

*FROM
ASHES
TO
BEAUTY*

BY Shaun Kearney

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MINISTRY PROFILE OF SHAUN T KEARNEY

After ministering extensively throughout Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America during 1967 the Lord led the Kearney's and their five children, (four sons and one daughter) to the North side of Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand. There they began to pioneer a church that was to have a significant impact on the whole church nationally and the community at large. In 1972 this growing body of believers known as “New Life Fellowship” miraculously acquired a tract of land where a Convention Centre and facilities for a Bible College and Christian Campground were established.

This beautiful location with its own private beach became the scene of many wonderful events accomplished by God. It was the venue for many conferences sponsored by the church for Christian leaders. Speakers from many parts of the world came there to minister to God's servants as they gathered from all over New Zealand, Australia, and from as far away as India, South East Asia and the South Pacific. Ministers attended these gatherings from every mainline denomination to be challenged and blessed.

During Brother Kearney's six-year tenure as chairman of the Pentecostal Ministers' Fraternal in Auckland, a milestone was achieved. For the first time in the history of the Pentecostal movement, a conference for all the streams of Pentecost, both classical and independent, was held at the church's convention centre. Accepting an invitation from Brother Kearney Jack Hayford Pastor from “Church on the Way” came as the guest speaker. All the leaders in the nation, without exception attended. As they lived together for five glorious days, the Spirit of God broke down barriers, allayed suspicions, thus paving the way for the formation of the Associated Pentecostal Churches of New Zealand.

This association of churches and ministers went from strength to strength for a season until vested interests eventually won control. In 1979 the Kearney's travelled to the United States for a Sabbatical along with their family. Returning to New Zealand in 1980, they sold all their possessions and went back to the US in 1981. They moved to Australia in 1987 and then to New Zealand in 2004. Brother Kearney has travelled in Asia, US, Canada, and Europe extensively. In addition he has authored many books on the ‘Unstructured Church life’.

FROM ASHES TO BEAUTY

Introduction

He is a rare individual indeed that can say I have lived a charmed and problem free life. On occasions I have heard a few Christian couples say, “We have never had an argument, nor has a harsh word ever passed between us”. If you fit into that category then read no further, because this effort has little to offer you, nor might I add will much of the Bible. However for redeemed mortals such as myself, who in spite of being saved, often found themselves struggling with the consequences of ill-conceived hasty decisions, there is much benefit. Regardless of whether those decisions were self-inflicted, or were made by others for us (before or after our conversion) makes little difference, for they are equally painful.

Isaiah is filled with hope and inspiration for the weary soul.

There are more prophecies in Isaiah concerning the church than all of the prophetic books combined; therefore this book is extremely important, and of particular interest to each one of us. Prophecy concerns itself with the present, as well as the future. A prophet speaks on behalf of another. Isaiah was such a one. He was an Oracle sent by God to declare what he had received by direct revelation from Him.

The marvellous theme of this book.

Isaiah is the Bible in miniature. It has 66 chapters that numerically correspond to the 66 books of the Bible. It is divided into two parts. The first section (39 chapters) deals with law and judgment, and corresponds to the 39 books of the O.T. The second section, (the last 27 chapters) correspond to the 27 books of the N.T. The message it brings is one of comfort and deliverance through Christ. The theme of the first section (like Jeremiah 200 years later) predicts the coming judgment and captivity of Israel, because of sin and apostasy; while the theme of the last section is one of compassion, mercy, and the final restoration of all His people in the last days. There’s no attempt in this short treatise to deal with its authorship or examine the chapters in the first division, but what we shall seek to do is confine most of our remarks to the second half of this marvellous book.

There are many similarities to be seen in this wonderful work. Isaiah was married Isaiah 7:3 and had two sons Shear-jashub (A remnant shall return), and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Hurrying to the spoil), their names were prophetic. Isaiah’s wife also prophesied; Isaiah 8:3. The second 27 chapters are not historical but prophetically written some two hundred years before the events began to take place, with the emphasis on before. It refers to Cyrus the Persian King who was named 200 years before he was born. This

prophecy speaks of the Messiah, redemption, restoration, and the ultimate consummation of God's great plan for His people.

The chapters are entwined around the ever-recurring theme of the coming of Christ into the world, not just to His people, but also for His people. The central message is the supreme Lordship of Jehovah, as our only Saviour. The central chapter of the last division is Isaiah 53 which is devoted to a lengthy description that fits only one figure in all human history, and when we reflect that it was written 700 years beforehand one finds it hard to imagine that any sane person would question the Bible's inspiration.

ISRAEL THE PARABOLIC PEOPLE

1 Corinthians 10:11

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come”.

Biblical scholarship now fully appreciates that many of the writings of the prophets have a dual application, connecting the times in which they were given with future events. Often they leap over the centuries as in Isaiah 9: 6-7. Inspired prophecy anticipates far greater issues of which the immediate historical occasion is but a parable of the future. Paul says there most certainly is a lesson to be learned from this nation that was delivered out of the land of bondage by God through the leadership of meek yet mighty Moses. Paul actually refers to Israel as the “Church in the wilderness.” Acts 7:38. They are there as an example to illustrate, admonish, and warn us. The lives of these people are in so many ways a parable of the Church.

Paul takes this next passage in Galatians to show from the writings of prophet Isaiah once and for all that the church is the spiritual seed. The blood bought saints are the children of promise; the true heirs according to the pre-determined will of God.

Galatians 4:21-31

“Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are allegories: for these are the two covenants, the one from the Mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Agar. (Hagar the mother of Ishmael) For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children, (The Jews). But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

Isaiah 54:1-3 For it is written, “Rejoice, thou barren that barest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? **Cast out** the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. We are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

THE SECOND EXODUS WAS PREDICTED

The Exodus from Egypt is one of the most significant events of the past. It's so because of its historical value to a nation, but even more revealing is that it inaugurated a religious movement, and a nation, which without question is a most important factor in our modern world. Scant attention has been paid to the 'second exodus' from Babylon. Perhaps it is because its importance to the Church of this present time has been overlooked and never fully appreciated, or because it was such a gradual event and not on as grand a scale as the exodus that took place under Moses from Egypt. Yet it was a marvellous episode in the life of God's people. The results of this gradual departure from Babylon, which slowly gathered momentum, culminating in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and the restoration of the Temple as the place of true worship for every Jew, has a great lesson for us upon whom the "ends of the age have come." It is a story filled with hope. We see in its pages, portrayed to us in graphic detail, scene upon scene of humiliation, shame, suffering and sorrow; and the hopeless confusion of a disobedient people. Then at the last we see the intervention of a loving Saviour. The descriptions are accurate, detailed, and absolutely contemporary. The spectre of a loving and gracious God is seen at every turn until we can barely contain ourselves. This story chosen for our consideration commences in Chapter 40, and continues right through to the end of the book.

Mighty signs and wonders did not accompany their departure from Babylon, as was the case in their triumphant departure from Egypt. There was no charismatic figure such as Moses with a ministry of miracles to rally the nation to depart. They had no Joshua to subdue the nations that sought to bar their progress to their Promised Land. Neither were wealthy David and wise Solomon there to build their place of worship. No, it's a very different scene that greets our eyes. Yet although the events that aided Israel's departure from Egypt as recorded in Exodus may not be apparent on the surface to the natural eye, never the less they were there in an even greater measure, for the Lord Himself was to lead them out. It still holds true for the church today that a far greater than Moses or Joshua or Solomon is here. "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the Wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" Luke 11:31-32.

