

STRAIGHTWAY

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].

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“It Shall Wither in All the Leaves of Her Spring” (Ezekiel 17:9)

by Dr. H. T. Spence

Ezekiel is a prophet of unique personality found among the great literary prophets of the Old Testament. He was taken down into the Babylonian captivity during the second deportation (597 BC, Ussher) and carried into the land of the Chaldeans to the city of Tel-Abib. There he worked on the docks on the Chebar River, a tributary of the Euphrates River. He was twenty-five years old at the beginning of his captivity, and at the age of thirty, he was called into the prophetic office through a most mysterious vision from God (Ezekiel 1).

A Parable and Its Prophecy:

In Ezekiel 17:1-10, God gives to the prophet a parable concerning Judah. The reader would

do well to read this parable because it aptly pictures the dilemma of the remnant of God's people today. It is the story of a great eagle (representing the king of Babylon) that cropped off the top of a tall cedar tree in Lebanon. The cedar represented the House of David that was high and above all others; no power could assail against it because of the protection of God. This great eagle swooped down, broke off the top branch of the cedar tree (representing Nebuchadnezzar's taking of King Jehoiakim), and carried it into a land of traffic (Babylon).

He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree (17:5).

This cropped off branch “became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs” (17:6b). However, there appeared another eagle in the parable, and the vine began to bend her roots toward him, “and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation” (17:7).

This branch that became a vine was King Zedekiah whom Nebuchadnezzar had set up in Jerusalem to replace Jehoikim. If Zedekiah had acted wisely, he might have had a safe though humble reign. There may not have been the need of the returns from captivity. But God did not allow Zedekiah to rule in pride like Jehoikim had ruled (as a top cedar twig); God allowed him to be a lowly vine, feeble and small, yet bearing fruit. Truly, a humble useful life is better than a proud pretentious one. But who was the feeble, lowly vine that sought the power of another eagle? It was Zedekiah, seeking the strength and help of another eagle, that of Egypt.

Zedekiah refused to live in the conditions under Nebuchadnezzar in which providence had placed him. In the parable, it was evident by God’s own words that confidence in a worthless defense would lead to ruin.

Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew.

God’s Divine Appointment

In these last days before the secret coming of Christ, the remnant of God’s people has found itself at a crossroads of decision. It is found in the throes of the overwhelming conflict with the end-time apostasy. This end-time apostasy is unprecedented in history. Although the falling away from truth has been evident throughout the generations of man, Satan has had millennia of human history to experiment with the fine-tuning of religious deception. With greater finesse Satan has infiltrated public Christianity and introduced error with such subtlety that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived (Matthew 24:24). The tentacles of such an apostasy have invaded every compartment of human society including,

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O. Talmadge Spence, Founder

H. T. Spence, Editor
President

Foundations Bible College

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of course, the public view of Christianity. The fact of the “falling away” (apostasy) before the coming of Christ cannot be denied (II Thessalonians 2:2,3). We are not in the days of the Awakenings; we are not in the days of national revival. What Neo-Christianity is calling an *awakening*, the Bible calls an *apostasy*. We are in the beginning of sorrows that Jesus prophesied of in Matthew 24:9-12.

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

In preaching today there is much that implies Christians are simply to enjoy Christ and His love, as little lambs in His fold being led by the Shepherd to green pastures and still waters for the purpose of getting fat and living a prosperous life. However, Paul penned the disturbing words in Romans 8:36 that give a picture contrary to this idea.

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Yes, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Times have not gotten better, dear reader. True Christianity is not popular as in former days of

awakenings and national revivals. We are as the top of the cedar tree, plucked off and carried into a land of traffic. God never intended at this time in history for the Church to be a “tree” with all the wild birds coming and lodging in its branches. The church was never intended by God to be popular and acceptable by the world. The church was appointed to be as a mustard seed bush, or a low growing vine, but to still be fruitful.

There is a spirit today in public Christianity that craves for popularity, acceptability, and conformity. This craving spirit has led to wholesale neutrality and compromise which in return has birthed the reality of a carnal Laodecian church. It must be clearly acknowledged that contemporary Christianity is *not* biblical or spiritual Christianity; it is a product of the times, and those times are dominated by the world. In Revelation 3:17, Jesus declared the condition of this church age:

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

The Reality of Another Gospel

Galatians 1:6 declares to the Galatians, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.” The apostle uses the Greek term *heteros* for *another*. This Greek word means “another of another kind.” It is a different kind

of gospel than that which Paul had preached unto them. He then states that it is not “another,” using a different Greek word *allos*, meaning that this gospel was not “another of the same kind.” Paul also uses these two words to warn the Corinthians about someone preaching another Jesus. II Corinthians 11:4 speaks of an *allos* Jesus, another Jesus like the one he preached, but it was *not* the *same* Jesus. Paul condemns both a *heteros* Jesus (another of a different kind) and an *allos* Jesus (another which is like the one he preached, but it was *not* exactly the same).

