



The Grace Proclamator and Promulgator

“To testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

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“MURMURING SAINTS AND FIERY SERPENTS”

Numbers 21: 4-9

Preached at Central Baptist Church

August 28, 2011

Pastor Bill Lee

In the book of Numbers, Chapter 21, I would like for us to read verses 4 through 9. ***“And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.(5) 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. (6) And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and much people of Israel died. (7)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. (8)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. (9) 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.”***

At the time of this account, Israel had almost made it to the promise land. They were very close. For forty years they had journeyed through the wilderness, and the land of Canaan was almost in sight. Just a short journey through the land of Edom, and they would have reached their destination. But, they had a problem. The

Edomites would not allow the children of Israel, to pass through their land in order to reach their destination. Now, keep this in mind, Esau's name was changed to “Edom”. Jacob's name was changed to Israel. The children of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, reached the border of Edom. And the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, would not allow them to pass through their land.

Look back to Numbers 20:14: ***“And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom. Thus saith thy brother Israel, [there is the relationship] Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us . (15) How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers. (16) And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt; and behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border: (17) Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country; we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders. (18) And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword. (19) And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way; and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will***

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pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet. (20) And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. (21) Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him." And rather than fighting their relations; rather than the children of Israel fighting the children of Esau, Israel went around the land of Edom.

In our text, Numbers 21:4, **"And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the**

Red sea, to compass the land of Edom". And you will notice in verse 4, this compassing, or going around of the land of Edom, caused them to have to go by the way of the Red Sea. Forty years earlier, they had crossed the Red Sea. Forty years earlier God, by a great miracle, parted the waters of the Red Sea and allowed the children of Israel to pass over on dry ground. But now, as they compassed the land of Edom, they are forced to go back by the way of the Red Sea. Now this is not the part of the Red Sea they earlier passed through, but a different part of the same sea none-the-less. And therefore we read in verse 4, **"the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way"**.

THERE IS A LESSON IN THIS FOR US TODAY.

There is not a one among us who has not, at one time of the other in our lives, become discouraged because of the way. Discouragement has come to every one of us because of the way. Keep this in mind if you would; discouragement is usually the fruit of unbelief. It certainly is not the fruit of faith. But rather, it is the fruit of unbelief. And discouragement left unchecked will lead to many other sins, even among the people of God. It was discouragement, in verse 4, which caused the people of Israel to sin against God, when they were so close to their destination. It was discouragement that brought about other sins in the people of Israel. They had endured forty years of hard travel since they first crossed the Red Sea. Now they are forced to go back to the Red Sea in order to reach the land of Canaan. And **"the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way"**.

Their discouragement, I think, would come because the descendants of Esau, their near kin according to the flesh, would not allow them to pass through their land. People who ought to have been friendly to them were not. Have you ever been discouraged when people, who ought to be friendly toward you, were not friendly at all? Considering the case of the people of Edom, they should have allowed Israel to pass through their land. It would not have cost them one thing for Israel to pass through their land. As we just read, Israel said, **"if we or our cattle (See MURMURING SAINTS Cnt. P. 5, R. Col.)**

IS MORMONISM A CULT?

By Wayne Camp

Is Mormonism A Cult? This article is by no means intended as a political article. It is not intended to persuade anyone to vote a particular way. This question has been much in the news recent days. It was prompted by something said by a pastor in Texas when he introduced Rick Perry at a political rally. He referred to Mormonism as a cult and suggested that a born-again believer was preferable over a Mormon. I well remember the news buzz when Jimmy Carter declared himself to be a born-again believer. I can tell you from having lived through his four years in office almost anyone would be preferable to Jimmy Carter. He was and still is a liberal politician of the rankest stripe who sought to use the fact that he taught a Sunday School class in a Baptist church and his claim to being a born-again believer as a political step up. Thousands, if not millions, voted for him based on that claimed qualification.

WHAT IS A CULT?

Webster's *First Unabridged Dictionary* to define cult defined a cult as follows:

1. Attentive care; homage; worship.

Everyone is convinced of the reality of a better self, and of the **cult** or homage which is due to it. *Shaftesbury*.

2. A system of religious belief and worship.

That which was the religion of Moses is the ceremonial or **cult** of the religion of Christ. *Coleridge*.

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary 1913, Page 355

Based on this definition, it is very evident that Mormonism is a cult.