THE DEPARTURE

Their departure from Babylon was in stages, gradually drawn out over many years. First a few, then more and more growing in number like the grains of sand in the bottom of an hourglass. It began with the proclamation of King Cyrus who was the son of Queen Esther and nephew of Mordecai who no doubt been brought up in the faith of his Jewish mother.

2 Chronicles 36: 22-23

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.”

Following the proclamation of the king, a small group of men, women and children returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel who Cyrus had appointed governor over Judah. These were joined by a small number of Levites bearing the vessels of the Lord that had been taken 70 years earlier from the house of Jehovah in Jerusalem.

“And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon.”

The rebuilding of the Temple took 20 years. They had become discouraged because of their enemies until the work at one stage completely ceased. So the Lord sent two prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the builders in Jerusalem and to encourage them to resume the work regardless of the opposition.

Ezra 6:14: “And the elders of the Jews built, and they were blessed through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it according to the command of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.”

The second major migration led by Ezra took place immediately after the temple was completed. During this period the remnant in Judah were in great distress and enduring much reproach. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the gates were burned with fire. This was still the condition even

after the temple was completed as can be seen in the book of Ezra. The walls were being built very slowly, and as was the case with the building of the temple the work became neglected until Nehemiah arrived to complete the task 85 years after the first company under Zerubbabel left Babylon. It was a long slow process rebuilding the Temple, the walls, and the gates of Jerusalem. It was hampered by the lack of manpower, **as the captives were slow in returning from exile**. The way back is always difficult. It's always easier to live in a compromising environment, than to make the journey back to (Jerusalem) righteousness and peace. The reason for their captivity was sin.

2 Chronicles 36:11-20

“Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel. Moreover the chief priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord that he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, **till there was no remedy**. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia.”

“To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years” 2 Chronicles 36:21.

“This whole land shall be a desolation and astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” Jeremiah 25:11.

This captivity of the Jews in Babylon was to last for 70 years. After which Babylon would be overthrown; and the Jews would then be free to return to their own land.

“For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you and perform my good word towards you causing you to return” Jeremiah 29:10-11.

Even as they were going into exile the prophet Jeremiah is encouraging the nation to set up high heaps of stones, as signposts marking out the route by which they will return.

“As you travel into exile, **set up road signs pointing back to Israel.** Mark your pathway well. **For you shall return again,** O virgin Israel, to your cities here” Jeremiah 31:21.

These signposts are found in shadow and type throughout the word of God. They are truths that were once delivered to the saints. Truths that are found in the early church, and are seen in types and shadows in the Tabernacle of Moses, the Feasts of Israel, The Tabernacle of David and in the parables of the kingdom of God in Matthew 13: These are the **principles** of the **doctrine** of Christ upon which we build. The church gradually left these principles until the light of Gospel truth was all but extinguished. Then came the reformation and since that time God has been calling His people out to follow Him.

Acts 3:19-20.

“Repent, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...until the times of the restoration of all things spoken by the mouth of all His prophets.”

THE MOST CRUCIAL STEP IN EVERY JOURNEY IS THE FIRST

Transformation via remembrance, repentance and forgiveness

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Then Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times but until seventy times seven” **Matt 18:21-35.**

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents (\$30 Million). This was an impossible amount to repay. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded that he be sold (into slavery), his wife, his children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. A mans wage was a penny a day so at that rate it would have taken him 8,219,178 yrs working seven days a week. This was utterly impossible.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. Yes, He forgave him an unpayable amount. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

Psalm 137:1-6 “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” Memories evoke strong feelings.

They were reminding themselves of the good old days, before their sins caught up with them. We also find ourselves in situations not only because of our sin, but also because of the sins of others. Sometimes we reap what others have sown. “They that carried us away captivity required of us a song of mirth.” “How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?”

But: “As you travel into exile, **set up road signs pointing back to Israel.** Mark your pathway well, **for you shall return again** to your cities here” Jeremiah 31:21. Thank God there’s a highway **all** the way back.

Memories evoke feelings of guilt, shame, and a sense of failure; of things we would rather forget and so we repress them. To a certain extent this way of dealing with painful memories is often necessary. Thank God for sleep. Some find the burden too difficult to bear and so turn to drugs, illicit or prescribed. Others receive shock treatment; or the deep sleep therapy. But indiscriminate

wholesale undistinguished, (unidentified), repression is unhealthy. If we never come to grips with our painful memories we will never learn anything from them, and so stunt our growth and development as a person.

Enslaved by painful memories we live in the past, not the present. Feelings of anxiety and pain lie embedded in our subconscious mind, and because we have suppressed the memories associated with them we have forgotten the cause of those feelings.

If there's a problem there's a reason. Unidentifiable painful feelings can be more crippling than the cause. We parade our good memories with trophies and diplomas, reminiscing about them with friends. But hide our pains by pretence.

It's only as we make a conscious effort to remember them that we can confront them and be healed. We need the help of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of recall. Perhaps it's time to use our God given talent for creative memory, recalling our hurtful memories so that God can heal them. Most of our human emotions are closely related to our memory. Remorse is a stinging memory; the spoken word never comes back. Guilt is an accusing memory, our own conscience as well as the accusations of the devil. Gratitude is a joyful memory; all these influence the way we live and the way we view our world.

We see life through our experiences of it.

A fellow minister clowned around me for years; finally I said to him one day; "I would love to get to meet you, if you can find the time." You can never get near some people, and there's usually a reason.

"Let there be light" were **not** the first words of creation, but the first words of recreation. The hidden works of darkness are brought to the light. Heliotherapy is the therapeutic use of sunlight. Exposure to sunlight for healing was known to be beneficial for those who were ill. In areas renown for high hours of sunshine many governments set up health camps because in this environment tuberculosis patients recovered. Native Americans resorted to the mountains around Colorado Springs long before European settlement for this reason.

1 Corinthians 11:28-31 "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep, for if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged".

REPENTANCE

A sick church is an unhealthy place to hang around.

There can be no good news without it. It's the first word of the gospel. "Testifying both to the Jews, and the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward Our Lord Jesus Christ" Acts 20:2.

It's the first step to deliverance. There can be none without it. Egocentric Christianity that ignores repentance and presents Christ only on the basis of what He can do for us is false. We have so many casualties in the church that never repented unto true faith. At Adolph Eichmeins trial the Israeli judge made this profound statement. "Neither the passage of time, nor the distance of asylum can provide immunity from judgment". "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us and on our children" Matthew 27:25.

The Jews quickly assumed full responsibility for His death. They were soon visited with the same type of punishment. The Romans crucified them in such numbers that there was insufficient wood left to build crosses to place them upon Luke 21:20-24. As many as 500 a day were scourged and crucified.

The Pastor of a Church we know in an adulterous relationship with the wife of another brother when challenged said, "We are prepared to accept the consequences". They divorced their spouses, married and carried on. How shall we escape? We won't because nobody gets away with sin unless they repent.

Hebrews 2:2-3 "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." Did Moses escape when he struck the rock? Did David escape when he numbered Israel, or lay with Bathsheba, or murdered Uriah? Then how shall we escape?

Proverbs 28:13 "He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."

Hebrews 6:1 Repentance is the first foundation of life.

