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Matthew 18: A Contextual Study

There are a number of ways to divide the gospel of the King, the son of David. For the purposes of this study we will simply divide it into three sections:

From **1:1 to 12:45** we have the presentation of the King of the Jews, and His rejection. In chapter one we see Him coming as *the son of David*. Chapter 12:23-24 records the second of two events that the Jews witnessed against themselves in rejecting Him: "And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this *the son of David*? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." (Compare 9:27-34.)

The Spirit of God had presented their King to them; thus they had sinned against the testimony of the Spirit (12:28, 31, 32) by rejecting Him. The Lord would move on to a different revelation of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Jews, having been given a plenitude of signs, still sought more (likely in the character of Joel and The Day of the Lord (See also Matthew 24:29, Acts 2:17-21)), and would be given none except the sign of the prophet Jonas (12:39). In verses 41-42 we see Gentiles of the Old Testament judging the New Testament Jews. By rejecting Him, the state of the Jews was worse than it was before the Messiah had come, and the program of God was moving on to include the Gentiles.

Chapter 12:46 until 20:29 deals with the present age. The rejected King, soon to be absent from this world, leaves information and instruction to his subjects. The old has come to an end, and what is coming is a new understanding (13:10-13), manifestation (16:15-17; 17:1-8), message (16:21) and testimony (18:20) based on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 16:18-19 and 18:20 we have the first mention of the means by which God's stated goal (Acts 15:14-17) of this dispensation will be fulfilled.

From **20:29** to the end of the book we see the King again in relation to Israel. He is called "O Lord, thou Son of David," by two blind men (20:31-32). He is seen as the son of David leaving Jericho (20:30) and coming to Jerusalem (21:9,15). Prophetically and parabolically He deals with a future age, starting with the tribulation period (chapters 24-

25). Unequivocally He deals with the sin question, and all eternity past and present centers around the Person and Work of Calvary. He now has returned to the Father, and sits at His right hand.

Matthew 22:41-45 "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is He? They say unto Him, *The Son of David*. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son?"

Setting of Matthew 18

Passing over the first mention of The Assembly (or Church) which is His Body (16:18-19.) we come now to chapter 18, and that portion of the Word of God where we see the first mention of an assembly (18:20), the local testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ in this present age. It is a first glimpse, but it is congruent with the whole canon of scripture (We invite you to prayerfully consider Leviticus 23:15-21.). Man is involved, his sin mars what God has instituted, and being in harmony with the God of heaven is the only way peace can be obtained, maintained or restored.

Matthew 18 can also be divided into three portions with the central portion (vs. 15-20) being the door that is hinged upon that which surrounds it. Indeed, the chapters before and after also aid in, or are aided by (e.g. 19:13-14) the interpretation of Matthew eighteen respectively.

The geographic location is Capernaum, the place is the house (17:24,25). The Lord had recently manifested Himself before Peter, James, and John on what we call the "Mount of Transfiguration." He has told them in the coun-

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tryside of Galilee that “. . . The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. . .” (17:22b-23a). On the mount, they that were with Him were exceedingly afraid (17:6); in the countryside they were exceedingly grieved (17:23); but before coming into Capernaum they reasoned amongst themselves who should be the greatest (Compare Mark 9:33-34).

In v. 24 Peter is asked if his master paid tribute. This we understand was a tax that went to support the temple in Jerusalem. Peter, not knowing what he said, (as in the mount (Luke 9:33)) said “Yes”. The Lord Jesus gently confronted him on the matter and taught him of his new relationship as a son (17:25,26) and the importance of humility: “Notwithstanding, lest we should **offend** them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.” (17:27).

The time is at the same hour (18:1), when he drew the twelve around him (Mark 9:35), and began to teach them about humility. It was important for the Lord Jesus Christ to not offend anyone materially in any way (Consider Matthew 12:16-21/Isaiah 42:2-3.); they already were stumbled by Him spiritually (e.g. Matthew 11:6).

Entrance into the kingdom of heaven is likened unto one becoming as a little child. In simple, childlike faith one believes what God has said about his sin and trusts the Savior.

Matthew 18:1-14; Little Ones

To be great in the kingdom of heaven, one must humble himself as a little child. That is without pride, pretense or prejudice, but contrariwise with humility, honesty, and integrity. Verse 4 reads, “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” This is a Divine principle. It has been perfectly expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the “author and finisher” of this truth, specifically as taught in Philippians 2:8-9: “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: . . .” There is no greater example than He, and the Spirit of God through Paul’s writing says “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus!” (Philippians 2:5) Blessed be His Name!

At verse 6 the AV clearly points out a change. From little child (*paidion*) to little (*mikros*) one. *Mikros* is where we get the term micro. A micron is an extremely small unit of measure. A microscope reveals what is invisible to the naked eye. A little one in Matthew eighteen is a believer who measures himself to be extremely small and is invisible in his own mind. He doesn’t focus on himself at all, nor

does he contemplate his humbleness; he focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ instead, and magnifies Him, continually bringing Him to the forefront of his life. This is true humility, and the Lord Jesus Christ says “the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” “But whoso shall **offend** one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” The word offend is *skandalizo* and means to entrap, i. e., trip up (figuratively, stumble (transitively) or entice to sin, apostasy or displeasure): — (make to) offend. [Strong #4624] This individual dares to tread where the Lord Jesus would not go in 17:27, except that it is now to a humble believer.

