the coming judgment concerning the false altar.

As we have seen, Jeroboam rebelled against the God of Israel by impetuously building altars like the altar of Jerusalem, placing them in Dan and Bethel, and offering sacrifices on them. The altars in themselves would not have meant anything if they did not represent another authority, another kingdom. The altar in Bethel represented a kingdom antagonistic to the kingdom of God. And eventually, it became the altar of Baal, of Satan himself. When the people of Israel bowed before this altar, they bowed before Satan and accepted a satanic sovereignty over their lives.

In reaction to the altar in Bethel, the Lord sent a prophet to declare war against this altar which stood as a defiant representation of the kingdom of Satan. God's kingdom must arise and stand against Satan's kingdom.

*“And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the Word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out **against the altar** by the Word of the Lord, and said, “**O altar, altar!** Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a child, **Josiah by name**, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice **the priests of***

## Warnings of the Prophets

*the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you” (1 Kings 13:1-2).*

This is a very interesting passage. Jeroboam became king over the northern kingdom, in 930 B.C., and Josiah became king in Judah in 640 B.C. Approximately 290 years prior to the birth of Josiah, God declared war on the altar of Bethel through a prophecy; and the Word of God was fulfilled in Josiah, the true warrior who had been mentioned by name by the prophet so many years earlier.

Satan may have thought that he had established his kingdom on this earth. But God's Word will stand forever: *“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” (Gen. 3:15).* This prophecy was fulfilled at Calvary where the head of the enemy was bruised and his kingdom demolished. Christ, the real 'Josiah,' fulfilled this prophecy uttered thousands of years prior to His own birth.

So Josiah fulfilled what God expected of him completely and became the greatest among the kings of Judah, because he was a true remnant man. The reformation introduced by Josiah in Judah stands as an important type which reveals significant lessons for the Church of the living God.

## Prophetic Rebuke

In the last years of his life, Josiah was penalized for not adhering to God's warning. Yes, even Josiah about whom this magnificent testimony was given: *“before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might ... nor after him did any arise like him” (2 Kings 23:25).* Such a man, who had fulfilled the first commandment, lost his life by not obeying the voice of the Lord in one specific area of his life: *“After all this, when Josiah had*

## Breaking the Silence

*prepared the temple, Necho King of Egypt, came up to fight against Carchemish [Assyria] by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But he sent messengers to him, saying, 'What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.'* Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho **from the mouth of God**. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, 'Take me away, for I am severely 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. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah..." (2 Chr. 35:20-25).

There is a great lesson to be learned from this incident which shows us that God may speak in unexpected ways. Since the Scriptures do not negate Necho's words, we can safely assume that he was directed by the Lord, and that the message he heard was enunciated by God. Necho was waging war against the king of Assyria. Josiah had no right to take sides with one worldly power against the other. He had no right to help a kingdom (Assyria) who had destroyed Israel and taken God's people captive. Josiah wanted to gain political advantage, but the end does not justify the means. The prophets had constantly warned the kings against such activities, but now we find Josiah "*meddling with God*."

Another lesson to be drawn from this incident is that Christians should not get deeply involved in the affairs of this world, especially in the global politics of this age. You may ask why? Because Christians are

God's kingdom and have nothing to do with the kingdoms of this world. Even if God, in His sovereignty, were to decide that one kingdom

## Warnings of the Prophets

should wage war against another, Christians should by no means get involved. Josiah could have learned this lesson from his great grandfather Hezekiah who had tried to form an alliance with a Babylonian envoy, but had been harshly rebuked by God through the words of Isaiah the prophet. So Josiah, the greatest king of Judah, failed only in this one point — he disobeyed one crucial Word from God. And consequently, he lost his life. May this truth be forever engraved on our hearts — that standing on the ground of God’s remnant does not protect us from evil unless we obey the Lord and remain faithful to the end.

## Prophetic Warnings

Nevertheless, Josiah obtained the highest acclaim from the Lord and fulfilled all that was expected of him. Then he rested with his fathers. All his accomplishments, however, were powerless to help Judah: *“Nevertheless the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah.... And the Lord said, ‘I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there’”* (2 Kings 23:26-27).

All Josiah managed to do in this regard was to postpone God’s judgment. The nation had become corrupted to such a point that even drastic reformations could not bring about true repentance. The end of the kingdom of Judah was a sad one. After the death of Josiah, moral, spiritual, social, and political conditions in Judah continued to deteriorate until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Three of Josiah’s sons and one of his grandsons succeeded him to the throne and ruled over the people for a total period of 22 years, 6 months, and 10 days. None of them walked in the ways of their father Josiah, but they all acted as wickedly as their ancestor, Manasseh.

## Breaking the Silence

From the history of the children of Israel, we learn that if the kings were functioning properly and the priests were performing their duties in the temple faithfully, then there was no need for a prophet. However, if the kings' state of affairs or the priests' conditions for worship declined, then God would raise up prophets to speak on His behalf and warn the king and the people of the consequences of their unrighteous ways. As we have seen before, the idolatrous altars and the high places were major points of contention between God and His people. When the children of Israel turned to Baal worship and bowed down at strange altars on high places, God, out of love for His people, raised up prophets to warn them.

What was the devastating outcome of the people's idolatrous activities? Lurking behind every idolater's altar, was another god. By bowing in worship, people were acknowledging the sovereignty of that god. And these pagan worshipers allowed the power and character of that particular god to take over and reign in their lives. The history of the children of Israel attests to this truth and principle. When they worshiped at Jehovah's altar and acknowledged His authority and kingship, the Spirit of His righteousness, mercy, and love overflowed in every aspect of their daily existence. On the other hand, when they conformed to the gentile nations around them and bowed before their pagan altars, the spirits of those other gods took them over. Consequently, they became unrighteous, merciless, covetous, perverse, permissive, and lustful, deserving Jehovah's righteous judgment. The prophets were there to warn the people of the consequences of their actions and to cause them to turn back to God with all their heart.

The northern kingdom fell into the hands of the Assyrians in 723 B.C and the inhabitants of Samaria were taken captive and relocated. The prophet Hosea who was contemporary with the last three kings of Israel, prophesied against idolatry and warned the people of the



## Warnings of the Prophets

consequences of bowing to altars other than the Lord's: *"Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself. According to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars; according to the bounty of his land they have embellished his sacred pillars. Their heart is divided; now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; he will ruin their sacred pillars"* (Hos. 10:1-2).

The people of the northern kingdom had been warned by prophets repeatedly, but to no avail. This is when the scene shifts to Judah, the southern kingdom. During the reign of Josiah, this greatest of all kings, God raised up the prophet Jeremiah to warn His people and try to win their heart back to Him. Jeremiah's ministry lasted throughout the reigns of the remaining four kings of Judah — until the attack of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of Jerusalem. Constantly, he brought the Word of God to the kings and the people of Judah. But the corruption introduced by Manasseh could not be halted, for its roots were too deep and too widespread. As God had testified, the people of Judah were beyond reform. Only a remnant survived.

*"Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble. For according to the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to that shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal'"* (Jer.11:11-13).

What an alarming condition for the majority of God's people! Despite the prophecies of Jeremiah and the reformations introduced by Hezekiah and Josiah, these people were not afraid of God's judgment and were not willing to repent.

## Breaking the Silence

### Prophetic Encouragement

*“Then the Lord said to me [Jeremiah], ‘Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people’”* (Jer. 15:1a). Both Moses and Samuel, at one time, had stood before the Lord interceding for the apostasy and idolatry of the children of Israel. But now the nation was out of control, unrepentant, irreparable, and totally idolatrous. Even Moses and Samuel, who knew how to intercede before God, would have found it useless to pray for these people.

Then God continues to speak through Jeremiah: *“Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. And it shall be, if they say to you, ‘Where should we go?’ Then you shall tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine, as such as are for the captivity, to the captivity’”* (Jer. 15:1b-2).

Nevertheless, amid all prophetic warnings of doom and gloom, God’s love and providence for the remnant remained.: *“Surely it will be well with your remnant; surely I will cause the enemy to intercede with you in the time of adversity and in the time of affliction”* (Jer. 15:11). God’s promise was directed to the remnant of whom Jeremiah was a representative. In fact, through this Word, the Lord distinguished the remnant from the unfaithful masses of the nation. In Jeremiah 15, we find the qualities characterizing the faithful remnant — they were separate from those who mock the Lord and loyal to the Word of God: *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, for You have filled me with indignation”* (Jer. 15:16-17).

# 9

## Judah's Final Four Kings

*"The Lord would not pardon."* 2 Kings 24:4

Jeremiah prophesied about the imminent seventy years of captivity to the unbelieving people of Judah: *"This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years"* (Jer. 25:11). This captivity issued out of God's love for His people to show them that His impending chastisement was not meant for destruction, but for redemption.

I want to remind you that God does not judge anyone arbitrarily, especially not His own people. Through His prophets, God used every opportunity, even up to the last minute prior to their captivity, to prove that He was just and righteous in whatever He did. This was the context in which prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other pre-exilic prophets were functioning.

## Breaking the Silence

### King Josiah's First Son, King Jehoahaz

God raised up Jeremiah to speak His Word to the last four kings of Judah who succeeded Josiah. The first of these kings was Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, who reigned over Judah for just three months. He was deposed and taken captive by the king of Egypt. Of him, Jeremiah prophesied: *“Weep not for the dead [Josiah], nor bemoan him; weep bitterly for him who goes away [Jehoahaz], for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus says the Lord concerning Shallum [Jehoahaz] the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place: ‘He shall not return here anymore, but he shall die in the place where they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more’”* (Jer. 22:10-12).

### King Josiah's Second Son, King Jehoiakim

After Jehoahaz, Eliakim, the other son of Josiah, became king over Judah. He was appointed king over Judah by the king of Egypt, and his name was changed to Jehoiakim. He reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years: *“He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him, and bound him in bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried off some of the articles from the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon”* (2 Chron. 36:5-7).

This passage shows a partial fulfillment of a prophecy given to King Hezekiah as he was attempting to enter an alliance with the Babylonians. An envoy from Babylon came to visit him upon his recovery from a near-fatal disease. This prophecy was completely fulfilled at a later date when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and destroyed it completely. So on several occasions, Jeremiah tried to turn the wicked heart of King Jehoiakim toward the God of his fathers, but

## Judah's Final Four Kings

each time the backlash of rebellion became worse than before.

In the latter years of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah warned the people of Judah of the coming judgment: *"In the beginning of the reign of Johoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. **Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent** concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings. And you shall say to them: ... If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you ... then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth'"* (Jer. 26:1-6).

One would assume that this word of prophecy would have had an effect on the people. But as recorded in the Word of God, the people, the priests, and all other prophets seized Jeremiah and tried to kill him for the "crime" of prophesying against the house of the Lord. But Jeremiah did not back down. As he was seized and taken to the princes and officials of the city, he said: *"The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard. Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; then the Lord will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you"* (Jer. 26:12-13).

This matter was reported to King Jehoiakim. He had already used Uriah to murder a previous prophet who had declared the same things as Jeremiah had. Now Jehoiakim decided to kill Jeremiah as well. But through the help of an official named Ahikam son of Shaphan, Jeremiah was protected and hidden from King Jehoiakim. This incident did not

## Breaking the Silence

stop Jeremiah from warning the people and their kings of the coming disaster.

On another occasion, we come across a most striking event which depicted the corruption of King Jehoiakim. This event should be studied, for there is a great spiritual lesson in it:

*“Now it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: ‘Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, **that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin**’”* (Jer. 36:1-3).

Jeremiah did comply with God’s command. He wrote all the words of God concerning the coming disaster and arranged for his secretary, Baruch, to read them to the people of Judah in the Lord’s house. Some of the officials who were at the temple heard the words of the Lord. They went to King Jehoiakim immediately and repeated all that they had heard:

*“The king sent Jehudi to bring the scroll, and he took it from Elishama the scribe’s chamber. And Jehudi read it in the hearing of the king and in the hearing of all the princes who stood beside the king. Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning on the hearth before him. And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe’s knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet **they were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments, the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words**. Nevertheless Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah*

## Judah's Final Four Kings

*implored the king not to burn the scroll; but he would not listen to them”* (Jer. 36:21-25).

In the first place, Jehoiakim and his attendants showed no fear. Either they did not believe the Word of God or they did not take it seriously. In addition, Jehoiakim showed his contempt for God's Word by burning it. He thought that by doing so, he could stop or change it. This was a serious offense committed against the Lord. Moreover, he attempted to murder Jeremiah and his secretary, Baruch. But the Word says that *“the Lord hid them”* (Jer.36:26).

The Lord commanded Jeremiah to write another scroll and send another message to Jehoiakim: *“And you shall say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, ‘Thus says the Lord: You have burned this scroll.... Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will punish him, his family, and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the doom that I have pronounced against them; **but they did not heed**’”* (Jer. 36:29-31).

Stubbornly, Jehoiakim refused to listen to the Word of God. He was like many Christians today who distort the Word of God and do not accept it in its totality. They just don't want to listen. This is a great sin which deserves a great punishment. Pay attention to the last words of Jeremiah the prophet about King Jehoiakim:

*“Shall you reign because you enclose yourself in cedar? Did not your father [Josiah] eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this knowing Me? says the Lord. Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, for shedding innocent blood, and practicing oppression and violence. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:*

## Breaking the Silence

*They shall not lament for him.... He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:15-19).*

### King Josiah’s Grandson, King Jehoiachin

After Jehoiakim’s eleven year reign, his son Jehoiachin, Josiah’s grandson, became king over Judah: “*Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months.... He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done*” (2 Kings 24:8-9).

The remainder of the events are very brief and painful. Just as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked Jerusalem. Eventually, Jehoiachin, recently-crowned king of Judah, with his mother, his attendants, nobles and officials, surrendered to him. Nebuchadnezzar, in accordance with Isaiah’s prophecy, removed all the treasures from the temple of the Lord and the royal palace. Undauntedly, he took away all the gold articles that King Solomon had made for the temple of the Lord. Furthermore, he took all the nobles, the craftsmen, and talented people, into exile, leaving only the poorest of the people in Jerusalem. Here is a segment of Jeremiah’s prophecy about this king of Babylon:

*“As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off; and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those whose face you fear — the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of the Chaldeans. So I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you shall die. But to the land to which they desire to return, there they shall not return’” (Jer. 22:24-27).*



## Judah's Final Four Kings

Then the Lord pronounced His curse on Jehoiachin (Coniah or Jeconiah): *“Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah”* (Jer. 22:30).

We must consider this passage carefully: This declaration did not mean that Jehoiachin would have no children, for some of them are named in 2 Chronicles (3:17-19; cf. Matt. 1:12). However, by divine judgment, none of Jehoiachin's physical descendants could occupy David's throne. Consequently, had the Lord Jesus, who was to occupy David's throne (Luke 1:32-33), been born from the seed of Joseph — who was of the ancestry line of Jehoiachin (Matt. 1:12-16) — it would have contradicted this divine prediction. Our Lord's **dynastic rights** to the throne did come through his step-father Joseph, who was born from the generational line of Jehoiachin; but the **physical descent** of the Lord Jesus came through Mary, who was from David's descent through his son Nathan (cf. Luke 3:31 with Matt. 1:17). In other words, Jesus was born **physically** in the genealogy of Mary descending from David and his son Nathan, but He was also born **legally** “according to law” (Luke 3:23) in the genealogy of Joseph descending from David and his other son Solomon, through whom Jehoiachin was born. Therefore, because of this curse pronounced by Jeremiah, none of Jehoiachin's children could have become heir to the royal throne of David. Jesus bypassed this problem by becoming the born-heir to David's throne through Mary, whose genealogical line stretches back to David through Nathan, the son of David — not Solomon, David's other son.

## King Josiah's Third Son, King Zedekiah

Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, who was one of the sons of King Josiah, became heir to David's throne — not one of Jehoiachin's sons.

## Breaking the Silence

Zedekiah became the last king of Judah: *“Then the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.... He also did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim [his brother] had done”* (2 Kings 24:17-19).

Now everything depended on Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. He was the son of an outstanding king, Josiah, whose revolutionary reforms had changed the nation radically — at least outwardly. If not from his father Josiah, Zedekiah should have learned from the tragic fate of his two brothers, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, and his nephew, Jehoiachin. Unfortunately, he also walked away from the Lord wilfully and became the final cause for the downfall of Judah.

Jeremiah, an exceptional and faithful prophet, who was Zedekiah’s contemporary, tried desperately to lead this king back to God and somehow prevent the great disaster which was about to befall God’s people. But his efforts were to no avail. God did not want to destroy Jerusalem or Judah and He did not want to permit the Gentiles to rule over His people. All He wanted from His people was for them to realize and acknowledge His sovereignty, allow Him to teach them how to be His people, and become a righteous nation under His kingdom rule.

# 10

## Proud Catastrophic Rejection

*“They have rejected Me as their King.”* 1 Sam. 8:7

In the days of Samuel the prophet, the people of God wanted to be like other nations and asked for a human king: *“Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations”* (1 Sam. 8:5). Samuel complained to the Lord about their request, but God’s response was: *“They have not rejected you; but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them”* (1 Sam. 8:7). God granted their request and allowed them to govern themselves, even though He knew they had rejected His sovereignty over them.

Later, after a succession of tragic failures, the days of the kingdom of Israel (Samaria) came to an end. Another failed dynasty of kings was gradually collapsing in Judah. The termination of the kingdom of Judah was not as a result of a sudden rejection by God. It had taken approximately 430 years to reach this point. Judah had developed, within a few centuries, a spiritual disorder which manifested itself in a

## Breaking the Silence

**total** rejection of the sovereign rights of God. The culmination of this disorder happened during the reign of the last human king of Judah, Zedekiah. God had spoken to Zedekiah repeatedly, through the mouth of Jeremiah. In fact, twice before, Jerusalem had come under serious attack. And even now, before the third and final time, the Lord was hoping to prevent another calamity by bringing Zedekiah and the people of Judah to their senses.

