

The Ultimate Snub

By Joe Slater

Insulting God used to produce gasps and raised eyebrows. Today it's pretty much standard fare.

But insulting God is nothing new!

Some 600 years before the birth of Jesus, King Jehoiakim of Judah demonstrated his disdain for God and His word in what might be viewed as the ultimate snub.

The Lord had been warning His people for centuries that He would send them into captivity unless they turned from their wicked ways. Jeremiah and other faithful prophets endured abuse ranging from mockery to imprisonment and death as they spoke truth from God.

Shortly after King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem (606 BC), God told Jeremiah to write all of his previous prophecies on a scroll and have them read to the people in hope that they would repent. (Jeremiah 36:1-3.) The warning shocked the

people, especially those in the king's administration. They arranged for Jehoiakim himself to hear Jeremiah's words from the scroll.

The king's servant, Jehudi, read from the scroll. "And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed." (Jeremiah 36:23.)

Burning the scroll didn't keep its warnings from happening. Jerusalem's condition continued to deteriorate. Finally, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar attacked for the final time, destroying the temple, sacking the city, slaughtering almost everyone, and carrying the survivors into captivity.

Today the Bible suffers more from neglect than from people trying to destroy it. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My

words will by no means pass away." (Matthew 24:35.) Let us not snub God by ignoring His word. Instead, store it up in your heart to keep you from sin. (Psalm 119:11.)

— Justin, TX

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. (Psalm 1.)

WHAT WOULD BE JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE FOR AMERICA?

By Danny Tunnell

There are many parallels between Judah in Jeremiah's day and America in recent times. When Jeremiah preached in the streets of Jerusalem, the people were experiencing great prosperity. But God is interested more in honesty, justice, and integrity. He looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7.) A nation can have outward prosperity coupled with inward depravity, though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is also possible for outward prosperity and inner righteousness to coexist. That is God's desire. He delights in the prosperity of His servant. (Psalm 35:27.)

If Jeremiah were among us today, would he plead for America to repent and return to a merciful and forgiving God? Jeremiah knew that the only alternative to destruction is repentance. (Jeremiah 12:17.)

Jeremiah spoke truth to power, and as a result was thrown into prison. (Jeremiah 37:15,16.) Jeremiah definitely was one of the faithful described in Hebrews 11, of whom

the world was not worthy. (Hebrews 11:36,38.)

Jeremiah minced no words about Judah's moral corruption. He talked about how God had fed them to the full, and how they had then gone out and committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in harlot's houses. They were "like well-fed lusty stallions; everyone neighed after his neighbor's wife." He said God would judge a nation such as this. (Jeremiah 5:7-9.)

What would Jeremiah say about our country today? Would he mention our moral decline? Would he have similar words for us as he had for Judah?

Jeremiah spoke of a horrible thing being committed in the land. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so." (Jeremiah 5:30,31.)

Would Jeremiah chastise today's messengers who say, "All is well, and

God will not judge us for our evils?" "They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:14.)

The preaching of judgment is not new, nor has it ever been popular.

If Jeremiah were here today, would he address the lost sense of sin in America? Would he remind us that the wages for sin is still death? (Romans 6:23.) Would he mention that God has not changed? (Malachi 3:6.) Would he tell us that we will reap what we've been sowing? (Galatians 6:7.) Would Jeremiah tell us that we cannot continue to break God's laws and get away with it, anymore than Judah could in his days on earth, some twenty-six centuries ago?

It is something to think about, Jeremiah's message for today. Are we willing to heed it and repent?

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

By Milton Smith

For all accountable adults, there exist two households upon earth. One belongs to Jesus Christ and the other belongs to Satan. Those who do the will of God belong to His household, but those who obey Satan belong to his.

But who would dare "obey" Satan? In a very real way, those who refuse to obey God are obeying Satan. When a person knows what God expects of him but chooses rather to ignore such instructions, he is actually choosing to follow Jesus' adversary. The Bible often emphasizes this fact.