In Matthew 18 we have three pairs of individuals. Here in verse 6 we have one that stumbles, and a believer who is stumbled. In verse 15 we have a brother that has sinned, and another brother who has been sinned against. In verses 28-30 we have a servant who is forgiven, but will not forgive his fellow servant. Contextually all three pairs are dealing with fellow believers (Compare Luke 17:1-4.) and the truths taught are interlinked. How could it have been better for a believer that stumbles “one of these little ones” to have died such a disgraceful death prior to stumbling his brother? One example that comes to mind is King Hezekiah. Had Hezekiah accepted his announced death and died we would not read of his weakened faith (2 Kings 20:8); his pride and complacency (2 Kings 20:13); nor his lack of care for the future testimony (2 Kings 20:19). Additionally such moral decline would not have been linked to his family name as that which his son, Manasseh, displayed, and the report to Babylon concerning the treasures would’ve never taken place under his watch (2 Kings 20:13-17). The result of Hezekiah living longer was disastrous. Concerning Hezekiah’s testimony for God as seen in the last fifteen years of his life “it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

The warning to the disciples and to us who have followed them is “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;” (Verse 10a). To despise a brother is to esteem him low. A prideful person that elevates himself puts the humble believer in the position where he has placed himself, but God sees “the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

The ways a person may despise another are numerous. One could despise another due to their youth (1 Timothy 4:12), genealogy (Titus 3:9), social standing (James 2:6) or spirituality (2 Timothy 3:12). Sadly the list could go on.

Finally, A. the Lord Jesus Christ died to save them (Verse 11); B. “in heaven their angels do always behold the face of [His] Father which is in heaven.” (Verse 10b); and C. “it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” (Verse 14)

What we can learn in verse eleven is that not just the proud, nor just the humble, but that all of us started in the same place: “For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” All who are saved were both low enough to need their sins forgiven, and made high enough through salvation to be called saints. God loved us equally as sinners. We will see that He also applies that equality to us as saints.

The word translated “Lost” in verse eleven, and “Perish” at the end of verse fourteen are the very same. It means “to destroy fully (reflexively, to perish, or lose), literally or figuratively: — destroy, die, lose, mar, perish.” [Strong #622] Seeing what has come before (i.e. the humble brother stumbled) and what follows after (i.e. the proud brother who has sinned) we can see it is not the desire of God that either should perish in (or mar) their testimony for Him, but that both would be recovered whenever they fall, whether by the means of another stumbling them, or by one’s own prideful ways.

In verses 12-14 though the context of the lost sheep is directed especially towards the “little ones” (Verse 14) who have been stumbled, the principle applies to all saints who have gone astray. “Astray” means “to (properly, cause to) roam (from safety, truth, or virtue): — go astray, deceive, err, seduce, wander, be out of the way.” [Strong #4105] Though the word occurs 39 times in the New Testament, the first three occurrences are here in verses twelve and thirteen. It can be in the passive (e.g. as being seduced or deceived), or active (e.g. to deceive or err). We should not forget the context that “it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” in their testimony for Him; but we should take note as we move on that the care for His saints applies to all.

Matthew 18:15-20; Sinning Brother

In verse 15 we have the second pair. This time the word is not *skandalizo* (stumble) but *hamartano* (sin). It is the first use of the word sin in the New Testament, and it is of one brother against another brother in Christ. (Though some manuscripts omit “against thee,” most translations retain the expression. A sin of a brother, whether directed against another or not, is “against thee,” since it will affect the testimony of all who are identified with him.)

The second use of the word *hamartano* is in verse 21: “. . . how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” The first portion of the chapter deals with humility; the last with forgiveness. There is a principal for the prideful one who stumbles the little one (Verse 6). There is a punishment for the pitiless who will not forgive his brother (Verses 34-35).

The Lord’s answer to the question was “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Offenses must come, and brother will sin against a brother, and there is need for forgiveness, therefore/because of/seeing that, “is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a

certain king, which would take account of his servants.”

In verse 28 we see the final pair. This time the pair are fellow servants who owe a debt. Three debts are charged. One of inestimable value (verse 24) was forgiven (verse 27); A second of reasonable value was demanded with payment due at once (verse 28). It was not forgiven. A third of moral value was charged on account of a lack of compassion, and they “delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.” (Verse 34) The Lord said, “Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Verse 33) Matthew 6:14-15 “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Coming back then to verse 15, we see that a brother has sinned against another brother. It has caused separation between two brethren, and communion needs to be restored. The brother who has been sinned against tells it to his heavenly Father (verse 31). Then, before dealing with his brother he must judge himself (See Matthew 7:1-5) and the sin before God (See Matthew 5:21-26) before trying to “gain his brother” that has sinned against him. It is implied in the chapter that this brother has already humbled himself, but in doing the above he is manifesting it.