## Broken Promises

As news of Nebuchadnezzar's third invasion reached Jerusalem, Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah to see if there was a word from the Lord. The messengers who brought the king's message to Jeremiah said to him: "***Perhaps** the Lord will deal with us according to all His wonderful works, that the king may go away from us*" (Jer. 21:2). All they had to do was refer to their history books, to find the conditions under which the Lord had acted on behalf of His people. Whenever they had confessed their sins and humbled themselves before the Lord, He had come to their rescue. Now, even though he was not meeting God's conditions, Zedekiah was asking for His intervention. Hence the messengers' use of the word "*perhaps*" when asking Jeremiah to mediate. And Jeremiah, without hesitation, conveyed to them the mind of the Lord:

*"Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside the walls; and I will assemble them in the midst of this city. I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath. I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great*

## Proud Catastrophic Rejection

*pestilence.* ‘*And afterward,*’ says the Lord, ‘*I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence and the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword. He shall not spare them, or have pity or mercy*’” (Jer.21:3-7).

Zedekiah was forewarned. In Jeremiah 21 and 22:1-3, Zedekiah was urged to return to the Lord and spare himself, all of Judah, and the city of Jerusalem. But notice these verses: “*For if you indeed do this thing, then shall enter the gates of this house, riding on horses and in chariots, accompanied by servants and people, kings who sit on the throne of David. But if you do not hear these words, I swear by Myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation*” (22:4-5).

As their plight became unbearable, Judah realized that they were about to lose the war. They heeded the words of Jeremiah and resigned to the reforms demanded by God. These reforms pertained mainly to the righteousness and justice that were lacking in the social orders of Judah. This pleased the Lord, and He promised to protect Zedekiah.

But not long after Judah’s promise of surrender to God and the withdrawal of the Babylonian army, all the princes and rulers went back on their word and broke the covenant they had made with the Lord. For example, even though they had agreed to set their slaves free, they changed their mind, canceled the slaves’ freedom, and took them in bondage once again. This demonstrated that they did not believe in a righteous system and social order — characteristics which represent the kingdom of God. Their actions betrayed them and proved that they were after their own interests at the cost of God’s people.

Once again, God pronounced His verdict through Jeremiah. Basically, God stated that He was a covenant-making God, and that His

## Breaking the Silence

covenants could not be broken. In response, Judah made a covenant of righteousness with Him, and broke it again. At this point, they truly deserved the judgment God had held back up to then — *“I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army which has gone back from you. Behold, I will command, says the Lord, and cause them to return to this city. They will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitants”* (Jer.34:21-22).

## Blind Disobedience

As a very last gesture of love, after everything else had failed, God, through Jeremiah, promised safety to Zedekiah and his family if they would surrender to the king of Babylon. But Zedekiah preferred to rely on his own judgment rather than the Word of God: *“I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me.”* But Jeremiah said, *“They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live”* (Jer. 38:19-20).

Jeremiah continued to tell Zedekiah about what was in store for him if he did not obey the Lord. But Zedekiah refused to obey. Consequently, we see the conclusion of the reign of Zedekiah and the kingdom of Judah:

*“Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine had become so severe in the city that there*

## Proud Catastrophic Rejection

*was no food for the people of the land. Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgement on him. Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon” (2 Kings 25:1-7).*

The final evaluation of Zedekiah is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:12: *“He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord”.*

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the plunder of the city, and the outpouring of God's wrath on His own people followed. No other king was appointed over Judah. A governor named Jedaliah was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar over the poorest of the people who had been left behind to do the work of the vineyards. But Jedaliah also was murdered. Thus, the kingdom of the children of Israel, represented by Judah, came to an end.

## Bitter Lamentations

In his Lamentation, Jeremiah gives us a very descriptive summary of the spiritual situation of Judah during this period. For instance: *“The Lord has spurned His altar; He has abandoned His sanctuary. He has given up the walls of her palaces into the hand of the enemy” (Lam. 2:7).*

The following verse from Lamentations reveals the truth about how hidden sin brings about captivity. Addressing the people, Jeremiah says: *“Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have*

## Breaking the Silence

*not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions”* (Lam. 2:14). Based on the same fact, the Apostle John also states: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us”* (1 John 1:9-10). So Judah was misled and deceived by false prophets. They were told that all was well. They were not convicted of sin nor desired to return to God.

Jeremiah also summarizes the consequences of this deception: *“The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! Because of this our heart is faint; because of these things our eyes grow dim; because of Mount Zion which is desolate, with foxes walking about on it. You, O Lord, remain forever; Your throne from generation to generation”* (Lam. 5:16-19).

What a clear description of the reasons for the fall of the crown of Judah on one hand, and the endurance of God’s kingdom and His throne on the other!

God’s judgment befell the nation in rapid succession during the history of the last four kings of Judah, who reigned after Josiah’s reforms: Jehoahaz was the first of these kings; and despite all the reforms accomplished by his father Josiah, he turned away and followed many different courses of evil, even during his brief reign of three months. The king of Egypt deposed him and set Jehoiakim, his brother, on the throne. Jehoiakim reigned only as a tax-paying pawn in the hands of Pharaoh. Actually, he was merely a puppet controlled by Israel’s age-old enemy — Egypt. Later, he became a tax-payer to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim also refused to learn the lessons of righteousness and for eleven years continued in his own evil ways. Consequently, these words are written about him: *“The Lord would not pardon”* (2 Kings 24:4).



## Proud Catastrophic Rejection

Calamity upon calamity fell upon the people until they were completely broken. Jehoiachin, the third of these last four kings, a grandson of the great reformer, Josiah, along with all his men of war and rulers, was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar.

Then, Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, became the final king of Judah. He was placed in authority by Nebuchadnezzar. He occupied his position for eleven years during which time he also followed in paths of evil. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, was captured and taken to Babylon, where a tragic destiny awaited him: his eyes were put out, his limbs were bound in chains, and his body was carried off to the courts of his conqueror — a symbol of a God who has cast a rebellious people away as broken pieces. The pleasant land that God had selected as the home of His chosen people was now occupied. Only the poorest of God's people were left behind to lead a nomadic life as peasant farmers.

## Brave Messenger

So, the history of Judah is a record of a movement which began when the people begged to be like other nations and asked for a king, and which ended in tragic and disastrous failure. To those whose eyes are fixed upon the eternal throne, it is clear that despite all such failure, the divine purpose in and through God's people must still be accomplished. And it is written that all these tragedies befell Judah at the commandment of Jehovah. We, human beings, cannot escape from God; we are always under His control. If we recognize God's throne and His kingdom, He commands blessing on us. If, on the other hand, we disregard His throne and break His laws, He commands calamities. In either case, God's actions are motivated by love and are ultimately redemptive. But an unalterable principle is that only a remnant can respond and be qualified to reign with Him and for Him.

## **Breaking the Silence**

Jeremiah concluded his forty years of prophetic ministry in Judah, but during all that time, he could not bring the people back to God. He declared the Word of God to a rebellious and stubborn people, despite fierce hatred and hostility, and every word he spoke on behalf of the Lord was fulfilled. The writings of this great prophet indicate that he did not draw joy from the sorrow that God's people went through because of their sins; rather he experienced the most excruciating suffering.

Nevertheless, Jeremiah must have felt a deep inward satisfaction from knowing that he had remained true to the Word of God delivered to him. The Word of the Lord is always a fulfilling experience. Happy indeed is the person who never fails to deliver the Word. There was no secret, selfish joy in the heart of Jeremiah when what he had predicted happened to the people. Rather, his only joy was the knowledge that he had been given the honor of being the messenger appointed to deliver the Word of God which cannot fail. He had the further honor of being the messenger of hope to a faithful remnant who would return from captivity to restore God's people and God's work.

# 11

## Limitations to the Patience of God

*"...till there was no remedy."* 2 Chron. 36:16

*"An end! The end has come."* Ezek. 7:2

### Reasons for Defeat

In the year 723 B.C., the northern kingdom of Israel was defeated by the king of Assyria. The northern kingdom comprised of the ten tribes of the children of Israel who had broken away from the united kingdom that started under King David and reached its zenith under King Solomon. The people were taken captive and dispersed among other nations. The Word of God explains and gives reasons for this defeat: *"So it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel **secretly** did against the Lord their*

## Breaking the Silence

*God things that were **not right**, and they built for themselves **high places** in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the **high places**, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did **wicked things** to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, ‘You shall not do this thing.’*

*“Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, **by all of His prophets**, every seer, saying ‘Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.’ Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; **they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them**, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and **worshiped** all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and **sold themselves to do evil** in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. **Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel**, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.*

*“Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. For He tore Israel from the house of David, and made Jeroboam the son of*

## Limitations to the Patience of God

*Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria...” (2 Kings 17:7-23).*

God in His mercy granted the southern kingdom of Judah the opportunity to remain a kingdom an additional 117 years after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, hoping they would repent and return to Him. But, regrettably, as we have already seen, they did not learn from the tragic fate of Samaria and continued to do evil. In the year 586 B.C., they fell prey to a Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Again, the Word of God gives the reasons for their fall:

*“Zedekiah [the last king of Judah] was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him **swear an oath by God**; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel. Moreover **all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more**, according to all the abominations of the nations and **defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem**. And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. **But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.***

*“Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their*

## Breaking the Silence

*sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions” (2 Chron. 36:11-19).*

Thus, the history of the kings of Israel and Judah comes to an end. They had been chosen under David to represent the kingdom of God and express His righteousness. Israel refused God as their king and asked for a human king (1 Sam. 8:5-20). God honored their wish. Now, this kingdom, on two separate occasions, crumbled. Israel, as a nation, reaped the consequences of what it had sown to the flesh.

Many years earlier, before the people had become a kingdom for God and before their leaders had become kings for God, God had warned them through His servant Moses of the consequences of doing evil and following paths of unrighteousness (Lev. 26:33-35; Deut. 28:58-67). In the above passages, the reasons for the fall of Samaria and Judah are clearly enumerated — secretly doing things that were not right, following worthless idols and becoming worthless, bowing down to starry hosts, selling themselves to do evil, building high places, taking oaths in God’s name without respecting them (Zedekiah), defiling God’s temple, mocking God’s messengers, scoffing at His prophets, despising His Word, including unfaithfulness in many other areas, **until “there was no remedy.”**

## Remnant in Captivity

This is a very sad picture of the history of the children of Israel. What a contrast between the days of Solomon and the days of Zedekiah!

## Limitations to the Patience of God

The temple in all its glory during Solomon's reign has now fallen in ruins and plundered by the enemy. However, through all these degradations, God had reserved for Himself a **remnant** who had not polluted themselves; they remained true to their God even unto death. The history of God's people can be divided into three periods — pre-captivity, captivity, and post-captivity. In each of these periods, there was a remnant who had remained faithful to the kingdom of God. Thus far, our studies have been related to the pre-captivity or pre-exilic period. Now, let us devote some time to the period of captivity, which is classified as the “*seventy years*” of exile according to Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 25:11).

To understand the condition of the exilic remnant during their captivity, it is necessary to look at the condition of Judah prior to their captivity, from another prophet's point of view, namely Ezekiel. Ezekiel was taken captive between the first and the final deportation of Judah — between 604-586 B.C. (2 Kings 24:11-16). Unlike the pre-captivity prophets, whose ministry was either to Judah, to the ten-tribe kingdom of Samaria, or sometimes to both, Ezekiel was the voice of the Lord to “*the whole house of Israel.*” Like Daniel and the Apostle John who prophesied outside the land of Judah, Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon.

His ministry was to remind the generation born in exile the national sins which had brought Israel down. His ministry included also sustaining the faith of the exiles by three categories of predictions — their national restoration, the execution of justice upon the oppressors, and the glory existing in the kingdom of God (Ezek. 14:23). He was a priest and well qualified to assess the religious condition of pre-exilic Judah. We must read the writings of Ezekiel under this light. He was not only a prophet, but also a seer. A prophet spoke the Word of the Lord, whereas a seer saw the visions of the Lord. Altogether, Ezekiel saw six visions which are all recorded in his book. He was not too distant from

## Breaking the Silence

the great reformer, King Josiah. In fact, King Josiah had conducted his great reforms only about 30 years prior to Ezekiel's writings.

### Revelations of Corruption

Throughout these chapters, we have riveted our attention on the relationship between God's **remnant** and His **altar**, both of which are the focus and representation of His kingdom. As the people became corrupted and polluted, they defiled God's altar and as a consequence God's kingdom. Ezekiel, along with other prophets, had come to see this truth: God would fulfill His purpose and establish His kingdom through the **remnant**. Ezekiel was also trying to show the "*house of Israel*" that as a nation they were once **invested with the glory of God**. But because of their abominations and sinful ways, God's glory had departed, which left them to their own duplicities. Although he presented the restoration of the temple and the return of the glory to God's people, Ezekiel also uncovered in the process some revealing factors about their former sins. For instance, "*Therefore, son of man, speak to **the house of Israel** and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: In this too your fathers have blasphemed Me, by being unfaithful to Me. When I brought them into the land concerning which I had raised My hand in an oath to give them, and they saw all the high hills and all the thick trees, there they offered their sacrifices and provoked Me with their offerings. There they also sent up their sweet aroma and poured out their drink offerings. Then I said to them, **What is this high place to which you go?**'*" (Ezek. 20:29).

The people in captivity thought that they were punished because of the sins of their fathers, especially the sins of King Manasseh. They did not consider themselves at fault. God through Ezekiel had to correct this misconception, and show them that they were being punished, not because of somebody else's sins, but because of their own sins (Ezek. 18:20-23).



## Limitations to the Patience of God

Ezekiel 23 provides a striking picture. It unmasks to both Israel and Judah the loathsome nature of their unfaithfulness to God. The picture furnished by this chapter shows the awfulness of spiritual adultery whereby the Lord's people, who were considered one with the Lord as a bride is with a bridegroom, renounced their union with Him and gave themselves to the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil: *"Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, therefore you shall bear the penalty of your lewdness and your harlotry'"* (Ezek. 23:35).

The one person who could give a precise account of the spiritual corruption of Judah was Ezekiel. An insider and a priest, he had firsthand information of the decadence of both the political and the spiritual leaders. In chapter 6, he brings a word of warning to *"the house of Israel,"* giving revelations of all the corruptions which had frustrated and angered the Lord:

*"The Word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them and say: O mountains of Israel, hear the Word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys: Indeed I, even I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your **high places**. Then your **altars** shall be desolate, your incense **altars** shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your **altars**. In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the **high places** shall be desolate, so that your **altars** may be laid waste and made desolate, your idols may be broken and made to cease, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the Lord'"* (Ezek. 6:1-7).

## Breaking the Silence

God, through Ezekiel, was showing the house of Israel what their sin was. In this passage, the word “*altar*” is mentioned five times. The house of Israel had, in today’s medical terminology, developed ‘altaritis,’ for they were building altars as wantonly as they could, with reckless abandonment. Should they have borne such a harsh punishment in order to know the Lord? Once again, God’s immense love for **the remnant**, immediately follows the pronouncement of judgment on the majority: “*Yet, I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations...*” (Ezek. 6:8).

## Removal of Glory

In all His communications, God was very honest and candid with His people. He was making it quite clear to them why they were going to be punished and why the Lord with His glory had departed from among His people. Now He had to remove His glory and leave them to their enemies. Ezekiel chapters 8 through 11 deal specifically with the departure of the glory of the Lord from Jerusalem and the temple.

Suddenly, Ezekiel heralded a denunciation of the kingdom of Judah predicting the dissolution of their sovereign statehood: “*An end! The end has come...*” (Ezek. 7:2). The words — “*An end!*” — are exclamatory and emphatic. God’s patience was over. Ezekiel told the exiles in Babylon what Jeremiah had been telling them in Jerusalem. The opportunity for recovery was past. The nation had overstepped the boundaries of the forbearance and patience of God. The end had come.

We are often amazed at the patience of God and sometimes His patience makes us impatient! We cry, “How long, O Lord? How long?” There is a limit to God’s patience. It is set at the point where man’s rebellious heart is so hardened that there is no hope of repentance. Then comes an end. And when the end comes, it is thorough, complete, and

## Limitations to the Patience of God

final. It falls upon the land, upon the people, upon individuals, and upon properties. A general study of human history, even outside of the Hebrew race, will show many true illustrations of this principle. God waits for nations and gives them opportunities to return to Him and to His righteousness. But if they persist in unrighteousness, the hour will come when He will say, “An end!” And it will be a final end.

Just before the close of chapter 7, Ezekiel says: *“I will do to them [Israel] according to their way, and according to what they deserve I will judge them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord”* (Ezek. 7:27). Israel was held directly responsible for the disaster that had befallen them. As long as the Lord remained with them there was hope. But once the Lord departed, there was no hope and no security anymore. Israel was responsible for the departure of God’s presence and His glory: *“Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary?”* (Ezek. 8:6)

# 12

## God's Departed Glory

*"The glory of the Lord departed."* Ezek. 10:18

### God's Departure from the Temple of God and the Remnant's Mark of Identification

Before seeing the vision of the departure of God's glory from Jerusalem (Ezek. 11:22-25), Ezekiel saw a vision of God's promise fulfilled for the faithful remnant. In the midst of Israel's fallen state, God marked and identified His remnant before removing His glory. Ezekiel chapter 9 discloses the departure of the glory from the temple, and then the Lord's command to a man clothed in white linen: "*Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it*" (Ezek. 9:3b-4).

