



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

“The Bible-Believer’s response to the deepening apostasy”



The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster at a “Christian Watch” meeting in St John’s Wood Baptist church, London on Saturday 20th September 2003.

It would appear from Ezekiel chapter 8: 1, that a conference of sorts had been convened in Ezekiel’s home. “And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me.”

Doubtless, the dreadful state of affairs which prevailed amongst the Israelites in Jerusalem and those in exile, following the Babylonian invasion of their land and capital city, tended to make them value the counsel of God’s servant more than they had before. The full destruction of Jerusalem had not yet taken place. That was to follow (see Ezekiel 33:21). Nevertheless, things must have been in a dreadful state of confusion and distress with news of events in Israel taking many, many months to reach those already in exile in Babylon. In such circumstances, the presence of a prophet of God amongst the exiles was a comfort.

There is a day coming when all men will recognise their folly in ever despising the truth of God. Had the words of Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and the other prophets been heeded they would not have come to this sorry state.

God’s means of grace

It is to be noted that the means that God adopted to convey His Word on this occasion to Ezekiel is the unchanging means by which we likewise are to look for a word from the Lord. As it was then, so it is still. It is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, conveyed by His servant, on this occasion, Ezekiel. In these days of man-made means and innovations in worship taking the place of God’s order, let this truth be noted.

Depths of the apostasy

The vision is one by which the depths of the dreadful apostasy in Jerusalem are revealed by God. The vision given to Ezekiel was undoubtedly the answer to the questioning of those who were sitting before the prophet (verse 1). It may be concluded that the question on the hearts of those gathered in the home of Ezekiel was: “Why are these dreadful judgments taking place against Jerusalem?”

What an answer God gives!

In seeking to apply this portion to our day, please learn first of all from this vision given to Ezekiel:—

I. IT IS ONLY BY THE GRACE OF GOD THAT THE WICKEDNESS OF THIS AGE WILL BE COMPREHENDED

The Lord takes Ezekiel to Jerusalem in the Spirit and reveals much to him, things that even he had not known before. There is much to be learned by God’s people about the full na-



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ture of the apostasy. It is a mystery that requires a revealing of its depths which can be done only by God. Remember what John did when he was shown the whore of Babylon in Revelation 17:6. "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." How alluring and deceiving is the apostasy! Its full depravity may be understood only under God's tutelage.

Learn the way of understanding.

1. A close relationship with Christ is first required. Not until we are brought into a close fellowship with Christ may we understand the wiles of the devil. "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light," Psalm 36:9. Ezekiel was lifted and elevated by the Spirit. Only a spiritually-quickened church will rightly understand the depths of the apostasy and adopt the attitude toward it that is pleasing to God. The essence of the quickening that Ezekiel experienced was to see the glory of the Lord. "Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber," verse 2. Nothing clears our vision and enables us to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin like a right view of Christ's glorious holiness. "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts," Isaiah 6:1, 5. As it was with Isaiah, so it was with John on the island of Patmos. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet," Revelation 1: 10. When John turned to see the One Who spoke, he was granted a view of the glory of Christ. "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead," verse 17. Thus He was readied for all that he was to have revealed to him. The people of God need a spiritual reviving before they can ever comprehend and rightly oppose the apostasy of this age.

2. There was an intellectual quickening. The reference to his head being touched by the hand of the Lord suggests that. God would have us understand these things and in order for that to happen we must enjoy a spiritual quickening which will have an impact upon our minds as well as our souls. Let us remember the experience of the dull-minded disciples following the resurrection of Christ. "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures," Luke 24:45. That intellectual quickening has been the experience of God's people whenever the Spirit of God has been poured forth. The writings of those times of revival give us clear evidence of this truth.

3. The need of instruction. The Lord gave him a tour of the inner workings of the apostasy. The Lord brought him, directed him, turned him, so that all of the wickedness of those engaged in rebellion against God was seen by the prophet, 5-16. Many believers do not see the depths of the wickedness of the apostasy today, because of the absence of a submission to the Spirit's revelation in the Word of God. A shallow understanding of the Bible has given rise to a shallow view of the spiritual rebellion of this age. It is tolerated by believers, mingled with by believers and clearly has a detrimental influence on believers and that because its satanic nature is yet hidden to them.