We need to be careful when applying the first mention of anything in scripture. Today, with the Word of God complete, knowing the goal is to gain the brother back, we would prayerfully include passages such as Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” It is to be done quietly and in quietness of spirit: “. . . go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. . .”

The JND translation is helpful with what may follow in verse 16 after the initial meeting between the two brethren, alone: “But if he do not hear [thee], take with thee one or two besides, that every matter may stand upon the word of two witnesses or of three.” The Greek words *de san akouse* literally mean “but not hearing (or understanding)”. It is accepted by the present writer that one who has sinned and has not asked for forgiveness already may fit with the AV and “will not hear thee”. However “will” is supplied by the interpreters. It may be safer then to recognize that he who trespassed may not agree with the sin which he is accused of committing or he may not understand it. In either case the result is without repentance (Compare again Luke 17:1-4.), and it follows then that one or two more brethren are to be brought along so that every fact may be established. The total number of brethren is limited by the Lord to “two or three.”

It is also implied that these one or two others have already done as the first brother did: They humbled themselves. In doing so they also judged themselves before God,

and they confirmed that the sin was legitimate and not “without a cause”. To complete the circle they confirmed that the brother that has been sinned against has already done this as well that they might be of one mind before God. “That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” (Verse 19) The word “agree” is *sumphoneo*, and means to be harmonious in agreement. Unity between brethren is precious at times like this; harmony with God is paramount.

The facts being established, “and if he shall neglect to hear them” the assembly is told. It is unlikely after not hearing during the first two meetings that there is any question of understanding anymore, but of hearing, and he will be unlikely then to listen to the assembly. At that point the Lord Jesus says “let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

There are layers to the Word of God, and Matthew 18 is no exception. We see in the undertones of the chapter a humble brother and a forgiving Lord contrasted with a proud and merciless brother. Brethren reading this chapter today would also have in their mind how much they’ve been forgiven (verse 24), and how the Lord Jesus Christ has exhorted them to freely forgive (verses 21, 33).

So what did the Lord mean when he said “let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican?” The heathen equated to an unbeliever of the nations, and a publican, a sinner of the Jews. The Lord ate with, and was accused of being a friend of publicans and sinners. He chose a publican to be one of His twelve disciples.

The brother who did not repent of his sin was to be dealt with in the context of seeking his restoration. Having the complete canon of scripture we prayerfully search elsewhere in the Word of God to guide us in what is to be done in each specific circumstance. The assembly may abstain from associating with him (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 3:6), or “have have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” (2 Thessalonians 3:14b,15) If his sin is heretical then he’d be rejected publicly (Titus 3:10-11). The principal of Matthew 18 may also ultimately be used in matters that end with excommunication. This should be done carefully and prayerfully in the light of all scripture, and before God.

Throughout the entire process those involved in trying to gain their brother have humbled and judged themselves before God, and sought His will in the matter. Having done so with God, there is harmony with God, and His will is known. If it is not known, the judgment cannot proceed until it is.

In verses 15-20, the Newberry Bible helps us see that there are three perfect participles which indicate “having been and being”. Two of them occur in verse 18. What is bound and loosed by the humble brethren has already

been bound or loosed and continues to be bound or loosed in heaven. Thus the brethren, having sought God’s will, and acting in harmony with it, pray according to the will of God, and thus they are in concert with the God of heaven on the matter of the brother, and the sin he committed. This is very solemn. It is not ours to do nothing, nor is it ours to do too much. It is ours to act in the will of God. Though perhaps redundant it should be plainly said that this is not men acting outside the will of God, and God binding it by some simplistic principle. It is men seeking, finding, and applying God’s will in this serious matter. This is commendable.

If any question remains, the issue of prayer is brought forth by the Lord Jesus to show that seeking agreement between brethren and with God is necessary. In this we are also given another principle of God: “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” (Verse 19) This principle is also developed for us further in scripture. For example, prayer is to be done in faith (Matthew 21:22, James 1:6-7); and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose “that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13-14) What is to be asked for is in agreement with God (John 15:7), and not simply to be used for our own personal desires (James 4:3).

Praying for and being in agreement and acting in harmony with God, the brethren would also have prayed from beginning to end for the restoration of the brother who had sinned. Having any other priority of purpose is outside the will of God (and the context of this chapter) and is not only not in harmony with Him, but will not be honored by Him (e.g. as having been bound or loosed in heaven). Could it be that an individual in the character of a proud brother who stumbles the “little one”, with craftiness brings in others, and with a claim on scripture they excommunicate a “little one” from the assembly wrongfully? This is a solemn question and a sad reality at times. An obvious example where this takes place in scripture can be found in 3 John.