Afterwards, Ezekiel hears the Lord's command to those who were with the man dressed in white linen: "*Go after him through the city and*

## Breaking the Silence

*kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary” (9:5-6).*

This is an awesome chapter! It shows that the punishment was as severe as the sin was great: *“The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great” (9:9).* Their sin deserved the ultimate punishment — God departing with His glory. But at the same time, in the midst of such corruption and depravity, a minority, a remnant existed who *“sigh and cry over all abominations.”*

Ezekiel saw Jehovah’s righteous anger as a result of the people’s blasphemous abominations; and this anger manifested itself in judgment, the first step of which was the slaughter of many residents of the polluted city of Jerusalem. At the same time, the man in white linen set a mark upon those who lamented and wept and, those who had this mark were spared. Even during the most corrupt conditions, God has a remnant of loyal souls who dwell among the abominations, but who have absolutely no share in them. Rather, they suffer perpetual grief, because their righteous souls are vexed daily. They sigh and cry over the idolatry that is epidemic among God’s people. And, the Lord’s furious anger does not touch them. They are duly marked. The word ‘mark’ in Hebrew is ‘TAV,’ which is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and is in the shape of a cross. We can say that the remnant are marked by the Lord with the cross. They are exempted from God’s wrath because of the cross they bear. And Abraham’s question ‘Does God destroy the righteous with the wicked?’ is thus answered!

In general, Christians associate the fate of the Jewish nation as described by Ezekiel with an era under the Law, and claim that such catastrophes cannot happen to the Church, because “we are in an age of grace.” But this thought is unpalatable, because it implies that grace can co-exist with wickedness, and it presupposes that the Lord’s glory will

## God's Departed Glory

never depart from the Church regardless of how badly it may be defiled, regardless of how many high places may remain in Christianity. No group of God's people — irrespective of what they call themselves — can be so disdainful of God's holiness and defile God's sanctuary without expecting a disciplinary reaction from God. The principle upon which God dealt with the nation of Israel is the same principle upon which He deals with the church-at-large.

The New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, attests to this truth. The command "*Begin at My sanctuary*" (Ezek. 9:6) is paralleled with "*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house [household] of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*" (1 Pet. 4:17).

Along with the principle of judgment and punishment for the fallen majority, there is the principle of sparing the remnant. Regardless of how deeply the church-at-large falls into apostasy, there is always a remnant within its ranks who is known and duly marked by God.

## God's Departure from the City of Jerusalem and the Remnant's Word of Encouragement

The glory departed in three stages — first from the temple, then from the city of Jerusalem, and finally from the people of Israel. Ezekiel recorded the beginning of the departure of God's glory from His sanctuary: "*Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory... Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight... and they stood at the door of*

## Breaking the Silence

*the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them” (Ezek. 10:4, 18-19).*

It looks as if God was reluctant to leave, as if He would rather have stayed. But His people were not willing to return to Him. They had defiled His house with idols, and completely sold themselves to other gods, which did not exist as real deities, only as evil forces. His holiness could not tolerate this anymore. He had to destroy the outward pomp and glory of the temple and of the city. The people were religiously clinging to a vacant temple and a corrupt city and at the same time vainly seeking the glory that no longer existed in them. But the Lord was about to frustrate their lifeless idolatry and empty ceremonial rituals. He was about to disperse His people among the nations of the world. His remnant also was being uprooted and dispersed along with the majority. But before His final departure, God felt compelled to encourage and lift up His faithful remnant who would later return to Jerusalem and restore God's temple and God's city. For those who bore His mark, God had a special word of encouragement:

*“Thus says the Lord God: ‘Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone. I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there” (Eze. 11:16-18).*

## God's Departure from the People of Israel and the Remnant's Renewal for Glory

Ezekiel eventually arrives at the point where he describes the final departure of the glory of the God of Israel: *“The glory of the Lord went*

## God's Departed Glory

*up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city” (Eze. 11:23). God’s glory departed for a designated time. He would return with all His glory, not to the same defiled temple, but to a new temple. Not to the same evil-hearted people, but to a people who have gone through a process of cleansing, regeneration, oneness, and complete surrender. Yes, Ezekiel eventually records the return of the glory and the circumstances under which it will happen:*

*“Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east... Then I heard him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the **house of Israel** defile My holy name, **they** nor their **kings**, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their **high places**’” (43:1-7).*

Yes, the glory will return! Everything will be renewed! The people will have a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 11:19). They will no longer be called Samaria and Judah, but “*the house of Israel.*” They will cast away their idols and eliminate their high places. They will prepare and build a house for the Lord according to His command. And, they will not follow human kings, but will place **the Lord’s throne** in their midst. The very fact that God was willing to come back and dwell among His people shows His mercy and love. The principle is that God will deal with His people according to His holiness and His righteousness. And, when His conditions are met, His glory will return.



## Breaking the Silence

### God's Departure from the Church and Another Remnant's Restoration to Glory

The same principle applies to the church-at-large which is like the Israel of old. It is infiltrated by sectarian high places and false altars; it is divided even worse than the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel; it has designated for itself human heads, and the glory of the Lord cannot coexist with such corruption and defilement. All that is left of the Church is an empty temple and a city full of dead, lifeless, sinful members. The glory will return, but not until judgment is carried out in the house of God and other spiritual conditions are met. God does not maintain a double standard; He is consistent. Although He works on the principle of covenants, yet we must know that covenants do not nullify the attributes and qualities of God. On the contrary, all His covenants are based on His mercy, holiness, righteousness, and glory.

In the same breath, the Lord works and deals with the Church in order to prepare and secure for Himself a remnant. God will separate for Himself a remnant who will return to Him, who will strip themselves from all religious wood, hay, and stubble, until they have nothing but reality — namely, Christ as their only Foundation, upon whom they build with gold, silver, and precious stones. As God did with Jerusalem, so will He carry out the work of restoration in the Church through the remnant. He will prepare the way for the return of His glory to His real sanctuary, the true Church *“made without hands.”*

God's glory came to His people and to His Church in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John says: *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). And of the experience of this glory, the Apostle Paul says: *“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the*

## God's Departed Glory

*light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).*

Yes, Christ is the glory who dwelt among us in the days of His flesh, but now dwells in the Church by His Holy Spirit. But as the Israel of old defiled God's house and caused His departure, so does the Church perpetrate the departure of the glory. But praise be to God who carries out the task of restoration through His remnant. Upon completion, He will return once again with all His glory and become the King of kings and the Lord of lords to His people and to all who love and wait for His appearance.

It is not a coincidental that the book of Jude, which covers the “*great falling away*” (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3), is placed before the book of Revelation. Revelation means ‘**appearance.**’ Jude covers three matters — the falling away of the Church, the judgment of its apostasy, and finally the **appearance** of the Lord with His faithful remnant.

As mentioned before, the line of the remnant is divided according to three periods in the history of the people of Israel — pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic. We have now arrived to the end of the pre-exilic or pre-captivity period.

# 13

## The Crushing Stone

*“Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.”* Dan. 1:8

So far, we have covered the biblical history of the remnant of God’s people during the pre-captivity era. Not much detail is given in the Word of God about Judah’s situation in captivity and exile in Babylon. However, the books of Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah, as well as the prophetic writings of Zechariah and Haggai, provide some details which reveal the condition of the children of Israel in Babylon. Daniel mainly covers the earlier part of the history of Israel in exile; the other books deal with the latter part of this history. These short accounts will help us note the faithfulness of the remnant, their holding on to the faith, and their refusal to bow before strange altars.

### Satan’s New Strategy

Through the chastisement manifested in their captivity, the children of Israel discovered the consequences of their idolatry. They learned not

## **Breaking the Silence**

to submit to any kingdom except the kingdom of God. But at this juncture, Satan changed his tactics. He changed the outward appearance of his altar. If Satan were to approach God's people with the same altars of Baal and the same carved Asherah poles, they would have recognized them. They would have known that these diabolical devices were the cause of their downfall and chastisement, warning them not bow down at these altars and poles.

So Satan began to disguise his altar and devise a new approach to entice the children of God, to forfeit their spiritual freedom and integrity, and accept him as the lord and king of their lives. They would once again sell themselves out to an inner spiritual captivity. This new strategic approach is presented to us in the book of Daniel. The first and second chapters cover the determination of Daniel and his three companions to keep themselves from getting defiled by the food and customs of Babylon, a nation God has raised up as an instrument to discipline His people. In chapter one, Daniel and his three friends are introduced. They were carried away to captivity before Ezekiel's prophetic ministry and were among those who had been taken from Jerusalem in the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, during the third year of Jehoiakim's reign. Evidently, they were all very young. Even though Daniel never returned to Jerusalem, his heart was there until the end of his life.

## **Daniel's Great Risk**

Daniel's history is remarkable. Although he was brought to Babylon as a captive, eventually he came to occupy important positions of power in three kingdoms — Babylon, Media, and Persia. But in all these kingdoms, he remained unwavering in loyalty to the God of his fathers. He was chosen to be in the service of the king, which meant he was also

## The Crushing Stone

placed in the peril of many pitfalls. Such a young man was impressionable and likely to be influenced by the glitter of material splendor. So his training in the king's court put him at great risk. He was, however, sensitive in his spirit and had sharp, fresh memories of the tragic fate of those who had disobeyed Jehovah; so he and his companions requested permission to live and act according to their convictions: "*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank*" (Dan. 1:8).

Apparently, his abstinence from the king's food was not for dietary reasons only. The main reason for his resolve was that the first portion of the food from Nebuchadnezzar's table was offered to idols and another portion was poured out on a pagan altar. Daniel and his three friends knew very well that by eating of the king's table, they would be partaking of idolatrous altars, and consequently, acknowledging a kingdom other than God's.

This principle of the altar is not just an Old Testament principle; it extends into the New Testament as well, and eventually to the twenty-first century. The Apostle Paul warns us to learn from the history of the children of Israel: "*I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud... all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our example, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them...*"

*"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, it is not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are*

## Breaking the Silence

*one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices **partakers of the altar**? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to **have fellowship with demons**. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's **table** and the **table of demons**” (1 Cor. 10:1, 4-7, 14-21).*

Eating a sacrifice means partaking of an altar or a table. Clearly, Daniel and his friends did not want to be partakers of Nebuchadnezzar's idols and altars by eating his food at his table. They would rather become vegetarian than acknowledge any other kingdom. By God's mercy, they were allowed to abstain from the king's choice food and drink; thus, they kept themselves from getting defiled with idolatry. The first altar presented to the captives was the altar-table of 'food and drink,' which was correctly recognized by Daniel and his companions. They did not succumb to this first altar-table disguised by the old serpent, the devil.

## God's New Method

During the time when Daniel and his friends lived and prospered in Nebuchadnezzar's court, God gave the king a dream. This dream is described in the book of Daniel chapter two, which is also a record of Daniel fulfilling his calling to God's appointed work. Whatever else he did in his association with the three major kingdoms of the time was of secondary importance. He was chosen of God to live in these kingdoms in order to interpret their relationship to the kingdom of God. God caused kings to dream dreams, see visions, and witness supernatural manifestations; and He used Daniel to interpret them for all time.

## The Crushing Stone

First of all, Nebuchadnezzar saw a troubling dream about a massive image. None of his magicians or astrologers could interpret the dream, much less reconstruct it. Daniel, however, was divinely enabled to do both. He called his friends so that they could seek the Lord's mind together in prayer. They were like-minded in their loyalty and cooperation with Jehovah their God. Their prayer was heard and answered, and the secret of the king's dream was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. The dream and its interpretation were appropriately conveyed to the king who was greatly surprised and amazed.

Prophetically, the vision portrayed the course of the empires of the world and their ultimate destruction by Christ, who called the era "*the times of the Gentiles*" (Luke 21:24). The four metals (gold, silver, bronze, and iron) of which the giant statue was composed of, were symbolic of four empires — Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece under Alexander, and Rome. The latter was seen to be divided into two, represented by two legs. Then the two were subdivided into ten, represented by the ten toes of iron mixed with clay. As a whole, the statue portrayed an imposing greatness and an awesome splendor of the immense global powers dominating the Gentile world.

## Christ's Crushing Blow

But, based on his own dream, Daniel showed Nebuchadnezzar that 'The Striking Stone' would destroy the Gentile world system in its final form by a sudden and irremediable blow. The world would not improve through a gradual process of conversion and assimilation as some Christians today try to make us believe — who claim that the Church is the leaven to permeate all the world until it becomes the kingdom of heaven. Clearly, Daniel shows that 'The Striking Stone' will first destroy, suddenly and simultaneously, the kingdoms of this world. Then,

## Breaking the Silence

it will become a mountain — a kingdom — which will fill the whole earth.

Such a destruction of the Gentile powers did not occur at the first coming of Christ. On the contrary, He was put to death by the sentencing officer of the fourth empire, which was at the zenith of its power. Nor will this destruction occur before the second coming of Christ. The Gentiles' global power still continues, and the crushing blow is still suspended until some time in the future.

However, it is important to notice, according to Daniel's prophecy and the book of Revelation, that the Gentiles' world power will end in a sudden catastrophic judgment and will immediately be followed by the kingdom of heaven. The millennial kingdom of Christ will not be manifested until after the destruction of the Gentiles' global systems of the world. Jesus Christ Himself — 'The Striking Stone' — in His second coming will destroy all earthly kingdoms and powers which oppose the kingdom of God.

Note that the Gentile world dominion has begun and will end with a great statue, or image (cf. Dan. 2:31; Rev. 13:14-15). What God had shown Nebuchadnezzar was the outward imposing splendor of the Gentiles' worldwide power, but at a later time He showed Daniel the true character of these governments. They were ferocious powers, established and maintained by brutal force.

As a result of his royal service in reconstructing and interpreting the dream to the king and his court, Daniel was appointed to a very high ruling position in the entire province of Babylon. At Daniel's request, his three companions — Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego — were also given high administrative positions over the province. Thus, Daniel chapter 2, unveils God's purpose to Daniel and his companions, and also to King Nebuchadnezzar and his entire court.



# 14

## The Suffering Remnant's Reward

*"They saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power."* Dan. 3:27

### A Remnant's Loyalty Arbitrarily Challenged

Daniel chapter three opens with a bizarre event: *"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon"* (Dan. 3:1).

What follows is the obvious, classical way Satan works. Although the principle of the idolatrous altar of the captivity era was the same as the pre-captivity era, the form was now changed. It was still high — ninety feet high. The **high places** of the previous era have now been incorporated into a **high image!**

Also, the arbitrary requirement of Satan was the same, for the command by the heathen king rang with the same old willful, forceful, and threatening pressure — "bow down or perish by fire!" All the dignitaries representing all walks of life were willing to obey the king's

## Breaking the Silence

command. They fell on their face and worshiped the high image — surrounded by ‘pomp and circumstance’ and accompanied by all sorts of musical instruments.

Report came to the king that certain Jews among the captives had disobeyed his command and refused to comply with his decree. Immediately, they were brought before the king, who gave them another chance to worship his image.

But these young men had witnessed the Lord’s anger toward their own fathers who had bowed to Baal. The memory of the massacres, their families’ starvation, torture, and death was still vivid, and the cause of it all was still fresh in their mind. Their fathers had sold out to serve other gods and therefore reaped the consequences. Now as a new generation, these young men were being put to the same test. They were wise enough to realize that the principle was the same, the enemy was the same, the altar although disguised was the same, and the outcome, if they succumbed to the king’s demand, would also be the same.

### A Remnant’s Loyalty Severely Tested

The choice was theirs — **either** bow down for a temporary gain and save their lives at the cost of losing the privilege of being God’s people, **or** accept the consequences of refusing the idolatrous king’s orders and face physical death. The latter seemed small compared to the spiritual slavery which would be their fate if they gave in to the heathen king. Giving in meant they loved their own life better than God’s kingdom. And their reply showed no trace of hesitation and indicated that their mind was already made up. Even if everyone else bowed to the image, they would not bow down to any altar, regardless of its form, other than the altar of Jehovah. This was their answer: *“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case [of being*

## The Suffering Remnant's Reward

thrown into the blazing furnace], *our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*" (Dan. 3:16-18).

To them, the question was not whether or not God had the power to save; rather whether or not they would bow, worship and serve a deity other than Jehovah. They knew, regardless of the outcome, that God was omnipotent and sovereign. As human beings, we can only represent one God as Lord, and as a result, we can only worship and serve one God. If we deviate from this principle, we will end up having a divided heart and a divided allegiance. And both God and Satan want our total and absolute allegiance.

For this reason, our Lord described God and Money as separate and distinct deities: "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matt. 6:24).

This is an eternal principle. If we do not come out victorious from this test, we will not be qualified to represent and express God, or in essence, to be the kingdom of God. These young men standing before Nebuchadnezzar had learned their lesson well. They were offered safety, security, money, position, and prominence. But at what cost? The world will give all these things to those who covet them. But what a price tag! Bow down to the king of this world, worship and serve him, represent and express him, and you are in his kingdom.

These three men, although young, were mentally bright enough to know the end of the story from the very outset. They knew the purpose of their existence. They knew that to walk in any way other than the way the Creator had intended — that is, to represent and express Him, and live in His kingdom — would have meant death, eternal death. So

## Breaking the Silence

their only logical, sensible, and intelligent reply was an emphatic **no!** “*Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image **which you have set up***” (Dan. 3:18).

This golden image was not the altar of Jehovah. It was an altar set up by man, behind which stood the old serpent. And these young people knew well in their spirit that a much greater issue was at stake than the physical holy altar which was in ruins in Jerusalem. They knew that the sovereignty of God was at stake, and it was up to them to either uphold it, or sacrifice it for the sake of their own safety and prosperity. Not that God’s kingdom was at their mercy, because even if they failed, God would raise up others to uphold His kingdom. If they bowed to an image set up by a human king, regardless of how great and important he seemed to be, they would have forfeited their privilege of being part of God’s kingdom.

### A Remnant’s Loyalty Victoriously Manifested

The outcome of their refusal was predictable: “*Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury*” (Dan. 3:19). In actuality, it was Satan behind Nebuchadnezzar who was furious. He was being defied by these three young Jewish captives who, at the cost of their lives, were upholding the banner of God’s kingdom in opposition to his kingdom. Nothing else was at issue except the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan.

