

Dear Friends,

You may need to 'put your thinking caps on' for the first article in this issue but as you do we think you'll get blessed to see how amazingly consistent and faithful our Father has been and surely will be to His children. More than ever, it seems that God is desiring His people to be separated unto Him in sincerity.

Jesus, God's Son did not begin His ministry until the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Him. How much more do we need to be seeking to be salt and light by this power. The world around us is indeed in exponential decay. The conclusion of all things is at hand. Whether a moment, a day, a week, a year or a decade, the time remaining is short. May we use it wisely.

May God bless you with wisdom, discernment, faith, love and power.

*In Christ's Love, John and Darlene Dickey*

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## Separated and Submitted

When I was in school, the primo job for any student who didn't like being a student was the AV aid. For some of you, this is before your time. However, the AV guys got to get out of some class time in order to move around the carts that carried the film projectors and other equipment for showing movies to the classes. I really envied those AV guys.

But I don't envy their Biblical counterparts – the prophets of old. You see, much of the time they WERE the viz-aids. Isaiah went around naked for three years (Isa 20), Jeremiah wore a sash, then buried it and then dug it up – a ruined mess. (Jer 13) He was also forbidden to take a wife or have children (Jer 16) In another instance, he smashed a potter's flask in full view of the elders of Jerusalem and then proclaimed God's message. (Jer 19)

Then there's Ezekiel – his wife was taken to paradise (Eze 24), he had to eat a scroll (Eze 3), to cook with cow's dung (Eze 4) and to lay on his sides – 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right. (Eze 4). No, I don't envy his ministry but I am so very grateful for it! And it is this last visual aid that I want to expound upon because it, like many other prophecies, has been fulfilled in our times very exactly. Studying it should increase our faith in God's masterful control. Let's start with the passage:

**4 "Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. 5 For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.**

From this visual aid, we learn of a period of time that corresponded to 390 years plus 40 years equaling 430 years. This was the period of time in which the "son of man" (see Eze 4:1) was to bear or carry the iniquity of Israel and Judah. Now, in order to understand what this judgment consisted of we need to reference the prophecies of Ezekiel's semi-contemporary, Jeremiah. He spoke of two specific judgments and a single length of time.

First Judgment: *And it shall be, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,' says the LORD, 'with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. (Jer 27:8)*

Second Judgment: *Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire,*

and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then **this city** shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall **burn it with fire**, and you shall not escape from their hand.” (Jer 38:17,18)

Length of Time: For thus says the LORD: After **seventy years** are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 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 the 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 29:10-14)

The two judgments are known as the **Servitude of the Nation** and the **Desolations of Jerusalem**. The periods of time they represent largely overlap, but they are two separate judgments. The initial time in which the Jews were in captivity at Babylon was seventy years.

Now, the first judgment began when the nation lost its independence in 606 BC. This was when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar first conquered Judah and Jerusalem. At this point, the city was left in tact. Later, by the declaration of the Persian king Cyrus II, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, but less than

50,000 of them took advantage of that. This was a small percentage of the population most of whom apparently found living in their new homes more appealing than making the trek back to a destroyed city and homeland. Clearly, this was rebellion against the Spirit of God for Jeremiah spoke, *This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place."* (Jer 29:10 NIV)

*"In Jeremiah 25:11-12, the prophet said that the Jews would suffer 70 years of Babylonian domination. Jeremiah also said Babylon would be punished after the 70 years. Both parts of this prophecy were fulfilled. In 609 BC, which is about 2600 years ago, Babylon captured the last Assyrian king and took over the holdings of the Assyrian empire, to which the land of Israel previously had been subjugated. Babylon later asserted its domination by taking many Jews as captives to Babylon, and by destroying Jerusalem and the Temple. The domination ended in 539 BC, when Cyrus, a leader of Persians and Medes, conquered Babylon and brought an end to its empire. Cyrus later offered the captive Jews the freedom to return to their homeland. The prophecy also might have been fulfilled in another way too: The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem's Temple in 586 BC, and the Jews rebuilt it and consecrated it 70 years later, in 516 BC. Having the Temple again showed, in a very important way, that the effects of Babylonian domination truly had come to an end."*—AboutBibleProphecy.com

So we see from this that the 70 year prophecy(ies) applies accurately to both the Servitude of the Nation(s) and to the Desolation of Jerusalem (as represented by the Temple) as well as the captivity of the Jewish people. For the nations, this was from 609 BC to 539 BC. Notice I'm using the plural. For the **nation** of Israel (as represented by Judah) the beginning of servitude began in the summer of 606 BC and ended in 536 BC. This latter date was the second literal year as well as the first legal year of reign for Cyrus. (See 2 Chron 36:22,23) The first year was considered a year of ascendancy. For **Jerusalem**, i.e. the **temple**, as mentioned above, this was from 586 BC when it was destroyed to 516 BC when it was rebuilt.