Discernment must be exercised when on the surface a man (or men) may claim to have scriptural backing in their actions, yet their fruit is clearly not spiritual. The Lord Jesus warned of such men in Matthew 7:15-20. He also appealed to discernment in such matters in Matthew 12:33-37. To ignore His teachings, His warnings, and His appeals is perilous. In fact history, teaching, warnings, and appeals concerning just such a threat is brought out throughout scripture. This size and scope of this article does not allow for further development of this sad fact.

Out of trials spoken of in the Word of God come great truths. Our remaining verse is a sublime segue from what the assembly has just had to deal with. The two or three in verses sixteen and nineteen are finally seen in the last perfect participle of this middle section of Matthew 18.

They are seen “having been and being gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the beginning of the chapter we see a humble child in the midst of the disciples. Here we see the Lord of Glory in the midst of his assembly. It is both solemn and sublime.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

“It is always the case that those who think much of Christ think little of themselves, while those who think little of Christ think much of themselves.” (F. B. Hole in comments on Laodicea)

The Five Thessalonian Notes of Thanksgiving

William Williams

In chapter 3 we get the third note. “For what can we render to God again for you, for all joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.” This is the soulwinner’s note of thanksgiving. There is a special God-given joy in winning souls for Christ, a joy that humbles and prostrates in His presence. We fear that many of the Lord’s people are strangers to this joy. They have no one of whom they can say, as Paul of Timothy “My true child in faith.” What a calamity it was when Jeremiah was sent to Coniah with the message: “Thus saith the Lord: Write ye this man childless.” But what will it be at the judgment seat of Christ to be written “childless,” not a soul won for Christ in a long life of 20, 30 or 40 years. We would advise young Christians to begin early to win others for Christ. It is the blessed God given privilege of all to do so. Natural children are good, but spiritual children are better. With death or at His coming the natural ties shall cease; but His advent will only usher in that distinction which shall make the spiritual children a joy and crown of glorying. Dear Rutherford longed to have such children when he wrote:

“If one soul from Anworth meet me at God’s right hand;
My heaven will be two heavens, in Immanuel’s land.”

There is no royal road to win souls for the Master. He can use a thousand means and ways to awaken and save poor sinners; but there certainly are conditions which are favourable to this end. Genuine fellowship with God will invariably produce a care for our fellow men’s spiritual welfare; it will beget love for them, and love will prompt us, however timid and backward, to reach them. If we cannot preach to them we can reach them by a sound Gospel tract. When we were on the West Coast we were staying with a Brother and one morning as he put on his coat, he slipped some tracts into a small inside pocket, saying at the same time: “When I get my suit made I

always ask the tailor to put me in a small pocket here; I call it the Lord’s pocket. I put ten tracts in here every day and I give them out to different ones in my daily routine of business.” We are sure that if we have a heart for perishing sinners we shall soon find scriptural means and ways of reaching them, and the sure outcome will be spiritual children which will cause us to say with Paul: “What thanksgiving can we render unto God again for you?”

In the second epistle, first chapter, we get the fourth note: “We are bound to thank God always for you brethren, as it is meet, because your faith groweth exceedingly and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.” Faith in God can, and ought to grow. It was with fear and trembling as poor lost sinners that we trusted Him; but simple faith brought peace and rest to our troubled souls; and then as we began to feed on His word our faith grew stronger and greater. It is a special cheer that the Lord’s servants have as they see their spiritual children growing in faith and love, and we are sure that God finds special joy in seeing His children grow and develop in that new life imparted from above.

When we were building the Hall in Aroa, Venezuela, our faith had plenty of room to grow and we often found how little it was. On one occasion we had no mail for some time, and there were just two trains carrying mail every week. The last one had come in on Thursday and still no mail. The railway company had sent us in a bill for freight that would be collected on Saturday and there were three workmen to pay and nothing in hand to do it with. Friday night came and still no relief. and there was a peculiar sense of loneliness and depression felt at times as unbelief took the place of faith in the living God. On Friday night, after a hard, hot day’s work, on the new Hall we got to the place where we were staying and we sat in a chair meditating. A knock came to the door and a Brother in his overalls, a turner in the railway shops, walked in and put a heavy parcel of money rolled up in a piece of dirty paper into our hand. This man had been a devout R. C., but was led to the tent meetings by a fellow mechanic and we remember him still how he used to come with a chair on his shoulder to sit on, as the tent used to be so crowded that many had to stand. God saved him and he began to grow. As he gave us the parcel of silver we asked him for an explanation. He said: “You know that I have some cattle down the line. I lost a steer some time ago and I made a contract with the Lord that if He would return me the bullock I would give Him half of the price for the new Hall, and then as I have been poorly I was going to use the other half to take me to Duaca for a few week’s rest. My brother found the steer and has just sold it to the Governor, and I feel that God has been so good and gracious to me in saving me that I have resolved to give Him all, and not take a holiday. Goodbye, I must hurry home and wash up to be back in time for the meeting.” He was off. We shall not soon forget that lesson. We took the thirty big silver

dollars and went through to our room, placed them on the table and got on our knees in confession and thanksgiving. What joy it was to see this dear brother's faith and love growing exceedingly.