The king’s command was carried out. The three presumably ‘defiant’ captives, bound hands and feet, were thrown into the roaring furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. But as much as the fury of the enemy is fierce and strong, so the victorious grace of God is sufficient.

The expectation of the proud and arrogant king, who had become an instrument of the devil, was a quick annihilation of these ‘defiant’ young

## The Suffering Remnant's Reward

captives. He wanted to make them an example to the whole world. But to his amazement and surprise, he witnessed a great miracle exhibited only on behalf of the remnant. In his staggering disbelief, he cried out: *“Look! ...I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God”* (Dan. 3:25).

It was in their trials and persecutions that the remnant of God's people became apparent. Thousands of Jews were in the land of Babylon, and the faithfulness of all of them was tested. The majority probably bowed down to the image set up by the king of Babylon; but these three young men chose to stand on the ground of the remnant, and if necessary, die for it.

What a victory! And what a testimony! The experience of walking with the Son of God in the burning furnace is not granted to just anyone. It is only the privilege of those who, forsaking all, are willing to enter into the furnace confessing the Lordship of Christ to the end. This experience was not granted to them as a thrill but because they stood for the sovereignty of the Lord, and therefore qualified to demonstrate the power of God's kingdom.

## A Remnant's Loyalty Currently Applied

Do we merely seek self-centered experiences to satisfy our selfish interests? Or, do we have the spiritual backbone to stand on the truth of God's kingdom, knowing that, according to His will, the power of the kingdom will be granted and manifested? On this principle, the three young men stood with the Son of God in the flaming furnace. They were qualified to be permanently recorded as a remnant in God's written Word, a remnant who would rather die than bow down to the old serpent disguised as a golden glittering statue.

## Breaking the Silence

How was it that these three young men were able to discern the truth that this golden shining image was the same as the idolatrous stone altar of Baal? Why was it that many other contemporary Jews could not see this truth? The answer is found in the first chapter of Daniel's book. Because these young men had refused to defile themselves by the idolatrous food and customs of the Babylonians, they had retained their spiritual alertness and discernment. Had they accepted the Babylonian lifestyle, they would have become numb and intoxicated like everyone else. And when the time of testing had come, they would not have recognized the disguised form of Baal's altar but would have succumbed and bowed down. From the beginning, they had resolved not to defile themselves.

My dear brothers and sisters, how much do we allow ourselves to be defiled, poisoned, numbed, and intoxicated by the ways of the world? Do we realize that a great test is ahead? If we do not resolve to keep ourselves from the effects of this world, we will not recognize Satan's constantly changing altar and will unknowingly bow down at the cost of losing the kingdom of God. Let us wake up and learn from the former remnants in history. They have been recorded in God's Word for our benefit. Neither the worldly pleasures of meat and wine, nor the tragic troubles and persecutions of a burning furnace, should bring us to our knees before any kingdom except the kingdom of God. Let us abstain from worldly pleasures and earthly ambitions so that we may be able to withstand any challenging trouble or persecution.

In reaction to all these events, the proud heathen king brought the young men out of the fire as a testimony of God's faithfulness to His remnant and placed them before all: "*They saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power*" (Dan. 3:27). After making a decree that no one was to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he said: "*There is no other God who can deliver like this*" (Dan.

## **The Suffering Remnant's Reward**

3:29). Such is the stand of the remnant of God's people. Such is the power of God to deliver from the enemy. Such is the testimony of God for the remnant.

God's ultimate objective is to establish His kingdom. Everything in human history works and flows towards one climax known as the kingdom of God. Through the ages, God's remnant have consisted of individuals or groups who have upheld this truth according to the revelation granted to them. One of these people was Daniel, an ardent upholder and proclaimer of this truth. God has used and is still using His remnant to proclaim the message of His kingdom. Along the same line, He used the blazing furnace incident and the trial of the three Hebrew youths to get the message across to King Nebuchadnezzar. God's purpose was to persuade the king not to glorify himself, but to acknowledge Jehovah as the Sovereign God who had delivered all the kingdoms of the earth into his hand. Nebuchadnezzar had to understand that he was but an instrument in the hand of God for His purpose. This was and is a very important truth to be understood and adhered to by every member of the human race.

# 15

## God's Kingdom on Trial

*“His kingdom is an eternal kingdom ... His kingdom will not be destroyed.”*

Dan. 4:3; 6:26

### Proclaiming an Eternal, Endless Kingdom

Throughout this book, I have maintained that the primary focus of God's original creative act was to establish and demonstrate His kingdom on earth. Satan, God's archenemy for thousands of years, has tried rigorously to prevent the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose. Through his rebellious ways, he has tried to claim sovereignty over earth. But God, through His remnant, has determined to fulfill His plan, working toward the glorious consummation of a kingdom that will demonstrate His power and glory.

God, through His covenant with David, had promised the fulfillment of His purpose on earth through his kingly Seed. The early fall of Israel and the later fall of Judah proved that none of their children was the Seed God had in mind. Nevertheless, the royal Seed was supposed to



## Breaking the Silence

come from the descendants of David. And Daniel, even though in captivity, bore witness to the fact that God had not abandoned His plan and that His kingdom would indeed be established through the Messiah, the true Seed of David. Every incident, revelation, dream, and supernatural phenomenon in the book of Daniel underscores this truth.

After the incident of the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar made a proclamation in Daniel chapter 4, a proclamation predicated on his recent experience: *“To all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! **His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation**”* (Dan. 4:1-3). And the chapter continues with the full account of his experience. The lesson Nebuchadnezzar had learned is summarized in these words: *“His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.”* This thought appears repeatedly in his retelling of the events. God used His beloved remnant-prophet Daniel to make the king understand the force of the reality of God’s kingdom. Recognizing the kingdom of God in its eternal existence and endless duration is mandatory. People of faith sometimes fail to grasp the force of this truth. God has never been and will never be dethroned.

## Plotting an Evil, Envious Conspiracy

One more incident from the life of Daniel shows us his determination in upholding the truth of God’s kingdom by not bowing to a disguised altar of the enemy. Daniel survived the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and his grandson who was defeated and killed by Darius the Mede.

## God's Kingdom on Trial

Under Darius, Daniel enjoyed great prominence. He was one of three administrators who supervised 120 satraps responsible for governing all the provinces of the Medo-Persian Empire. Because of his ingenious abilities and incredible trustworthiness, Daniel became the object of jealousy. His colleagues conspired to destroy him. Since they knew Daniel's unblemished record, they concluded that the only way they could entrap him would be in matters pertaining to "*the law of his God.*" They knew that Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem three times a day. Based on this knowledge, they approached King Darius, and taking advantage of his conceit and foolishness, tricked him into issuing a decree which would ban prayer to any god or man other than Darius, for thirty days. All violators would be thrown into a den full of hungry lions. King Darius was not aware of the envious and malicious motives behind the proposal.

*"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days"* (Dan. 6:10).

Enemies were trying to bring this faithful remnant man to his knees before a heathen king. These rulers, out of envy and political ambition, laid an evil, cunning plot to bring Daniel down. If the temptation created by this plot did not force him into committing an indisputable sin or act of idolatry, it could at least put a stop to his prayer for thirty days. If Daniel stopped praying, their plot would come to naught. But this, Daniel could not do. His prayer was shaking the kingdom of Satan, and if he were forced to stop even for thirty days, the devil would have won the fight.

But Daniel knew what was at stake. His heart and soul were for Jerusalem, the city of the great King, where His throne would be established. His prayer was "*Thy kingdom come.*" After all, his ministry

## Breaking the Silence

was a kingdom ministry. His whole life was ordered around keeping his eyes towards the city of the great King, while his heart held constant communion with Him. How could he stop praying? To stop, even for one day, meant disaster. This time, he did not have to bow before an idol; stopping his prayers, however, meant neglecting God's kingdom — and that, Daniel could not do, not even for one day. When our lives are centered around God's kingdom, we can always leave circumstances under the control of the One in whom we trust.

### Proclaiming an Indestructible, Never-Ending Kingdom

Immediately, report came to King Darius that Daniel was a transgressor by disobeying the king's decree. Darius reluctantly ordered Daniel to be thrown into a den of lions. The following day, at the first light of dawn, the king hurried to the lions' den and called out in an anguished voice: "*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?*" (Dan. 6:20).

Once again, through this incident, a king, an emperor, was given the opportunity to recognize God's kingdom and confess: "*For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end*" (Dan. 6:26).

Daniel was truly a messenger for the kingdom of God. His book is filled with revelations concerning the kingdoms of the world and their relationship to the kingdom of God. He was shown many mysteries regarding the times, the ways, and the means through which the kingdom of God was to be realized and manifested. He lived long enough to see the return of God's post-captivity remnant to Jerusalem for the restoration of the temple and the city walls. In this connection, he was an ardent searcher of God's Word: "*In the first year of Darius... in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number*

## God's Kingdom on Trial

*of the years specified by the world of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:1-3).*

### Rewarding the Faithful, Triumphant Remnant

Knowing that the time of the captivity was coming to an end and recognizing that a faithful remnant was needed, Daniel started to pray that many would stand up, go back, and restore Jerusalem. What a man! What a heart! What a devotion to God's purpose and plan! Yes, his heart was saddened for his people. But further revelations showed him that however perplexing the forecast of their circumstances, all things were clear in the omniscient mind of God and that all things were moving forward according to the predestinated purpose of His kingdom.

The last words of the Lord to Daniel are most beautiful and offer great hope for His remnant: *“But you, go your way till the end; for you shall **rest**, and will **arise to your inheritance** [reward, NRSV] at the end of the days” (Dan. 12:13).* These are words full of light and comfort. Daniel knew that his grave would be a place where he would wait in **rest**, and at the end of the day, when all the purposes of God were accomplished, he would rise to stand and receive his allotment. He would have an appointed place among the triumphant ranks, ready to receive **the rewarding portion appropriate for the remnant**.

So Daniel and all others who stand on the ground of God's remnant and who fulfill their earthly service can anticipate their inheritance in His glorious kingdom. When it comes, all who share the torments and troubles of upholding and proclaiming the message of His kingdom, will share in the triumph. God will bring **them** with Him, when He enters into the final glory of His kingdom established on earth.

## **Breaking the Silence**

Through the window of the lives of Daniel and his companions, we saw the remnant in their faithfulness during the captivity period. There were others — such as Esther and Mordecai — who did not bow to any god, other than Jehovah. In Egypt, the people of God had been slaves, but they were permanently liberated once they made their exodus out of Egypt. Their unfaithfulness, however, caused them to be taken back into captivity for a short while; but God would not allow His people to remain captives. After seventy years of discipline, they were free to return to Jerusalem where they would rebuild the temple, restore the city, and proclaim God's kingdom openly.

# 16

## Exiles Returning to the Promised Land

*“All whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.”* Ezra 1:5

### God's Esteemed Remnant

Daniel fulfilled and accomplished what God expected of him. First, he and his companions recognized the disguised altar of Satan and kept themselves from its defilement. Second, he saw the gentile kingdoms in relation to God's kingdom during his earthly life and ministry. Wherever he was and whatever he did, he was very clear about the power and finality of God's kingdom. He went about God's business fearlessly and relentlessly, with no regard for his personal gain or safety. As a result, God was also able to demonstrate His kingdom's character and power through the life of Daniel.

Daniel, in his own generation, received one of the greatest testimonies from God. Three times he was told that he was “*greatly beloved*” of God. Once, Gabriel the archangel appeared to him, when he

## Breaking the Silence

was praying and confessing his own sins and the sins of His people, and told him: “*At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are **greatly beloved**...*” (Dan. 9:23). What a testimony!

The second time, Daniel was praying for the interpretation of a vision. He became so weak that he almost fainted and fell into a deep sleep with his face to the ground. It was then that “*Suddenly a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, ‘O Daniel, man **greatly beloved**...*” (Dan. 10:10-11).

Finally, we read of the third confirmation of his standing with God: “*Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, ‘O man **greatly beloved**, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!’*” (Dan. 10:18-19).

Daniel was a remnant-man for God’s people. He risked his life to predict a disaster to the most powerful king of the time, telling him that he would become like an animal eating grass “*till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men*” (Dan. 4:25). Such a man truly deserved the epithet “*greatly beloved*” from the throne of God.

A few others also brought their part in the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth during their captivity and exile. Each of them contributed to the kingdom of God, because their faithfulness to the Lord destroyed the kingdom of Satan. The captivity remnant, including their outstanding example — Daniel — understood from God’s Word that the Lord would raise others in their generation to stand on the principle of the remnant, which is, to declare and proclaim God’s kingdom by building God’s altar. Daniel, among others, realized and believed God’s promise that the captivity would last only seventy years. After that, a remnant would undertake the task of building God’s altar in a prescribed manner and at a prescribed location — namely, on mount

## Exiles Returning to the Promised Land

Moriah in Jerusalem, the city of the great King. They not only believed, but also prayed that God would prepare and raise up people who would be willing to go and work in Jerusalem.

### God's Fulfilled Word

Through the years, many people in the church, like Daniel and the captivity remnant, have seen the truth of God's kingdom and the mission of the Church. Perhaps, they are not called to stand up and build, but they are called to proclaim God's purpose and not make any compromises. Many of them risked and lost their life, but they prayed that God would raise up His restoration remnant. And God may choose the most unlikely means and persons for accomplishing His purpose. One such unlikely person was the king of Persia: *"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia..."* (Ezra 1:1).

Nothing, absolutely nothing, can frustrate the spoken Word of God. Once the Lord utters the word, any word, it is as good as done. It does not matter through whom it is uttered. Here it was *"by the mouth of Jeremiah...."* For thousands of years, God has used people to speak on His behalf, but the real Speaker has always been the same person — God Almighty. The fulfillment of the Word was not to vindicate the speaker nor the instrument, but to vindicate the Word from God, the Source.

Finally, there came a time when all those words became incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ. In Him, all of what God has spoken was fulfilled. John in his Gospel writes: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (John 1:1). What John is saying is very simple: that Christ is the spoken Word of God. For



## Breaking the Silence

example, in the beginning of creation (Gen.1:1), nothing existed, until God spoke, and then creation happened. Therefore, God's Word is as good as God Himself. Since God's Word is the extension and release of God Himself, John writes in his first Epistle: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life"* (1 John 1:1). In the same breath, John wrote in his Gospel: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

Whether before or after Christ's incarnation as the Word, God's Word is simply the extension and release of God Himself and therefore must be fulfilled. Every Word spoken by every prophet was to be fulfilled. And they were fulfilled when the Word became flesh. In the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of Jesus of Nazareth, every Word of God received its fulfillment. Therefore, when Jeremiah spoke of the seventy years of captivity and of the return of God's remnant to fulfill His purpose, his prophetic utterance had no choice but to be fulfilled. God can even use a heathen king to help His people accomplish His purpose and fulfill His Word.

## God's Inspired Leaders

In order to follow the line of the remnant after the seventy years of captivity, we must look into the life of three characters — Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. These three personalities were leaders of the post-captivity remnant. They were instrumental in fulfilling God's purpose, which opposed the kingdom of Satan by declaring God's kingdom.

The post-captivity remnant returned to Jerusalem in three different companies. Their work was to build the center of God's earthly kingdom

## Exiles Returning to the Promised Land

— the temple of God and the city of Jerusalem. This great task began in 536 B.C., which was exactly seventy years from the first Babylonian attack in 606 B.C., when the first group of captives were taken to Babylon. Now seventy years later, Ezra and Nehemiah, two great servants, ministered to God's remnant during the restoration period of rebuilding the temple and the city. They spoke the Word of God when the work started in 536 B.C. and continued for two years. And then, through their encouraging words, the work resumed in 520 B.C. and was completed in 515 B.C.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the activity of the remnant during this era. A positive note of hope resounds in both of these books, because the remnant was returning to the land of promise, the land in which God's purpose was to be fulfilled. The basic theme of the book of Ezra is first of all the restoration of the temple and then the revival of spiritual, moral, and social values of the remnant in Jerusalem. The restoration and the revival were both brought about under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra.

God's faithfulness is seen in the way He protected His people within and throughout a powerful empire, especially when they were in captivity. They prospered in exile. God raised up pagan kings sympathetic to the cause of the people of God and encouraged them to return and rebuild their homeland. God also provided zealous and capable spiritual leaders to direct both the return and the rebuilding. He kept His promise: *"I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive"* (Jer. 29:14).

## Breaking the Silence

### God's Appointed Privilege

At this time, Nebuchadnezzar, his children, and his grandchildren were all dead. His empire and all the captives has fallen into the hands of the Persians. In Cyrus, the Persian king, God found a responsive heart. Cyrus had overthrown Babylon in October 539 B.C., making himself king over all the territories of Babylon, Medes, and Persia — the territories where most of God's people were in exile.

All of God's people were called to go back. But the question posed by the heathen king shows that all were not willing and all did not return: *“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem’”* (Ezra 1:1-3).

These verses point to three major facts: First, King Cyrus was used to fulfill God's Word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet. Second, King Cyrus had learned the lesson of humility, by confessing in his written proclamation that it was God who had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. Third, Cyrus was privileged to be divinely appointed to build a temple for God at the city of Jerusalem in the promised land of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar had been appointed to **destroy**, but Cyrus had been given the privilege to **build**.

# 17

## The Chosen Few

*“For many are called, but few are chosen.”* Matt. 22:14

### Response of a Committed Remnant

Through Cyrus, God asked a question to determine the condition of the hearts of His people: *“Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem”* (Ezra 1:3). Only the remnant responded to this call. All the Jews were God’s people and called to go back and represent Him and His kingdom. But most of them had become affluent and were too comfortable to even consider such a long journey to rebuild the desolate city of Jerusalem. Why sacrifice the comfort and prosperity gained through seventy years of hard work, to return and rebuild a broken-down city? But *“all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem”* (Ezra 1:5b). The heart that chooses to respond to God’s call is the heart that participates in the great

## Breaking the Silence

work of building up His kingdom. This is how the chosen are identified. In this context, we can better understand the verse, *“For many are called, but few are chosen”* (Matt. 22:14). The chosen demonstrate their calling by their commitment to their election.

