

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN A PROBLEM SEEMS TOO GREAT?**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

As recorded in Deuteronomy 9, Moses spoke to the generation of Israelites who would enter the Promised Land. Moses, sadly, would never reach Canaan, yet by inspiration he advised those who would. However, the task set before the nation of Israel seem a daunting task, to say the least. In verse 1, Moses began: *“Hear O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven...”* To the men and women of Israel, this must have seemed a near-impossible command to follow. Ten of the twelve spies had thought as much (Numbers 13:31ff), and convinced the Israelites that they were going to perish at the hands of the land’s inhabitants. The nation of Israel, a nomadic and inexperienced people, was to go against giant men with great numbers, great cities, and a reputation that spurned the cry, *“Who can stand before the children of Anak!”* Indeed, the feat placed before this fledgling nation was a feat that seemed **too great** to overcome.

However, Moses, foreseeing the people’s fear, went on to list several points that should have given the Israelites courage and hope, and should do likewise for those today facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles. First, Moses admonished the people to *“understand therefore this day, that the Lord thy God is He which goeth over before thee”* (Deuteronomy 9:3). In essence, Moses reminds the Israelites that God is with them. How, one might ask, could Israel have ever forgotten that fact? From the plagues in Egypt to the parting of the Red Sea to the giving of quail, manna, and water in the wilderness, God set forth an inarguable case for His dedication to the people of Israel. Every time they faced adversity, God was there, and, dear Christian, the same is true for us today. Consider Hebrews 13:5, for instance: *“Let your conversation [manner of life] be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”*

According to the Greek, in which this statement was originally written, five negatives intensify each other, rendering a statement that in English would read **“I will never, never, never, never, never leave thee nor forsake thee.”** Paul, when ending his epistles to the Romans, as well as the II Corinthians and Philippian epistles, prayed that *“the God of peace be with you all”* (Romans 15:33), and in the same epistle acknowledged that, while we remain faithful to the Gospel, nothing, whether it be *“nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God...”* (Romans 8:39). What comfort for the Christian to have the assurance that, despite the obstacles and hardships so many face, God will remain the True and Faithful Friend!

Moses continued his speech to the Israelites by reminding them that it was *“for the wickedness of these nations”* that God was driving them out of the Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 9:5). In essence, Moses is stating a principle that we should all understand: **God will punish the wicked.** At times, we all face hardships and obstacles brought on, not by our own actions, but by the actions of others. As well, there are times when the problems we face seem to arise with no cause whatsoever. In such instances, we often ask *“Why do the wicked prosper?”* The weeping prophet Jeremiah asked such a question in Jeremiah 12:1, wondering why he had to suffer for faithfully preaching God’s word while the wicked lived happy lives. The Psalmist, as well, asked a similar question, but finally discovered the answer: *“For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee”* (Psalm 73:27). As we consider problems that seem too large to overcome, may

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

THE MARVELOUS MESSAGE OF THE MASTER

Text: _____

I. _____ of Inspiration

Notes:

II. _____ of Inspiration

Notes:

III. _____ to Inspiration

Notes:

WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR...

Jim Smith went to church one Sunday morning. He heard the song leader miss a note, and he winced. He saw a teenager talking when everybody was supposed to be bowed in prayer. He felt like the usher was watching to see what he put in the offering plate, and it made him boil. He caught the preacher making a slip of the tongue five times in the sermon, by actual count. As he slipped out through the side door during the closing hymn, he muttered to himself, "Never again. What a bunch of clods and hypocrites."

Ron Jones went to church one Sunday morning. The church sang "A Mighty Fortress," and he thrilled to the majesty of it. He was glad to hear that the church was sharing in a special offering for the mission work in Nigeria. He especially appreciated the sermon that Sunday—it answered a question that had bothered him for a long time. He thought, as he walked out the door, "How could a man come here and not feel the presence of God?" Both men went to the same church service on the same Sunday morning. Each found what he was looking for.

"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

we understand that God will "even the playing field," quite often in this life, but most definitely in the life to come (I Corinthians 15:57).

The leader of the nation of Israel also called to the people's remembrance that faithfulness of God in times of trouble. Moses stated that one motivation for God delivering Israel into the Promised Land is "*that He may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*" (Deuteronomy 9:5). Indeed, when facing overwhelming odds, God's faithfulness is one of the greatest keys to success. Throughout Scripture, God has assured us of His willingness and ability to keep His promises. Deuteronomy 7:9 describes the "*Faithful God*" who keeps "*covenant and mercy...to a thousand generations.*" The Hebrews writer described a God who is "*faithful that promised*" (Hebrews 10:23), and Peter described our God as One who "*is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (II Peter 3:9).

