

Message #25 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

"History Repeats Itself"

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about Romans 15:4, which says, "For whatever things were written in old times were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." We know that the Old Testament was written for us as well as for the Israelites. And we also know that the hope that this scripture refers to is Jesus Christ. He is our hope. For centuries the Israelites looked forward to the coming Messiah, and finally Jesus Christ did come, and brought to pass all that was hoped for. However the Israelites did not understand all the things that were given to them, for many types and symbols which we recognize today were not understood by them of old. The passage of scripture we read from Romans 15:4 explains that the writings in past ages were for our learning. Many people think the Old Testament is just history, and that it was only for the Israelites. But we know that things written in the Old Testament acted also as symbolical things which point to the time that the rest of the world would be brought into the family of God through the covenant of grace.

In the time of the Israelites, there was a covenant between the children of Israel and God, and it was established in a Law of Commandments. This Law of Commandments was written and engraved in stone tablets. The law was good, and holy, and because it was a covenant from God to Israel, it was glorious. But the glory that it had, according to 2 Corinthians 3, could not be compared to the glory of the new covenant through Jesus Christ because the glory of the new covenant was much greater in that it caused the things of God to become much more clearly revealed. Now, before we go too far here, we must be careful not to give the impression that the Old Testament covenant of the Law was somehow unable to bring about God's will. On the contrary, the Law of Commandments did exactly what it was designed to do, which was to bring

all people to a knowledge of what sin is, in the eyes of God, and also, it was to show human's how sinful we really are. The Law accomplished that. It made man realize just how wicked he really was, and to also realize that he could never attain righteousness by his own strength. No matter who the man was, or how hard he tried to keep the Law of Commandments, he failed. This was not a failure of the Law of Commandments itself, but a success, for that is exactly what God had intended to do, in order that man might come to realize how little the strength of our own hands can be relied upon.

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son into the world to redeem men from the curse of the law. And that's just what the Bible calls the Law of Commandments, which was written in tables of stone; a curse. You might wonder why God would call something a curse which he had created to be a help to mankind. But the Law itself was not cursed, but every man who came under the Law was cursed because the Law condemned every man who broke the law. And of course, every man of the Israelites broke the law, for no man could keep the law perfectly. Therefore the law became a curse to all men. Now, let me say once again, this was not a failure of the Law, but a success.

You see, God never intended man to reach the status of being sons of God through the law. The law was intended to condemn every man, in order that man might realize that he could do nothing on his own to save his soul. Man, through the Law, learned that his own ability was insufficient to secure a place with God in heaven for eternity. Of course, as flesh and blood humans, man can only attempt to reach heaven by the works of his own hands. The original concept of man attempting to do this took place at the Tower of Babel. However, the Tower of Babel attempt failed in that God would not allow man to lift himself up to heaven by the strength of his own hands, but would cause man to learn just how feeble he really was unless he relied solely on God. The first step in teaching man that the only way to heaven was through the reliance on God, began in Abraham. A covenant was established with him which was a covenant of faith. God further developed the concept of being saved by faith, as opposed to being saved by works of righteousness, through Jacob, who was the father of all Israel. Then the Law of Commandments was given to this nation of Israel in order to establish the record for all time that man could not do it on his own. The Law was instituted, and mankind was immediately condemned. The Law was a good schoolteacher. It taught us that we had no power to exalt ourselves up to heaven, but would have to rely solely on God's righteousness as a free gift to us.

As we look back in Old Testament history, we can see plainly that Israel certainly did fail in their quest to keep the Law perfectly. They ran the gamut of sin, from one extreme to another. They would start out perfectly, and little by little their perfection would erode and they would become more and more sinful, until such time as they had become so wicked that God would have to punish them to get their attention. As we read about the Israelites we can see very plainly that it was unrealistic to think they could reach a state of perfection by the strength of their own hands. In each and every part of their covenant, they failed. Then, when the time was right according to God's plan, Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law; in essence, to finish its purpose. He did this by living the law perfectly. Of course, we know he did this, and that through this he made the way

for us to attain everlasting righteousness through him, rather than through the strength of our own hands.