In their heart, the remnant upheld God’s kingdom while minimizing the comfortable and selfish kingdoms of their own lives. Only a committed few were willing to relinquish with utter abandonment a life of relative comfort and ease in Babylon (and later under the Persian empire). Only they were willing to endure the difficulties of a journey of 900 miles and face the many hardships and dangers with strength and courage. And, upon their arrival, they encountered many adversities working against them in rebuilding a broken altar, a destroyed temple, and a desolate city. Out of a total population of two to three million Jews, only less than fifty-thousand chose to take advantage of God’s invitation and ultimately become the remnant of His people.

It is true that many neighboring Jews in Jerusalem helped the remnant. For instance, *“All those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold...”* (Ezra 1:6). Yes, these neighbors did give the remnant silver and gold for the work, but they did not get involved in the actual work. They are like many Christians today who are willing to support various ministries by their financial contributions, but who are not willing to leave the comforts of the present world to get involved in the actual work. Although God, in His mercy, extends His invitation to all His people to be co-workers with Him in the establishment of His kingdom, only a remnant respond.

## Intervention of an Anointed Instrument

Sometimes it may seem that God’s plan and purpose are not being fulfilled. But rest assured, they are never abandoned, nor are they

## The Chosen Few

delayed. The Jewish history is one of failure and captivity. The nation was scattered and the people were taken captive. They had lost their national position and power. Nevertheless, God was still moving toward the fulfillment of His ultimate purpose. He was taking steps in establishing His kingdom through redemption — a redemption not only applicable to the Jews, but also to the entire human race, to everyone who believes.

The seventy years of captivity placed the remnant in a process of suffering through which God prepared a remnant to return and rebuild Jerusalem until the arrival of the true Redeemer. They were ‘to hold the fort’ until the appearance of the promised King. God used the most unlikely instrument to contribute to the accomplishment of His will. Isaiah, who had prophesied of Cyrus by name two centuries earlier, called him the anointed one of God (Isa. 45:1). Through his royal decree, he became an ordained instrument for restoring God’s remnant to their land.

### Testimony of a Recorded List

We now come to the book of Ezra, chapter 2: “*Now these are the people ... who came back from the captivity ... those who came with Zerubbabel...*” (Ezra 2:1-2).

The first person of the remnant of the post-captivity era mentioned by name is Zerubbabel. He was a prince of Judah, a direct descendent of King David. He led the faithful remnant back to Judah and Jerusalem. “*Now these are the people ... who came with Zerubbabel.*” Zerubbabel was not an ordinary person!

He was “*a prince of Judah,*” a prosperous person in the Persian empire, and he had access to the king. He had all the reason to remain in the Persian court and enjoy his worldly gains. He had much to lose,

## Breaking the Silence

more than anyone else. But by making a consecrated and sacrificial choice, he became a representative and a leader of the remnant of God's people. And for this reason, he was given the honor of having his name recorded in the eternal Word of God. Dedicated consecration makes the difference between the remnant and the majority, between a carnal and a spiritual believer.

Ezra chapter 2, lists not only the remnant of the restoration period by name, it also records the possessions they carried from Babylon to Judea. This chapter lists those who, by taking advantage of the decree of King Cyrus, returned to take possession of a land God had promised to their forefathers. These people did not despise their inheritance, as humble and disgraceful as it may have appeared.

The list begins with the name of Zerubbabel. The names of the high priest and other immediate associates follow. Then come the names and numbers of families (2:3-35), of the members of the priesthood (2:36-39), the number of Levites (2:40-42), and finally the total number of the people and their livestock (2:64-67). This is a very interesting record, for it authenticates the remnant, their possessions, and the preparations they had made for their return to rebuild Jerusalem.

## Establishment of the Remnant's Altar

Chapter 3 is also very instructive concerning God's work of restoration: "*When the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, **the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and **built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it*****" (Ezra 3:1-2).

The leaders of the remnant, particularly Jeshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the prince, recognized their priorities and knew the

## The Chosen Few

important and compelling issues for the life of the people. This is evident from the fact that immediately after they had settled into their cities, “*the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem*” to establish the altar of God. The altar, representing the kingdom of God, had to be restored first, even before work began on the temple, so that the enemy would know whose altar stood in Jerusalem. Then they offered burnt offerings, an act that demonstrates the people’s allegiance to the sovereignty of the Lord God of Israel. Immediately after, they observed the Feast of Tabernacles, which in type is not only a memorial of the Lord’s people freed from slavery, but also a prophetic foreshadowing of His millennial kingdom.

*“Though fear had come upon them because of the peoples of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord”* (Ezra 3:3). Although different interpretations are possible for this verse, the background and context show us that the remnant were conscious of the fact that in the past God’s people had become contaminated by surrounding nations, had become idolatrous to a point where they had bowed down to other kingdoms, turning their back to the kingdom of Jehovah their God. Now, in order to prevent a repetition of their past failure, they took a stand immediately, set up the true altar, and declared God’s kingdom.

We are studying the Old Testament remnant in order to learn from both their mistakes and their victories. We have seen, time and time again, that God wants to establish His kingdom on earth, the planet where Satan instigated a universal rebellion against God’s kingdom. Also, we have noticed clear indications that from the beginning of human history, God’s kingdom has been represented by His altar. Furthermore, we have conclusively seen from the history of the Old Testament that God had called the entire nation of Israel to represent His kingdom, but not all responded. The majority fell prey to the deception



## Breaking the Silence

of the enemy, became unfaithful, and ended up in captivity, because the majority bowed down to idolatrous altars which represented Satan's kingdom. Nevertheless, God has always maintained for Himself a remnant among His own people — faithful ones who have, at any cost, kept His altar standing. It was true of the Old Testament, it is true today — God always accomplishes His purpose through a remnant.

### Indivisibility of the Kingdom's Altar

We have examined the Jewish nation in various stages of their history. At times, they gave in to the deceptions of the enemy, and at other times, they overcame their adversaries through the remnant. But at one point the corruption became so rampant, God had to finally uproot them, allow them to be taken from their homeland, and forced then into a captivity under the Babylonians for seventy years. The remnant of God's people, however, remained faithful all through the captivity. When Cyrus declared the captivity 'null and void,' the remnant returned to their homeland where they could live the life that God expected from them. Even then, the majority chose to live their own lifestyle based on personal preferences and selfish rights.

Christianity is not an exception. God desires to accomplish His purpose through the Church. But not all are willing to sacrifice their worldly comforts and pleasures in order to stand on the principle of the kingdom. Nevertheless, in Christianity, there is also a remnant of 'born-again' believers who are willing to uphold God's kingdom at any cost.

The many divisions in today's Christianity point to the fact that we have not yet seen the kingdom of God as we ought to. It is interesting to note that just before the captivity, the Israelites were divided. But after the chastisement of their captivity, the Word says "*the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.*" As long as we stand by our

## The Chosen Few

denominational allegiances, we cannot see the kingdom of God. If we tolerate divisions, we do not stand “*as one man.*” As long as this divided condition in Christianity exists, God’s kingdom cannot be demonstrated. The end result of division is always captivity.

The remnant must renounce sectarianism and stand on an attitude of unity with all believers. The kingdom people are not divisive, but all-inclusive. And the altar represents His transcendent kingdom. What the post-captivity remnant did was the first logical step — they “*arose and built the altar.*” Likewise, in the Church, some will have the revelation of the kingdom, will become the remnant who renounces the sectarian fragmentation of denominationalism, and will declare the message of the kingdom. This is not just a message of ‘out of hell, into heaven,’ not just a message of ‘God the King of heaven,’ but also a message of ‘God the King of both heaven and earth!’ And when this message is preached, those who are most committed will offer burnt offering and will prove the reality of their election for the kingdom.

Today, our priorities are all mixed up and we may not recognize the matters of highest importance in the life of God’s people. The gospel of the kingdom is often buried under a heap of religious rubbish. Only the gospel of salvation is preached. The gospel of salvation is not wrong, but it only shows the love of God in saving the sinner and meeting mankind’s need. It only has mankind as its center, not God. But what about the responsibility of believers towards God? What about the responsibility of believers toward their brothers?

God cannot and will not dwell even among His own people if His kingdom and sovereignty in every area of their life, be it individual or corporate, is not recognized. Only then will He take His abode in the temple of His people.

# 18

## The Temple's Greater Glory

*“The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the glory of the former.”*  
Haggai 2:9

### The Remnant's Weeping and Rejoicing

The altar was now rebuilt and burnt offerings were reinstated by the post-exilic remnant. The time had come to restore the temple. As the remnant were laying the foundation (in the second year of their return), they rejoiced with relevant ceremonies. The older people, however, began lamenting: *“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off”* (Ezra 3:12-13).

## Breaking the Silence

Perhaps these old people were justified in lamenting, because they could see the significant difference between the old majestic temple and this new humble edifice. But, they did not recognize, at the time, that the new temple was destined for a much greater honor and glory.

On the other hand, many were filled with joy and shouted with excitement, because they were looking ahead to the day when this humble building would be completed. If these people looked at themselves and the limited resources available to them, they would become afraid and discouraged. How could they, this small remnant, finish such a monumental task? So God raised up prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to strengthen the hands of the people.

The Lord had called this Jewish remnant to proclaim and live the life of the kingdom of God. But even among the remnant, there were two groups — those who lamented over the lost glory of the earlier temple, and those who shouted for joy over the anticipation of what was yet to come. Today, our “shouting” and our “weeping” are also being heard. We weep because of what we see around us — the lost glory of the early Church. We also rejoice because we anticipate what awaits us. Some may look at the financial situation of the remnant and compare it with the affluence of many denominations, or they may look at the extent of damages incurred by today’s Christianity and weep. But we must encourage and remind each other of the words of the Holy Spirit to the weeping remnant in the book of Ezra. The old temple built by Solomon was destroyed, but the new one, built by this poverty-stricken remnant, would see the real glory.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did not enter the temple built by Solomon; rather, He entered the temple built by this remnant with His divine glory: “*We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father*” (John 1:14). So we weep, but we also rejoice. We weep and mourn because of the great damage and destruction in Christianity

## The Temple's Greater Glory

today, but we also rejoice because Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matt. 5:4).

God encouraged the post-exilic remnant through Haggai and Zechariah; today, God comforts us through the Holy Spirit who speaks words of encouragement to strengthen our hands. We may encounter criticism, even enmity, but this was the expected portion of the remnant throughout all ages, especially the remnant in the post-captivity era.

## The Enemy's Deception and Tactics

As the remnant started the work of establishing the altar and restoring the temple, the enemy of God began his work also. Most of the book of Ezra covers the conflict between the forces of Satan's kingdom and the power of God's kingdom. The first method of opposition was very subtle — an offer for cooperation: *“When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity [exiles] were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, ‘Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him...’”* (Ezra 4:1-2).

The deception was recognized and dealt with immediately. These adversaries were not part of the people of God. And, even though they claimed to worship God, they sacrificed on altars other than the altar of Jehovah. Since they did not represent or belong to God's kingdom, they could have no part in building the house of God. The leaders of the remnant, discerning the enemy's deception, replied: *“You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel...”* (Ezra 4:3).

Human reasoning and emotions without spiritual discernment would accept cooperation and help from any source. Men of faith (or rather, unbelief) have often fallen into this trap and associated themselves with

## Breaking the Silence

people who did not share their kingdom-faith; and the end result has been a negative compromise. Helpful aid from those who do not stand in the interest or on the ground of God's kingdom is a fallacy. Doing many works for the King is of no value if He says, "*I never knew you*" (cf. Matt. 7:21-23). The leaders of the restoration remnant, however, were not so easily deceived. They detected the enemy's tricks and refused his false hand of help.

The crafty deception of the enemy did not stop here: "*Then the people of the land tried to **discourage** the people of Judah. They **troubled them** in building... They **wrote an accusation** against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem*" (Ezra 4:4-6).

The enemy tries very hard to disrupt, discourage, and frighten us. But we, who stand on the ground of God's kingdom and who intend to maintain His altar, should not lose heart. We should not be discouraged or intimidated. We must refuse to pay attention to the enemy's accusations.

## The Prophets' Message and Encouragement

Through accusation, the enemy succeeded to stop the work temporarily. Even though the remnant were living in the promised land, they had become lax. So the Lord reprimanded them through the mouth of Haggai: "*Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?*" (Hag. 1:4).

But these verses in the book of Ezra usher in a glorious truth that should always be before the eyes of the remnant: "*Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them*" (Ezra 5:1). The Lord continued to strengthen and encourage the remnant: "*Go up to the mountains and bring wood and*

## The Temple's Greater Glory

*build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.... Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God ...; and the people feared the presence of the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying: 'I am with you,' says the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel ... and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God" (Hag. 1:8,12-14).*

And in response to the older people who had wept when the foundation of this new temple was laid, God gave a new message: *"Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel, says the Lord; and be strong, Joshua... and be strong, all you people of the land, says the Lord, and work; for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!" (Hag. 2:3-5).*

Then comes the Lord's intent and glorious promise: *"'They shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts.... 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts" (Hag. 2:7,9).*

God is faithful. He fulfilled the above promise at the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. I don't think the people who heard God understood the depth and the magnitude of His promise, but they obeyed God's Word and listened to the voice of the Spirit. Today, the message of the Spirit to the church is: "Stand up and build! Be not afraid! Preach the gospel of the kingdom!" We must obey even if we do not entirely understand. *"The fear of the Lord"* simply means obeying the Lord conscientiously. We have the Holy Spirit with us. He is speaking to us.

## **Breaking the Silence**

He is encouraging us. Let us, like the restoration remnant, build according to the fear of the Lord and the obedience of the Holy Spirit, who is the Prophet of prophets.



# 19

## Prophetic Help and Encouragement

*“And the Lord answered with good and comforting words...”* Zech. 1:13

### God's Standards of Working

Here is a portion of the Old Testament which sheds valuable light on the true relationship between prophetic ministry and the national life of Israel as God's people: *“So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them”* (Ezra 5:2).

The prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah made it perfectly clear that stopping the work of building, for whatever reason, was incompatible with divine standards. By human standards, people could have justified the suspension of the work. The king of Persia had ordered them to stop their project, and they had to obey. However, by divine standards — the only accountable standard for God's kingdom people — they had no reasonable right to stop the work. And based on this principle, the

## Breaking the Silence

prophets spoke God's Word, because this was their contribution to the work of rebuilding. They introduced the qualities of the kingdom of God into the thinking of God's people, qualities which were all too easily forgotten. God's prophets reminded God's people of the strength of His government and their true relationship to it. Once they weighed everything in the light of His kingdom's will, they could then find proper perspective and balance for their other duties and responsibilities.

### Kind Words of Comfort

In the context outlined above, we are better able to understand the prophecies of Zechariah. He showed the people that what their fathers had gone through was deserved justice from God. On one hand, he said, *"The Lord has been very angry with your fathers"* (Zech.1:2). On the other hand, he showed the people that God was a merciful God by describing how an angel was interceding on their behalf, asking God: *"O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?" And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me, with good and comforting words"* (Zech.1:12-13). Here are some of the Lord's kind words and comforting promises:

#### 1. PROMISE OF THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

*"I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it"* (Zech. 1:16). What a beautiful promise to God's remnant! This promise was meant only for the post-captivity remnant, but its spiritual fulfillment is for today's remnant Christians. Coming out of the ruins of the 'Church at large,' they have found mercy from the Lord. God is going to rebuild His house among them. He is going to dwell in them with His fullness. Looking at their limited resources and overwhelming circumstances, they may panic, as did the remnant of those days. But

## Prophetic Help and Encouragement

God, through His prophet then and through His Holy Spirit now, gives the greatest promise and comfort.

### 2. PROMISE OF THE POWER OF THE LORD'S SPIRIT

Through Zechariah God told His remnant: "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts*" (Zech. 4:6). Hallelujah! It is not by our human might or feeble power, but the Lord will accomplish His purpose by His own Spirit.

### 3. PROMISE OF THE PLUMB LINE IN THE LORD'S HAND

'Look at us,' we may say, 'we are too small and insignificant.' This is exactly what the post-captivity remnant thought in their day. But once again, Zechariah uttered comforting words: "*Who has despised the day of small things? For these seven [men] rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel*" (Zech. 4:10). Christians who crave for the 'massive' and 'spectacular' will despise the remnant, but the remnant are the plumb line of God's kingdom in the hand of the true and real Zerubbabel, the Lord Jesus. Let us rejoice and shout for joy.

### 4. PROMISE OF THE PRIESTLY AND KINGLY MINISTRY OF THE ANOINTED

The Lord Himself is the true olive tree of which the prophet says: "*These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside **the Lord of the whole earth***" (Zech. 4:14). The Lord Himself represents these two olive trees in both His **priestly** and **kingly** ministry.

### 5. PROMISE OF THE HOPE OF THE COMING KINGDOM

Zechariah encouraged the discouraged remnant to continue the good work they had already started. Once again, he reminded them of God's promise: "*Thus says the Lord: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain [type of the kingdom] of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain*" (8:3). Zechariah kept the promises of God and the process of His work before the eyes of the remnant. This is exactly what the Holy

## Breaking the Silence

Spirit does for those who have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### 6. PROMISE OF THE INHERITANCE FOR THE FAITHFUL REMNANT

Zechariah reminded the remnant that God had something great in store for His faithful ones: “*But now I will not treat **the remnant** of this people as in the former days,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew. I will cause **the remnant of this people to possess all these...** So I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear, let your hands be strong’*” (Zech. 8:11-13).