The fifth and last note we have in chapter two, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

The Apostle looks back to what God had saved them from; sin, superstition and idolatry. He then looks forward to the coming crisis, the satanic deception, the terrible tribulation, and as he thinks of these beloved Thessalonian saints, he thanks God that they have been chosen to salvation from it all; that they would not pass through it but would be with Christ in the heavenly places.

May the Lord help us then in some measure to imitate those Thessalonian Christians, retaining the form of sound words, expecting the immediate and personal coming of Christ for His own at any time: and as we wait let us work, work, WORK, constrained and impelled by the dying love of our risen Lord. And in the measure that we do this, these five notes of thanksgiving shall be re-echoed in us to the praise and glory of God.

Josiah and Revival, pt 2

Robert Surgenor

His Awakening

In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father" (2 Chronicles 34:3). The first seeking king was Saul. "And Saul's uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses" (1 Samuel 10:14). This huge hulk of unsanctified flesh was an extremely selfish and self-centered man, who became an enemy of David. It is interesting that at the very commencement of his public life he is seen seeking unclean animals. This seemed to characterize him to the day of his death, where we find him seeking a witch and dying among the unclean. The world loves that which God hates and hates that which God loves. "For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12). The circus tent attracts far more than the gospel tent. The games of the day hold a far greater attraction than the gatherings of the Lord's people. The world is an unclean place and we are exhorted to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). What are we seeking?

As a lad of sixteen, Josiah sought after His God. How wonderful to see a young man, a young woman, seek after God. I realize that one cannot save themselves, but one certainly can seek to be saved. Perhaps the martyred Isaiah's words came by way of mouth to the lads attention.

"Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6,7). It was said of three other kings that they sought the Lord—Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Uzziah. I am sure that it is the prayer of all Christian parents that their children will seek the Lord at an early age. Do you as a Christian parent make it attractive to your children to seek the Lord? Do they see in you contentment, peace and true happiness as a Christian? Do they observe that you have a happy fellowship with other believers, a fellowship that the world knows nothing about? Do you live in such a way that you make them wish that they had what you possess? Or, do they see in you a grumbling saint, never content and certainly not enjoying the Lord. How is your home adorned? A television in the home is one of the most successful ways to instill into your children a thirst for the world. Are you raising them for the world, encouraging them in worldly affairs? Certainly we want the best for our children. But, what do you consider the best, being successful in the world, or, becoming a child of God? We realize that salvation is of the Lord, but God forbid that any parent should become a stumbling block to their children in they're seeking the Lord.

I have often been asked by parents, "When is a child old enough to be saved?" I would say that depends on the child. Matthew Henry, whose outstanding commentary is read world-wide, was saved at the age of ten. Isaac Watts, who wrote hundreds of profound hymns and is acknowledged as "the father of English hymnody," sought the Lord and found Him at the age of eight. Jonathan Edwards who set all of New England on fire for God and saw thousands saved through his preaching, was saved at the tender age of six. Josiah was sixteen and God gave him twenty-three years to prove the reality of it, which he unmistakably did. May God give parents the joy of seeing their little ones seeking the Lord at a tender age. God assures us, "Those that seek Me early shall find Me" (Proverbs 8:17). May God also give those parents the joy of seeing their little ones, after confessing Christ, going on and proving in their life to be truly the workmanship of God. May the Lord give parents the wit and wisdom not to encourage a false profession in their children. On the other hand, may they be given wisdom from above not to discourage the little one in their profession. Let us consider, that little children who are saved are not thirty-year-old mature individuals They are children, thus they will be childish. I knew of an unwise couple who had a child profess. However, every time the little fellow did some trivial thing that they considered wrong, they would yell at him, "If you were saved, you wouldn't do that!" This kept up to the point that the child gave up his profession. He was so confused and never encouraged in the home. Later he professed again, gave that

up and professed again, then again. I myself believe that he had the root of the matter in him the first time, but due to unwise parents he was sidetracked into “Doubter’s Castle” and could never seem to escape its grip. A life that could have been useful for God, was ruined. After seeking God and finding God, we are exhorted to, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,” (Matthew 6:33). Even in Old Testament times this could be said of the young king.

His Acclaim

Having considered his ancestry and attitude, let us consider for a few moments Josiah’s Acclaim. It really matters very little what men think of me. The all-important thing is, what does God think of me? I am sure in Josiah’s day there were folks not too happy with this “young upstart” trying to change things in the nation. Jeremiah was the speaking prophet during Josiah’s day and God warned His prophet saying, “Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces” (Jeremiah 1:7,8). God accused the nation of going far from Him and walking after vanity. Even those who handled the law (the priests) God said, “Know Me not.” God’s lament continues: “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (2:13). “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed-how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (2:21). Thus we see the attitude of the people toward God or anything of God during Josiah’s childhood days. Nevertheless, here in the midst of apostasy rises a young man with the right ATTITUDE. God’s pen writes, “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him” (2 Kings 23:25). Some have said the Bible contradicts itself, quoting 2 Kings 18:5. “He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.” This was said of King Hezekiah. What scoffers fail to see is that when God is commenting on Hezekiah, He is placing emphasis upon Hezekiah’s trust in the Lord. While in the case of Josiah, the LORD is placing emphasis on the wholeheartedness of the young king’s turning to the LORD.