1 Corinthians 1:18 "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

"But go ye and learn what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" Matthew 9:13. In these days of powerless witness, we have salvation without repentance, and life without intelligence. People will do all sorts of things to avoid repenting. Schizophrenia is often a form of denial.

FORGIVENESS

If we sin we have an advocate. “Therefore if you bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” Matt 5:23-24.

1 Corinthians 11:24

“And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.” Our celebration of the Lord’s Supper is a remembrance feast with consequences.

Matthew 6:12-15

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, you’re heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

1 John 1:8-10

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

GRACE THE FOUNDATION OF FORGIVENESS

Romans 3:24-26

“Being justified **freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: We have been acquitted. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness **for the remission of sins that are past**, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him, which believeth in Jesus.

An exhortation to obedience and remembrance.

What is the *ground* for faith that we can be delivered? Throughout the Biblical record **its memory!**

Deuteronomy 1:31-33

“The Lord your God which goes before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God, Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go and in a cloud by day.”

God’s provision was more than adequate. Food, clothing, health, there never was a day when they lacked anything despite their murmuring, unbelief and open rebellion. The purpose: Was to make us to know that we don’t just live by natural bread. You can have everything you need to sustain natural life and still be a miserable and cantankerous individual.

Deuteronomy 8:16. “Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end”.

Life isn’t easy; we weren’t promised it would be a bed of roses. Things do happen we would rather forget, or wished they had never happened but they did, and so we must ask ourselves what are we going to do about them? Sweep them into the hidden corners of our hearts? Or courageously confront them.

John 14:26 “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

Remembrance is the first step to freedom from the power of the past.

Repentance before God is the next:

Forgiveness releases the grace of God:

Forgive your brother; agree with your adversary quickly, while you're in the way with him, lest at any time he delivers you to the Judge. We put ourselves (and others also) in prison by bitter hatred and resentment.

1 Cor 5:5. Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

Guilty memories; painful memories.

Gird up the loins of your mind. Bad things do happen to innocent people. Little children are abused; husbands and wives do cheat on each another, but woe unto them by whom these offences come. Jesus has proved that bad things happen to the best of people. It's useless to ask why, because there are no answers to some of these things.

Job never did find an answer to the mystery of undeserved suffering. But **in** his sufferings **he** finally **met** God. Christianity is irrational, yet one thing is certain, that we need problems more than we need solutions because in them we meet God. The experiences of the four Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace; Daniel in the lion's den; Paul and Silas in prison; and Joseph in jail all testify to this fact.

Ecclesiastes 7:8-9

“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger rests in the bosom of fools”.

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”.

Isaiah 46:10

“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure”.

Job 19:23-26

“Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever! For I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God”.

James 5:10-11

“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

Romans 8:28

“And **we know** that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Job 23:1-17

“Then Job answered and said, even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat so I would order my cause before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words, which he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me.

Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered forever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hides himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But **He** knows the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food”.

God’s decree is changeless

“But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desires, even that he does. For he performs the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God makes my heart soft, and the Almighty troubles me: Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither has he covered the darkness from my face.”

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

Because the nation of Israel never completely fulfilled the prophetic predictions of Isaiah it leaves us with a dilemma, either God's word is unreliable, or the prophet under divine inspiration had more than one people in view? As Christ is undoubtedly the Servant in chapter 53, so His offspring the ecclesia is the true Israel referred to by Isaiah. This Body was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world. He never replaced Israel; He always intended that His Body and none other would be His instrument to fulfil His purpose in the earth. To this end He has pledged His word; And He gives to it His grace and power to guarantee its success.

Let us look again at this parabolic people. In spite of all that they had suffered in exile, for the second time they failed to realize what God required of them, which was to be an example to the world of a people under His governance. Instead under the reigning ecclesiastical class of Priests Pharisee and Scribe they settled down to become a nation of legalistic bigots and straw splitting racists. As prophesied Jesus Christ came and assumed the responsibilities they had neglected and fulfilled them by the Gospel He preached; and the body He began to form. What He was and what He did, the whole nation ought to have done and been. To be fair, what God wanted was impossible for unredeemed Israel, or indeed any nation to accomplish. Since the fall only a redeemed community would be capable of it. The apostle Paul fully understood this, and so the new creation, His body, the redeemed community under His headship takes the pre-eminence.

Acts 13:45-48. “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. (Yes that's right blaspheming.) Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, it was necessary that the word of God should **first** have been spoken to you: **but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.**

For the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. When the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

Does God have a plan for the natural Jew? Has He forsaken them? No He has not! Has He not promised to **take out** from among the Jews, and **take out** from among the gentiles to make **one** people for His namesake? Ephesians 2:14-16; 3:6. “That the gentiles should be ‘fellow heirs’, and of the same body.” “A new body, gr: susomos, one that never existed before, not an existing Jewish body, a new one). It could not come into being until Christ died and rose again to become the firstborn of this new creation. They may enter through Jesus the door at any time in like manner to every believer. But this is not our consideration here.

SUMMONED TO AN EXODUS

Isaiah 58:12

“And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shall be called, the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.”

Isaiah 61:4

“They shall build the old wastes, and raise up the former desolations, they shall repair the waste cities the desolations of many generations.”

The desolations of many generations.

Sin is devastating in all its deadly forms. For the Jews in captivity the sins of their fathers over many generations weighed heavily upon them. They were not only bearing their own burden of sin, but the sin of a whole nation, who apart from a revival here and there under pitifully few kings and judges, had been in rebellion for hundreds of years. The history of Christianity has followed a similar path. Its birth on the day of Pentecost was an exciting event as we read about it in the infallible record. It promised so much as it moved in wondrous power and conviction, and yet before the death of the last apostles tares sown by the enemy were beginning to manifest themselves in their midst. By the third century this apostate church and the State had settled their differences due to Emperor Constantine accepting Christianity. From here on in, it was all downhill. Priest craft practiced and prospered. Gradually an ecclesiastical hierarchy arose like a pyramid, with popes and cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests mediating between God and men, holding through the confessional the power of life and death.

Approach to God in the most trivial matters of faith and morals could only be made through those who were appointed by the order of a carnal commandment. Indulgences and favours were freely sold. Many popes, cardinals, and bishops accrued to themselves fabulous wealth. Living in luxury they gratified every carnal desire at the expense of their flocks. In reaction to this excess new Religious Orders arose headed up by men and women who vowed never to touch the gold of the sanctuary, but to live simple lives in the manner of their Lord and Saviour. Then around the fourteenth century the reformation began, and the process of restoring to His people all that had been lost through design neglect and ignorance began. It has been ongoing, but sadly in the main it has been ineffectual and fruitless. These religious systems, which in every case are designed and controlled by ecclesiastics, are beyond reforming; they need to be forsaken. Let the dead bury the dead.