### 7. PROMISE OF THE ‘GRAND FINALE’ OF THE LORD’S COMING

At the conclusion of his prophecies, Zechariah mentioned many truths regarding the coming of the Lord. But the ‘grand finale’ was a reminder of God’s plan and purpose. In the final chapter of his book, he mentions “*in that day*” several times. For instance, “*The Lord shall be King over all the earth. **In that day** it shall be — ‘The Lord is one,’ and His name one*” (Zech. 14:9). Again, “*Everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from **year to year** to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*” (Zech. 14:16). And then Zechariah recorded ‘the last day’ concerning the altar to the Lord: “***In that day** HOLINESS TO THE LORD shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before **the altar***” (Zech. 14:20).

## Heaven’s God on Earth

Inspired by prophetic teaching, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people began the work once again, and this time carried it through to completion. We can now understand Ezra 5:2, “*The prophets of God were with them, helping them.*” Although the opposition of their

## Prophetic Help and Encouragement

enemies did not cease, the people went on, inspired by the influence of the prophets. As they continued the work, the enmity got fiercer. However “*the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease...*” (Ezra 5:5). Neither the enemies, nor the king of Persia could stop them now. The remnant persisted in God’s work and declared Him as the King of heaven and earth.

In response to the king’s officials who questioned them about their work, the people said, “*We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth*” (Ezra 5:11). Their God was not only the God of heaven, but also of earth. The phrase “*God of heaven*” is used twenty-two times in the Old Testament, mostly in the books of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah — the books written during the period of captivity and restoration. After the destruction of Jerusalem and before it was rebuilt, God became the “*God of Heaven,*” because He was not in His temple. But these returning exiles, the remnant of God’s people, were in the enterprise of re-crowning Him as the “*God of earth.*” Satan always tries to make God the “*God of heaven*” only, so that he himself can be “*the god of earth.*” Unfortunately, not only all the religions of the world but also the majority of Christians do the same, because they limit God’s kingdom to heaven only.

For the remnant, however, there is no compromise — God’s kingdom must come, and God must be declared **King of earth** as well as heaven: “*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever*” (Rev. 11:15).

God is sovereign and will help those who have His kingdom at the center of their life. He will turn all tyrannical circumstances around to the advantage of His remnant who are engaged in His work. This command goes out to all who oppose: “*Keep yourselves far from there. Let the work of this house of God alone... So the elders of the Jews **built,***

## Breaking the Silence

*and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel... Now the temple was finished...*" (Ezra 6:6-7,14-15).

### The Fortifying Hand of God

In Chapter 7, another remnant-leader appears — Ezra himself. Fifty years had elapsed since God had raised up Ezra to go to His people in Jerusalem and teach them. The rest of the book of Ezra deals with his God-given ministry of restoring order to the moral, spiritual, and social life of His people. Ezra was a scribe. His responsibility was not to receive new revelations, but to explain and apply existing revelations. His expertise was in the area of the application of the Law. His ministry can be summarized as follows: "*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*" (Ezra 7:10).

Ezra's ministry, as portrayed in the latter portion of his book, indicates the possibility of the remnant's contamination by their surroundings.

Although Zerubbabel, and later Ezra, devoted themselves to leading God's remnant in the work of restoration and the proclamation of His kingdom, something was still lacking. And Nehemiah was the person called to fill this gap. He was another remnant servant chosen to put the final touches on the portrait of God's purpose.

# 20

## The Broken Wall

*“The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”*

Neh. 1:3

### A City Without Walls

God uses insignificant individuals to do His great work. Even though the remnant had returned from captivity with very limited resources, they managed to build the temple and the altar under the guidance of Zerubbabel, and they learned the principles of the Law under the teachings of Ezra. God’s plan, however, was not yet completely fulfilled. Although the altar represented the kingdom, something was missing. Jerusalem, the site on which the temple and the altar were restored, still had no walls. Only a wall around this city could solidify it as a kingdom which could withstand the principalities and powers around it.

In those days, only a walled city was considered a kingdom. In fact, the very reason Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the wall of Jerusalem was to

## Breaking the Silence

remove it as a kingdom. Devoid of security and protection, a city without walls was vulnerable and exposed to all sorts of infiltrating attacks. Although the temple in Jerusalem was God's habitation, the city was not yet God's kingdom. The presence of the altar represented the sovereignty of God's kingdom **to God's people**, but it would take a wall around Jerusalem to represent God's kingdom **to God's enemies**. Jerusalem needed to be fortified by walls. Nehemiah — one of the last returnees from captivity — realized this urgency. He set out to finish the work undertaken by the remnant of the preceding generation. He was raised up to put the finishing touches on this portrait of restoration according to God's purpose. He was called to face a monumental challenge, a great and enormous task.

## A Comforter With Purpose

A few years had passed since Ezra had completed His ministry. Back in Persia, a Jew by the name of Nehemiah was a cup-bearer to the king. He held a position of honor which gave him access not only to the presence of the king, but also to many other people of influence advising the king. Despite his affluence, influence, and success, he did not forget his responsibility towards God and his own people.

When certain Jews visited him on their return from Jerusalem, Nehemiah *“asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem”* (Neh. 1:2). Nehemiah was concerned for the remnant of God's people and for the city of Jerusalem — that is, for the people and the kingdom of God. Had he enquired only about the Jewish remnant, he would have been treading on the ground of nationalism. Had he enquired about Jerusalem only, he would have been insensitive towards the sufferings of God's people. In other words, he would have been a dry religious non-conformist. But his



## The Broken Wall

question indicates that he was a truly balanced man of God, for he was living up to his name. ‘Nehemiah’ means *comforter*. He was not only a comforter of the people, but also a comforter of God. He was not only thinking about the welfare of the remnant, but also about the concerns of God’s kingdom. His ministry was that of the true Comforter, the Holy Spirit — the real and greater Nehemiah, the encouraging Comforter of Jehovah.

This illustrates what the Holy Spirit is doing today. For centuries, Christians had been in captivity, but now they are being restored to Christ as their spiritual homeland, and the Holy Spirit challenges all to arise and build the wall around their spiritual Jerusalem, to declare and present God’s kingdom to His enemies. This encouraging spirit was also working in Nehemiah. He gave up his position of affluence, influence and comfort in the royal court of the Persian king. He made the ultimate sacrifice in order to return to Jerusalem, build the wall around God’s remnant, and declare Jerusalem as a kingdom, thereby vindicating God and His people. He knew that everything had to be ready for the appearing of the future King of the Jews. Zerubbabel and Ezra had gone ahead of him and rebuilt the temple, restored Jerusalem, renewed the covenant, and reformed the people. The Messianic line was intact, and the King’s coming was imminent.

## A Remnant With Character

Was everything really ready? This is what Nehemiah wanted to find out when he questioned the Jews who had returned from Jerusalem. But he received a saddening answer: “*The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire*” (Neh. 1:3). His reaction demonstrated the character of a true

## Breaking the Silence

remnant: “*So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven*” (Neh. 1:4).

Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*” (Matt. 5:4). Our weeping and mourning should be over the present situation of the Church at large, which is supposed to represent the kingdom of God. Even though God’s people have been liberated to a certain extent and to some degree restored, the Church is still “*in great distress and reproach. The wall ... is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.*” Mourning alone is not enough. We must also act! Our true ‘Nehemiah,’ the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, motivates us to arise, build, and be comforted and strengthened until our King comes.

Zerubbabel and Ezra had built the altar, offered burnt offerings, declared their allegiance to God, and acknowledged His right to rule as King over all the earth. Moreover, they had built the temple, a house for His name. However, the enemy and the world would not take them seriously as long as Jerusalem did not have a wall, because the kingdom was not yet firmly established for God. Nehemiah understood and appreciated what his predecessors had done, but he also knew that it was not enough. He wept over the broken wall in Jerusalem and the disgraced remnant.

Some people think that a present-day remnant should disregard the work and efforts of other Christians. Not at all! Today’s remnant must acknowledge all that God’s saints have done in their own generations. They must rejoice in what others have done, but this is not enough. They need a wall around **their** Jerusalem. They need to start to declare and live out the kingdom of God by letting the whole world know that there is only one King and one kingdom — the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

## The Broken Wall

### A Preaching With Vision

Nehemiah prayed, “*Lord God of heaven*” (Neh. 1:5). He knew that he could not call God ‘the God of heaven *and* earth.’ He knew that due to the sins and negligence of God’s people, His city was in ruins and His kingdom had no representation on earth. Nehemiah also knew that as long as Jerusalem did not have a wall, God had no kingdom on earth. That is why Nehemiah was weeping, confessing, and repenting.

Dare we Christians call God ‘the God of heaven *and* earth’? Do we declare to the world His kingdom and His sovereignty over all nations? Or do we merely preach a gospel of individual salvation, neatly putting God in heaven? We must proclaim the gospel of His kingdom which challenges the world with all its principalities, powers and spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. But to preach the kingdom of God, we need revelation; otherwise we would confuse salvation and eternal life with the kingdom of God. Nehemiah declared the message of the kingdom by building the wall of Jerusalem, thus, paving the way for the coming King. If he had not received a revelation of God’s kingdom and its relationship to the wall of Jerusalem, he would not have attempted to build the wall. The light and knowledge he had obtained motivated and gave him the persistent will to finish the task. Who else would preach this gospel other than those who have received the light, seen the vision, and been empowered?

Before asking the king of Persia permission to return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah “*became dreadfully afraid*” (Neh. 2:2). He had every right to be afraid. His request for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem could have easily been misconstrued as rebellion and treason to the Persian empire. But as part of a remnant entrusted with the message of the kingdom, he had no other choice but to forget about his own personal safety. When a remnant stands for the truth and pays the price for it, God begins to

## **Breaking the Silence**

work, as He did for Nehemiah. Once again, we witness the sovereignty of God over all rulers and powers, because the king granted Nehemiah's request. When God finds the right people, He grants grace and power for them to act on His behalf.

# 21

## **Stones Brought to Life**

*“Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.”* Neh. 2:17

*“Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish?”* Neh. 4:2

### **The Enemy Disturbed and Angry**

The book of Nehemiah is basically divided into two parts: Chapters 1 to 7 cover the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem. Chapters 8 to 13 cover the consolidation of the people. The former shows how God’s kingdom is expressed; the latter shows how God’s people are consecrated. God’s kingdom must first be expressed and proclaimed before the people can be consecrated and consolidated to walk according to the will of God’s purpose. The recovery ministry of Nehemiah’s day is parallel to that of the present-day remnant.

In part one of the book of Nehemiah, we discover how quickly the opposition emerged to hinder the reconstruction of the wall. The resistance came first in the form of mockery, and later in the form of

## Breaking the Silence

conspiracy, especially when the work was progressing at a surprisingly fast rate. But Nehemiah overcame each problem with remarkable God-given wisdom until the task was completed.

In chapter 2, Nehemiah recounts the anger of God's enemies: "*They were deeply disturbed*" (Neh. 2:10). What was so important about these returning captives and the rebuilding of the wall that disturbed the enemy? They knew that Jerusalem was the city of God and that rebuilding its wall would declare it the kingdom of God. The world does not mind Christians who are gathered in a church building, conducting ceremonies, singing hymns, and even sending missionaries to Third World countries. But if the Church ever start proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, which includes the good news of salvation, the world would get upset and disturbed. As long as Christians do not identify the world as the kingdom of Satan, everything is fine. But once they unveil the reality of the kingdom of Satan versus the kingdom of God, then all the fury of hell will be unleashed.

## The Ruins Surveyed and Inspected

The remainder of chapter 2 covers Nehemiah's inspection of the ruins of Jerusalem. Having gathered all the necessary information, he was then able to begin the work. If we undertake a proper survey of today's Christianity in comparison to the true standard of the Word of God, we will expose the extent of its devastation. Such a survey will reveal that heresy has entered into the Church since the reformation, that Luther did not eradicate all of the leaven, that Satan has caused much havoc among God's children, through the world, flesh, and sin, that many Christians are carnal, that the 'clergy and laity' system has propagated false doctrines and deeds, that the spirit of Jezebel has penetrated the Church, etc. Great is the ruin and great is the work! As long as we are aware of the extent of the damage caused by 'the Church

## Stones Brought to Life

in ruins,' as long as we have been motivated by the Lord, we can stand up and say with Nehemiah: "*You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach*" (Neh. 2:17).

### The Work Mocked and Ridiculed

The chapter continues, "*Then they set their hands to this good work*" (Neh. 2:18). Hallelujah! The Word of God asserts that the work for the kingdom of God is "*good work*"! Christians, by virtue of their new spiritual birth, are the children of God. But they are not all involved in the "*good work*" of the kingdom. This "*good work*" is not only bringing people to the saving knowledge of Christ which makes them members of God's family, but also bringing them into preaching and living the gospel of the kingdom, making them overcomers.

The overcoming workers of the kingdom in Nehemiah's days were actively rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. As a result, their enemies attempted to frustrate the "*good work*" by ridiculing the remnant: "*They laughed at us and despised us, and said, 'What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?'*" (Neh. 2:19).

When the remnant stand up to do the good work of preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, an unholy alliance (of so-called believers along with some non-believers) rises up to ridicule and mock them. The answer to this unholy alliance must be the answer that Nehemiah gave to his enemies: "*The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you [Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem] have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem*" (Neh. 2:20). The Lord Jesus Himself, when pronouncing the constitution of the kingdom of heaven, stated the same response in slightly different words: "*Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me,*

## Breaking the Silence

*you who practice lawlessness*” (Matt. 7:23). These people who practice lawlessness frustrate the “*good work*” of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven. Yes, they may be believers — they may perform miracles, cast out demons, and even prophesy — but not in the context of the kingdom. They do not contribute to the declaration and advancement of the kingdom of God. Rather, they are lawless, self-centered workers, who will not have a portion with the Lord Jesus in His millennial reign.

### The Restoration United and Coordinated

Chapter 3 of the book of Nehemiah is dedicated to the memory of all the remnant who participated in the good work of rebuilding the wall of the city, thus proclaiming Jerusalem as God’s kingdom. God rewarded His faithful remnant by having their names written in His Word so that they might remain before His eyes forever.

Throughout chapter 3, we notice the phrases “*next to him*” or “*next to them*” are repeated 15 times. Another pair of phrases, “*after him*” and “*after them,*” appears 16 times. These phrases characterize the coordinating unity of the work. The workers linked together built the entire wall. The work proceeded in a very orderly manner. Beginning at the Sheep Gate through which the sacrifices were taken to the temple, continuing to the Fish Gate, the Valley Gate, the Dung Gate, the Gate of the Fountain, the Water Gate, the Horse Gate, the East Gate, and arriving back to the Sheep Gate.

It is important to note that the unifying factor in the work was the wall. Everyone was inspired by the desire and intention to see it through to completion. The work was beautifully partitioned and allocated. Each group was united in the effort of completing the portion of the wall allotted to them. There was no sense of isolation, fragmentation or rivalry. Each person worked “*next to*” or “*after*” the other. Eventually, the good work was completed.



## Stones Brought to Life

In the flagrantly divisive condition of Christianity today, what will it take to bring oneness and unity among the ranks of Christians? One solution is a realization of a common goal — to establish and preach the gospel of God’s kingdom. In every locality where a church stands, the banner of the kingdom must be raised. It is **then** that what our Lord predicted will take place: *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”* (Matt. 24:14). Oneness and unity can only be achieved when the children of God have a mutual goal of preaching the gospel of the kingdom “*next to*” or “*after*” one another.

## The Word Questioned and Challenged

Chapter 4 of the book of Nehemiah shows us that the enemy never gives up without a fight. There can be no peaceful coexistence between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, many Christians in this current world system behave as though an armistice between God and Satan exists. Never! The reason for our life is to fight God’s enemy. We are here to reclaim lost territory and proclaim God’s kingdom to all humanity. And if we do what we are supposed to do, the enemy will be forced to show his hand. But if we do not actively fight as God’s freedom fighters, the enemy will continue his evil works under disguise. He will use every trick in the book to silence and stop God’s kingdom-preaching Christians, but he has no power over them! Spiritual warfare exposes and shames the enemy.

In Nehemiah chapter 4, Satan uses the same trick — the same insinuating questions — as he did in the Garden of Eden: *“It so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, ‘What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer*

## Breaking the Silence

*sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish — stones that are burned?’ Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, ‘Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall’” (Neh. 4:1-3).*

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, and Tobiah was the governor of Ammon, both very prominent and influential personalities in their community. The question was not whether these “*feeble Jews*” could or could not build the wall out of dead stones, but whether or not **God** could do it. It did not matter how weak the Jewish remnant was. If God said it, it was as good as done.

In this situation, the temptation to discredit God was great. Could God really do it? Could this Jewish remnant really trust the Lord? Nehemiah knew that what he had undertaken was in fulfillment of God’s spoken Word although the enemy was trying to create doubts.

The same subtle trick was used on the Lord Jesus when He was tempted in the wilderness. After He had fasted for 40 days and nights, Satan came to Him with the temptation — “*If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread*” (Matt. 4:3). Is this challenge not similar to what Sanballat was asking: “*Will they revive the stones*”? However, Jesus answered, “*It is written: ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’*” (Matt. 4:4). To Him it was clearly not important whether these stones would turn to bread. What was important was that every miracle must serve God’s purpose in fulfillment of His spoken Word. Man was to live by the spoken Word of God, not by miracles.

The restoration work of preaching the kingdom of God is not fragile and breakable, as the enemy would like to make it seem. We stand on the solid foundation of God’s Word.

# 22

## Builders and Fighters for the Kingdom

*“Our God will fight for us.”* Neh. 4:20

### Work by Spiritual Warfare

Angry enemies mocked and ridiculed the good work of rebuilding the wall. They also tried to use subtle insinuations to discourage Nehemiah. But he did not react; rather, he prayed while the builders continued the “*good work*” with all their heart until the wall reached half its planned height. We must pay close attention to two points — first, the importance of prayer; second, the involvement of the heart. In times of danger, these two principles should ever be the attitude of those who are called to do the “*good work*” for God. As the work progresses, the first strategy of the enemy will always be to hurl ridicule, which will then turn to anger mixed with contempt. Nehemiah, was well aware of the danger of this attack on the work, and so lifted his heart in prayer to God.