Now, we know from 2 Chron 36 that the seventy years were determined by God to account for the seventy Sabbath years that the Jews had ignored. Their seventy years of absence gave the land rest: *And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. (2 Chron 36:20,21)*

On the other hand, we are not told explicitly why God determined the 430 years. In the only previous judgment that came upon the Jewish people involving a day for a year, it was when the spies went in to the promised land and came back with a faithless report. God said, *According to the number of the days*

*in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. (Num 14:34)* Forty years in the wilderness led to a new more faithful generation who followed Joshua into the promised land. In other words, the judgment had a purpose and a message.

Now, the only other mention of 430 years (concerning the Jews) in the Bible is: *Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations. (Ex 12:40-42)*

Scripturally, Egypt is a picture of the world. The Jews went there when Joseph was powerful and were treated well at first but after his death became servants and were ultimately oppressed. Now, the Jewish people, contrary to what the Lord has ordained for them, have always desired to be a part of the world, accepted by the world and even esteemed highly by the world. Worldly success and notoriety are very important to them. Therefore, I suggest that the purpose and message in this 430 days/years judgment was to produce a people separate from the world -- truly separated unto the Lord, crying out for a Prophet like Moses to lead them out. (See Deut 18:15)

Now, we need to introduce another key verse. In the book of Leviticus 26, the Lord laid down a very serious condition upon His people:

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright. 'But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and **you shall be defeated by your enemies**. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you. 'And **after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more** for your sins. (Lev 26:13-18)*

You see, in Jeremiah, God had said that after the seventy years, He would cause the Jews to return. But though some did make the trip, the vast majority were rebellious to the nudge of His Spirit. For that reason, we can consider the condition cited above in Lev 26 as 'kicking in' so that the balance of the period of judgment after the 70 years was being multiplied by seven. We started with 430 years. Then after 70 years we're left with 360 years. Multiplying this by seven, we get 2,520 years. Hang with me, this will be worth it.

Now, as we are dealing with prophecy, we must use the biblical year of 360 days. When we do, we find that 2,520 years equals 907,200 days. If we add to that number the days represented in the first 70 years (25,200) we get 932,400 days total. "So what," you say. Here's what – start with May 14, 1948, the day the modern nation of Israel was reborn, and go backward 932,400 days and guess where you land – July 17, 606 BC which corresponds to the first week of Av 3155 on the Jewish calendar.

That means that indeed, starting with the servitude of Judah to Babylon in the summer of 606 BC, we don't see a truly sovereign nation of Israel again until May of 1948 just as prophesied.

And then there is the Desolation of Jerusalem. History shows that from the time that the nation was put into servitude until the desolation of the city and the temple was 19 years. Likewise, the time from the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 until the liberation of Jerusalem in the 1967 6-day war was 19 years.

So, as we should expect, the prophecy of Ezekiel and the prophetic condition declared by Moses were both fulfilled precisely concerning the nation's servitude and the desolation of Jerusalem.

There is, however, another very important aspect of this that has yet to play out. To understand it, we need to review again Moses' words in Lev 26:

**Initial Condition:**

*You shall not make idols for yourselves;...*

*You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary...*

*But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you. (Lev 26:2 – 17 excerpts)*

**Why God Brought Babylon Upon Them:**

*For behold, I am calling All the families of the kingdoms of the north," says the LORD; "They shall come and each one set his throne At the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, Against all its walls all around, And against all the cities of Judah. I will utter My judgments Against them concerning all their wickedness, Because **they have forsaken Me**, Burned incense to other gods, And worshiped the works of their own hands. Jer 1:15,16*

*They have **committed adultery with their idols**, and even **sacrificed their sons** whom they bore to Me, passing them through the fire, to devour them. Moreover*

*they have done this to Me: They have **defiled My sanctuary** on the same day and profaned My Sabbaths. For after they had slain their children for their idols, on the same day they came into My sanctuary to profane it; and indeed thus they have done in the midst of My house.*

