
HOW DOES GOD WORK WITH MANKIND?

Many people have drawn the wrong conclusion from Jude 3, which states, *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”*¹ People get comfortable in their surroundings, which includes church. They depend upon ministers to teach them God’s ways, as long as they don’t have to work too hard at learning them. Far too many people are comforted by attending church because their church is where they first encountered God and therefore, that church must have the “faith once delivered.” But as scripture shows, the teachers of God often leave God’s ways and bring God’s people with them. How do you know the church you are attending is the church that will help you continue your spiritual growth? The answer lies in scripture, the manual of life given as a guide and a help by God to His children.

WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF MANKIND? Many Christians teach and believe that all you have to do is accept that Jesus is the messiah and that he died for your sins, thus you are saved. Although God loves each and every human being, He does not want us to remain just the way we are. Dietrich Bonhoeffer explored this concept, which he aptly labeled cheap grace, in *The Cost of Discipleship*. God actually not only wants, but requires us to change and grow, just as any father would want his children to change and grow. There are far too many twelve year olds who act like four year olds and forty year olds who act like they are fifteen for us not to realize growth is required for the human condition. Matthew wrote, *“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*²

Far too many legalists have stated that God demands perfection and will settle for nothing less, but that is not what Jesus is telling his followers in the fifth chapter of Matthew. The Greek word translated as perfect is *teleios*, which can be found as Strong’s 5056. It has the connotation of being complete, as a car is complete when it rolls off the assembly line. Barnes notes that Job was a perfect Christian, in the *teleios* way, but not a perfect man. Job, *“was not merely a pious man in one place, but uniformly. He was consistent everywhere. See the notes at that passage. This is the meaning in Matthew. Be not religious merely in loving your friends and neighbors, but let your piety be shown in loving your enemies; imitate God; let your piety be ‘complete, proportionate, regular.’”*³

We are to grow up and become adults. Even Jesus, *“grew and was strengthened in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.”*⁴ That is why Peter wrote and told us to *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*⁵ Paul was disappointed when people did not grow up to be mature Christians. *“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of*

righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”⁶

C.S. Lewis described this building process in *Mere Christianity*. *“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”⁷*

God even gave helpers to Christians so they could grow. God *“gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”⁸* Many have claimed the role of apostle or evangelist or pastor or teacher so they could lord it over Christians.⁹ However, just because some have usurped roles for which they were not qualified does not mean that God does not supply helpers for our faith.¹⁰ Paul wrote that these helpers were, *“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”¹¹*

God supplies these helps so we can continue our journey with Him. God said through the writings of Solomon, *“I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.”¹²* He did this so we would, *“make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.”¹³*

THE ROD OF MOSES

God has given helps to His people so we could see and know Him, especially as we start on our journey with Him. When God introduced Himself to Moses, He alleviated Moses’ doubts by asking him, *“What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.”¹⁴* Can you blame Moses for running away? I certainly do not. But Moses was the kind of man who would actually put forth his hand and through the power of God turn the serpent back into a rod. God used Moses’ rod so that Israel would believe, *“that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.”¹⁵* God gave Moses his brother Aaron as a spokesman, but He told Moses to, *“take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.”¹⁶* As Moses wrote the book of Exodus, he stressed the importance of his rod. *“And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.”¹⁷* The rod is no longer just the rod of Moses, but the rod of God.

Although *The Ten Commandments* is a great movie, it deviates from scripture in some important points, but not when it comes to the rod of Aaron. In the movie, Aaron takes the rod from Moses every time. Aaron does not have a separate rod. In the seventh chapter of Exodus we read, *“When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent. And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.”*¹⁸ There can be little doubt that the rod of Aaron here has to be the same rod that became a serpent in Exodus 2, the rod of Moses, which became known as the rod of God in Exodus 4. So why is the rod called the rod of Aaron? Kiel and Delitzsch write,

*Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh, and it became a serpent. Aaron's staff as no other than the wondrous staff of Moses (Exo_4:2-4). This is perfectly obvious from a comparison of Exo_7:15 and Exo_7:17 with Exo_7:19 and Exo_7:20. If Moses was directed, according to Exo_7:15., to go before Pharaoh with his rod which had been turned into a serpent, and to announce to him that he would smite the water of the Nile with the staff in his hand and turn it into blood, and then, according to Exo_7:19., this miracle was carried out by Aaron taking his staff and stretching out his hand over the waters of Egypt, the staff which Aaron held over the water cannot have been any other than the staff of Moses which had been turned into a serpent. Consequently we must also understand by the staff of Aaron, which was thrown down before Pharaoh and became a serpent, the same wondrous staff of Moses, and attribute the expression “thy (i.e., Aaron's) staff” to the brevity of the account, i.e., to the fact that the writer restricted himself to the leading facts, and passed over such subordinate incidents as that Moses gave his staff to Aaron for him to work the miracle.*¹⁹