First, Mormonism definitely has a system of worship that is different from that of the Word of God. They base much of what they believe on the book of Mormon. They believe that their way is a better way than the biblical system of worship.

Second, Mormons have their own system of religious belief and doctrine. We will look at

some of their beliefs and doctrines of little later.

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF A CULT

Another characteristic of a cult is that they usually have a very dynamic personality in their leadership. This was clearly seen in the case of a split-off cult whose leader had some 70 wives.

As most of our readers probably know for many years after their origin in 1830, Mormons practiced polygamy. The founder of the Mormon cult was Joseph Smith and reportedly he had approximately 30 wives. The picture seen here is of members of Joseph F. Smith's family, including his sons and daughters, as well as their spouses and children, circa 1900.

A cult usually introduces new Scripture or at least what they call Scripture. One Mormon writer rationalizes their introduction of the book of Mormon as additional Scripture by citing the fact that the New Testament was new Scripture and placed the book of Mormon on the level with it, perhaps even superior to it. While they may also use the Bible they usually issue their own translation so that they may set forth their doctrines by improper translation or outright departures from the truth of the Scriptures.

THE ORIGIN OF MORMONISM

The world knew nothing of a Mormon church or Church of Latter-Day Saints before A.D. 1830. Jesus founded the first true church on earth during his personal ministry. He commissioned that very church to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He also commissioned that church and those that would descend from her to baptize the disciples made and to teach them all things whatsoever he commanded. He promised her that he would be with her and her descendents throughout the age and until he comes again. God has never decommissioned his him and him and churches. Any church that must place its origin this side of the ministry of Christ is too late to be a true church.

MORMONISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Following the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., Mormon leaders, beginning with Brigham Young (Second President December 27, 1847-August 29, 1877), instituted a policy of excluding most people of black African descent (regardless of actual skin color) from Priesthood ordination and from participation in temple ceremonies. These practices continued in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) until September 30, 1978, when the highest bodies of church leadership lifted the ban after stating they had received a revelation.

MORMONISM AND POLYGAMY

Polygamy laws practiced publicly from 1852 to 1890. It was instituted in the 1830s by founder Joseph Smith, Jr. The public practice of polygamy by the church was terminated in 1890 by the Manifesto issued by church President Willford Woodruff in which he publicly declared "that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriages forbidden by the law of the land." Today, over 14 million members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) are strictly monogamist, and members who are known to practice polygamy are excommunicated. Still, the practice of plural marriage continues among tens of thousands of members of various fundamentalist splinter groups long disassociated from the main body of the church,

SOME OF JOSEPH SMITH'S WIVES AND CHILDREN



such as the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB) or the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS). These polygamist sects are generally located in Utah, Arizona, Texas, and other parts of the Western United States, Canada, and Mexico. Even though polygamy is generally illegal in all 50 states and in all three countries, practitioners are almost never prosecuted unless there is evidence of abuse, statutory rape, welfare fraud, or tax evasion.

Brigham Young was perhaps the most famous polygamist of the early Latter Day Saint movement, marrying a total of 55 wives, 54 of them after becoming a Latter Day Saint. He stated that upon being taught about plural marriage, "It was the first time in my life that I desired the grave." By the time of his death, Young had 57 children by 16 of his wives; 46 of his children reached adulthood.

MORMONISM AND PRESIDENTIAL INFALLIBILITY

Mormons claim infallibility for their leaders, especially the president of the Mormon church, under certain given circumstances. A Mormon teacher once explained it to me this way. "If the president is just speaking generally he is not infallible in his declarations. On the other hand if he prefaces what he says with the words, 'Thus saith the Lord,' that is infallible and is to be incorporated into church doctrine." Presidents of the Mormon church have often reversed the doctrines of previous presidents by simply uttering, "Thus saith the Lord," before an utterance. They usually claim a special revelation from God for their declaration. One president claimed to receive a revelation from God that Mormon men should practice polygamy. A later president, after polygamy was outlawed by the United States, received a revelation that they should not practice polygamy in a longer. Consequently Mormon doctrine has been changing from the time of the origin of the cult to the present day.

Yes! Mormonism is definitely a cult!

THE CHILDREN NOT YET BORN

By Bill Lee

In Romans 9:11 the Apostle Paul wrote; ***“For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth”***. Also in Genesis 25 we have the account of the birth of Jacob and Esau. But it is not so much the birth of these twin boys that now has our attention. The one thing I would like for us to focus our attention upon is what is said about these two **before they were born**. We read in verses 21 and 22 of Genesis 25 these words; ***“And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD”***.