Eze 23:37-39

From these and other passages, we can see that Israel utterly failed the **initial** condition set forth by Moses and thus the Lord did as He said He would in the **first part** of Lev 26. And, as we discussed in some detail above, we've also witnessed the consequences of the following passage:

*And **after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more** for your sins. (v18)*

But now, how about the balance of the prophetic conditions in Lev 26? During the long period of time in which the nation was in servitude and Jerusalem desolated, God said: *I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit. (v19,20)*

Indeed, the Roman Legions that crushed the nation in 70 AD completely broke the nation and scattered the people, even renaming the land and cities. In rejecting Christ, the Jews were incommunicado with God and ultimately became vagabonds on the earth. Everywhere they relocated they were eventually rejected and persecuted. Meanwhile, the land of Israel was

pillaged and destroyed. In fact, a tax from a Turkish ruler upon trees resulted in the complete deforestation of the land. Visitors to what was Israel in the nineteenth century described it as the most desolate place on earth.

But all that ended in the twentieth century as Israel was re-established and Jerusalem taken back from foreign control. The judgment spoken by Ezekiel and compounded by Moses was over. The year was 1967.

Now, for forty years since, the Lord has waited to see if the nation will turn to Him. There has been, however, **no change of heart**. The Jews are still unrepentant and unyielding to Him, stuck in their stubborn adherence to worldliness and spiritual apathy. They have become more powerful militarily and economically than all of the nations surrounding them put together and are supported by their 'superpower' ally the US. Consequently, their confidence is in **their own power**, not God's.

Daniel the prophet was told concerning this very situation: *At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time...and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.* (Dan 12 excerpts)

This period is also known as the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's 70 week prophecy found in Dan 9 and also as the "time of Jacob's trouble", a seven year period we call the Tribulation. Now, I'll suggest that

the remainder of Lev 26 continues to describe it when it says:

- *Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins. (v 21)*
- *And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins. (v23,24)*
- *And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. (v27,28)*

In the balance of the chapter, we see that there are three more sets of judgments, seven times each upon a rebellious people. Now, what do we know about the Tribulation period from the book of Revelation that comes upon a Christ-rejecting people in three sets of seven? Right – seven seals, seven trumpets and seven vials of God's wrath. In Revelation we read:

- *But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. (Rev 9:20,21)*

- *And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. (Rev 16:9)*
- *They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. (Rev 16:11)*

In fact, if you carefully examine the judgments in this latter portion of Lev 26 and compare them with the direful tribulation events of Revelation, they are very, very similar.

Yet, the conclusion of Lev 26 also offers a glorious promise: *...if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt— then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. ... for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.” (v40-42, 45)*

And Revelation concludes: *Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or*

*his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Rev 20:4)*

*Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev 21:2-5)*

And so, although God has dealt and will continue to deal with His rebellious people, their end is a glorious one. Our Father is looking for a people separated from the world and submitted to Him. May His bride, both Jew and 'gentile' be such a people! Maranatha!

*Dear Friend, if you are lacking absolute assurance of where and with Whom you will spend eternity, make the decision now to receive the complete forgiveness of all your sins. Jesus the Christ died for you personally – He took your place, took the judgment you and I are both worthy of there on the cross. Just accept that fact and confess it. It is all grace – see Ephesians 2:8,9 God deeply loves you.*

# The Samson Option

By Hal Lindsey

Last week, WorldNetDaily reported a stunning admission from a Syrian official. He said that Syria had "learned from the Hezbollah experience last summer and we can have hundreds of missiles hitting Tel Aviv that will overwhelm Israel's anti-missile batteries."

He claimed Syria has "proof" Israel is also readying for a war. "We hear about special Israeli trainings to take Damascus. We see that Israel is re-establishing bases of the Israeli army in the Golan that are unusual and not needed except for war. We believe the Israeli government has an interest in confronting Syria to rehabilitate its image of losing to Hezbollah."

The WorldNetDaily report also says that Damascus believes newly-installed Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, a former prime minister, "wants to prove he is a military expert." This information is perfectly in line with the official statements made by both Bashar Assad and Mushen Bilal to several major Arab newspapers.

Furthermore, London's Daily Telegraph reported June 25 that Tehran was establishing a missile defense shield for Syria. Iran is also preparing to ship sophisticated military hardware, including "dozens of medium-range Shahab-3 and Russian-

made Scud-C missiles, together with Scud-B missiles."