When Eve chose to rebel against God's clear instructions regarding the famous tree, whom did she choose to follow? When Judas made the decision to betray his Lord, who was behind that decision? John 13:27 tells us that Satan actually "entered" into Judas. But what does this mean? Obviously, Satan found a quick entrance into this man's corrupt heart and took full advantage of it. When Ananias and his wife Sapphira chose to lie to the church, who do you suppose was behind this evil decision? Acts 5:3 tells us that Peter told Ananias that it was Satan who had "filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit." When Simon the sorcerer offered money to the apostles in an attempt to purchase the ability to give the Holy Spirit to others, Peter said to him: "Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money . . . your heart is not right in the sight of God, for I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." In other words, he was under the influence of the dark side. When Jesus said to Peter, "get behind me Satan," it seems obvious that He knew who was influencing Peter's words. (Matthew 16:23.)

It is easy for a person to know which household he belongs to by simply observing whom he chooses to follow. All faithful Christians are heirs with Christ. His riches become our riches and His joy becomes our joy. In the same manner, His character should become our character. But to follow Satan is to develop his characteristics. To secure eternal life we must remain faithful to the Lord. Those who reject eternal life are choosing to remain faithful to Satan. The promise of eternal hope belongs only to those who make the personal choice to remain faithful members of Jesus' household. To those who make this wise choice, the death of the physical body is merely the beginning of life eternal.

— Tulsa, OK

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24.)

OUR CHOICES

By Glen Walton

Decisions have tremendous implications for our lives. I read somewhere of a young man who was planning a medical career who had to make a decision one evening about studying or attending a ball game. He attended the game and the next day made a low grade on the test. It so happened that the low grade kept him out of medical school, and made it necessary for him to change his plans for the future.

At times, what seems to be an innocent choice is fraught with grave consequences.

A man named Lot once made what seemed to be an innocent choice. Strife arose between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of his kinsman, Abram. In order to avoid even more serious problems, Abram thought it best for them to separate, but gave Lot the privilege of choosing whatever land he desired. Lot chose the plain of Jordan and journeyed east. He "pitched his tent toward Sodom." (Genesis 13:12.) What seemingly was an innocent choice led to disaster. In Sodom his righteous soul was vexed, and he lost a part of his family. Even in fleeing the tragedy continued. His wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Afterward, his daughters, contaminated by the immorality of that wicked place, made their father drunk and conceived children by him. Moses, in Genesis 18-19, shows us the real ugliness of this innocent but unwise decision.

But there are better examples in the book of God. "By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." (Hebrews 11:24,25.) Moses chose God and His people, and became God's great leader and lawgiver. As long as the world stands, his influence for good will abide.

May God bless us in our decisions. These are very important to the worth of our own lives and the lives of those around us. Undergirded by good moral principles, and with our attention focused on things eternal, we can make decisions which are sound and good.

— Amarillo, TX

"Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14,15.)

ARE YOU READING YOUR BIBLE?

By Dalton Key

How are you coming along with your Bible reading this year?

Bible reading, once a regular practice for Christians, a daily pastime for families of the Lord's people, and, further, a personal and daily regimen of the masses, has more recently fallen upon hard times. Sadly, the reading and study of the Bible is now too-often ridiculed as amounting to nothing more than the wasted efforts of those with small minds and even smaller intellects.

The ablest leaders and most brilliant minds in history would beg to disagree.

Sir Isaac Newton, renowned scientist, mathematician, and philosopher, once confessed, "I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever."

William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, declared, "The Scriptures contain a declaration of the mind and will of God. They ought also to be read, believed, and fulfilled in our day. We accept them as the words of God Himself."

Martin Luther, whose determination sparked the early fires of the Reformation, was a man in love with God's Word. Though we believe him wrong on many counts, he was "spot on" in observing, "Holy Scripture is a sweet-scented herb, and the more you rub it, the more it emits its fragrance."

Our country has been blessed with leaders at the highest levels of government professing deep respect for the Bible. George Washington once said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible. He is worse than an infidel who does not read his Bible and acknowledge his obligation to God." John Adams stated, "The Bible is the best book in the world." Thomas Jefferson declared, "I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, better husbands. The Bible makes the best people in the world." And Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the most admired and loved of all past presidents, once acknowledged, "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible," further advising, "Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man before God."

Today's Bible scoffers are on the wrong side of history!

Why not resolve now, at the beginning of this new year, to make the reading and study of the Bible a dedicated priority in your daily routine! The time to begin is now!

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

TWO EARS, ONE MOUTH

By Dalton Key

The Lord has blessed us with two ears and one mouth. Perhaps we should double up on our hearing and pull back a bit on our speaking! The Bible encourages us to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (James 1:19.) Jesus warns that we "take heed how (we) hear." (Luke 8:18.)