Please notice the Word of God refers to these two who struggled within the womb of Rebekah as “the children”. The Word of God views the unborn as children, whether we, politicians, or society as a whole views them as such or not. Lawmakers can debate the issue, courts can give their rulings, constitutional amendments can be offered, and people can vote as they choose. But none of these things are able to change the fact that God views the unborn as a child. And His Word, being forever settled in heaven, is not swayed, influenced, nor changed by the thoughts, opinions and laws of mere mortals. Nothing in heaven or earth can change the fact that God views the unborn as a child. And any rational mind can understand that a child is a person.

We are all familiar with the biblical account of David and Bathsheba. We all know this was an adulterous affair between David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. In II Samuel 11:5 we are told that Bathsheba conceived. And the words she used to inform David of the conception are, ***“I am with child”***. Referring to a woman who has conceived as ***“being with child”*** has a reoccurring theme in the Scriptures. See Numbers 21:22, II Kings 15:16, Isaiah 26:17, I Thessalonians 5:3. This is language which is not only

used in Scripture, it is also language which is recognizable today all over the world. For when almost anyone hears of a woman “being with child” they understand the meaning of the words. They understand a conception had taken place, but the birth has not yet occurred.

In Luke, chapter one, we have the account of Mary visiting her cousin, Elisabeth. We are told in verse 36 that Elisabeth had ***“conceived a son in her old age”***. Note carefully, that which she had conceived is referred to as “a son” before the birth. In verse 41 we read, ***“And it came to pass, that when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb....”***. In verse 44 Elisabeth tells Mary of this experience; ***“the babe leaped in my womb for joy”***. Now, according to verse 36, at the time all of this happened, Elisabeth was only six months into her pregnancy. The birth of her child surely had not yet taken place. If we recap this for just a moment, we can clearly see at least two things. First, Elisabeth had conceived a son in her womb. Second, This son, while still in Elisabeth’s womb, is referred to twice as a “babe”. I would encourage anyone and everyone to look up the definition of this word “babe” in any concordance. If you do so you will find the word translated “babe” is defined as “an infant-a child”. And I will repeat myself by saying, this was somewhere around three months before the birth. It is very clear from the Scriptures, the unborn is considered by God as a child, an infant, and certainly a person.

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even drink any of your water, we will pay you for it. All we want to do is just pass through the land.” But their passage was refused. And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way they must now take. And I will ask again, have you ever been discouraged by the actions of others? Have you ever been discouraged by those who were very close to you, maybe even your near kin? Have you ever been discouraged because of the way?

One of the great lessons of our text is this:

We must not allow discouragement to prevail in our lives. Discouragement will bring on other sins. Discouragement will cause you to doubt and/or to question God. The children of Israel were discouraged because of the way. This added great length to their journey. Instead of taking the direct route, the closest way, now they are forced to take the long way! This would be very hard travel for them. There would be a tiredness, a weariness, and fatigue because of the way. Israel was discouraged because of the way. One thing Israel forgot, one thing they failed to consider, is the one thing you and I many times forget when we too are discouraged because of the way. Israel forgot, and Israel failed to consider, that God was leading them all the way. We are led by God all of the way! God was leading Israel. He led them by a pillar of fire and by that great cloud that went before them. God was leading them.

Look in the book of Psalms, if you would. In the book of Psalms, chapter 107, and I will begin reading in verse 1. Remember, they were discouraged because of the way. There is something we need to know about the way. It would have been very convenient for Israel to pass through the land of Edom, and take that short, easier route. But I have mentioned to you on many occasions, God is not too interested in our convenience. God leads all the way and God leads His way! Psalms 107 and in verse 1: ***“O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. (2) Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; (3) And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. (4) They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. (5) Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. (Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. (7) And he led them forth by the right way”***. It was to them the wrong way. It was to them a way that was very hard. It was to them the long way. It was to them the inconvenient way. But the Bible tells us, ***“he led them forth by the right way”***.