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II. THE NATURE OF APOSTASY IS ABOMINABLE

What Ezekiel saw as a result of the Lord's detailed instruction was unspeakably wicked. It is just as wicked today as well, though few seem to see it so. The devil is pursuing the same agenda today as he did back in the 6th century BC.

1. The apostasy is a provocation to God. "And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy," verse 3. I wonder do we understand that? Do we sense the holy outrage that the apostasy provokes in the heart of God? I do not think that we do. Were we to truly comprehend the wickedness of today's departure from God that is everywhere to be seen, both in church and state, then there would be fewer people who profess true faith in Christ assembling with the apostasy on the Lord's Day. They would have obeyed the call of Paul in Hebrews 13:13. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach," Hebrews 13:13. Instead, we see innovations of worship and doctrine and practice of every kind engaged in easily by Christians. The sacred Word of God is tampered with, the means of grace are set aside and replaced by the follies of men, reverence and humility are abandoned in the house of God and all without the slightest troubling of mind or conscience of those acting so. This is the fruit of ignorance of how provoking to God these things are.

2. The apostasy is an abomination to God. The word is used 7 times in these 2 chapters in 8:6, 9, 13, 15, 17 & 9:4. The Lord would have us understand how apostasy appears to Him that we might share His view and reaction to it. Being "unclean" - for that is what abominable means, we should shun it utterly. "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD," Isaiah 52:11.

Fellowship with apostasy

How many true Christians are fellowshiping with the apostasy today? How many, motivated by denominational pride rather than the fear of God, remain in such abominable institutions as the "Church of England", with its acceptance of sodomy, female "priests", fellowship with Roman Catholicism with a view to reunion, denials of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible including the deity of Christ, and a host of other wickednesses? I believe that if the true people of God were to obey God and come out of those ecclesiastical bodies that are incurably corrupt then we would see a mighty impact upon the spiritual life of the nation. It is disobedient believers who hold back the blessing of God upon His people.

3. Apostasy will cost a people the presence of God. "He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary?" verse 6. God will remove Himself from that which is marred by apostasy. He takes up a position of war against it.

Cause of troubles

Herein is the cause of the troubles of the United Kingdom. The apostasy of the main churches is the real troubler of the land. "Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son



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of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose" verse 17. The moral and social ills of this nation may be traced to the door of the apostasy!

4. Apostasy corrupts the core of God's work. The devil was never one to attack the peripheral areas of the work of God. He goes for the heart. Jerusalem was the seat of the apostasy, right in the vicinity of the temple. Wicked rebellion had penetrated the very heart of the temple, verse 15-16.

There is a great deception within apostasy. "For they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth," verse 12. This is the working premise, the basis of the apostasy. It is a denial of the God of Heaven which will give rise, one day, to the one "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God," 2 Thess 2:4.

III THE RESPONSE OF THE BELIEVER TO APOSTASY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Ezekiel was overcome with grief at what he saw as was each true and faithful believer. Those that God spared from the judgment that fell upon the apostasy were distinguished by broken-heartedness. "Set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof," 9:4. Here is the grace we need in this day to resist the apostasy all around us and to see God's blessing, rather than His judgment, fall upon us and those that we love.

1. It is an inward and outward grief. They "sigh and cry." It is something felt in the heart and expressed through the mouth. This is the functioning of true grace. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," Romans 10:9-10. The mouth must give voice to what the heart truly feels. If there is that grief of heart regarding the apostasy that God looks for, it will manifest itself through the mouth in prayer, preaching and protest against the wickedness of men.

2. We thus become associated with the people of God in all ages. This is how the people of God throughout the ages reacted to apostasy. "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)" 2 Peter 2:6-8. "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law," Psalm 119:53. "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word," Psalm 119:158. "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth," Rev 11:3. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" Jeremiah 9: 1. The sound of weeping is very faint indeed in our prayer meetings. May God melt our hearts over the sin of the land and where it is taking the people.



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3. We thus share in the burden of Christ. “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,” Luke 19: 41. This was the Saviour’s reaction to the apostasy within the hearts of that generation which was very soon to reject Him utterly and crucify Him.

Reproach

Be it known that if we seek to share in His grief of heart over the sins of this age, we will also share in His reproach. “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets,” Luke 6:22-23.

The need of the hour

How much we need the grace of God to wait upon the Lord and to cry to Him, as did David when his sins were revealed to him! “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee,” Psalm 51:10-13.

May God, the God of all mercy, be pleased to work that grace within our hearts!