A young Simon Peter often struggled in this area just as we do. He was usually the first among the apostles to speak up, on most any subject, at most every opportunity, but too often he spoke when he should have been listening.

When Peter, along with James and John, witnessed the remarkable Transfiguration of Christ, he should have felt content basking in the glory of the moment, with eyes and ears open and mouth firmly shut. But, alas, this was not Peter's way of doing things! He just had to say something, even something glaringly wrong. His impetuous speech, demoting God's Son to the level of mere men, was so grievously in error that heaven's reproof came thundering forth from a cloud. Had the apostle been more interested in listening than in speaking, he not only would have avoided divine correction; he almost certainly would have learned something as well. (Matthew 17:1-6.)

This wasn't the first time the apostle had created such a problem for himself. Just a few days earlier, Peter had actually rebuked the Lord, resulting in this curt and cutting correction: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23.)

And yes, this was the same Peter who would later rebuff his Master by blurting out, "You will never wash my feet!" (John 13:8.) And shortly after making that misstep, Peter foolishly dismissed the words of Jesus, brashly boasting, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble . . . Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matthew 26:33,35.)

The good news? Peter changed. Peter grew. He became a tremendous force for good in the early New Testament church. Whose inspired words reached the hearts of obedient souls on the day of Pentecost? Were they not Peter's? (Acts 2:14-41.) Who stood boldly before the council, defying orders to desist in preaching Christ and proclaiming, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Was it not Peter? (Acts 5:29.)

Peter had learned a valuable lesson: there is a huge difference between having something to say and having to say something.

Peter changed. Peter grew. And so can we.



IN A FISHBOWL

By Steven Prine

A math teacher worked ten problems on the chalkboard for the class to see. From the beginning, she heard giggles as she continued writing. By the time she had finished, giggles had turned to laughter and ridicule. Putting down the chalk, she turned around and asked the class, "What's so funny?" One student said, "You got the first problem wrong!"

The teacher responded, "I know, and I did it on purpose. I wanted to show by example that all of you focused on what was wrong. No one bothered to see that the other nine are correct!"

Christians live in a fishbowl. Jesus said to let our light shine. (Matthew 5:14.) We all make mistakes in judgment at times, lose our tempers,

etc. It's too easy to criticize a work being done, a lesson taught, no one visited the sick, etc.

I wonder if we get so caught up in expecting perfection in others performing the works of the church that we don't notice the good being accomplished. What catches our eye is the mistake or less-than-expected result. We complain about what could've been done better, or what should've been done. Perhaps the task at hand could've been done better if we had pitched in and contributed our talents!

Worse yet, we complain about our fellow-Christians' flaws in their work or character to someone who isn't a Christian. How many times have I seen that? And we wonder why our neighbors and friends have no interest in listening when we talk about God!

Yes, we are in a fishbowl. The world will see our good; but the bad can overshadow our good. We must

all work together, encouraging each other, "exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25.)

Let's focus on encouraging each other, not on joining Fault-Finders, Inc.

—Turlock, CA

"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31,32.)

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A LIGHT

By Richard Dent

During an Atlantic Ocean crossing, a severe storm arose, and a passenger lay in his bunk very seasick. In the dark of the night he heard a cry, "Man Overboard," as some poor soul was swept from the deck of the ship.

The sick man lay there thinking there was nothing he could do to help. But then he thought, "I could at least put my lantern in the porthole of my room."

The almost drowned man was rescued and he recounted the story the next day: "I was going down for the third time when someone aboard the ship put a lantern in a porthole. It shone on my hand, and a sailor in the lifeboat grabbed me and pulled me in."

One small light! It belonged to a sick man. But it enabled a strong sailor to save a life.

Was the sailor who pulled the man into the lifeboat more important to his "salvation" than the man who put the light in the window? Which of the two could he have done without?

Every Christian can do likewise for his fellowman. Someone may actually pull the lost into the boat, but a light is needed. The light may be a well-prepared Bible class lesson from God's holy word. Perhaps it may be the example of faithful attendance to services of the church down through the years. It could be a number of good deeds done for strangers we may never know that well.

Remember that Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16.)

God's word is light! Your influence can be light! Never underestimate its power.

— Liberal, KS

"Do all things without complaining

and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." (Philippians 2:14-16.)

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