Syria recently test-fired two Scud-D surface-to-surface missiles that have a range of about 250 miles. This puts virtually all of Israel's population centers within range. Analysts say the planned Iranian arms shipment to Syria may be coordinated with the delivery of advanced Russian fighter jets.

Syria is also known to be producing non-conventional warheads, including those containing VX gas for delivery via the new longer range and more accurate Scuds. All Israel's cities are within range of these missiles. Most of them can be reached in less than three minutes. Syria is gambling that Israel's performance in the Hezbollah war of June 2006 means that it has seen all Israel has to offer.

Apparently, Bashar Assad now believes Israel can be beaten. Assad is miscalculating. In the event Syria launches a gas attack on Israel, it's a virtual certainty that Damascus would be instantly obliterated by Israeli nuclear weapons.

The thought of being gassed evokes a visceral response among Israel's Holocaust survivors and their descendants that Damascus wildly underestimates. Israel has more than 400 nuclear weapons in hidden silos in various places within its borders, as well as at least two submarines in the Mediterranean that are launch capable. And you can be certain that in the event of a massive

WMD attack by the Syrians, Israel will respond in kind.

There are two particular codes used by Israeli Defense Forces when planning worst-case scenario responses. One is called the "Masada Option." Masada was an ancient fortress taken by the Romans following a three-year siege. Just before they were overrun, the defending Jews committed suicide rather than be captured.

The other code term, "The Samson Option," refers to Samson, who said just before he pulled down the house of the Philistines on himself – and them – "Let me die with the Philistines." Judges 16:30 records it this way: "Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life."

That's pretty clear imagery. Israel will not just meekly fade away into destruction. And it certainly won't die alone, even if it has to destroy itself in the process of nuking the Middle East.

I once encountered Ariel Sharon in the Knesset in the late 1970s. I asked him if Israel still had a Masada Option. He boldly announced, "No longer 'Masada Option' – now 'Samson Option.'"

Moshe Dayan and Golda Meir almost used that "Option" in the first days of the Yom Kippur War, when it appeared they were going to be overrun. Dayan gave the code for its use when he told

Prime Minister Meir, "Arm the doomsday weapons, the Third Temple is about to fall."

War with Syria threatens to bring all nations of the Middle East into direct conflict with Israel – even the supposedly moderate state of Jordan. Jordan has never recovered from the defeats it suffered at the hands of the Israelis, particularly in 1967, in which it lost both the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

All of these events may well be setting up a prophecy that I have pondered for over 40 years. Isaiah predicts a catastrophic end to Damascus that I do not believe is part of the final war of Armageddon. It appears to be a regional conflict that will occur shortly before the anti-Christ is unveiled.

Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city on earth. It has never been destroyed despite being besieged and captured many times in history. Its existence reaches back to the dawn of history.

Yet Isaiah predicts in a series of oracles concerning "the last days" that Damascus *will suddenly be obliterated and cease being a city forever*. Over 2700 years ago, Isaiah foresaw this terrible event, **"An oracle concerning Damascus: 'See, DAMASCUS will no longer be a CITY but will become a heap of ruins.'" (Isa. 17:1 NIV)**

Isaiah makes two statements about the destruction of Damascus that indicates an instantaneous event. First, Isaiah

says, **“The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, and royal power from Damascus ...”** (17:3) This refers to Damascus, which is in part of land allotted to Ephraim. The Hebrew word **“disappear”** used in this context means a sudden, total annihilation.

Isaiah’s second description of Damascus’ destruction predicts, **“In the evening, sudden terror! Before morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us (Israel), the lot of those who plunder us.”** The great city of Damascus will **“disappear”** in a night. And it is the Israelites who will do this.

Another important part of this prophecy is that it will occur at a time when some calamity hits Israel, **“In that day the glory of Jacob will fade; the fat of his body will waste away.”** (Isa. 4) This indicates some kind of terrible, physical attack.

Here is where I believe all of this could be headed. Israel is going to be hit with WMDs from Syria that will kill a great number of Israelis. Israel will immediately implement the “Samson Option” against Damascus – totally obliterating it. This will cause the Muslim nations to back off out of fear of also being hit. It will also throw the world into a state of such fear that it will set them up for the anti-Christ’s arrival with a superhuman plan for peace and freedom from war. With his satanic powers, he will convince the world that the only hope is a

one-world government under his leadership.