In the 19th chapter of Exodus we learn God not only led them, He also carried them. In

verse 4 of this chapter we read; ***“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself”***. The children of Israel had a miraculous journey. A journey unlike any other that had ever taken place. Notice Deuteronomy 8:2-4; ***“And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.”*** This was truly a miraculous journey. Their clothes did not get old during their 40 years of wilderness journey. Their feet did not swell, even after walking in the wilderness for forty years. We also read in Deuteronomy 29:5, ***“And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.”***

The children of Israel did have a miraculous journey. In this wilderness journey they had bread provided for them. When they became hungry and thirsty in that dry land, God furnished them manna from heaven and water from a rock. God also miraculously lighted the encampment of the children of Israel. No city on earth had such light at night as the encampment of the children of Israel. They had every reason in the world to be thankful unto their God. They had every reason in the world to trust their God. They had every reason to be humble before their God. But we find this was not the case at all. According to our text in Numbers 21:4, ***“the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way”***.

Now let’s notice what this discouragement led to. It led to their complaining, and complaining, and complaining. Discouragement, left unchecked, will always lead to complaints. Notice in verse 5, ***“And the people spake***

against God and against Moses. Wherefore have you 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." Many times discouragement among the people of God will lead them to complain, even against God. The children of Israel spoke against God and they spoke against the man of God. They did not like the way they were being led and they did not like the way they were being fed! It is a very dangerous thing to complain against God. Consider this, when they were hungry, God gave them bread. When they were thirsty, God gave them water. But when they complained, God gave them fiery serpents.

SURELY THERE ARE LESSONS FOR US TO LEARN IN THIS.

In Numbers 21:6, **"And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died"**. When they complained God gave them fiery serpents. If you would, hold your place in the Book of Numbers. I am going back to the Book of Psalms again to read Psalms 18:20-26; **"The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness."** There is a lot to consider in that statement. The Psalmist is speaking of how God rewards individuals. **"The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight. With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright. With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward."**

I read this to you in order to point out the last words in verse 26. With the froward, the

rebellious, those who in their mind and heart, complain against God and rebel against His ways, God will show Himself froward. This relates back to what I just said. When they were hungry He gave them bread. When they were thirsty He gave them water. But when they complained He gave them fiery serpents.

Now let's notice their complaint. **"The people spake against God, and against Moses. Wherefore, have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness, where there is no bread neither is there any water and our soul lotheth this light bread."** Numbers 21:5. The first response of the children of Israel in their discouragement was to speak against God. Their second response in their discouragement was to speak against the man of God, Moses. You might note back in chapter 20, and verse 28, about a month earlier Aaron had died. I suppose if Aaron had still been alive they would have complained about Aaron also. But if you will read their complaint in verse 5, you will find they complained, even though they had nothing at all to complain about. They complained about their deliverance: **"Wherefore, have you brought us up out of Egypt"**. Isn't it an amazing thing that the redeemed of the Lord would complain about their redemption? But when people become discouraged, their minds do not think correctly. Their complaint was that both God and Moses were guilty of bringing them out of Egypt for the purpose of allowing them to die in the wilderness. And that would be the same thing as our saying, "God has saved us in order that we may later be condemned and consigned to hell". It would be the very same thing. They were complaining about their redemption, their deliverance! They murmured against both God and Moses.

The people of Israel said, **"There is no bread"**. They said this, even though God had sent bread from heaven. In Psalms, chapter 78, and in verse 25, the Bible says, **"Man did eat angels' food"**. But in their discouragement they said, **"There is no bread"**. I am going to go back to the Book of Exodus and read chapter 16:31; **"And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey"**. God sent them

bread from heaven, typifying the Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this “manna” was called angel’s food and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. But in their discouragement, the children of Israel complained against God, and said, **“there is no bread”**. They said, **“our soul loatheth this light bread”**.

In the Book of Numbers we learn the children of Israel wanted something other than the God provided bread. In Numbers 11:5 we read these words; **“We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt, freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic”**. They did not want the food God provided. Now let me ask you a couple of questions: Do you not think God knew what kind of food was best for them and their digestive systems? Don’t you think God knew what they needed in order for them to survive forty years in the wilderness? I think He knew better than they did! I think He knew the manna He provided was exactly the nourishment and the food they needed to go 40 years in that wilderness. If it had been better for them to have the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic of Egypt, God would have provided these things for them! But just as he led them in the right way, He also gave them the right food, but yet they complained about the way they were being fed!