Fellow saint, let us bring this up to our day. Look at all the saints that are in the fellowship of your assembly. Which one do you think that it could be said of the Lord, “There is none like that saint”? I have seen some amazing cases of saints trusting God. Some godly widows would put many preachers to shame when it comes to wholehearted trust in their God. Isn’t it also wonderful to see in a saint, wholeheartedness in turning to God and walking in His way in spite of the trend of the day in departing from divine principles? May God raise up young men and women in our

assemblies that will purpose in their heart, that no matter what the cost, and that no matter what the trend, they will turn to the Lord with all of their heart, soul, and might. Josiah, his ANCESTRY; his ATTITUDE; his AWAKENING; and his ACCLAIM. How his report card should speak to us today. May God in His sovereign grace, raise up Josiahs amongst us today.

A pure heart, then, contains nothing adverse to God. For where there is mixture, there cannot be purity.

Thomas Cook

2 Thessalonians 1-2

Chapters 1 and 2 of this short yet extremely stimulating epistle afford great encouragement to tried and troubled saints, particularly while passing through persecutions and tribulations. These saints were being especially tried, for the enemy of their souls was assailing them with false teaching that the day of the Lord was upon them.

This infant company of believers which, according to the first epistle (1 Thessalonians 1: 9, 10), had been delivered from idolatry in turning to God under the power of the grace of God preached in the gospel, had become targets for the opposition of evil men under the dominant influence of the prince and god of this world.

The bent of their evil teaching had earlier failed in its attempt to pervert them from the faith, it having been ably countered by the apostolic teaching bringing before them the revelation as to the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their opponents then changed their mode of attack. The minions of Satan are like chameleons, being “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11: 12-15).

And so these dear saints in Thessalonica were now being upset by false teaching that they were now in the day of the Lord. If in the first epistle they had been perversely taught that their brethren who had fallen asleep had missed the kingdom they were now being falsely taught that they had missed the rapture, and of this the persecutions they were experiencing were the evidence.

Two reasons were advanced by the apostle as to the falsity of this teaching. One, the fact that the saints were still here; two, the man of sin had not yet been revealed. The rapture followed by the apostasy must precede the presence of the day of the Lord--that period of unparalleled judgments and tribulation. So the administered stimulus for the assembly in a day of trial and severe persecution with

its assault on hearts and minds by false doctrine is the anticipation of the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith is encouraged by the apostolic ministry to look forward to that day with the certain knowledge that His coming for His own must first take place (2 Thessalonians 2: 1). In that day there shall most certainly be righteous recompense for those who have troubled the saints. Then, too, shall be redressed the trouble inflicted upon those who have suffered for their Lord during His absence and rejection. Then shall the erstwhile persecuted saints find:

“Each hope of glory gained,
fulfilled each faithful word,
and fully all to have attained
the image of their Lord.”

And then shall suffering saints, now witnessing in the measure of their love and fidelity to Him in the day of contrariety, shine forth in the radiance of His glory. For then shall He be displayed in glory to every creature in the universe by those who, cost what it may, have been His faithful witnesses in the world which crucified Him. “When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thessalonians 1: 10). This is the hope of the gospel and this is its consummation.

But prior to the realization of this blessed hope there shall be, here in the place where their witness has been so faithfully borne, the consummation of evil. The apostasy—the giving up of the faith and truth of Christ—shall come. Between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of the Lord in power and great glory bringing His saints with Him, there shall be on earth the presentation and acceptance of the devil’s masterpiece, the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. This shall be the crowning blasphemy of the mystery of lawlessness, initiated in Genesis 3: 5 when our first head, Adam, succumbed to the proffered bait in Eden, “ye shall be as gods.” “This is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4: 3). Indeed, the whole sphere of professing Christendom is leavened with it. Everyone who honors the name of the Father and the Son can expect to be despised and to suffer reproach.

Such, most blessedly, shall receive the comfort and sympathy of their blessed Lord, expressed in those feeling words, “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life” (Revelation 2: 10).

The Day of the Lord cannot come while the Assembly is still upon earth. Before it does come the Lord Himself shall have come for His own and they all shall have been “gathered together unto Him” (2 Thessalonians 2: 1). Then, and only then, can the apostasy—the general and public renunciation of the faith of the Son of God—take place.

There shall no longer be any element of faith in apostate Christendom, for all that is held forth in the claims of the man of sin shall only be presented to the senses of men. Note 2 Thessalonians 2: 9: “whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.”

These latter, “powers, signs, and wonders,” had already been used on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 22) with regard to the witness of the Holy Spirit as to the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ— “a Man approved of God among you.”