OUR PERSONAL CAPTIVITY

On a personal level our lives in many cases started with such great joy, hope and promise. Then as we look back over the years and survey our lives, for reasons that become all too plain we find ourselves in captivity to wilful decisions made with little thought to their consequences. It's the double captivity of our lives. I remember so vividly my deliverance from my first captivity. Bound by Satan and sin God forgave me, set me free, and took me just as I was. It was an exodus of epic proportions. Perhaps your salvation was not as dramatic as mine, or it may have been even more so. But what one of us doesn't look back on that wonderful event that filled our hearts and spirits with joy, enveloping us as we began our journey. Our lives were completely turned around as we moved in a new direction, our hearts full of gratitude to our blessed Saviour. Then after many years we look back over our lives at some of the decisions we made that have come back to haunt us; things that have brought us so much heartache, pain and sorrow.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

It seems unfair that the most important decisions of our lives have to be made when we are young naturally and inexperienced spiritually, for example, the choice of our life partner. Fifty years is a long time to live with one person, so you need to choose carefully, so be sure you get God's choice. Then the career we choose will decide what we study and what we will be doing for a great portion of, if not all of our lives. We are called upon to make these decisions when we have precious little experience; when we lack the wisdom that only years will bring. Though the question of our salvation may have been settled, there are other decisions of major importance that still must be made that will affect our lives for years to come. Once they have been embarked upon it's almost impossible to turn back. The decision was made, and the consequences that followed cannot be changed, even God can't do that. We cannot change history, or turn back the clock.

The young man who for a moment of unbridled passion finds himself enveloped in circumstances that will exact their toll for years to come. As the ever broadening circles of a stone thrown into a pond reach far and wide, so too do the consequences of our actions. The hopes and aspirations of a dream to serve God are now left seemingly in tatters. Living in secret sin bound by

a habit that you cannot seem to overcome. Carrying a secret close to your breast and every time it comes to mind you die a thousand deaths. The young woman who had an abortion, wondering if she should tell her future husband what she did? What will happen if he ever finds out? The dreaded fear of being caught out for whatever reason. The binding terror of concealed and unforsaken sin, or the newborn child that you had to give away. You lie in bed at night wondering where they are and what's become of them.

Broken vows; becoming unequally yoked with an unbeliever, constantly crying to yourself "if only I had listened to God or my godly parents". Whether all or none of the above have been our problem, what wouldn't any one of us give to be able to turn back the clock and change decisions we made that have caused us so much pain. But it's too late now, the past is irreparable, you can't change what took place, not even God can do that. Christians with one failed marriage going and repeating the same mistakes for the second and third time. With each successive marriage the chances of success are greatly reduced.

A professional Christian counsellor recently told me that 80% of all the Christian women she had counselled over many years who had been married twice or more told her, that had they followed the teachings of the Bible they would never have left their first husband. Our basic problem has always been our determination to go our own way. To this we must add, that if the Christian husband had been more Christ like his wife would never have contemplated leaving.

"We have eaten the fruit of going our own way." And it always leaves a bitter taste in our mouths. Proverbs 1:31.

"Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law" Isaiah 42:24.

God may hand us over for a season, but He never completely gives us up to our enemies. The God, who gave us **into** the hand of the enemy, is the God who will most assuredly deliver us **from** the hand of the enemy when we turn to Him. He gave Job over, but only for a short season, He never gave him up. When Israel had served their seventy years sentence in exile they were legally free to return. Our wonderful Saviour has served our sentence; the time we should have served He has done for us, and He wants us to come home right now, this very minute, to righteousness and peace.

Deliver us from evil. Psalms 79:9-13

“Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say where is their God? Let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants, which is shed. Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die.”

Psalm 102:16-22

“When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. **He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.** This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people, which shall be created, shall praise the Lord. For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; **To hear the groaning of the prisoner;** to loose those that are appointed to death; To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.”

Divine nature is caught, not taught. It's caught by association.

Eternal life is not something we do; it is something we accept. If it is self-effort, then it is self-salvation, and the end is self-righteousness. One must meet the Saviour to get it. Transformation is not an attainment, but an obtainment. Religion is man's search for God; the gospel is God's search for man. There are many religions but only one gospel.

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

Isaiah 40:1-2

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand **double** for all her sins.” James 5:10-11.

Is there no answer for my pain you cry? Is there no help, or must I live out the rest of my days in pain and sorrow? Take heart your life can change no matter how hopeless it may seem.

Wherever the stinging nettle is found the dock leaf is close at hand. The antidote, the counteracting remedy, is never far from where the pain is. The same Jesus that came to seek and save the lost also came to bind up the broken hearted, to heal, and to set the captive free. He is the cure for all our ills, and is ever near, closer than we usually imagine. Though we may not see Him, what is better still is that He sees us. Yes dear one there is Hope, you can come on home and find righteousness and peace, yes you can, and you can come now, just as you are. Life becomes barely tolerable when we bitterly resent things as an unwanted intrusion into our lives. We can never be at peace with ourselves, or those around us, when always resentful of our situation.

Don’t let your failures make you despondent. The world is not against you. God hasn’t abandoned you, He understands you completely and better still He loves you. Self-pity is a dead end street that leads to loneliness and rejection. You’ll drive all your friends away to become an angry, lonely person. Don’t keep reacting to life’s problems by always getting mad. If you do you’ll turn into a bitter, resentful, and nasty kind of a person. Don’t develop this kind of attitude; it only makes you miserable to live with, or be around. Righteousness, joy, and peace are not unattainable goals.

THE PRESENT IS NOT YOUR DESTINY.

Time and again the Lord is seen wooing and encouraging the exiles to come home. Urging them to depart from Babylon and return to Jerusalem. But these poor captives keep feeling sorry for themselves and can't stop feeling that their circumstances are absolutely impossible.

The curse of depression.

"But Zion said the Lord has forsaken me, my God has forgotten me." To which the Lord replies, "Can a woman forget her child, and not have compassion on the son of her own womb? Yes she may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold I have engraved you upon the palms of my hands, you are continually before me."

Romans 8:1

"There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." This chapter commences with "no condemnation" and ends with "no separation." There are many unanswered questions in the Bible, but in this chapter of Romans we are left in no doubt about two things.

First there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Secondly Paul declares that there is nothing in heaven or earth, or under the earth, that can separate us from the love of God. Still not satisfied the captive asks in Isaiah 49:24-25. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" To which the Lord replies, "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered, for I will contend with them that contend with you." It sounds too good to be true, I don't deserve it, please don't build up my hopes, because I've tried so often to escape, to find an answer and found nothing or nobody to help. I guess I will just have to bear my cross; I know I'm guilty, and I deserve what's happened. Dear one please let me commend the Saviour to you. He took divine initiative to become like us that we might become like Him. He saves us from the penalty of sin and from the stinging memory of the guilt. It's buried in the sea of His forgetfulness. And if He has forgotten it, then we must forget it too. It's a sin against the forgiveness of God to keep bringing up in our memory what God has blotted out of His.

THE NATURE OF CONDEMNATION

To receive forgiveness you must confess, and when God forgives you, you must forgive yourself. So many receive forgiveness from God and then fail to take it to themselves. They keep lashing themselves for what they have done, hoping to pay God back by their own suffering. Don't try to make atonement for what has already been atoned for.

So many believers live in condemnation. There's nothing that makes us as ineffective, or paralysed as condemnation. It has its roots in doubt and unbelief; the inability to forgive oneself, because we doubt the forgiving nature of God. The fruit of it is insecurity, timidity, torment, fear, and despair. The battle as ever is in the mind. I knew a man who took his own life whose only sin after coming to Christ was he couldn't forgive himself.

In Luke 15: in that wonderful story of a father's love for his wayward son we read these words, “and when he came to himself he said, I will arise and go to my father.” It's a great place to come to; when you come to yourself. The mind and the whole personality are dyed by our thoughts.