The people of Israel had three complaints against God and Moses. They said, you brought us up out of Egypt in order that we might die in the wilderness. That was a lie. They said there is no bread. That was a lie. They said there is no water. That was a lie. Let us all remember, the things written aforetime were written for our learning. We need to be very careful. For when we become discouraged; it is so easy to complain. And if we are not careful, we will find ourselves complaining in areas where we have no right to complain. We will complain against God, and everything else. And I have found by practical experience, when people become discouraged and they begin to complain, most of the time, their complaints are groundless. They have no reason at all to complain. They especially have no reason to complain against God. The children of Israel found fault with the

very things for which they should have been thankful.

Back in our text, Numbers 21:5-6, the children of Israel spoke against God, and they spoke against Moses. They had the three complaints we have mentioned. And what was the result of their discouragement and their complaints against God and against Moses? The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people. Let me ask you another question: Have you ever heard a parent, who has a child that cries for no reason, tell that child, “You hush, or I will give you something to cry about”? That is what I am reminded of in our text. God gave them something to complain about! They had nothing else. They had three complaints, which were all groundless. They were all lies. And God sent fiery serpents among the people!

Now let’s look in Leviticus 26: 21. The Lord said, **“If you ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins”**. Notice the first words of this verse, **“if ye walk contrary unto me”**. Now look at the first words of verse 24, **“then will I also walk contrary unto you”**. Let’s also read verses 27 and 28 of this same context; **“And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but will walk contrary unto me; (28) Then I will walk contrary unto you, also...”** Well, Israel, even after 40 years of blessings, complained against God and against Moses. And God said, “If you walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you. You complain against me, I will give you something else. Instead of giving you bread and water, I will give you some fiery serpents.”

In our text, Numbers 21:6; **“And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people and much people of Israel died.”** Now, consider all of this in its context. And remember, everything God does is for His glory and for the good of His people. He withholds no good thing from them that fear Him. Let’s read Hebrews 12:11; **“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby”**.

Notice the fruit of chastening is righteousness. God’s chastening yields a

peaceable fruit of righteousness. It did with the children of Israel, and it will with you and me. If we complain against God, if we complain about the way, if we complain about everything else, God will send us some fiery serpents. These fiery serpents will come into our lives in many different forms, and not so much as a punishment, but as a tool of correction. Chastening produces purity.

In our text, Numbers 21:7, the fiery serpents did bring about a confession of sin! The chastening of the Lord always accomplishes its purpose. The people of Israel said to Moses, **"We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee"**. The redeemed of the Lord confessed their sin. And we are told, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin"**. They said, **"We have sinned"**. How had they sinned? They spoke against God and against Moses. They became discouraged because of the way and they complained about the providence of God and the provisions of God

Then, after their confession of sins, they asked Moses to pray for them. They said, **"Pray unto the Lord that He take away the serpents from us."** And Moses prayed for the people. You will notice they said, **"Pray that He take away the serpents"**. I do not know what was in Moses' prayer. As to the content of Moses' prayer, the Bible is silent. But there is not a hint in the Scripture that God did take away the fiery serpents. I do not know how long the fiery serpents remained in the camp of Israel. It could have been a few days; it could have been a few years. I do not know. But we are not told that the fiery serpents were taken away. But **"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 that serpent of brass. He put it on a pole as the Lord had directed. And it did come to pass, if the serpents had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived. That serpent of brass was certainly a picture and type of the Lord Jesus Christ. For every one who truly knows they are a sinner and looks to Jesus Christ, and Him alone, for deliverance and salvation, shall be saved.

The people became discouraged. They began to complain with groundless complaints. Again, these are people of God. And God sent fiery serpents among them. And much people of Israel died.

LESSON

Never doubt God. Never doubt the providence or the provisions of God. No matter what way He is leading you, if you know you are led by God, know also it is the right way. He will not lead you the wrong way. Never complain about God's providence and care in your life. Keep your eyes upon Jesus. He leads His sheep. It may be the long way. It may not be the convenient way. It may not be our way, but He always leads His people the right way. May God help us to never complain against Him, the One who loved us with such great love that He sacrificed His Son for us.

THE GREATEST UNKINDNESS THEY COULD POSSIBLY DO TO THE CHILD!

(J.R. Miller, "Morning Thoughts" 1906)

"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod--he will not die. Punish him with the rod--and save his soul from death!" Proverbs 23:13-14

Some parents have such weak hearts, that they cannot bear to correct a child lest they cause it pain.