And God, through Nehemiah, completely captivated and inspired the

## Breaking the Silence

people: *“For the people had a mind to work”* (Neh. 4:6). The opposition became even fiercer, and a determined conspiracy attempted to stop the progress of building. Then Nehemiah took steps to counter this new threat: *“Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them **conspired together** to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless, we made our prayer to God, and because of them **we set a watch** against them day and night”* (Neh. 4:7-9).

These verses give us a stunning and yet truthful portray of the spiritual warfare fought for the sake of God’s kingdom. At first, the enemies did not take God’s remnant seriously and merely ridiculed them. But when they saw the work progressing, they became angry and plotted with other opponents of the truth. They organized a more determined fight against the *“good work”* of preaching God’s kingdom. In reaction, God’s people also acted energetically, praying and watching. They were neither foolishly independent of God, nor foolishly neglectful of human responsibility and precaution. Their twofold attitude was their dependent faith in God and their complete cooperation and diligent effort. Both of these attitudes were necessary for success.

## Work through Internal Problems

God’s people and the remnant not only suffered at the hands of the enemies, but had to cope with difficulties from within: *“Then Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.’ And our adversaries said, ‘They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.’ So it was, when the Jews*

## **Builders and Fighters for the Kingdom**

*who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, 'From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us'”* (Neh. 4:10-12).

Nehemiah was now facing greater problems. His overburdened laborers were tired, complaining about the removal of the massive amount of rubble. A remnant usually has to deal with a tremendous amount of corruption which has penetrated God's people and accumulated over long periods of time. And such corruption is commonly passed from generation to generation. The longer these periods, the harder it is for the remnant to eliminate cleanse God's people.

Although Luther brought in reformation, he left behind much corruption which needed to be dealt with. And as God raises up a remnant in this era of history to rebuild the wall and proclaim the kingdom, they will find themselves confronted with *“so much rubble.”* They will look at the extent of the corruption around them and at the limitation of their resources, causing them to lose heart and be discouraged.

Moreover, the remnant is always exposed to discouraging words and rumors spread by Christians *“who dwelt near them.”* These derogatory words, criticism, and threatening news become a hindrance to the workers. But the ears of the remnant should be closed to such talks. The motives, purposes, and intentions of the enemy are clear. If they could, they would *“kill them and cause the work to cease.”* But praise be to God, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom. 8:31). Since the good work is God's work, He gives the necessary strength. Since the enemies are God's enemies, He makes sure they are destroyed.

## **Work with Prepared Weapons**

Our best defense is an offense: *“Therefore I positioned men behind*

## Breaking the Silence

*the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren'”* (Neh. 4:13-14).

Nehemiah said, *'Do not be afraid... Remember the Lord... and fight....'* A great and fierce counter opposition is not necessary. What is necessary, however, is to fortify the weaker believers, encourage everyone not to fear the enemy, and be prepared to fight while continuing to build the wall.

The actions and the attitude of the remnant are thus summarized: *“Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built... Then I said... ‘Our God will fight for us’”* (Neh. 4:17-20). The remnant is composed of builders and fighters. In the meantime, they put their trust in the Lord. Throughout all generations, the kingdom people have been involved in building and fighting. Many Christians do not see both functions in their corporate church life and their individual personal life. Usually one is sacrificed or neglected at the cost of the other.

In view of this context, we read in the New Testament, *“Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 14:15). When someone asked Him who could follow Him into the kingdom, He replied: *“Which of you, intending to **build** a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it... Or what king, going to make **war** against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet... twenty thousand?”* (Luke 14:28,31). Jesus thus emphasized the two aspects of an effective kingdom life — building and fighting.

## Builders and Fighters for the Kingdom

### Work by Self-Denial

In chapter 5 of the book of Nehemiah, a new and more precarious difficulty arises among the workers. The rich were exploiting the poor and oppressed brothers. So Nehemiah decided to set an example of self-denial. Not only did he refuse to collect interest from the poor, he even refused to take what was his right as the appointed governor over the people of Judah. This example produced immediate and positive results. As the nobles followed in Nehemiah's footsteps, the poorer people were relieved and filled with joy. Consequently, the work went forward with new enthusiasm.

A much greater example is our Lord of whom the Apostle Paul says: "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich*" (2 Cor. 8:9). Nehemiah and the other remnant followed what the Lord commanded: "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). Let us all walk in the footsteps of Jesus lest we be counter-productive to the "*good work*" and become a hindrance to the kingdom of God. We must all maintain the attitude of our Lord in order to deprive the enemy from any ground to frustrate God's work.

# 23

## God's Strength for a Great Work

*“Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.”* Neh.6:9

### Refuse Empty Talks

Nothing frustrates the enemy more than the advancement of God's kingdom through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. Chapter 6 of the book of Nehemiah unveils several of the enemy's strategies: *“It happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, ‘Come, let us meet together among [in one of] the villages in the plain of Ono!’ But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, ‘I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you!’ But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner”* (Neh. 6:1-4).



## Breaking the Silence

Clearly, Nehemiah knew that his enemies had but one purpose behind their scheming tactics — to frustrate the process of building the wall. Since violence and intimidation did not work, they resorted to compromise, deceit, and subversion. Nehemiah was a man of integrity with a whole-hearted dedication to God’s cause. So he immediately became aware of the tricks of his enemies, recognizing that they had not changed their mind about God’s kingdom. Although they appeared to want peace, Nehemiah knew their true motivation and did not even consider their offer. Consequently, he refused to delay the “*great work*” by engaging in empty talks. To him, such talks meant “*coming down.*”

### Reject Slanderous Rumors

Once the enemies realized that their tactics had failed again, they adopted a new approach — gossip and slander: “*Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand*” (Neh. 6:5).

This was not an accepted practice. A governor like Sanballat would never send an unsealed letter to another governor. But this time he intentionally sent an open letter so that it could be read by anyone. The words “*open letter*” in this passage are very significant and should be interpreted in the light of this particular historical setting.

The letter read: “*It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now these matters will be reported to the king [of Persia]. So come, therefore, and let us consult together*” (Neh. 6:6-7).

Note the relationship between rebuilding the wall and proclaiming a king. Note also that proclaiming oneself as king was considered

## God's Strength for a Great Work

rebellion. All the rumors had but one purpose which Nehemiah reveals in verse 9: *“For they all were trying to make us afraid saying, ‘Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done’”* (Neh. 6:9a). All Nehemiah did in reaction to this new approach of the enemy was to send back a message, saying: *“No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart”* (Neh. 6:8). He also turned to His God and prayed: *“Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands”* (Neh. 6:9b).

God's remnant involved in the great work of proclaiming His kingdom must, like Nehemiah, refuse to pay attention to rumors of self-exaltation and self-seeking kingdoms. The remnant rebuild the fallen walls, not for their own kingdom, but for the return of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. If they fall into the trap of fearing every rumor, their hands will be weakened and the work will not go forward.

## Discern False Prophets

One of the last deceptions used by the enemy was to deploy false prophets to frighten Nehemiah and his workers and to deter them from continuing their good work (Neh. 6:10-14). This is one of the most dangerous and forceful devices Satan has used to frustrate God's work. The Lord cautions us: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Matt. 7:15).

Who are false prophets? They are those who, in one way or another, discourage God's people from proclaiming His kingdom. Jesus did not leave us in the dark when He spoke about false prophets: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets...”* (Matt. 7:13-15a).

## Breaking the Silence

These false prophets lead many to the wide gate and broad way which lead to destruction. “*The many*” who enter are their fruits, as Jesus said, “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Matt. 7:16a). True prophets and ministers of the gospel lead the children of God to the narrow gate and the difficult way. They know that every believer has to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give account for the works done in his body. In this context, the Lord Jesus said: “*Not everyone [in the broad way] who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who [in the difficult way] does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’*” (Matt. 7:21-23).

The Lord’s command here is very clear and emphatic — “*Beware of false prophets*”! False prophets in Nehemiah’s time, knowingly or unknowingly, contributed to the frustration of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. It is no different today. False prophets do not preach the gospel of the kingdom and, directly or indirectly, resist it. Believers who enter through the narrow gate and walk the difficult way will be rewarded. Nehemiah was a true member of the remnant, a leader who recognized every deceit of the enemy.

## Finish God’s Work

“*So the wall was finished... And it happened that when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that **this work was done by our God***” (Neh. 6:15-16). Perhaps, the most significant word in this statement is “*So,*” because it reminds us of how difficult and how dangerous the work had been. Regardless of the

## God's Strength for a Great Work

difficulty and danger, the work was of God and was accomplished by Him through His faithful remnant. The wall was the outwardly visible symbol of both the kingdom and the remnant. God's kingdom included all the remnant who were its guardians until the arrival of the King.

The efforts of Nehemiah and the people are characterized by caution, courage, and passionate persistence against all opposing forces. The enemy had first begun in contempt, then proceeded with conspiracy, and finally turned to subtlety. But against every method of the enemy, the remnant proved unshakable. Nothing affected them until the wall was finished. This strength against opposition was the result of a clear understanding of the greatness of their task. God's walls are always built in this manner. He leads, guides, and brings about circumstances to help His workers who are in the "*good work*" and "*great work*" of living His kingdom life and proclaiming His kingdom message. The remnant goes about the good work in resolute refusal of allowing anything from within or without to hinder them. May we learn from this fascinating portion of God's Word, as we continue to do our share in the "*good work*" of this era and generation.

# 24

## Complacent Symptoms of the Last Remnant

*“Having a form of godliness, but denying its power.”* 2 Tim. 3:5

### Criteria of the Kingdom Gospel

My intention in reviewing the first section of the book of Nehemiah (chapters 1-7) was to demonstrate the paramount importance of the wall of Jerusalem to the remnant. They realized that Jerusalem would not be a strong kingdom if it did not become a walled city. They worked with all their energy to rebuild the wall, and God helped them in this “*good work*.” Consecration and consolidation could only take place when the city was declared a kingdom and the people had taken their place in it.

In Nehemiah’s time, although the temple had been repaired and consecrated, Jerusalem did not become a kingdom, a testimony of God’s sovereignty to all nations, until its walls were erected. In Christianity, “salvation by grace” is like a city without walls. It is only after the gospel of the kingdom is practiced and preached to all nations that the end will come. We must make an earnest attempt to make God’s people

## Breaking the Silence

see that *salvation* and *kingdom* are not the same; that *grace* and *reward* are two different aspects of our new life in Christ; that *redemption* is a gift by grace, whereas the kingdom of heaven is a reward of maturity.

### Prophets of the Restoration Period

Chronologically, Nehemiah was the last of the remnant in the Old Testament, but the Old Testament closes with the book of Malachi. I am awestruck when I think of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the order of the books of the Bible. Let us find out what was so special about the ministry of Malachi the prophet, which made his book the last book of the Old Testament.

Malachi, like Haggai and Zechariah, was a restoration prophet. The restoration period began when the remnant returned to their homeland, away from the comforts and security of Persia. They traveled long distances to rebuild the kingdom of God in a small corner of the earth. The world looked at them with contempt, but God looked at them with pleasure. This poor, insignificant group of people was the focus of a great, universal, cosmic warfare. Everything depended on them. God was watching them, and so was Satan. God was well-pleased with them because they were about to declare His kingdom on earth. Satan was apprehensive and angry, because he and his kingdom were being challenged by this small group.

Because of their unfaithfulness to God's will and purpose, all of the children of Israel were taken captive by Babylon, which was later conquered by the Persian Empire. Years later, the king of Persia, inspired by the Lord, allowed the Jewish people to return to their homeland to rebuild Jerusalem. Only certain Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a prince of Judah, and Ezra, a priest, returned to the Promised Land, rebuilt the altar, and offered sacrifices to the Lord.

## **Complacent Symptoms of the Last Remnant**

Then, the wall around Jerusalem was erected under the leadership of Nehemiah. This period, between the return of the people and the completion of the wall of Jerusalem, is called the restoration period.

During this period, God raised up three prophets who were known as ‘restoration prophets’. Haggai and Zechariah appeared on the scene during the reconstruction of the temple and the altar, encouraging the remnant to persist in the good work they had undertaken. Malachi, however, appeared on the scene after the reconstruction of the wall.

### **Malachi in its Historical Setting**

To understand the writings of Malachi, we must be aware of two important points: one, that Malachi was a prophet in the restoration period, and two, that he was a prophet to the remnant. What ensues from these points is that the book of Malachi only applies to those who stand on the ground of the kingdom and see themselves as doing the will of the kingdom. The prophecies of Malachi cannot and should not be applied to all the Jews, but only to the remnant.

A look at the historical background of the book of Malachi shows us that the temple had been repaired, the altar erected, and the sacrifices offered. The people were consecrated and consolidated. They had been taught the Law, and for a brief period had practiced what they had learned. But they had gradually started to question the wisdom of their standing, which was in contrast to the rest of the Jews scattered all over the world. They had prepared the way for the Messianic King, but the delay of His coming had made them question the principles on which they had stood. Eventually, there was no reality in their religious rituals anymore. There was no joy and anticipation in their worship. They had begun giving in to the pressures of day to day life, compromising their principles, and becoming complacent.

## Breaking the Silence

Malachi directed his message of judgment to a remnant plagued with corrupt priests, wicked practices, and a false sense of security in their privileged relationship with God. The people who were supposed to represent God's kingdom had lost heart. They were disillusioned, because the great prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah had not yet been fulfilled. As their faith turned into cynicism, they began questioning God's providence. This attitude translated itself into mechanical observances, empty rituals, cheating on tithes and offerings, and indifference to God's moral and ceremonial laws. The priests were also corrupt and their practices wicked. They were so insensitive spiritually that they wondered why God was not blessing them. In such a setting, Malachi brought the Word of God. The last word in the Old Testament is a word of warning to the remnant.

### Remnant under a Reality Check

Using a series of questions and answers, Malachi sought to pierce their hearts of stone. No other prophet has confronted the remnant as Malachi. Despite their corruption, the remnant were proud of their knowledge of remnant principles, but their knowledge was without faith and practice. Through Malachi, God said in effect, "Don't fool yourselves! You will all stand in judgment, but not all shall be rewarded." Malachi's words were bitter medicine for the remnant of his time. Yet it is good medicine for the remnant today. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done [not, according to what he has believed], whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10).

As the last days are fast approaching, the words of Malachi are truly applicable to the remnant of the Christian faith. Let us be forewarned by the six questions the remnant of God's people asked in Malachi: How



## Complacent Symptoms of the Last Remnant

has God loved us (Mal. 1:2-5)? How have we despised God's name (Mal. 1:6-2:9)? How have we profaned God's covenant (Mal. 2:10-16)? How have we wearied God (Mal. 2:17-3:6)? How have we robbed God (Mal. 3:7-12)? How have we spoken against God (Mal. 3:13-15)?

According to the prophet Malachi, the remnant were in effect sneering at God. Their rebellion was quiet and hidden. As they grew complacent and disillusioned, materialism and externalism penetrated their religion, characteristics which later became the tragic traits of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The remnant should remain true to their calling, or else they will be in danger of becoming hypocrites who have "*a form of godliness, but denying its power*" (2 Tim. 3:5).

# 25

## Prophetic Answers to the Last Remnant

*“Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”* Mal. 1:2b-3a

After the restoration period, the remnant was fast becoming unfaithful and corrupt. Their many questions were symptoms of their failure to satisfy God. But to each of their questions, God had an answer.

### Loved?

The remnant’s first question was directed at God, and it was very displeasing to Him: *“In what way have You loved us?”* (Mal. 1:2b). They deliberately overlooked the words with which Malachi’s message from the Lord had started: *“I have loved you, says the Lord”* (Mal. 1:2a). God’s remnant had forgotten that God’s love was the key note of His message. The tense of the verb *“have loved”* in the original, is not past, but continuous. God’s statement of His unfailing love is most interesting and unbelievable — especially in the face of people who had lost their love for God. They were a remnant who — despite their temple services,

## Breaking the Silence

sacrificial offerings, and formal religious observances — had lost their love for God. Love toward God should have been the outstanding mark of a true remnant. The loss of this first love is what the ascended Christ reproached the church in Ephesus for: *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (Rev. 2:4). Is this love not what Jesus expects from His remnant, especially from a remnant who will immediately precede His coming?

God’s answer to the remnant’s question is so beautiful and profound: *“‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ says the Lord. ‘Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated’”* (Mal. 1:2b-3a). By giving them the example of Esau and Jacob, God confirms to the remnant how profoundly He loves them. Esau and Jacob both were Isaac’s sons; however Esau despised his birthright, while Jacob coveted it. This birthright was an inheritance passed on from generation to generation, starting with Abraham: *“I give to you and your descendants after you the land”*; and, *“multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”* (cf. Gen. 17:8; 22:17-18). The inheritance was in fact God’s people forming God’s kingdom. The apostle Paul uses the same argument about Esau and Jacob in the book of Romans, where he shows that God’s election of the heirs of the kingdom is based on whether they covet or despise their birthright. Esau would always remain Isaac’s son, but not his heir, because he sold the rights of his inheritance.

Believers also may, under certain circumstances, sell the birthright of their inheritance, but they cannot sell their ‘born-again’ status. That is, they cannot lose their salvation, but they can forfeit the right to their reward. It is in this particular matter of reward that we may either secure God’s love, as Jacob did, or His hatred, as Esau did.

## Prophetic Answers to the Last Remnant

If the people had despised their privileged standing and not cared for God's kingdom, as Esau had done, they would have become the objects of God's hatred. But by leaving the comforts of Persia, and returning to their kingdom inheritance, they had showed that, like Jacob, they were coveting the birthright. Thus, they had become the objects of God's love. The very fact that they were standing in Jerusalem and had not dispersed all over the Persian Empire should have convinced them that they were standing on the right ground which secured God's love.

