

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## God's Kingdom: Impossible for Godless Humans to Grasp

*And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king. (Daniel 2:44-49)*

As Daniel interacts with the various officials of Babylon during his seventy or more years in exile, we see a rather consistent problem. Repeatedly the king is confronted with a problem, Daniel or one of his three friends answer the pressing question or solve the critical issue at hand. They are recognized and promoted. However, the next time a demanding problem occurs Babylon's highest and best leaders seem to have utterly forgotten about the wisdom and integrity of the Hebrews. They look to every source available within their pagan circle and only seek help from God's men after exhausting all other resources. Another recurring behavior that we witness is that, once the Hebrews provide the help requested, the Babylonian leaders miss the real point. They worship the Hebrew men, but they give bare lip-service to the God of the Hebrews. Will they ever learn? Perhaps one of them eventually did learn, but only after God's intervening grace worked with effectual power in the man's life. We'll save him for a later study.

The real problem that we see in the Babylonians is not at all different from the problems we see in modern man apart from God's intervening and saving grace. The distinction between paganism, or atheism, and belief in and true worship of God is far more profound than a mere difference in philosophy. The transition cannot occur by the sinner simply changing his mind and embracing a Christian worldview. In fact, according to Scripture, an unregenerate sinner cannot grasp the spiritual things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:14) They are both alien to him and foolishness to him. And, according to Scripture, he is dead both to them and to God—dead,

spiritually dead. (Ephesians 2:1) Thus to think that convincing such a sinner to change his worldview would be as foolish as an attempt to reason on yesterday's news with a dead person in the morgue. This person is both unaware of yesterday's news, and wholly lacks the life and related abilities of reasoning and memory necessary to process that news and reach any thoughts regarding it. (John 8:43) According to Scripture, natural, unregenerate man is capable of studying God's wonders in nature and concluding that there is a God, along with significant facts regarding His power. (Romans 1:20) However, even what these fallen, spiritually dead people are capable of comprehending regarding God, they knowingly reject. (Job 21:14; Romans 3:10-18, which of the manifest traits in these people either seeks or demonstrates the slightest ability to please God?)

In the case of Daniel's interaction with the various Babylonian leaders God so powerfully demonstrated His power that they could not deny the truth of what they saw, but their sinful hearts were so dead to God and so set in contradiction against Him that they demonstrate neither the ability nor the interest in "getting it right." They readily bow and worship Daniel, but they are not so receptive to Daniel's God. And on the few occasions when they acknowledge Daniel's God, their concept more demonstrates a warped and confused perception than a right sense of God. Someone recently described human-centric philosophy as being similar to a man in a pitch black room, looking for a black cat—that isn't there. Such a philosophy, or any philosophy for that matter, cannot span the chasm that exists

between God and sinful man. That impossible chasm can never be bridged by any effort or by any contribution from fallen, sinful humans. God alone must build the bridge, and God alone must resurrect the dead spirit of sinful man and bring him across the chasm, from the "...power of darkness...into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13) For modern Christians to think that they have the power to transform either themselves or others from alienation to God into God's family, from death to life, is no less futile than the blindness of Babylon's leaders as they repeatedly misunderstood and confused the nature and character of the God of the Hebrew exiles. Once God imparts eternal life by His own grace alone, not by any synergistic participation from the sinner, He fills our lives with commandments and examples that He directs us to follow, giving us the possibility of filling our lives with godly fruitfulness to His glory. He gives us a will that is as new and different as the life that He gave us in the new birth, a will that seeks above all else His will and His glory, something that we did not formerly possess at all.

The whole distinction between a person whom God has changed by grace in the new birth and a "born-again" person is instructively paralleled in the very analogy of Scripture that defines this divine change. (John 3:1-12) My wife and I have three daughters. Prior to their birth we didn't approach them, reason with them, plead with them, urge them to confess their sins, or exhort them to repeat the "sinners prayer" so that they might become our daughters. There was no conscious, cognitive cooperation from them whatever in the process of their conception and birth. However, as soon as those little bundles of joy were delivered into the world, we began to nurture them, care for them, and teach them about life and about themselves. Once born into the world, our learning and growing never ends. So it is with God's family. He alone produces our "new birth." It is not a part of our gospel enlightenment or conversion. It is the exclusive work of God alone. However, once we experience that new birth, literally that "birth from above," God constantly teaches us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, as well as through the Bible, the gospel, and through interaction with godly people. He directs us to grow in His grace, to grow in the knowledge of His truth (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). He also instructs us to become what His Holy Spirit in us teaches us to become. (Titus 2:11-15; it is God's grace that saves us and also teaches us) However, just as within human families, different children have different dispositions, and some children are inherently compliant and obedient, while others are testy and rebellious, even so we see the testimony of

Scripture regarding God's family. Not all regenerate children of God obey and seek alike to serve and honor God. Notice the exhortation above in First Peter 2:2, "...as newborn babes..." Our obedience does not produce our new birth, but our new birth equips us to obey, and God through Peter directs us, "...as newborn babes..." to seek the sincere milk of the word that we may grow in our spiritual life and conduct "...as obedient children..." (1 Peter 1:14)

God does not robotically program and irresistibly micromanage our every act of obedience. He teaches us and leads us through the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the influence of Scripture to transform our lives into the godly mold of "obedient children." To attribute our whole discipleship, every single act of godly obedience to a divinely micromanaged and irresistible decree is to ignore and devalue the vital ministry of the Holy Spirit in God's regenerate children, as well as to ignore and negate the profound change that God's grace made in us through the new birth. The total depravity that governed our whole existence prior to our new birth, the bottomless pit of sinful disposition and potential that Paul so accurately described in the above passage (Romans 3:10-18) controlled our whole existence, including every faculty of our being prior to the new birth. However, do not confuse or denigrate divine grace. Once God produces the new birth, you are no longer that totally depraved person you were before the new birth. The typical title to the tune by which we sing John Newton's grace story, "Amazing Grace," is "New Britain." Prior to God's saving grace that produced the new birth in Newton, he was a slave trader and a true example of total depravity. However, once divine grace effected that change, Newton's whole world was changed. He then lived in a new world, a "New Britain." The person who claims to be both regenerated and totally depraved is wholly confused regarding the incredible re-creation that God accomplishes in us by that work. Interestingly two opposite theological camps of our time equally and similarly confuse God's grace. One group believes that man before the new birth and after it is equally capable of obeying God and securing his ultimate entrance into heaven. The other and opposite camp holds that man before the new birth and after it is equally incapable of any—even a single—act of true obedience, remaining totally depraved and insensitive to spiritual things unless God manipulates his emotions and actions for good. Fascinating; two opposite theological errors embrace the same premise. Man before and after regeneration is the same man. Regeneration makes no real change in the person at all.

Don't be too hard on Babylon's leaders. They had no ability or sense of the true God whom they had offended. Neither did we before God made that change in us that Scripture describes as being "born again." The Biblical truth that distinguishes God's way from both of the above errors affirms that in the new birth God makes a personal, moral, spiritual, and essential change in our very nature.

*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light...*  
(Ephesians 5:8)

Paul does not write that we merely lived in darkness. He rather affirms that **we were darkness**. God's saving grace changed our very nature—from **being** darkness to **being** "light in the Lord." How are we living?

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Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
Joseph R. Holder    Pastor