Finally, Moses called for Israel to "*Remember, and forget not, how thou provokest the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness...*" (Deuteronomy 9:7). Looking back at Israel's history, Moses could see clearly that they were not perfect. For the Christian today, as well, it must be understood that we are not, nor ever have been, perfect. Paul noted that "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23), and John recognized that "*if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (I John 1:8). One key, then, to overcoming obstacles is recognizing the fact that we might have, at least in part, brought the trouble on ourselves. Therefore, it is often necessary to examine ourselves when problems arise and determine what we can do from within to defeat the problem.

In the face of Moses' comments to the nation of Israel, the old adage "God helps those who cannot help themselves" might need some adjustment. The remembrance for which Moses called and the responsibility he placed on God's people might prove this statement: "God helps those who have prepared themselves to be helped by Him." Thus, when we face problems that seem to us insurmountable, may we remember Moses' words, make right our own lives, and depend on God to help His people.

-Chris Perry

[**Note:** Again remember that Chris is scheduled to preach our Gospel Meeting in 2009. We look forward to having him and his family here with us so that he can share Biblical insights similar to those expressed in this article.]

THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF GOD

“Glory” is one of those words that most people have a sense of what it means, but if asked would be hard pressed to give a verbal definition. Webster’s dictionary applies to this word the idea of “great honor or fame... adoration, great splendor, prosperity...heavenly bliss.” As the words of Ezekiel the prophet then are examined, one gets a glimpse into the splendor of God. *“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake”* (Ezekiel 1:28b). A few preliminary things can be gleaned from the words alone. First, Ezekiel had been fortunate to have witnessed something that tried to put God’s glory into perspective, but it could only be referred to as a likeness. Why? Because the glory of God cannot be fully expressed in terms understood by man. Second, though, what ever this appearance that likened His glory was, it was still awe-inspiring enough to cause Ezekiel to fall prostrate in honor of it. Then third, it is seen that this vision was not the “main event” but merely an “attention getter” whereby Ezekiel would be provided some sort of spoken information. With these preliminary matters firmly established in our minds, let us examine exactly what this vision was that likened the glory of God, trying to put His splendor into perspective for man.

As the vision opens (vs. 4), Ezekiel looks and sees a whirlwind come out of the north. Whirlwinds were often used as precursors for majestic and powerful scenes and this is no different. Out of the midst of the whirlwind, though, Ezekiel witnesses the likeness of four living creatures proceed, each having four faces and four wings. The number four has special symbolism in Biblical writings, alluding to completeness or perfection. The four wings symbolize the perfect ability of these angelic beings to move anywhere at anytime with swiftness in order to fulfill the will of God whom they serve. The four faces, each representing a powerful creation of God likewise identify these living creatures as phenomenal beings. One of the faces was the face of a man which represented wisdom and intelligence as man is the crowning achievement of God’s creation. The face of the lion indicated power and authority, both attributes commonly associated with this fierce creature. The face of the ox represented the strength and service of this domesticated animal. And the face of the eagle brought to mind speed and discernment. Each of the attributes associated with the faces describes what kind of creatures these angelic beings were and identifies them as amazing.

In addition to their physical appearance, Ezekiel records further information regarding their organization and fervor in service. Their feet and legs were straight, able to withstand any burden God would place upon them; and they were joined one to another, never turning off course, but traveling straight forward. They were perfectly unified as servants of God and bore the needed attributes of accomplishing anything God demanded of them.

Around the middle of the chapter (vs. 15), Ezekiel reveals an added attribute of these amazing creatures, that their work was accomplished “as it were” a wheel in the middle of a wheel (vs. 16). The “as it were” indicates that this was not literally so, but appeared as such. The wheel in the middle of a wheel reemphasizes the ability and willingness of these creatures to go anywhere at anytime without limitation in order to fulfill the expectations associated with serving God. The rings of the wheels were full of eyes (vs. 18) representing the all-seeing nature of God as He oversees their work, and the fact that the wheels were not on the ground but above it (vs. 21) indicates further the lack of limitation as to their abilities. An added feature of these beings was that their movement was directed by their spirit (vs. 21) meaning that when they went, there was no reluctance on their part, but full submission. Further verses 22-24 reveal that there was a firmament directly above them to indicate that they were not supreme beings.

This is quite a description of a these living creatures. The attributes associated with them surely strike a since of awe and wonder in the heart of every sincere student of the Bible. But this was not the fullness of the vision. Revealed in the final four verses of the chapter is the fact that these living creatures in all of their wonder still were under the likeness of the throne of God, indicating their subjection to Him as their Creator and as their Master. Not only was this throne situated above them to indicate their subjection, but when a voice came out of the firmament, these angelic beings let down their wings in reverence to the great Sovereign of the universe. That is the likeness of the glory of God that illustrates His splendor and bliss; that no matter how glorious a creature there might be, still there is a Creator to whom it is subject and that Creator is God.

Man can learn much from this depiction of God’s glory, but most important is that man recognizes the glory that is due God. It is before that great splendor that we too should fall prostrate in honor of the great Master that we too must serve with fullness of heart.

-Andy Brewer