

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Judgment: Certain

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old. (Daniel 5:17-31)

Generally Scripture portrays God's judgment against wicked men as delayed till the Second Coming, but this is by no means always the case. In our present study we see a dramatic revelation of God's immediate judgment against Babylon and her king. By sunup the next day the judgment that God revealed in the "handwriting on the wall" had come to pass. No one can sin with impunity and believe that divine judgment will ignore the sin. Numbers 32:23 makes the point with clarity, "...be sure your sin will find you out." And, based on our present study, we should not dismiss all of God's judgments as delayed till the final Day. (Ecclesiastes 12:14 as one of many "judgment" passages) Paul indicates that, even within the family of God, stubborn sin is liable to bring immediate and decisive divine judgment. (1 Corinthians 11:30) No doubt God's primary judgment against His own dear children is designed to be corrective, but our failure to respond to the chastening rod may bring immediate judgment upon us as was the case with those in the Corinthian church who refused to correct their sinful view of the Lord's Supper and suffered either significant health problems or death because of their refusal to obey.

Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. God does not reserve these grave words for an obscure Babylonian ruler. He pronounces them against all fallen humanity. He also pronounces them at times against His own children. Our passage indicates that a lifted up heart and a mind hardened in pride lay at the core of Nebuchadnezzar's fall, his ancestor who ruled in Babylon before him.

Solomon warns us that this deceitful spirit of pride is far more pervasive than merely a resident in king's palaces. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) In fact Paul affirms that this heart-hardening spirit of pride may invade the family of God and even men who might otherwise be profitable in the ministry.

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:6)

Pride is a major danger to any young "wannabe" preacher. In fact it has destroyed many seasoned mature ministries as well.

God's stern warning, "...weighed in the balances and found wanting," cannot be taken lightly. Scripture often documents God's immediate and grave judgment against sin. It is a grievous error to presume that God suspends all judgment till the final Day.

In the context of the blessings of the New Covenant Paul (I believe) in Hebrews 10 warns against a negligent attitude or habit toward our gathering in the public assembly of the church with our brothers and sisters (Hebrews 10:25; do not overlook Verse 24; you cannot possibly provoke anyone to love and to good works if you are absent from their presence). When he moves in the next verse to willful sin and the certainty of God's judgment, the contextual weight of the passage strongly points us to the specific sin of neglected assembling in the church. He concludes this rather frightening passage with a clear application of its warnings to God's children and to the present time.

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30-31)

Notice the specific application of the passage. "The Lord shall judge his people." Also notice the immediacy of the application, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He did not write, "It shall be a fearful thing..." but rather, "It *is* a fearful thing...." In the case of the Hebrews the problem of neglect grew out of intense persecution and the ensuing discouragement. In our day the problem of neglected attendance more often grows out of pride. The person who turns away from faithful attendance and support of one's church didn't get his/her way about something, or someone said or did something that the individual took wrongly and reacted wrongly, "He/She hurt my feelings." Scripture affirms that God's intent with specific local membership in a New Testament church and faithful support of and attendance at that church are far more important than our emotions, our "feelings." How would you like to stand up and preach to people who "hurt your feelings"? Every preacher who has served as pastor for any length of time has had just such an experience, but the faithful minister of the gospel knows that his calling and service to the family of God is not based on his personal emotions. It has been my fifty-year experience that those bruised emotions typically heal and get worked out far more quickly and fully when we continue faithful in our service than when we nurse and magnify them. To deal with just such personal issues, Jesus taught us how do resolve

them in a rather extensive lesson, the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. This lesson is not about church discipline, but about following Jesus' directions when we do encounter those moments of personal offense. Why do Christians practice this model of godly conduct so seldom? I suggest that pride lies at the heart of the typical refusal to approach the offending brother or sister, surface the problem, and sincerely try to talk through it and get over it. Ah, once again we hear the echo from the throne room, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."

There is a growing fantasy in our contemporary Christian society that rejects specific membership in a given local church assembly. According to this fantasy, where ever you happen to attend church on a given Sunday is "your" church for that day. So you can go to four churches in a month and be a member of each church at least for one Sunday. This idea can claim no Biblical support whatever. Such an impersonal and unassociated view of church membership leaves the individual void of supervision, Biblical discipline, and it also leaves the individual void of lasting and meaningful fellowship with other believers. It is the ultimate Western "Do your own thing" flavor of non-Biblical Christian pretense. Thus it in fact puts such a person in specific violation of the warning in Hebrews the tenth chapter to not forsake our assembly, and it thus also puts the individual directly under the fearful judgment that the passage describes.

Are churches perfect specimens of Christianity? No they are not. In fact if you ever find that perfect church, please tell me about it, for, if I were to attend it, its perfection would immediately cease. The Lord designed and instituted the New Testament principle of the local church, not to be the perfect model of the Christian life and faith, but to be a place where believers meet, encourage each other, admonish each other (Yes, we all need admonition, so we should not become so prideful as to take great offense if a brother or sister cares enough to admonish us), and grow in their common faith. In fact many contemporary churches boast of their ability to gain great numbers of new converts, but quite often they never bother to confess the staggering reality that a large per cent of their new converts exit the side door in a few short years. A New Testament church should cultivate permanence and maturity in its members, not a multitude of temporary Christians.

How do we attain this permanence? We start by solid and consistent teaching, not just about how to live, important as lifestyle is to New Testament Christianity, but also about what we believe and how our belief impacts our life.

Anyone who neglects to teach a cohesive and clear doctrinal message either doesn't know what he believes, or he avoids preaching it to keep others from knowing what he does believe. In the sad process he will also nurture superficial "store-front" believers who look very pretty on Sunday morning for a while, but, when life's certain difficulties challenge their faith, they are unprepared and unequipped, so they look for the exit door.

Hardened hearts in pride are as significant for us in our time as they were for a Babylonian king in his palace.

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