They forget that to leave an *uncorrected fault* in a child, or to allow any *wrong habit* to grow up in its life unchecked--is **the greatest unkindness they could possibly do to the child!** To leave the roots of *weeds* growing in the garden among the flowers--is to insure the springing up of those weeds by and by, to mar the beauty of the garden.

No tender feeling should ever prevent a parent from correcting a fault in a child. Love must always seek the best.

"Chasten your son while there is hope--and do not set your heart on his destruction!" Proverbs 19:18

PROFITING FROM THE SCRIPTURES

By J.C. Ryle

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

(1) For one thing, begin reading your Bible *this very day*. **1 Timothy 4:13** *Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.* The way to do a thing--is to do it; and the way to read the Bible--is actually to read it! It is not merely *meaning*, or *wishing*, or *resolving*, or *intending*, or *thinking* about it--which will advance you one step. You must positively read. There is no *royal road* in this matter, any more than in the matter of prayer. If you cannot read yourself, you must persuade somebody else to read it to you. But one way or another, through eyes or ears--the words of Scripture must actually pass before your mind.

(2) For another thing, read the Bible with an earnest desire to *understand it*. **2 Timothy 2:15** *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* Do not think for a moment, that the great object is to *turn over a certain quantity of printed paper*, and that it matters nothing whether you understand it or not. Some ignorant people seem to imagine, that all is done if they *advance so many chapters every day*, though they may not have a notion what they are all about, and only know that they have pushed on their bookmark ahead so many pages. This is turning Bible reading into a *mere ritual form*. It is almost as bad as the *Popish* habit of 'buying indulgences'--by saying an astounding number of 'Ave-Marias' and 'Pater-nosters' (*Hail-Mary's* and *Our-Father's*--on their 'rosary beads'.) It reminds one of the poor Hottentot who ate up a Dutch hymn-book because he saw it comforted his neighbors' hearts! Settle it down in your mind as a general principle, that a Bible not

understood--is a Bible that does no good! Say to yourself often as you read, "What is this all about?" Dig for the meaning like a man digging for gold.

(3) For another thing, read the Bible with *child-like faith and humility*. Open your *heart*--as you open God's book, and say, "**Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!**" Resolve to believe implicitly whatever you find there, however much it may run counter to your own desires and prejudices. Resolve to receive heartily every statement of truth--whether you like it or not. Beware of that miserable habit into which some readers of the Bible fall--they *receive some* doctrines because they like them; and they *reject others* because they are condemning to themselves, or to some relation, or friend. At this rate, the Bible is useless! Are we to be judges of what ought to be in God's Word? Do we know better than God? Settle it down in your mind--that you will *receive* all and *believe* all, and that what you cannot understand--you will take on trust. Remember, when you pray--that you are speaking to God, and God hears you. But, remember, when you read Scripture--that God is speaking to you, and you are not to "dictate," but to *listen!*

(4) For another thing, read the Bible in a *spirit of obedience and self-application*. Sit down to the study of it with a daily determination that you will live by its rules, rest on its statements, and act on its commands. **Psalms 119:9** *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. Him and him and him* Consider, as you travel through every chapter, "How does this affect my *thinking* and *daily conduct*? What does this *teach* me?" It is poor work to read the Bible from mere *curiosity*, and for speculative purposes--in order to fill your head and store your mind with *mere opinions*; while you do not allow the book to influence your *heart* and *life*. That Bible is *read* best--which is *practiced* most!

(5) **For another thing, read the Bible *daily*.** Make it a part of every day's business to *read* and *meditate* on some portion of God's Word. ***Psalms 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*** Private means of grace are just as needful every day for our souls--as food and clothing are for our bodies. Yesterday's food will not feed the laborer today; and today's food will not feed the laborer tomorrow. Do as the Israelites did in the wilderness. Gather your *manna fresh* every morning. Choose your own seasons and hours. Do not scramble over and hurry your reading. Give your Bible the *best*, and not the worst part of your time! But whatever plan you pursue, let it be a rule of your life to visit the *throne of grace* and *God's Word* every day.