It is at this point that Paul gives a very bold curse in Galatians 1:8.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Paul does use the literary plural expression “though we” in his pronouncement of a curse. He is clearly including himself in this sober declaration: let any one, including us, that gives any other gospel remember that he will be brought under the curse of God.

Could a pastor, known for preaching the true gospel, known as a Fundamentalist, at some point in his ministry begin preaching another gospel? This is a most sobering thought! Not only what comes out of a preacher’s mouth, but also what

steps forward in his practice becomes his message. Apostasy can come into a ministry through the practice and associations of one’s ministry as well as through the message. Billy Graham kept his message fundamental for many years, but his practice drew him into the apostate arena.

“Another” Gospel of Neo-Christianity

Perhaps the gospel of Neo-Christianity will be the hardest truth for many to reckon with because it hits near the home life of the Fundamentalist. Is Neo-Evangelicalism the gospel? Do the messages of expositors and key leaders of the Neo-Evangelical camp preach the true gospel? Are the Charismatic preachers preaching the gospel? The words of Paul in both Galatians and II Corinthians declare lucidly that we cannot preach a “different” gospel or even a gospel “like” the gospel. Is the God of the true gospel a compromiser? Is He an ecumenist with the liberals? Does He change with the generations in His view and declaration of truth? Has He changed in this generation to include the world and its music in His worship? Has He denied the truth of separation for His people today? Is He in the changing of standards and ways of living to become worldly in His appeal? Does God now allow media personalities to influence changes that make us more accommodating and acceptable to them? *No*, this is not the true gospel; this is

The article continues after the insert.

not the gospel of Scripture. Although it may have some truths contained in some parts of its proclamation, this is a gospel of another kind

However, we must go a step farther. The Bible declares there is a *curse* upon any man who preaches this “other” gospel. It is one thing to have the “wrath” of God upon one’s life as a sinner (John 3:36), but it is another thing to have the “curse” of God upon one’s life and ministry. It must be acknowledged that the Neo-Evangelicals have the curse of God upon them because of the “changes” they have given to both the doctrine and the practice of the gospel. The contemporary music of our times has both the message and the sound of another gospel. Those that become the media of such changes are immediately under the curse of God.

Leaning to Another Eagle

In the parable found in Ezekiel 17, the fruitful vine began leaning toward another eagle, which represented Egypt. The vine believed it would be more fruitful under the influence of such an eagle. But God made it clear that the vine would wither in its prime, in its spring, and would not prosper.

Do we as Fundamentalists now believe that the ways and practice of the very enemies whom we stood against will become acceptable to God and produce fruit for Him? Will we reject our former ways and stands believing they are our curse for the future? It is evident that the Fundamentalist movement is

“leaning” toward the eagle of Neo-Evangelicalism in its music to prove its adaptability with the world. Such a practice is a leaning toward another gospel. God delivered us from the systems of Rome, of liberalism and modernism, of Charismaticism, of shallow preaching, and of shallow music. Yes, it is true that most churches are leaning toward the eagle of Egypt for their future hope and prosperity. But once the world and carnality make inroads into a church and such powers are tolerated and ultimately commended, that church will not know the presence of God and spirituality. God will leave such a church, such an institution, and such a school. It may seem to grow, prosper, and become more accepted by the world’s standard, but before heaven it will wither in all of its spring. The ones who led in such leanings will be under the curse of God.

Every ministry wants to prosper; every school wants to grow; every minister wants to be accepted. But these goals cannot be reached with God’s blessings if they are sought through compromise. Truth has not changed! God has planted us in a world of hatred and rejection. But thank God, He has promised us His presence if we remain true to His Word! Dear preacher, do not try to change what God has appointed; we will never be popular with the world. In order for our ministry to prosper, we must seek prosperity in accordance to God’s definition and not the earth’s. The Neo-Evangelicals and the Charismatics have entered an alliance with Egypt from their in-

ception. This alliance has been and will continue to be their spiritual ruin. Eventually, any true ministry that has come to the belief that it is time to change its methods, its ways, its approaches, its preaching, its standards, and its music will end in spiritual demise.

Conclusion

When men begin losing communion with God, becoming discouraged with their appointment in providence, or fearful of the future, their hopes will then turn to the eagle of Egypt. There are enough voices around us who talk with convincing words of the need of change for future survival. They say, "We must give the people what they want." Perhaps it is true what the old preacher J. H. King stated at the turn of the twentieth century, "When you've heard from the people, you have heard from Hell." It is not the worldly people that a preacher and president must listen to, it is God.

Are we being convinced that certain changes are needful to bring us into the acceptability of the twenty-first century public? Do we need a new Bible? Do we need new music standards? Do we need to change the way we preach and not to deal with the problems facing us? In this age of body piercing, slob dress, and modernistic thought, do we need to leave the old way and accept a "new way"?

The natural man thinks that such changes and leanings will inevitably cause God's people to prosper, to grow, and to be accepted in the earth. Instead, history has proved repeatedly that God's people spiritually wither when they leave the clear path of His Word to lean toward the powers that be in the earth.

Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew (Ezekiel 17:10).

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