According to my sources, there are fully armed Israeli aircraft sitting on the runway of Jezreel Valley IDF base with pilots in the cockpits on 24 hour alert. Normally, these aircraft are stored under ground. These planes can be over Damascus in 180 seconds from take off.

Syria is playing a very dangerous game, and is being urged on by Iran. If just one-missile hits Israel with the deadly VX gas, the ‘Samson Option’ will be instantly implemented.

Never in history have any of these events occurred. More than that, at no time in recorded history were any of these things even possible. But Israel can now fulfill these prophecies with the nuclear weapons it possess.

Never before have all the causative factors of this event been present at the same moment in history.

But today, they are the only logical conclusion if current events continue along their current path. It’s a terrifying scenario, but to those who trust that these signs point to the imminent return of Christ for His Church, it is, nonetheless, an exciting time to be alive.

# Rags to Riches

*(Ragamuffin style)*

“All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags...” Isaiah 64:6

Some stories in the Bible really sober me. One such story is that of Achan. It takes place in the time of Joshua and is found in Chapter seven of the book of Joshua.

Here’s what happened –

The host of Israel had just crossed the Jordan River and had defeated Jericho. Now, they faced a little stronghold known as Ai. It was so small that they decided to send just 3000 men against it. Clearly, they expected to make quick work of this little town but instead, they were trounced and 36 of their men were killed. Israel ran away that day and the whole camp was traumatized.

Joshua fell before the Lord in desperate prayer thinking everything was lost, that they would soon be surrounded by vengeful Canaanites and be massacred.

But the Lord said, “Get up!” and led him through a process of supernatural detective work which ended in the identification of the problem – one guy – Achan.

With the leadership of Israel looking on, he admitted to taking some booty during the Jericho campaign, something which had

been strictly forbidden. And as he described, the loot was found hidden in his tent.

At this point, with the truth of his sin evident before all, he and his family and his livestock and his possessions are first stoned, then burned and then buried in stones – wow! It’s not the least bit fuzzy, is it? God hates sin and deals severely with it. And we must remember that He has the right to do this and He is just.

And this sobers me, frankly. It can scare me to pieces because I’ve done much worse than Achan – I make him look like Billy Graham by comparison.

***And the devil is always reminding me of it. Hmmm***

Now, I don’t know about you, but if you’re like me, as you grow older in the Lord, you’re becoming increasingly aware of your own wretchedness – the sin-nature of the ‘old man’ that fights against the redeemed ‘inner man’.

You see, it’s kind of like the prophet Isaiah who in the first chapters of his book is going, “Woe to you,” and “Woe to you!” and so forth until chapter six where he sees the Lord, high and lifted up in His glory. And then he says ruefully, “Woe is ME for I’m ‘un-together’ and my ‘mouth is unclean’” (slight paraphrase). For at this point, he realizes that the standard is our Lord before Whom we are awed and pained by our ‘un-togetherness’.

Yes, I certainly blow it. I don’t want to or sometimes even mean to, but I do – and some of Satan’s most powerful weapons against

me is to try to make me believe these lies:

- That I'm uniquely bad
- That I'm beyond the forgiveness of God
- That God regrets His choosing me
- That God's disappointment with me has limited or diminished His love for me
- That my weaknesses make me useless to Him
- That repentance means I need to get up and prove my worth – to show God that 'I'm really better now.'

That I can't turn to the promises of God because I've over-used them.

And you know, I'm stupid enough to believe some or all of them at times!

Yes, God hates sin. Our world and our hearts are thoroughly polluted by it. If something were killing my child, I would hate it too – and I have. And I think God, knowing that although His righteousness demanded the expression of His anger, that it demanded justice – and knowing that doing so would consequently obliterate anyone or anything upon which it was vented except Himself – chose to do exactly that. He put his anger upon Himself on the cross – compelled by His love and grace.

When my own son was dying, I begged God to let me take his place, but I couldn't. This attitude of love is by comparison just a small reflection of the infinite love of our Father who looks on our condition and not only desires to take our place but in fact, He did.

And this brings me to grace. You see, God is truth and I need truth, truth about my weakness, my wretchedness, my utter need of a much higher power. The Old Testament is full of illustrations of God's truth. But truth in isolation only brings death in this sin filled world. And now, there's a choice – we can allow ourselves to be confronted with the truth about ourselves here and now or just slip by it time and again. In the latter case, we will ultimately be confronted with it before God's throne – too late to change. In the former, we will find ourselves in a desperate state – perhaps broken, humiliated, even drowning and overwhelmed – way, way out of our comfort zone. But then, as the truth about ourselves hits hard, destroys our fanciful impressions, fills our personal throne rooms with manure, the truth about our God brings freedom. And we see grace. Do you know what grace is?