Condemnation:

It's a word connected with law. It means, judgment against, to judge down. The Holy Spirit will not and cannot condemn anyone. He will only convict. He is like a policeman. He can arrest you, and write you out a ticket for breaking the law, but it's not His task to judge you, that's the Father's job. He who hands out the ticket doesn't hand down the judgment; He only refers us to the Father. He arrests us, for He cannot let us get away with breaking the law. It's for this reason that He came, to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and judgment to come, and then accept His pardon. Neither does Jesus condemn us. No minister sent by God would preach condemnation. To the woman taken in adultery Jesus said; "neither do I condemn thee." Then He said to her; "go and sin no more." He does not condone sinful behaviour, but neither does He condemn the sinner, but calls them to repentance. The Father could condemn us but He will not, for His demands have been satisfied. Christ paid the price in full so we can go free. You can't judge a man twice for the same offence.

THE NATURAL CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

In Nehemiah the Spirit of God unmistakably draws our attention to the desolate city Jerusalem, uninhabited except by a few persecuted and struggling Jews. Though it was a barren place, unproductive and forsaken of men, God did not forget it. Here it lies in ruins, destroyed because of sin and disobedience. Look at the description of her by one who cannot lie. The wealthy stayed in Babylon, and played little part in restoration.

Nehemiah 1:3 “And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.”

Nehemiah 2:13-17 “And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. Then said I unto them, ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.”

How can this be? What are these ruins the result of? This opens up to us a great subject that touches us all. It is a subject that many of us would rather not consider because it is so distressful. That though our sin is forgiven, yet certain natural consequences remain of which that ruined city is a type.

We cannot undo the past. Neither can God Himself. It can never be as though it had never happened. Seventy years of captivity, sorrow, and shame, and for God heartache and disappointment over His children. Oh the lost opportunities, the wasted years, the thistles, briars and thorns so recklessly sown. Can God forgive us for the past? Yes He can and He has! Then can He change the past? No! But He can most certainly change our future.

There are many questions that arise regarding this vital matter that we shall try to address, for they deserve an answer. What does Redeemer mean? "To

redeem" means "to ransom by means of a price". To redeem is to buy something back from a person who was not the original owner. When the pawnbroker purchases an article from you it becomes his legal possession. He will give you a certain amount of time in which to redeem the article before it he can sell it.

God created us; we have always belonged to Him. But His creation sold itself into slavery for the price of sin. We were without hope until Christ came and redeemed us from the hand of our enemy, paying the full ransom price. This is what is meant when the scripture says; "Where sin reigned unto death" there "Grace would reign unto eternal life". The moment we came to Christ our past was eradicated. It is as if we never existed before that moment, we were newly created. The old had gone; the new had begun.

After our conversion, if we sin, and it says 'if', we have an advocate with the Father, Christ our kinsman and redeemer. But from this point in time although our sins may be forgiven, serious consequences can arise if we are disobedient. Every sin is not the same. It's called the law of sowing and reaping. Some seeds that are sown will bring forth for only a season, but others go on bearing fruit year after year.

We must distinguish between sin and its consequences.

Though our sins are forgiven certain consequences remain. The alcoholic's health may be broken. The rich man's fortune may have been gambled away. The wife that was mistreated has left for another, and now perhaps your children despise your religion and want nothing to do with you or your God.

This distinction is clearly seen in scripture.

2 Samuel 12:13-14 "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shall not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." His relationship with the Lord was restored, but the consequences of his sin were devastating and followed him for years.

When Nathan the prophet told King David the tale of the wealthy man who stole his poor neighbour's only sheep, David said that he would see to it that this man would repay four fold. Upon asking Nathan to tell him who did this terrible thing, Nathan replied to David "thou art the man." Perfect pardon may be realized, but dreadful scars may remain. David paid dearly for his

crime of passion. Murder, rape, betrayal and sorrow were to plague his household for years to come. Truly the wages of sin is death. These consequences are clearly seen on another occasion when David disobeyed God's implicit instructions not to number Israel, yet he went ahead with disastrous results for the whole nation. Then there were those seventy long lost years, for the house of Judah in Babylon.

These natural consequences are bitter to bear.

God help us never to forget the terrible cost for the consequences of sin. I'm sure if we were to ask the Bakkers' and Swaggarts' of this world they would warn us of the terrible cost of unbridled passion.

Isaiah 44:21-22 "Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shall not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

Psalms 118:19 "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord."

God has paid the full price and opened the prison door for us to return to Him. What a wonderful message of hope the gospel is, as it tells us of the loving redeemer, who is ever drawing the backslider back to Himself.

The restoration of lost and seemingly wasted years.

Joel 2:25 "I will restore the years that the Locust has eaten."

A fatal mistake that is made by many if not most Christians, is that because the natural consequences of their sins seem to surround and overwhelm them, they assume **incorrectly** that this is a sure sign that God hasn't really forgiven them, but that they are being deservedly punished for their past disobedience, and so they go on confessing the same sins over and over again, year in and year out. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Colossians 2:13 "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you **all** trespasses."

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from **all** unrighteousness."

God said He has removed our transgressions as far as the east is from the west. He will not remember them. The sin and its consequence are two distinctly different things. Once we have confessed to God and repented of our sins, that is the end of the matter as far as God is concerned. We can now turn to God with complete confidence, and expect that He will help us with **unlimited grace** to work through the consequences of our actions in such a way, as to bring glory to Him, to restore the lost years, and thereby immeasurably enrich our lives.

Isaiah 42:22 “But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivered; for a spoil, and none says restore.”

Joel 2:32 “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said.”

God desires to set us free from inbuilt readiness to receive condemnation in spite of the fact that we have been forgiven, and our striving to work it off like a debt, (penance) thereby commending ourselves.

It seems His grace is just too good to be true. God did not lower His standard to receive us, but provided a salvation so mighty that we can stand completely justified in His sight.

Romans 3:28 Declares, “A man is **justified** by faith without the deeds of the law”. This statement sparked the reformation. Justification appears several times in Romans in one form or another.

Just	True
Justified	Acquitted
Justifier	Acquitter

We are not just whistling in the dark, we are walking in the light. Are we going to walk by faith in God? Or rely upon our carnal reasoning?

AFFLICTION AND PAIN

Nehemiah 1:3 “The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach, the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.”

Four things in this verse were affecting the lives of those Jews who had returned to Jerusalem, Pain, Shame, Confusion and Weakness. They had to return to a city that was defenceless. They parallel many things that still affect God’s people when the time comes for them to return to Him. Judah’s Temple had by now been rebuilt, which is a picture of our restored spirit, the hidden man of the heart; it speaks of our spiritual relationship to God, this is redeemed territory, nothing can touch that. It is one thing however to have your relationship to God restored but quite another to have your personality restored to yourself.

Shame caused by sin and failure is hard to bear, and the reproach that comes from the knowledge of the fact that many others are also aware of your past failures makes it doubly so. We have all experienced one or more of these things to some degree at some time of our lives; the broken down walls of human emotions, in addition to our personality. Walls that should have kept us from the world, and from the ravages of the attacks of the enemy, but regrettably he came through gaps that were left in the hedge and today we live amidst the ruins of what once was beautiful and full of promise. Confusion fills our hearts, as one half of us longs to come back, and the other listens to the voice of the enemy telling us there’s nothing that can be done to ease the pain.

The longer we’ve been in captivity the greater the humiliation and devastation. We feel powerless because the ‘gates’, the places of judgment are burned with fire. It was here that the city elders met. It is here that the enemy seeks to gain control that he might have access to the city. We are so conscious of our weak condition, and any authority we may have had in our lives has long been swept aside. It was these four things that Judah was called by God to return and rebuild. And it is to this that God is calling us.