So the rod of Aaron and the rod of Moses were the same rod, the rod of God. It is simply called the rod of Aaron when Aaron is acting as Moses' spokesman and Aaron takes the rod from Moses.

After the comeuppance given to the Pharaoh's magicians, Moses carries out God's orders by turning the Nile's waters to blood. Notice the importance of the rod. *“Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall lothe to drink of the water of the river. And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone. And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.”*²⁰

God continues His onslaught on the power of Egypt, again focusing attention on the rod carried by Moses. *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.”*²¹

The third plague upon pharaoh and his Egyptian subjects was also initiated through the rod of Moses. *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.”*²²

God used the rod of Moses as the focal point to initiate most of the plagues, but not all of them. To spread the plague of boils, God chose another physical instrument. *“The LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast.”*²³ In the site of pharaoh, Moses took physical ashes and as the soot flew through the air, the boils flew onto the skin of the Egyptians.

Again, in the plain site of pharaoh, God has Moses use his rod to call down thunder and hail. *“And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt.”*²⁴ After the thunder and hail had seized, God again told Moses to use his rod to bring destruction upon Egypt, but not upon Israel. *“And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.”*²⁵ With the coming of the ninth plague, the plague of darkness, God focuses the attention not upon the rod of Moses, but upon his hand. *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt.”*²⁶

Perhaps the most powerful scene in *The Ten Commandments* is the parting of the Red Sea. Moses, powerfully played by Charlton Heston, bellows out that Israel needs to stand and see the deliverance of the Lord their God. That deliverance is given when God tells Moses to lift *“up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.”*²⁷ Notice how God focuses the attention of the Israelites upon both the rod and the hand of Moses.

After beginning their journey out of Egypt, but before they are offered to covenant with the God of creation, Israel is shown the God is their provider. He brought them bread and meat in Exodus 16 and used the bread to teach them about the creation ordinance of the seventh day Sabbath. But He also gave them water to drink. *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?”*²⁸ God has Moses use the rod, but He is introducing Himself by standing on the rock from which the waters required for life would flow.

God not only gave the people food and water, but gave them the battle, again making sure the people focused upon the rod of God. *“Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, ‘Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.’ So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”*¹²⁰ When the rod of God was raised high, Israel could not lose, but without it, they lost.

Forty years later the unbelieving generation of Israelites were nothing more than bleached bones left in the dessert. God is ready to re-introduce Himself to this new and chosen generation. The stories of the rod of Moses and bring water from the rock must have been stuff of legend by this time. *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.”*¹²⁰

Notice the God insists that Moses bring the rod, the mystical, magical rod which had crushed Egypt and parted the Red Sea. This is the rod that brought water forth from the rock for the Israelites parents. But God also insists that Moses not use the rod, but instead simply to speak to the rock to bring forth water. *“And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”*¹²¹

Many have speculated why the sin of Moses was so heinous that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, but taken in context, it is plain to see. God knew that the people needed a physical instrument to help them focus upon God. He chose the ash from pharaoh’s furnace to initiate the plague of boils. He had used the very hand of Moses to bring darkness upon Egypt, except in the land of Goshen, the land given the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Joseph. But God had used the rod of Moses as He had used nothing else. But there comes a time when God’s people need to refocus from the tool God has used to God Himself. Perhaps the greatest miracle performed by Moses was when he struck the rock and water sprang forth. God had orchestrated events so that forty years after the miracle of water springing forth from a rock, as the people prepared to enter the Promised Land, the water would spring forth from a rock again. But this time the people were to be made to see that it was not some magical rod that brought forth the water, but that it was God that brought forth the water.

God is so upset because Moses did not *“sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.”*¹²² Moses had allowed the idea of a magical rod to stand between God and His people by disobeying God and using the rod rather than using just his voice to bring forth water. Of course the rod never performed a single miracle. It was always the power of God. But God used the rod as a point of focus so that

physical human beings could try to understand a spiritual God. But there come a time in God's relationship with His called out people that the physical instruments He used to introduce Himself to us must be put aside, at the very least, because they begin to hinder our walk with Him.