### Contempt?

Malachi continued to show the remnant that they were not taking their rights and privileges seriously, thus displeasing God: "*But you ask, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'*" (Mal. 1:6b). And the Lord told them how: "*You offer defiled food on My altar*" (Mal 1:7a).

They only brought to the Lord what was useless or worthless to them, gifts that were defective. In a way, they were confessing that they no longer cared for God's kingdom. With this same attitude, they continued the religious acts of keeping the temple door open and offering daily sacrifices. The Lord, however, told them that he did not care for their religious appearance and pious formalities. He expected a real, living "*priestly kingdom*" from a remnant who would declare and live out His kingdom life. His purpose was, and still is, that He be recognized continuously as the ultimate Sovereign Ruler of all creation, including the earth: "*For I am a great King,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and My name is to be feared among the nations'*" (Mal. 1:14b).

### Wearied?

God's righteousness was also being questioned; for this reason, the Lord said: "*Yet you say, 'In what way have we wearied Him?'* In that

## Breaking the Silence

you say, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them,’ or ‘Where is the God of justice?’” (Mal. 2:17b). They claimed to be the remnant, yet they attributed unrighteousness and injustice to God.

The Lord knew that His people were disillusioned and discouraged. He knew that they had lost heart, because the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah had not yet been fulfilled. So He gave them a word of encouragement which was also a word of warning: “*Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts*” (Mal. 3:1).

In other words, the Lord was saying, “I know you seek Me and desire the coming of the Messenger of the covenant. I know you left the comforts of Persia and came here to rebuild Jerusalem for My purpose. I know you are My remnant out of all the Jewish people who were taken captive. It is for this reason that I love you. But you have lost heart. You have become disillusioned, disappointed, and discouraged. Your priests have become wicked. And, you are attributing unrighteousness to Me...”

The word “*Behold*” at the beginning of the verse contains all of God’s explanation and exhortation. It is as though He is telling them to wait, be patient, bear with Him, not compromise, not sell their birthright, not give up their inheritance as Esau did, to persevere, and ‘*the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple*’.

## Enduring?

*“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’*

## Prophetic Answers to the Last Remnant

*soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver” (Mal. 3:2-3a).*

The Lord cautions the remnant that their claims of being the remnant will not exempt them from standing at the judgment seat of God, if they do not persevere to the end.

Along the same line, the apostle Paul says: *“If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:12-15).* They whose work survives are the true remnant. They will receive the reward. There is no favoritism with the Lord. Paul reminds the believers of this principle with two more references: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).* *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29).*

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John also reminds us of the fiery quality of the Lord: *“His eyes like a flame of fire” (Rev. 1:14).*

The Lord continues: *“For I am the Lord, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6a).* The question of all questions proposed to the remnant of God’s people in this and every age must be: *“Do you think God is changeable? Do you think you who claim to be the remnant of a corrupted Christianity will survive if you do not continue to the end? Do you think that by claiming to be the remnant and knowing the principles, you will survive the fire of the judgment seat of Christ? Are you going to be found naked and disqualified of the inheritance? Are you merely a*

## Breaking the Silence

nominal remnant to whom Malachi prophesies, or are you the true ‘remnant of the remnant’?”?

### Stealing?

The Lord’s word for us today is the same as it was to the remnant of Malachi’s day, the last remnant before the appearing of the Lord: *“Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts... You have robbed [stolen from] Me.”* But like the remnant of old, we may ask, *“In what way have we robbed [stolen from] You?”* And the Lord’s answer is, *“In tithes and offerings”* (Mal. 3:7-8).

In our highly materialistic societies, we tend to steal from God by not giving to Him what belongs to Him. A kingdom principle which cannot be changed or altered is that one tenth of all we earn belongs to God. Assuming we live in countries where laws are observed, what would our government do if we cheated on our tax returns?!

We can either pay our dues to God’s kingdom or steal from Him. Yes, many Christian ministers and organizations are corrupt and embezzle charitable donations, but this is not an excuse for us not to find an honest ministry to which we can bring our tithes and offerings. If we are honest members of a local church that stands on the ground of the kingdom, we must pay tithes to the Lord in our church. If not, then we must find a kingdom-preaching church, and send our tithes and offerings to that church in the Lord’s name. This does not only apply to finances, but also to all that we are and all that we have, including our time.

### Proud?

The Lord may have another charge against us: *“Your words have been harsh against Me.”* We may ask, *“What have we spoken against You?”* The Lord replies, *“You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God;*

## Prophetic Answers to the Last Remnant

*what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free”* (Mal. 3:13-15).

We must search ourselves to find out if we have fallen to a similar low state. Are we proud of our knowledge and accomplishments? Are we proud of having left the world, come out from among the denominations, and discerned the “Body of Christ”? Are we proud of having seen the difference between ‘salvation’ and ‘kingdom’? Are we proud of having seen the principle of the remnant? Are we proud of our knowledge about our birthright? And yet, do we say in our heart: *“In what way has God loved us? ... In what way have we despised God’s name? ... In what way have we defiled God? ... In what way have we wearied God? ... In what way have we robbed God? ... What have we spoken against God?”*

If our answer to any of these questions is “yes,” then we must return to God. Do not lose heart. Persevere and run the race set before you, or the Lord will say, *“Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse”* (Mal. 4:6).

So ends the prophecy of Malachi, and so closes the Old Testament. When Jewish rabbis read this passage, they never end with verse 6, but go back and repeat verse 5, and then verse 4. No one wants to end on the word “*curse*”. But although the last word is “*curse*,” the last thought is not. Rather, the emphasis is on the word “*lest*”. This suggests a way of escape from the curse – of losing the birthright and the inheritance. If the remnant realize the enormity of the task and the importance of the message entrusted to their care, if they do not lose heart, if they teach the succeeding generation the truth of God’s kingdom, and do their part in upholding this truth, eventually *“the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come... the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, He is coming”* (Mal. 3:1).



# 26

## Brighter Revelations, Unparalleled Blessings

*“So there was great joy in Jerusalem ... there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.”* 2 Chron. 30:26

### The Remnant's Richer Rewards

God's promises are unchangeable; so also stands the promise: *“I will make the lame **a remnant**, and the outcast a strong nation”* (Micah 4:7). His priestly kingdom is not composed of the strongest, but of the weakest, lest anyone should boast.

The closer we get to the time of His appearance, the brighter the light of His revelation shines to the remnant who have eyes to see and ears to hear. God intensifies the light of His revelation to keep the remnant of His people encouraged and strong. He knows that the majority of His people will not have the heart to persevere to the end, and that only a minority will stand with Him and for Him until the battle is completely won.

## Breaking the Silence

Because of their covenants and their privileged relationship with the Lord, Israel assumed guaranteed 'heirship.' But to shatter any such illusion, God declared to Israel through Isaiah the prophet: "*Though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea [His promise to Abraham], a remnant of them will return*" (Isa. 10:22).

God spoke through Ezekiel: "*Yet I will leave a remnant*" (Ezek. 6:8). God has His eye on the remnant, to keep them and bless them. He conveyed through Jeremiah: "*I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries*" (Jer. 23:3). He expressed through Ezekiel: "*Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, both sons and daughters; surely they will come out*" (Ezek. 14:22).

This promise continues through the Old Testament and follows through the New Testament, until it is finally consummated in the book of Revelation. In Isaiah, the Lord asserted to His people: "*It shall come to pass in that Day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left*" (Isa. 11:11).

The Lord constantly keeps His promise before the eyes of His people. Through Zechariah, He heralded: "*For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew — I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these*" (Zech. 8:12).

The word "*remnant*" in these verses points not to the survivors of the captivity, as it is often incorrectly assumed. Rather, its focus is on the faithful remnant both from among the nation of Israel and from among the captives — those who chose not to bow before other gods and continued to uphold God's kingdom by worshiping Jehovah at His altar. The remnant is not composed of gentiles or unbelievers, but of the faithful from among believers who do not bow before any other kingdom but the kingdom of God. They do not condone mixed worship, and refuse to present strange fire on God's altar. They are known and

## Brighter Revelations, Unparalleled Blessings

marked by God, and a great reward is in store for them (cf. Ezek. 6:1-10; 9:1-11; 11:1-25; Rev. 22:4).

The mere fact that the Bible mentions the word “*remnant*” or “*overcomer*” proves the failure of the greater sector of the visible church. If all were faithful and the whole visible church were overcoming, it would be needless to establish the moral ground which distinguishes a minority (remnant) from the majority. And awaiting the faithful is a distinct reward — not only a future reward, but a present one as well. Can we see the current failure and ruin in Christendom? Do we wish to come to God’s true altar and worship Him in “*spirit and truth*”? As I mentioned earlier, the closer we get to His return, the brighter the light of His revelation. The deeper the darkness and corruption into which the majority sinks, the richer the displays of the divine glory and grace which His chosen remnant see and enjoy.

## The Remnant’s Greater Joy

In order to better understand the present reward and blessings of the remnant, we must quickly review a few incidents from the history of Israel.

In 2 Chronicles 30, we read of a Passover celebrated during the reign of Hezekiah. Hezekiah had succeeded his father Ahaz, one of the most corrupt and evil kings of Judah, to the throne. But under the guidance and teachings of the great prophet Isaiah, Hezekiah had learned to stand on the ground of God’s kingdom: “*He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept the commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went*” (2 Kings 18:5-7).

This is a great compliment for any human being, and the Holy Spirit

## Breaking the Silence

penned this honorable tribute to Hezekiah as a permanent Scriptural record. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been defeated and taken captive by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. Judah had become corrupt under Ahaz, Hezekiah's father. But as soon as Hezekiah took over, he enforced the reforms that the Lord had expected from other kings. He kept the commands the Lord had given Moses, among which was the celebration of **the Passover**.

Pages could be written about the Passover, but suffice it is to say that this feast was a memorial to bring into view redemption, upon which all other blessings rest. King Hezekiah based everything of his God-ordained reforms on the sure foundation of redemption by the blood of the Lamb, as commanded to Moses by God. He acted as one of God's real remnant.

2 Chronicles 30 goes on to convey the divine grace bestowed upon those who truly confess their failures and weaknesses. These people did not pretend to be what they were not. We see no sign of pretense, hardness of heart, or any effort to hide the true condition of their hearts. They were willing to celebrate the Passover in the prescribed manner, even if the time-frame was not as indicated by Moses. They were willing to go back to the foundations of their faith: *“So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem”* (2 Chron. 30:26).

Since the days of Solomon, such a Passover had not been celebrated. Although nothing around them came close to the glorious days of Solomon, yet the remnant were now celebrating the Passover. Many were laughing at Hezekiah's messengers, because as always, his act of faith was not understood. But those, who came to the feast and joined in with God's people and the remnant, were joyfully blessed. Those who mocked it and were absent from the feast, however, missed the

## Brighter Revelations, Unparalleled Blessings

blessings. This Passover was a very sweet and meaningful celebration to God.

### The Remnant's Better Blessing

Now we move to the days of Josiah — the greatest of the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. It is necessary to remember that he was the **last** of the remnant kings before the captivity of Judah. His reforms were very decisive and thorough.

The days of Judah were numbered and darkness had set upon it. Despite Josiah's reforms, the nation was on an irreversible course of destruction. All Josiah managed to accomplish was to postpone the judgment. The people had been corrupted beyond repair. But even in such a disastrous condition, the Lord had His remnant who were led by Josiah; to them the light of God's revelation shone even brighter than before.

*“Josiah kept a **Passover** to the Lord in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the first month. There has been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem”* (2 Chron. 35:1; 18).

I must note that the closer the Jewish people got to the end of their freedom, the celebration of the Passover became more glorious. Hezekiah's Passover celebration is compared to Solomon's time; Josiah's Passover celebration is compared to the more glorious days of Samuel the prophet. But both of these celebrations came out of the darkest days of decline and degradation. Consequently, the darker the days, the greater the light and blessing enjoyed by the remnant.

# 27

## **Present Rewards and Treasured Remembrances**

*“A book of remembrance was written before Him ... They shall be Mine, says the Lord ... My jewels.”* Malachi 3:16-17

### **The Remnant’s Burning Heart**

Soon after Josiah died, the nation once again turned back to the altars of Baal. Then God’s long-delayed judgment came over a nation which was comprised of Judah and the survivors of Israel. Jerusalem was besieged and eventually destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The people who escaped the sword were taken captive to Babylon. All of the surrounding nations and the enemies of God’s people assumed that the people of God were finished. But God never leaves Himself without a testimony on the earth!

Even during the long and terrible Babylonian captivity, we can find some true hearts. A small group of men and women who loved the Lord and were true to His Word and His work cleaved to one another. They

## Breaking the Silence

were willing to pay a price for the sake of maintaining their testimony for the Lord. Although the Lord's altar was nowhere to be seen, they kept the fire of the altar lit in their hearts.

Although Baal had succeeded in setting up his altar in the form of Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue, the remnant did not bow before it. They knew God's faithfulness. They knew that if they stood for God, God would stand for them. Although the whole nation had failed, a remnant remained true and loyal to Jehovah against all odds. It was from among this remnant in captivity that God selected Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild His temple, erect His altar, rebuild the wall, and proclaim to all nations that Jehovah is King.

## The Remnant's Consummate Revelation

A particular event, mentioned in Nehemiah 8, shows us how richly God's mercy was manifested to His remnant regardless of how hard and dark the days may have seemed.

The people of Israel had begun reading and understanding the Word of God under the leadership of Ezra the scribe. The Lord unveiled their eyes: *"And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem..."* (Neh. 8:14-15).

People responded in obedience and celebrated the **Feast of Tabernacles**: *"The whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness"* (Neh. 8:17).

Hallelujah! We see a small, weak remnant gathered around the Word of God. As they identified themselves with God and His Word,

## Present Rewards and Treasured Remembrances

the Lord anointed them, leading them to understand that it was imperative to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Why was it so important that this time they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and not the Passover? The Feast of Tabernacles was both a memorial feast and a prophetic feast. It was memorial as to redemption, and prophetic as to the kingdom.

As the remnant responded to the proclamation of the kingdom which preceded the actual coming of the Lord, the blessing became proportionately **greater**. The Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated since the days of Joshua. It was now celebrated by an insignificant remnant who had just returned from captivity. All through the days of the Judges, Samuel, the kings, even during the days of the glorious reign of David and Solomon, the Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated. This revelation was preserved for a small, weak, insignificant, despised remnant rising from the midst of the ruins of Jerusalem. The odds against them were enormous, but so were the blessings bestowed upon them. King Hezekiah's blessings went as far back as *the great glorious days of Solomon*. King Josiah's blessing went back further to *the greater glorious days of Samuel*. But now, the blessing of the remnant in the post-captivity era, who celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, went all the way back to the original feast in *the greatest glorious days of Joshua*. Joshua is a type of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Was their call for a celebration a form of arrogant pride or unrealistic presumption? Absolutely not! In the eyes of the world, they were insignificant, non-effective, and despised. In the eyes of God, however, they were important, cherished, and honored. The revelation of the Feast of Tabernacles was granted to the last of the recorded remnant before their Messianic King actually appeared. No generation



## Breaking the Silence

before this last remnant had ever celebrated or received the revelation of this feast.

In these latter days, while the religious world is getting darker, the light of God's revelation is becoming brighter. The closer we get to the actual appearance of our King, the brighter the light of the revelation of His glory. The Feast of Tabernacles represented in type the blessed Millennial Kingdom. Today, many Christians celebrate the Passover and try to obtain the blessings that come with it. But we need to see that it is **the last generation of the remnant** who will see and celebrate the kingdom. This revelation is reserved for those who will precede the second appearance of Jesus, the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Therefore, the present reward for the last generation of the remnant is this revelation of the kingdom.

### The Remnant's Precious Remembrance

There is another present reward for the remnant. Malachi provides us with this wonderful truth: *"Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a **book of remembrance** was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. 'They shall be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on that day that I make them My jewels [My special treasure]. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.' Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him"* (Mal. 3:16-18).

What a contrast and what a blessing! The prospects for this Jewish remnant were as dark as it could ever be. But great were the blessings of those who trusted in His Word and served Him by upholding the banner of His kingdom. Their outwards circumstances may have been as dire as the remnant had ever experienced, but the blessings pronounced and the

## Present Rewards and Treasured Remembrances

revelations granted were the greatest and unparalleled in the annals of their history.

Such a book of remembrance was not opened during the brilliant victories of Joshua, or the great accomplishments of David, or the building of the splendid temple of Solomon. But the words, works, and the faithfulness of this small remnant amidst such a great ruin were so refreshing to the heart of God, that He had a book of remembrance written about them, always keeping them before His eyes, never letting them be forgotten. They were closer to God's heart than the singers and the trumpet players of Solomon's temple.

Why did this remnant deserve such an honor? Because they simply stood on the ground of God's kingdom, believed in His faithfulness and His promises, and "*spoke to one another.*" They did not converse about politics, fashion, business or pleasure. Rather, what they did was to "*fear the Lord and meditate on His name.*" They contemplated His names and titles. They contemplated what Isaiah the prophet had said about Him — Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. They contemplated the Seed, the Shiloh of Judah, the Lord our righteousness, the Branch of David, the Morning Star, the Messenger of the covenant. They contemplated the wonders of His name. To them, God's name was precious. In return, their names became precious to God, and therefore "*a book of remembrance was written before Him.*"

Persia, Rome, and other empires built magnificent altars and multitudes came from far and wide to bow down to them. In the meantime, in the humble city of Jerusalem, in the humble temple repaired by Ezra and Zerubbabel, stood a humble altar. On it, a humble remnant kept burning the fire of the Lord. They were bold enough to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, thus declaring God's Kingdom. And the result was this monumental testimony:

## **Breaking the Silence**

*“And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage” (Ezra 9:8)*