Acts 8:32-35 Isaiah 53:7-8

“The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his Shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth, then Philip opened his mouth at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus”.

Someone reading this may say, but I've been married and divorced more than once, surely I can't come. Yes you can, and what is more you can come home just as you are. Someone else reading this may say, but surely this is lowering the standard, it's nothing but a license for sin. Its just greasy grace, (a horrible term.) But to you who think we are making it just too easy let me say this. We all have things that we would like to forget. But we will have to carry those memories of our past mistakes with us to the grave, and if that isn't painful enough, the devil will see to it that we won't forget it, and sad to say so will many of our brethren. At least, Job's comforter Elihu sat down with him for several days before he offered an opinion.

Jude 1:21-24

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. **And convince some that doubt, on others have compassion:** And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,”

Nehemiah 4:1-2. The opposition they were up against was vicious.

“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we built the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, what do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?”

Isaiah 53:4-5 “Surely he hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Matthew 8:17 “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”

SHAME AND REPROACH

Revelation 3:18 “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: so be zealous and repent.”

When I think of shame I think of how sin strips us naked, not nudity. Adam and Eve in their sinless state were naked, transparent, and they were not ashamed. Then the first thing that they did after the fall was to hide from God because they were now acutely aware that they were naked. Sin is a shameful thing. And so one of the first things God did for them was to make them a covering. These are spiritual realities. I cannot think of anything that would be more embarrassing than to be caught naked in public. Yet this is the very thing that sin has done to many of God’s people. Some sins are extremely public. We cry what can I do to win back my reputation? We don’t want a bad reputation that destroys our testimony before men, but even more important than that is our character. God is more interested in our character than He is in our reputations. When you get one back the other will follow.

Philippians 2:7

“But made Himself of no reputation.”

You can either do it to yourself, or let God do it for you. Our blessed Saviour thought it not robbery to be equal with God yet he made himself of no reputation. Conceived out of wedlock, born in a stable, raised in humble circumstances by poor parents, it is clear that every step of the way was planned by His heavenly Father to make Him of no reputation. He never had a bad reputation, **just no** reputation. Reputations are deceitful and at best only human opinion. Character is different, and no man can take that from you. An abiding life that produces the fruit of the spirit is what God has in mind for all His people.

Reproach: Reproach is the blame that is attached to an action that was taken. It’s the emotion of failure, not just for ourselves, but that we have let down all those that were relying and depending upon us. We feel it keenly as we blame ourselves over and over again. And **then some people never let us forget the fact that we messed things up in a big way**, and so we isolate ourselves from people, but far worse we hide from God. We start to follow the Lord from afar off. Please don’t get away on you own He loves you.

REMORSE AND CONFUSION

James 3:16 “For where envy and strife is there is confusion and every evil work.”

Sin is baffling in its effect. It brings great confusion, but “God is not the author of confusion” **1 Corinthians 14:33**. It was because of these things that “Nehemiah the Comforter” was sent by God.

Nehemiah 2:17-18 “Then said I unto them, you see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”

Nehemiah encouraged the people to begin to rebuild the broken down walls of their shattered lives. These walls upon which they would hang the gates with their bars would provide them with protection from their enemies. Gates by which they could secure the city against all intruders, thus maintaining control over who may enter the city of God and who may not. Whoever controls the gates makes safe the city. It's about these things that the Lord is addressing many saints in pain, and shame, who feel confused and powerless to arise and rebuild their lives.

Resurrection Life.

We are on the verge of a visitation of God. That is beyond question. It will be a time when lives that have been in captivity for years, will be released and resurrected. They shall arise from the consequences of their sins, and from the legalism of pharisaic religion that has driven so many away. Just as Adam's sin has been overruled to the enrichment of the human race, so in our individual experience we rise by our falls and triumph by His grace in our defeats.

The work of God is built on the ruins of a man's life.

F. Fenelon Spiritual adviser to Louis XIV of France.

Perhaps someone reading these pages may feel I never betrayed anyone, and yet I was betrayed. I was loyal and faithful to my vows, yet I'm the victim of disloyalty that has all but destroyed me. Keep sweet, don't be bitter, He understands, and will yet bring you forth from your cave of Adullam. Caves are the places where kings are kept until God summons them forth to the throne.

POWERLESS AND WEAK.

Legal power is appointed and permitted by law; the right to; delegated authority; permission; influence. Israel lost all these, their position and authority among the nations was gone. Their influence for goodness had disappeared. Their enemies called them “feeble” and so they were. In Deuteronomy 28:13 we are told they were to be the head and not the tail, to be only on top in every situation but it was all gone. When their captors required of them a song of mirth, they said, we can’t sing, how we can sing after all that’s happened to us.

Psalm 137:1-4 “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

Even Satan is compelled to be a means of God’s grace. Is it any wonder that no weapon formed against us will ever prosper?

Romans 1:16-17 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith.”

The gospel is not just a story, or set of spiritual laws, it is power! Whose power is it? Its God’s power and therefore unlimited. It’s power for what? This power is for salvation and deliverance from every infirmity of the human spirit, soul, and body. To whom is it available? It’s available to every one that believes. The just shall live by faith.

COMING OUT OF BABYLON ISAIAH 52:

This double captivity of Israel in Egypt and Babylon is typical of the double captivity of God's people; for every individual believer in bondage to sin, and its ongoing consequences, particularly guilt and shame. The heart of the gospel is full salvation by faith. In Isaiah 52 the prophet sees God's people in captivity 200 years before hand, at the same time he sees them coming out of 70 years captivity 270 years before it takes place. Apply this to our needs and us. God sees right now every sinner potentially saved that will be saved. He has made full provision for them.

2 Corinthians 5:19

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”

All the sinner has to do is enter by faith into this complete salvation accomplished by Christ long ago at Calvary. Those who will not come receive nothing, those who will come He will in no wise cast out; you just have to come. Let's get the situation clearly in our minds. God's people were still in captivity where they had been for seventy years. There could be no deliverance until the divinely appointed time limit had expired.

But there is no time limit in the glorious dispensation of grace.

Judah was still groaning under the heel of the oppressor. But now King Cyrus appears on the scene with his God given message of deliverance. He begins to proclaim liberty to every captive who would listen. The message was they could ignore the defeated Assyria and go out from Babylon a free people. They could go out now without fear of interference, yes God's messenger Cyrus, called, named and commissioned 150 years before he was born has overthrown Babylon and is proclaiming liberty to the captives and encouraging them to return to Jerusalem. Listen to what He is saying! You're free to depart this minute, right now! Turn your face to Jerusalem, go without fear, only believe, act upon this word and depart in absolute freedom how perfectly this fits our own situation and needs.

It is finished long ago. Proclaimed and consummated by one greater than Cyrus, by one who was named and commissioned 1000's of years before He was born. All was planned from before the foundation of the world, yet why do we find it so hard to believe?

Isaiah 53:1

“Who has believed our report?” So it was with the people in Babylon. They found it so hard to believe that they were actually legally free to go after all those years of bitter bondage. The prophet is urged by the Holy Spirit to proclaim in no uncertain terms the part that Judah has to play in God's

scheme of deliverance. In Isaiah 52: he proclaims it in successive stages. Awake Thyself! Shake Thyself! Arise and sit down! Loose Thyself! Then finally depart!

Awake!