If God's intent was to show the people that He was God and that there was no magic in the rod, why did God allow water to spring forth from the rock? I believe there are two reasons. The first is that God is a god of free will. He has chosen to allow us to exercise that free will, even when it means going against His. A second probable reason is if God had allowed Moses to strike the rock and no water had come forth, the people, who were still transfixed on the power of the rod, would have not only not have been introduced to God as the water giver, but would have had cause to doubt the power of God just before they were to enter the Promised Land.

Although this analysis of the rod of Moses is logical, some may think of it as nothing more than conjecture. But this conjecture fits exceedingly well with the pattern of scripture, as can be seen with Nehushtan, the fiery serpent.

THE FIERY SERPENT

Shortly before the incident of striking the rock for water at Meribah (Numbers 20), Moses' sister Miriam died. Shortly after Moses was given the sentence of not being allowed to enter the Promised Land, Aaron dies. And how do the Israelites react? *"And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread."*³³ God showed the people He was still in charge when He *"sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died."*³⁴

Israel came to their senses, but God had to teach them a lesson. *"Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."*³⁵ Even though Moses would not be in charge when Israel entered the Promised Land, God showed them that Moses was still His servant, still in charge and still doing His will. God showed the nation of Israel that salvation came through God by requiring them to see the bronze serpent. But they could only see the bronze serpent and get the salvation of God if they stayed close to Him, a timeless lesson for all of God's people.

This fiery serpent of salvation pointed directly to the messiah to come. *"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."*³⁶

God Himself ordered Moses to create this symbol and hold it high above the camp. God Himself told Israel that if they were close enough to see this symbol of His salvation, they may have to endure the pain of sin, but He would save them. And it was God who used the fiery serpent to point towards the gift He would give all mankind, the sacrifice of His only begotten son to show how much He loves us. But what happened to this powerful symbol used by God?

Hezekiah was a righteous king of Israel more than a half millennia after the fiery serpent was first raised on high. *"He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."*³⁷ What did king Hezekiah do that got him such accolades? *"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan."*³⁸ Nehushtan can be translated as copper thing, so righteous king Hezekiah, under the inspiration of God, destroyed the copper thing that had been used so powerfully by God because it got between God and His people. Just as God used the rod of Moses to draw His people to Him, when its usefulness was over, it was discarded. God does not discard His children, but He will and does discard things when they interfere with His relationship with His children, no matter how they may have been used in the past.

THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

Even a casual reader of scripture knows that David desired to build a temple to honor God, but he was not allowed. God told David that his son would build that house.³⁹ And what a house it was. Although Solomon's temple is not currently listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, it was magnificent. Currently the Muslim shrine, the Dome of the Rock, rises ten stories above its surroundings and it can be seen throughout Jerusalem.⁴⁰ Solomon's temple would have been twice that height and was built more than 1,500 years before the Dome of the Rock.⁴¹ So the temple to honor YHWH, the God of Israel stood out and was the prominent feature of Jerusalem. But the temple was more than spectacular architecture. The Shekinah glory, the glory exuded by God, actually resided in the temple.

Although both Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel had abandoned God's covenant, only Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians during the period of 740 to 720 A.D. God told Judah through the prophet Isaiah that Assyria would not prevail against them. *"And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."*⁴²

The devastation was akin to what God did to Egypt to set Israel free.

"Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning,

behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.”¹³

Assyria was broken by the power of God to such an extent that many scholars attacked the Bible as nothing but legend because “it vanished without a trace until a French physician and diplomat named Botta discovered the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, on the northern outskirts of Ninevah, in 1843.”¹⁴ Because of this battle, with 185,000 dead and the enemy never having set foot in Jerusalem, the legend grew that Jerusalem could not be defeated because they had the temple of the Lord, the temple of YHVH. They began to believe that if they appeased YHVH, then they could never be defeated, no matter what they did.

Sixty years after the defeat of the Assyrians, the nation of Judah is threatened by Babylon. Although God knows He is still the God of Judah, Judah does not know who or what God is. “Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over to the isles of the Kittites, and see, and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there hath been such a thing. Hath a nation changed its gods, which yet are no gods? But My people hath changed its glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye exceeding amazed, saith the LORD. For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”¹⁵

God complains to Jeremiah about the evil that Judah had done. “The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.”¹⁶ Judah justified itself by bringing offerings to the temple while continuing to disobey God, all in the vain belief that it was the temple of YHVH that had saved them and that the creator God would always protect and preserve His temple. Just as Israel looked to the rod of Moses when God wanted them to turn to Him, just as Israel looked to Nehushtan for salvation rather than to YHVH, they also looked to God’s temple rather than to God.