Here, as connected with the man of sin, we further read, “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

So long as the Assembly is here the restraining presence of the Spirit will be exercised. There is “What withholdeth” may refer to divinely instituted authority in government among men. For this see Daniel 2: 37; Romans 13: 1-4 and John 19: 8-11. 2 Thessalonians 2: 7, refers undoubtedly to the Holy Spirit Who dwells in the Assembly as the temple of God (see 1 Corinthians 3: 16 and 2 Corinthians 6: 16). When “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and . . . our gathering together unto Him” occurs, the restraint which the Spirit exercises as being in the Assembly shall be withdrawn also.

The march of lawlessness shall then receive great momentum. That which presently is working “mystery”—not generally apparent, being known only to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear—shall develop rapidly. When once it reaches its peak as it shall do when the man of sin—so different from the Lord Jesus, the Man of God’s pleasure—claims for himself what is due to God (Revelation 13: 11-17; 2 Thessalonians 2: 4). then shall the Lord Jesus be revealed from heaven and shall consume the man of sin “with the breath of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.”

All who, in the meantime, received not the love of the truth, shall be damned along with the devil and his deputies, the Roman beast and the man of sin—the antichrist.

May we ever thank God that He has “from the beginning chose you (us) to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; Whereunto He called you (us) by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Let us all join therefore with the apostle Paul in giving thanks to our God for having enlightened us as to the trend of evil and of its deserved end under righteous judgment. May we also, in the purifying power of our blessed hope with its encouragement, “stand fast” and “hold fast” the traditions or instructions, which we have

been taught, whether by word or apostolic epistle. May we do so until we meet our precious Savior and see Him face to face in our Father's house in heaven.

Prayer, preaching, patience and perseverance are four P's that should go together in a Servant of God.

Prophets and Ministry

Joel Portman

Hebrews 1:1-2

A study of the prophets of God contains in it some elements of encouragement as well as some for our warning. We can learn basic and important truths regarding our own responsibility to God and men now, especially with regard to those who seek to teach and guide the Lord's people in local assemblies in our day. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 3:6-15 may have a general application to all believers in assembly fellowship, but the entire passage is directed toward those who were continuing the work which he and Apollos had begun, namely the planting of the Word and its watering, with the fruit that would result.

We see the same warning by our Lord in Matthew 7:15-20, which passage, though it applies generally to all, contextually is directed toward the prophets and the kind of fruit that their preaching yields. So that what is ministered publicly in assemblies bears heavy responsibility in view of its results, which may be for good and blessing, or may result in decline and degeneration.

General Observations

Two expressions seem fairly closely linked pertaining to these men: "Man of God" and "Prophet".

1. "Man of God" seems to indicate the character of the person, stressing their responsibility toward God and representation of God toward men. FM: Moses (6x) Deut. 33:1. Thirteen men are called "man of God." One was an angel (Judges 13). Four references give no name.

2. "Prophet" relates to their function, their office, and is applied with regard to their ministry toward men. This word comes from a root word related to "seer." It indicates one who sees the unseen, who is in touch with God or receives messages to deliver to men (or who formulates them falsely and pretends to deliver God's Word). However, God can also use false prophets such as Balaam.

There are at least 36 prophets + Christ in Scripture. Three are unnamed, Four are little known. Five were women.

3. Not all men of God were prophets: Timothy is one example (in the true sense of word). Not all prophets were called men of God, such as Balaam, Hananiah (Jeremiah 28), Barjesus (Acts 13), Old prophet, (1 Kings 13), False Prophet, (Revelation 16).

4. Several root words are used for Prophets and Prophecy.

Nabi (#5030) may have a root meaning "to bubble up, spring forth" and thus "to utter." This is the original word found in the Pentateuch and later. It indicates one who speaks for God, an ambassador, to make His will known to men. He is God's Mouthpiece. 1 Peter 4:11... "as oracle of God." This carries the thought of a "friend of God" (Abraham), one who is on speaking terms with God. It is also used for Aaron in Exodus 7:1. There Moses is seen as God, speaking through Aaron to Pharaoh.

Ra-ah (#7200) means "to see," so it indicates those who saw visions and gave them.

Other words are also used: Chazeh (chazon) #2374 also means "to see" 2 Samuel 24:11.

The word used in the New Testament is "prophetes" (#4396), which means an interpreter of oracles or hidden things, one who speaks for another, for God, His spokesman.

The meaning as "one who predicts" is post-classical, and is not the exact idea in the New Testament, even though prediction may be a part of prophecy. **Locke** says: "Prophecy comprehends three things: prediction; singing by the dictate of the Spirit; and understanding and explaining the mysterious, hidden sense of Scripture by an immediate illumination and motion of the Spirit."

There are 16 Old Testament prophets whose prophecies form part of the inspired canon. These are divided into four groups:

1. The prophets of the northern kingdom (Israel), viz., Hosea, Amos, Joel, Jonah.
2. The prophets of Judah, viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.
3. The prophets of the Captivity, viz., Ezekiel and Daniel.
4. The prophets of the Restoration, viz., Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

In addition, there are many more "minor" prophets, some whose names are not mentioned, but who were vital to the fulfillment of God's purposes as they delivered direct messages from God to the people.