Am I just dreaming? No you're not dreaming it really is true? These past years have been a nightmare. We have got so used to satanic bondage and chains of habit with no power to release. Awake and dust off the ashes of your past defeats. Awake to the truth, deliverance is real. Awake from weakness and put on strength, awake from mourning, put on thy beautiful garments. Get up and get dressed, it's not a funeral we are going to, but to a resurrection. Put off the spirit of heaviness, and put on the garment of praise. Awake from doubt and fear, you're free to come home where you belong.

Shake Thyself!

We need to shake ourselves from the dust of humiliation. The custom of eastern conquerors was to put their feet on the necks of their captured enemies and grind them into the dust. Some would even use them as stepping-stones in victory ceremonies, this had been Judah's humiliation, but that's all over now. Shake yourself from the dust of self-reproach for past unfaithfulness, for remorse, condemnation and failure. Shake yourself; **be alert** to the temptation to be negative.

Joshua 10:24b, 25.

"And they came near, and put their feet on the necks of them. And Joshua said to them fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of a good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

Arise!

It's possible to awake and shake yourself, and then still go back to sleep. We are never certain anyone is awake until they arise and go about their duties fully alert. Arise spiritually from half heartedness, and sluggishness. Arise from the dust where the enemy said to thy soul, "Bow down that we might pass over thee." Arise from your habit, from your bed of sickness, take it up and walk. Arise and sit down O Jerusalem. In other words take your rightful place.

Ephesians 5:14-17

"Wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye **walk** circumspectly, **not as fools**, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is".

Arise from legalism and its strict adherence to the letter and not the Spirit. Even a slave has expectations. He can expect to be protected. He can expect to be loved; appreciated and valued because he was purchased at such a great cost.

Loose Thyself!

Awake, shake yourself and arise. Now “loose thyself from the bands of thy neck O captive daughter.” You are captive no longer. The word has gone forth just as it did to the woman bound by Satan for many years.

Luke 13:11-13

“And, behold, a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself”.

Like many saints today, she spent all she had; suffered much at the hands of many physicians, (preachers). And was is no way any better; but when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

Thou art loosed therefore loose thyself.

To the man with the withered hand Jesus said, “Stretch forth thy hand.” His commands are accompanied by His enabling. Christ loosed us at the cross. Saved people don’t always feel saved. We don’t live by feelings, but by faith. Jonah could have forsaken God’s mercy and stayed in the whale’s belly, but he looked again to God, and offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving. God can do no more than He has already done, so loose yourself from discouragement and leap into faith.

Finally Depart!

Isaiah 52:11-12

“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing, go ye out from the midst of her.....For ye shall not go out with haste, or by flight: for the Lord will go before you.”

God said He would not only go before them, but He would be behind them, He would totally compass them about. Believe it, receive it and act upon it now! Depart from every bondage, fear, habit, and sin. Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth.

Isaiah 55:12

“For ye shall go out with joy, and be lead forth with peace, and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.”

Revelation 18:1-4

“And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

The call to “come out of her **my** people,” indicates that it’s the voice of Christ. The reason God’s people need to come out of Babylon is so that they do not partake of her sins, for if they stay they will most certainly receive her plagues. Surely this is reason enough to wake up and shake ourselves, to arise, loose ourselves, and depart from every form of defeat. This command is repeated in Jeremiah 50: 4-9; 51: 5-8, 45.

Jeremiah 51:6 “Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord’s vengeance; he will render unto her recompense.”

An incredible journey from captivity to righteousness and peace.

Psalms 126:1-6 “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

THE END OF THE LORD

James 5:7 “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

What was the end of the Lord? For Job God restored all he had lost and then doubled it. The end of the Lord in all His dealings with His people is to fully restore and then some.

Isaiah 61:7 “For your shame you shall have double, and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion, in their land they shall possess double, and everlasting joy shall be upon them”.

Jeremiah 33:1-3 coming home to righteousness and peace. “Moreover the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the Lord the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is his name; Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which you know not”.

Jeremiah is often referred to as the weeping prophet, because he never had a lot to laugh about. He’s ministering to a people who don’t want to listen to him, and don’t believe a word of what he says. He isn’t exactly the kind of person you would want to hang out with. He’s a prophet of doom, and he cries a lot. Then one day God came to him and said Jeremiah there are some things you don’t know about what I’m going to do, that I want you to know.

Jeremiah 33:4-9

“For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I procure unto it”.

This word from the Lord to Jeremiah must have been a great source of comfort and hope to him, for he never found a living soul to stand with him.

Jeremiah 5:1

“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executes judgment, that seeks the truth; and I will pardon it”.

THE RESTORED STATE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Jeremiah 33:10-12:

“Thus saith the Lord; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endures for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down”.

In these last days God will raise up shepherds after His own heart that will feed the flock. Gather them together, carry them in His bosom, and lead them. In their habitation will be heard the voice of joy, the voice of them that say praise the Lord for the Lord is good, the voice of the Bridegroom, which is the spirit of prophecy, the voice of the bride, the spirit and the bride say come, the voice of them that bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. It will be a habitation free from parasites, where His flock can dwell in safety. So much of what God will do will revolve around what's coming out of our mouths.

Psalms 67:1-7

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth; and thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee O God; let all the people praise thee. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. Let the people praise thee, O God. **Then** shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him”.

SING O BARREN SING. ISAIAH 54:

Isaiah is sometimes called the fifth gospel. In the last 27 chapters, which from 40 to 66 correspond to the New Testament, the central chapter 53 depicts the cross. Then immediately after the description of the death, burial, and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ chapter 54 cries, “sing O barren sing.” And it’s interesting to see whom he’s telling to sing; it’s a woman and a barren woman at that. Barrenness was a terrible reproach for a woman to bear.

Luke 1:24-25 “And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men”.

You can gauge the spirituality of a congregation of saints by its singing. Dead singing or singing spiritual nursery rhymes is a sign of immaturity, or perhaps even worse. Some say Isaiah 54 is for the Jews and has nothing to do with the church. If we accept that the New Testament writers were the infallible interpreters of the Old Testament scriptures, then let’s hear what Paul has to say.

Galatians 4:21-31

“Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things is an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. (Hagar the mother of Ishmael) For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children (The Jews). But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

Isaiah 54:1-3

“For it is written, rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.”

Here Paul quotes Isaiah 54 applying it not to the natural seed, but to the spiritual seed. He likens the earthly city of Jerusalem to a woman. We have two women in Revelation, and we have two cities. A woman is a type of the church true and false. Two women are grinding at the mill, baking bread to feed their households. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a woman in Matthew 13: The church is both a woman and a city, and also a mountain. Paul likens the earthly Jerusalem to Hagar, and her son Ishmael to the natural

seed. Look what the scripture that can't be broken says; cast out the bondwoman and her son for they will not be heirs. He likens the heavenly city to Sarah, and her son Isaac to the church, and just as Isaac's wife Rebekah was barren, so has the church been barren. Barrenness was always a reproach.

Galatians 4:27-31

“For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. **Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.** But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

He's the singing prophet; he sings about Christ, about His people, he just can't stop singing because he's got a lot to sing about. There are more exhortations to sing, and prophecies about singing for increase, and singing in general in Isaiah than in any of the other prophets. Jeremiah can't stop crying, and Isaiah just can't stop singing.

Isaiah 49:13

“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.”