But God is a loving and merciful God. He asked, “Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim.”¹⁷ God practically begged Judah to look at what He had done to Israel so He would not have to do to them. But they would not listen. God told Jeremiah, “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?”¹⁸ The prophets said that God was in His temple, which would never fall for David’s sake. The priests taught what the prophets said and the nation of Judah used these words like salve

to sooth the pain of their sinful ways. But they would not repent because they thought they had bought off God by honoring His temple.

Again God tells His people, what He wants is justice, mercy and faith. Micah wrote, *“Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”*¹⁹ God can’t be bought off because He is a loving father that wants what is best for His children. The very idea of a child offering his father a small part of his allowance as a bribe is ludicrous, but that is what the nations of the world thought their gods wanted and Israel followed their lead.

If the people wanted God’s protection, they would have to get it on His terms, not theirs. *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.”*²⁰ I can imagine the people bowing and in reverential tones crying, *“The temple of YHWH will save us. The prophets and the priests have told us of it power.”* Not of God’s power, but of the temple’s power.

Was the temple used powerfully by God? Without a doubt. Was it His temple? Without a doubt, although He makes the point that because of what Israel had done, He no longer considered it His temple. But did temple have the power to save? Of course not. But people are more comfortable doing what they want and attempting to buy God’s good graces while worshipping something other than God, rather than actually changing, repenting, and following God’s ways.

God says, *“For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.”*²¹

God tells Judah not to trust the soothing but untruthful words of the prophets and priests using the temple.²² God asks Judah, *“Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD. But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.”*²³ The tabernacle resided at Shiloh, with the holy of holies and this is where the Shekinah glory shined, but no more, God is telling Judah. If I allowed your brother to the north to be taken captive because they would not listen to Me, and if I allowed the tabernacle to be destroyed, what makes you think I will not allow this temple to be destroyed, says God?

But Judah would not listen. *“And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.”*²⁴

God tells Judah their reliance upon the temple and their attempts to placate God with bribes did nothing but infuriate Him.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth."⁵⁵

God said He was going to totally destroy the temple because it got between Him and His children. God told the children who would listen to leave and go to Babylon, where He would watch over them for seventy years, without the temple, without Nehushtan and without the rod of Moses.

"When Nebuchadnezzar took away Jehoiachin, and with him all the men of weight and character, his object was plain: to leave a people so broken in resources and spirit that they would not be moved to rebellion (see Ezekiel 17:14). But this measure of his effected a segmentation of the nation which the prophets immediately recognized as virtually separating out their spiritual "remnant" to go to Babylon, while the worldly and inferior grades remained in Jerusalem. These are sharply distinguished from each other by Jeremiah in his parable of the Figs (chapter 24), published soon after the first deportation. The people that were left were probably of the same sort that Zephaniah described a few years before, those who had "settled on their lees" (1:12), a godless and inert element in religion and state. Their religious disposition is portrayed by Ezekiel in Zedekiah's 6th year, in his clairvoyant vision of the uncouth temple rites, as it were a cesspool of idolatry, maintained under the pretext that Yahweh had forsaken the land (see Ezekiel 8). Clearly these were not of the prophetic stamp. It was over such an inferior grade of people that Zedekiah was appointed to a thankless and tragic reign."⁵⁶

Those that trusted God left the temple behind. Those that did not trust God clung to the temple with all their might. And those that clung to the temple were useless to God and useless to Judah. But God takes care of those who will follow Him and will make Him their God. *"Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God."⁵⁷*

God wants people who will follow Him, but far too many of His children don't really want to walk with Him because they don't really trust Him. They don't really see Him as a father, but as a demanding God who must be placated. This God demands they "do the work." That work can be

preaching the Ezekiel 34 warning message. It might be memorizing the Mishna. It might be the work of preaching the “true gospel to the world.” It might be preaching the three angels message. It might be to follow “The Prophet” or “The Prophetess” or “The Apostle.”