Sometimes we have heard it said, that God ruled His people by the priesthood (His first intention), but when the priesthood failed, then God allowed Kings. When the Kings failed, we find that prophets were predominant. However, that is not absolutely true! Prophets had a function prior to Samuel (though not so prominent), and they functioned strongly during the time of the Kings. God has His unique ways of speaking to His people.

We might modify that statement to say that the Priesthood was to rule for God and to speak for God. When the Priesthood began to fail in Judges and following, God began to speak to His people through prophets and rule them through Kings.

Samuel seems to be the beginning of the line of prophets. He was Levite, but he also functioned as a Priest in offering sacrifice. Like other prophets, he was raised of God during the evil, ungodly period of Eli's sons as Priests. Following him was a series of prophets who continued that work to speak to the people.

"Sons of the Prophets" seems to have been a school or system to develop those who would be qualified to succeed the prophets. They likely were being trained in the Law and its Interpretation. However, they generally, didn't display much spiritual discernment (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 4:38. although see 1 Kings 20:35). It seems evident that belonging to a prophetic order does not indicate that one possesses the prophetic gift.

We note that ability to speak to men for God cannot be developed by schools, nor is that ability passed on from father to son, or from family to family. Many good men had bad sons and some bad fathers had good sons.

Introductory Lessons for us:

1. God always provides a manner of speaking His mind to Men. Different means may be used, but mainly men. God is a communicating God, He almost always has a message to convey, one that is authoritative and vital.

2. Man as the instrument must recognize his great responsibility to convey that message as accurately as possible, in words that are suitable to the message and the Person who he is representing.

3. Men who spoke for God as prophets seem to be raised of God sovereignly, but with clear indications of their own personal exercise having been involved (Elijah, Haggai)

4. Faithfulness to God and the message was vital. See Numbers 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. If prophets have received a message from God, it was a burden to them to deliver it (Jeremiah 20:9). To him, it was like a fire within. They never spoke simply to be heard or to fill the time, neither to gain attention to self.

5. Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Outward miraculous indications were of no importance if the message would tend to lead the people away from simple obedience to the Lord and His house. God may allow him to speak in order to test them regarding their faithfulness to Him, but that didn't indicate His approval of their message that they gave.

6. Deuteronomy 18:20-22. God's judgment was upon any prophet that spoke anything contrary to the message God had commanded. His word had to give evidence of Divine power that accompanied it.

7. Proverbs 29:18. Proper deliverance of a message from God will restrain God's people and will preserve them from evil so that they will adhere to God's Word. If God's Word is not preached faithfully, the prophet bears part of the responsibility for the departure of the people. This is most solemn for our day as well.

8. The prophet's work involved

A. **Blessing** (Balaam, Numbers 23, Nathan re. David's house, 2 Samuel 7, Moses, Deuteronomy 33...)

B. **Encouragement**, as Zechariah, Elisha, Gad re David

C. **Rebuke** (unnamed Judges 6, Jeremiah, Nathan (2 Samuel 12),

D. **Correction**, to turn the people in the right way as Haggai.

E. **Instruction**, teaching the people, Moses, (Deuteronomy 33:3)

F. **Prediction** (Samuel, 1 Samuel 3 to Eli, Ahijah 1 Kings 11:29, Micaiah (1 Kings 22); both major and minor.

G. **Anticipation** as they spoke of Christ: Isaiah, Zechariah, Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15),

H. **Judging** according to God's Word, such as Samuel in particular.

I. In the New Testament, the prophets gave **direct messages from God** without the use of Scripture (the teacher instructed the truth from the Word already given). The majority of the Bible is the result of prophets receiving messages from God directly and then writing them (1 Peter 1:10-12, 2 Peter 1:21).

Paul's warning to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 applies to us equally today in its principle, and is a warning as to how we receive clear teaching of His Word. He tells them to "Quench not the Spirit", which may speak to the individual with a message from God that he should deliver to the people. When the Spirit of God entrusts a man with a message, he is obligated to deliver it, whether or not it is received by the people (1 Peter 4:11).

Then, of equal importance is vs. 20 "Despise not prophesyings," (noun), which would obviously apply to the listeners. Could it be possible that believers could fail to consider the solemnity of a message given, think lightly of it and not take heed to it? Yes. One whose heart is not right with God would be inclined to refuse to take such a message to his or her own heart and apply it correctively to the life. One can be in such a condition that corrective ministry is refused, for like Israel, we can desire "smooth words" and those that comfort us in our wayward condition.

Verse 21 provides the balance. We, having listened to such a message, should test it according to the entire Word of God to assess its correctness. 1 Corinthians 14:29 indicates that this is the special responsibility of those who are most qualified to ascertain its veracity in relation to all the revealed truth.

We, now having God's Word complete in our language, are even more responsible than those of the past to listen, receive and respond to the ministry given. Those who speak also have a solemn responsibility to deliver the entire "counsel of God," (Acts 20:27).

(continued)

I have said it many a time, and am surer of it than ever, that the life and death issue of Christianity is the inspiration and authority of the Bible.