Isaiah 51:11

“Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

Isaiah 52:8-9

“Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.” It's remarkable the barren women in the Bible that God caused to sing. His people will begin to prosper and enjoy increase when they begin to sing. Not just for the sake of singing, but in expectation with regard to what God is about to do. You can take for granted and think its just entertainment, but there's a far higher purpose than that in song.

Colossians 3:16

Here we are told to “remember” what Christ taught, and to let His words enrich our lives and make us wise; teaching them to each other and singing them out in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to the Lord with thankful hearts.”

Singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are three areas of worship that should be in local congregations. Christianity is not a spectator religion. The king’s wife Michal despised her husband David when he danced before the Lord, for this attitude she became barren, although she was a king’s daughter, and born of royal blood, she remained childless. I’m not saying we can’t enjoy it, but we are not there just to gawk and listen. We sing because we have seen something that God is about to do. It is remarkable to see how many barren women in the bible became mothers after they started singing.

Sarai means contention. Proverbs 21:9-19

“It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.” God doesn’t want a contentious woman, but a singing woman. God changed Sarai’s name to Sarah when He confirmed the promise of a son to Abraham in Genesis 18 telling him that his seed would be as the dust of the earth and stars of heaven for multitude. O how they laughed when Sarah conceived and Isaac was born. Scientists tell us music is coming from the stars.

Rebekah means captivating.

The bride of Isaac through whom the promises to Abraham were to come was barren. **Although she was prophesied over she remained barren for 19 years.**

Genesis 24:60

“And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.” The lesson here is that we inherit the promises through faith and patience.

Rachel means beautiful.

“Hello Rachel, I’d love to hear you sing”. “Don’t bother me thank you very much. We don’t do a lot of singing around here in case you haven’t noticed”. (Like Rachael a lot of us think we haven’t got a lot to sing about, because we’re barren you see). “In fact I’m not going to sing unless my husband gets saved, and until then I’m just going to be an ugly woman. I might think about singing after I’ve had a baby, but until then don’t bother asking me to sing, okay? So you see I’m not going very pretty until I get what I want”.

Psalms 126:2 “When the Lord turned again their captivity; “**Then** was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing: **then** said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.” Other women besides those we have mentioned such as Hannah and Elizabeth, the mothers of Samuel and John the Baptist.

Psalm 113:6-9 Hannah’s song. “He makes the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord.” How?, by singing of course. Sing O barren sing. All these point to the people of God. It’s one of the secrets to personal growth. It’s not the only one but it is one.

Psalm 137:1-4 “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps on the willows in the midst thereof. For they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land”?

Acts 16:24-26 “Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and **every one's** bands were loosed.”

In the Bible there are only three men that God called by His name: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each had a wife that was barren. Here God was foreshadowing a condition in the church, and at the same time offering a solution for all those that want to overcome the desolations caused by sin Isaiah 61:4. How can I sing says Israel! My city is in ruins, my temple is burned with fire, the precious things I once counted on as being mine are wasted and gone. How can I sing? The divine reply is sing and see the salvation I’m about to bring to you. Sing not for what has happened to you; nor about your present condition; but sing for what I am about to do for you. Because what I have promised to give you is enlargement and increase.

Isaiah 54:2-4 “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.” There’s a world of difference between punishment and chastisement. God is not punishing you;

that is a lie of the enemy. Christ was punished for our sins. The Father chastises us for future blessing.

It is this writer's conviction, that that no matter how far an individual may have wandered, or how much of their inheritance he or she may have squandered, if they will come to God just as they are, God will take their life and restore the years that the locust has eaten. Then by His miraculous power and grace make them as an instrument in His hand and use them for His glory, and for their restoration, satisfaction and joy. The pardoned prodigal can talk of the father's love in a way that the elder son could never do. Your life can be productive and spiritually fruitful in a way that you never imagined was possible. Your life in Christ has not failed it's just begun.

Jeremiah 31:12-13 “Therefore they shall come and **sing** in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.”

Psalms 42:3 “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, where is thy God?”

Job 23:1-2 “Then Job answered and said, even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke heavier than my groaning.” When misfortune strikes, death, deep depression, sickness, the loss of a job, the breakdown of a close personal relationship, God seems so very distant, uncaring, impersonal, and our lives seem about to dry up and die. The saints of old in similar circumstances expressed their feelings in no uncertain way, directing their passionate expressions of grief to the God whom they no longer experienced. They let it all hang out so to speak. In this day and age our tendency when things go wrong is to attempt to go back to the root of the problem and fix it by whatever means available. We try to get healing for the memories of the past, or start seeking to find significance, or begin to look for scapegoats, feeling like we are victims. We run constantly looking back over our shoulder, instead of engaging in the constant biblical practice, of looking in anticipation to God who tells us that all things are working together for our good. Things are not only operating, but also cooperating for our ultimate blessing. David said I would have fainted if I had not expected to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Paul said, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Two of the most severe forms of physical pain are giving birth, and passing kidney stones. I have had considerable experience with the latter. Only a

psychopath would want them I can assure you. But women will willingly become pregnant, but for a good reason. My wife was an only child and resented it. She determined that when she married she would have more than one child; this was made plain to me when we married. We eventually had six children, five sons and a daughter. It makes all the difference when suffering has a desirable constructive purpose. Suffering as the result of injustice, through no fault of the victim can be bitter. Such pain needs to be expressed if it's not to become a liability and achieve its full purpose in the growth of an individual.

Job 23:8, 10 “Behold I go forward, but He is not there, backward but I cannot perceive Him; But He knows the way that I take; when He hath tried me I shall come forth as Gold.” It’s better to be Stoic than to cry before men, or to men. Better to cry before the Lord, or cry to the Lord, the last is preferable.

Psalms 142:1-2 “I cried unto the Lord with my voice.” (A habit we would do well to cultivate.) “Unto the Lord did I make my supplication, I poured out my complaint before him: I showed before him my trouble”.

Psalms 142:3-4 “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me? I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” Other than the Lord I don’t know of any one who would be prepared to allow you to come every time you were overwhelmed with problems and pour them out all over them. Time and again the expressions of David’s soul are marked by the great intensity of his feelings. It’s a safety valve.

Vs 5-6. “I cried unto thee O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.” Here his prayer becomes more positive until faith begins to saturate his being. **Vs 7.** “Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shall deal bountifully with me.”

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” The trial of our faith is more precious than gold that perishes. We live by faith, we walk by faith, and the next step forward with God can only be a step of faith. My prayer for you dear reader is that you will rise up in faith and trust in our wonderful deliverer and enjoy your resurrection.

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An look at practices that have no scriptural foundation but are no more than traditions.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

A must for every lover of Christ.

DUMBING DOWN THE SAINTS

A bird's eye view of the pulpit from the pew.

MEGASHIFT OR MEGAHYPE

Something for “House Church leaders to consider.

THY KINGDOM COME

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom and we gave Him institutions

WHERE OH WHERE CAN WE GO

For all those that are looking for something better than what's on offer.

I LOVE THE CHURCH BUT I HATE WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO IT

The pastor's antics behind the pulpit are what hold most churches together.

THE REFORMATION 1600 YRS BEFORE MARTIN LUTHER'S

The one that took place 1600 years before Martin Luther's.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK YOU'RE ALL YOU'VE GOT

For those who have a desire to make something of their lives and not be a statistic.

PROPHETS PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETIC

A revealing look into an area of great importance to all of us

In New Zealand

shaunkearney@xtra.co.nz

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