People get so caught up in doing this work and supporting their church that they lose their perspective on who God is and what He wants. They lose perspective on the mission of the church.⁵⁸ This leads to the idea that the ends justify the means. Christian leaders actually believe that it is okay to lie, cheat and steal in order that “the work” can be done. The story of Jim and Tammy Baker comes to mind. Although Jim Jones started out doing good works, he became consumed with doing his work supposedly in the name of God and 907 followers drank the Kool-Aid and died. Tens of thousands of misguided people met on October 22, 1844 as “the great disappointment” when William Miller was proven to be a false prophet, yet millions still maintain William Miller was correct, probably because they can’t look past their version of the “temple of God, the temple of God, the temple of God”.

This type of vain worship is nothing more than trying to bring offerings to the temple to please God while you a liar, a cheater and a thief. And God will not have it and He will not honor your supposed service.⁵⁹ God knows that those who call themselves teachers or preachers or apostles or prophets, but who do not have a personal, covenant-based relationship with Him are doing nothing but hurting His children. *“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”*⁶⁰

A living, functional church, in which a group of Christians will help each other grow in the ways of God, is very important to help Christians walk in the way of God. But far too many churches became Nehushtan or the rod of Moses.

Some Christians have seen their churches blown to pieces by God for the same reason He destroyed His temple. God’s people will realize the church God blew up had become an idol, even if it had been used powerfully by God in the past. They will continue to walk in the way of God by putting their trust and faith in Him, even if the path is now much less visible. Unfortunately others will continue to cling to their temple even though God is not there and destruction they believed the temple would save them from is upon them. Let us realize we must look past the rod of Moses to see God. We must destroy Nehushtan. We must repent of whatever is keeping us from getting closer to God rather than just putting another sacrifice on the altar. If we do, we can become the people of God.

ENDNOTES

¹ Jud 1:3

² Matt. 5:46-8

³ Barnes Notes on Matthew 5:48 from e-sword commentary.

⁴ Luke 2:40 Young's Literal translation.

⁵ 2 Peter 3:18

⁶ Heb. 5:11-14

⁷ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/13641>

⁸ Eph. 4:11

⁹ Mark 10:42-4 But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

¹¹ Eph. 4:12-5

¹² Prov. 4:11-12

¹³ Pro 4:26-7 Revised Version

¹⁴ Ex. 2:2-4

¹⁵ Ex. 4:5

¹⁶ Ex. 4:17

¹⁷ Ex. 4:20

¹⁸ Ex. 7:9-12

¹⁹ Commentary on the Pentateuch, Kiel, Karl and Delitzsch, Franz, From E-sword, Commentary Ex. 7:8-13

²⁰ Ex. 7:17-20

²¹ Ex. 8:5

²² Ex. 8:16-7

²³ Ex. 9:8-10

²⁴ Ex. 9:23

²⁵ Ex. 10:13

²⁶ Ex. 10:21

²⁷ Ex. 14:16

²⁸ Ex. 17:5-7

²⁹ Ex. 17:8-13

³⁰ Num. 20:7-8

³¹ Num. 20:9-12

³² Num. 20:12

³³ Num. 21:4-5

³⁴ Num. 21:6

³⁵ Num. 21:7-9

³⁶ John 3:13-7

³⁷ 2 kings 18:5

³⁸ 2 kings 18:4

³⁹ 2 Sam. 7:13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

⁴⁰ <http://factoidz.com/dome-of-the-rock-a-masterpiece-of-islamic-architecture/>

⁴¹ <http://www.solomonstemple.com/the-temple/second-3rd-temple-height-foundation/>

⁴² 2 Kings 19:6-7

⁴³ 2 Kings 19:32-7

⁴⁴ <http://hsci.cas.ou.edu/exhibits/exhibit.php?exbgrp=-999&exbid=47&exbpg=6>

⁴⁵ Jer. 2:9-13, JPS

⁴⁶ Jer. 3:6-11

⁴⁷ Jer. 4:14-5

⁴⁸ Jer. 5:29-31

⁴⁹ Micah 6:6-8

⁵⁰ Jer. 7:3-4

⁵¹ Jer. 7:5-7

⁵² Jer. 7:8

⁵³ Jer. 7:9-12

⁵⁴ Jer. 7:13-5

⁵⁵ Jer. 7:20-8

⁵⁶ <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/zedekiah.htm>

⁵⁷ Jer. 32:37-8

⁵⁸ Eph. 4:13-6 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

⁵⁹ Matt. 25:31-46

⁶⁰ Matt. 23:13-5