It's totally unmerited favor. You see, God didn't invent grace for me or anyone else. He just IS gracious – always has been, always will be. It's not like someone just getting an impulse to buy me a gift cause I'm so nice. It's not about me or you; it's about God. Grace is who He is, not some 'effect' I've 'caused'. I'm simply the beneficiary, period.

And you don't really begin to comprehend it until you realize how desperately you need it. As long as you think you can "make it right" with God, that you can somehow show Him you are or

were worthy of His forgiveness and goodness – you are really still seeking to atone for your own sins, to observe a law of works.

And much Christian life and service is spent in this pursuit of worthiness – when Paul wrote, "Walk worthy of the calling..." he wasn't saying, "Try to prove your worthiness" but simply, "Walk in the light, walk with the Lord, walk the 'talk' – be an example of the believer." You see, that's totally different inwardly even though outwardly, it can look the same. However, one leads to spiritual barrenness while the other nurtures a garden.

"The Kingdom belongs to people who aren't trying to look good or impress anybody, even themselves. They are not plotting how they can call attention to themselves, worrying about how their actions will be interpreted or wondering if they will get gold stars for their behavior."

"Maybe this is the heart of our hang-up, the root of our dilemma. We fluctuate between castigating ourselves and congratulating ourselves because we are deluded into thinking we save ourselves. We develop a false sense of security from our good works and scrupulous observance of the law. Our halo gets too tight and a carefully-disguised attitude of moral superiority results. Or, we are appalled by our inconsistency, devastated that we haven't lived up to our lofty expectations of ourselves. The roller coaster ride of elation and

depression continues." (Brennan Manning)

As I said, when I sin, I am tempted to believe that I've somehow gone beyond the limits of God's grace but, "We must keep in mind also that the grace of God is infinite and eternal. As it had no beginning so it can have no end, and being an attribute of God, it is as boundless as infinitude."

"We can never know the enormity of our sin, neither is it necessary that we should. What we can know is that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." To "abound" in sin: that is the worst and the most we could or can do. The word abound defines the limit of our finite abilities; and although we feel our iniquities rise over us like a mountain, the mountain, nevertheless, has definable boundaries: it is so large, so high, it weighs only this certain amount and no more. But who shall define the limitless grace of God?" (A. W. Tozer)

Grace is a purifier, a godly fertilizer for the soul, not a license for licentiousness.

"We who feel ourselves alienated from the fellowship of God can now raise our discouraged heads and look up. Through the virtues of Christ's atoning death the cause of our banishment has been removed. We may return as the Prodigal returned, and be welcome. As we approach the Garden, our home before the Fall, the flaming sword is withdrawn. The keepers of the

tree of life stand aside when they see a son of grace approaching." (AW Tozer)

"If Jesus appeared at your dining room table tonight with knowledge of everything you are and are not, total comprehension of your life story and every skeleton hidden in your closet; if He laid out the real state of your present discipleship with the hidden agenda, the mixed motives, and the dark desires buried in your psyche, you would feel His acceptance and forgiveness. For "experiencing God's love in Jesus Christ means experiencing that one has been unreservedly accepted, approved and infinitely loved, that one can and should accept oneself and one's neighbor." (Brennan Manning and Walter Kasper)

C. S. Lewis wrote, "Grace substitutes a full, childlike and delighted acceptance of our need, a joy in total dependence. The good man is sorry for the sins which have increased his need. He is not entirely sorry for the fresh need they have produced."

But Satan wants us to look inwardly in self-deprecation and/or to hang on to our pointless march for merit. That is, to be absorbed in our unworthiness or our drive to attain worthiness. On the other hand, receiving grace takes grace – that is, there is an attitude which is itself an unmerited gift that positions our hearts to receive from God His unmerited favor. John put it, "...of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." Jn 1:16

"...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:7

This is heavenly mindedness – you're not bound up in continual self-pity nor enslaved by earning any of God's favor – pro-actively or post-factively. This is the understanding of His goodness that naturally brings forth our repentance; this is the aroma of heaven's sweet breeze, the refreshment of living waters; this is the joyful confidence of grace.