(6) **For another thing, read *all* of the Bible--and read it in an *orderly way*.** I fear there are many parts of the Word which some people never read at all. This is to say at the least, a very presumptuous habit. ***"All Scripture is profitable." (2 Timothy 3:16.)*** To this habit may be traced that lack of *well-proportioned views of truth*, which is so common in this day. Some people's Bible-reading is a system of perpetual 'dipping and picking'. They do not seem to have an idea of regularly going through the whole book. This also is a great mistake. No doubt in times of sickness and affliction, it is allowable to search out seasonable portions. But with this exception, I believe it is by far the best plan to begin the Old and New Testaments at the same time--to read each straight through to the end, and then begin again. This is a matter in which every one must be persuaded in his own mind. I can only say it has been my own plan for nearly forty years, and I have never seen cause to alter it.

(7) **For another thing, read the Bible *fairly* and *honestly*.** Determine to take everything in its plain, obvious meaning--and regard all *forced* interpretations with great suspicion. As a general rule, whatever a verse of the Bible *seems* to mean--it *does* mean! Cecil's rule is a very valuable one, "The right way of interpreting Scripture is to take it as we find it, without any

attempt to force it into any particular theological system."

(8) **In the last place, read the Bible with *Christ continually in view*.** The grand primary object of all Scripture, is to testify of Jesus! ***John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*** Old Testament *ceremonies* are shadows of Christ. Old Testament *deliverers* are types of Christ. Old Testament *prophecies* are full of Christ's *sufferings*, and of Christ's *glory* yet to come. The first coming and the second; the Lord's humiliation and His glorious kingdom; His *cross* and the *crown*--shine forth everywhere in the Bible. Keep fast hold on this *clue*, if you would read the Bible aright!

I might easily add to these *hints*, if space permitted. Few and short as they are--you will find them most profitable when implemented.

EDITORS NOTE: I have taken the liberty to insert Scriptures in several places in this article.

CHURCH AUTHORITY: ITS LIMITATIONS

By John Mason Peck

The term "authority" in the question cannot mean any form of arbitrary power. It cannot include human legislation in or out of the church; for the servant has no power to usurp the authority of the master, and make laws for the government of his fellow-servants. Its meaning is exclusive, and must be determined by scriptural precept or example, drawn from the various cases of discipline mentioned in the New Testament,—The most dangerous power is that derived by implication; and not from precept or example.

The question now assumes this form. Has the New Testament established, or even recognized any authority in the hands of any man, or company of men to sit in judgment on the proceedings of any church of Jesus Christ? Such power, if it does exist, necessarily includes several particulars; as—The power to look into

the conduct of a church, examine its records, institute an ecclesiastical court, prescribe the forms of trial, summon and examine witnesses, punish those who refuse to testify; adjudicate on the church, decide the case, and if adjudged guilty execute the penalty. All these particulars must be included in the supposed authority or the procedure would be farcical.

All Baptists maintain that each church, in its own capacity, is a judicial body, and capable of conducting a trial, and executing the penalty enjoined in the New Testament on incorrigible offenders. If there is any higher court to sit in judgment on the proceedings of the church, supposed to be delinquent, it must have all the power in its capacity, belonging to a superior court in reversing the decision. and granting redress to the injured party. If such provision has been made by the Head of the Church, it can be shown from Precept or example in the New Testament.

There is a very obvious line of distinction made between the churches mentioned in the New Testament, as local bodies. Each was a separate community and in discipline wholly independent of the rest. By this arrangement personal intercourse amongst the members belonging to the same community was provided. Discipline extended no further than the members who had entered into covenant with each other. All delinquent members were tried by their brethren with whom they were in special covenant relation. They would know all the circumstances, and make useful allowances for mistakes and defects in knowledge. Such were the churches, and such the discipline, as testified by Mosheim, Jones, Neander, and other historians.

There does not appear to be the least intimation in the New Testament, either expressed or implied, that any one or more churches should exercise authority over another church, or its members. We regard all such interference as usurpation, and highly dangerous to the welfare of the churches....

It is conceded by all Baptists that these "councils" have no ecclesiastical power, and can only advise, and, exert a friendly influence, and not adjudicate the matter. This practice was not an original Baptist feature but seems to

have been borrowed from the Puritans of Massachusetts and Connecticut, who were semi-Presbyterians in some features of church polity.

If these principles are correct, then all declarations of non-fellowship by churches, associations, or other organized bodies concerning other churches are wrong;—are a usurpation of power that does not belong to them; and in its tendency is subversive of the New Testament order of churches.

SPURGEON ON QUOTING OTHERS

"Of course, you are not such wiseacres to think or say that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition It seems odd, that certain men, who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others." CHS

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