Now, the Law was not just abandoned in lieu of the new Covenant of Grace, but was brought to its completed end. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. Its purpose was completed. Jesus brought it to its rightful end. Then once the Law of Commandments was fulfilled, there was room for a new covenant to be established. This covenant was a covenant for all men, whereas the covenant to Israel through Moses, that Law of Commandments written in tablets of stone, had not been given to anyone else except to the Israelites. The new Covenant of Grace established through Jesus Christ was for any man on the face of the earth who believed that Jesus was Savior. Therefore, a man could be saved just by believing in Jesus Christ as God's son who was sent to save the world. No longer would man be judged worthy of death because he was sinful, but now would be judged righteous just because he believed in the saving blood of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this new covenant was not to replace the Old Testament Law of Commandments because of the old covenant's inability to bring about salvation, but this new covenant was the natural next step in the process of bringing righteousness to mankind. The first covenant showed man that he could not attain the righteousness of God through his own strength, and the second covenant, the new covenant of grace, showed man how to actually accomplish that righteousness.

Ever since the beginning of the world man has tried to lift himself up to the level of God by the strength of his own hands. Babel, that tower in the land of Babylon, was man's initial attempt to reach heaven by his own means. But he could not do it at the Tower of Babel, any more than he can do it now, for God is above all men, or anything else that has been created. For God is Lord of all, whether they are men or angels.

But we must also realize that the experiences of the children of Israel were not just for them to see their own weakness, but that we ourselves might also prosper by their example to us, and how we might avoid the same pitfalls in which Israel fell. Satan has not ceased to work his fiendish temptations and lies in the earth just because the covenants have changed. He still destroys God's people with these same things, these same temptations, and if we want to escape his traps, then we must closely observe the historical experiences of Israel in order to avoid making the same mistakes they did. When we realize that our history is pretty much the same as their history, then we begin to see the types and symbolisms of their time period played out in our modern day time period. However, it's not always easy to comprehend the types and symbols of the Old Testament and to apply them to our current covenant of grace. Yet, what Israel was actually doing in the Old Testament by their lives was to give us a basic picture of heavenly things. The New Covenant of Grace brings a much greater realism to heavenly things, but yet it is still just the history of Israel that we are living over again. Here, let me give this some more explanation.

When we look at Israel, in the Old Testament, we read that they had a temple where the presence of God stayed. This was a physical temple, a physical structure. Those of us who are under the

new Covenant of Grace realize that we do not have a physical temple, an actual physical building, but realize that we ourselves are the temple of God, and that God dwells in us. Instead of having a physical structure where the priests go before the Lord to offer sacrifices, we find that God now dwells in us, instead of among us, and that the sacrifice we give to him is our worship, our praise, and ourselves. Our sacrifice of ourselves is a sacrifice of our time and energy in order that we might accomplish his will in this earth rather than our own. The Israelites, in the Old Testament, prepared sacrifices for the Lord consisting of incense, flour, animals, etc. There were both mandatory offerings for sin, and voluntary offerings from the heart. In the New Covenant of Grace, Jesus became our sin offering, and we became the voluntary offering. Let me say that again. Jesus became our sin offering, and we became the voluntary offering, giving our lives daily to him to do his will. We don't give an animal on an altar, we give him our whole lives each and every day as a living sacrifice of our own will, in order to do his will.

As we look back in history we can see the order of events unfold as Israel was given the Law of Commandments. Then they continually went back and forth between righteousness and wickedness. But because we can look back at these things which were written in old-time, and take them as instruction for our own learning, we can recognize that the events which occurred to Israel were not just for them but were for us also. There are some who think that the only learning we can gain from Israel's history is to recognize how sinful we are. But in actuality, as we read the history of Israel we can not only see what happened to them, but if we look closely enough, we can also see that this is the history of Israel played out in the Christian church. Of course, our Christian church history is not played out in the same physical way as was played out in Israel under the Law, but nevertheless we are living the same history as the Israelites did. Let me explain a couple of concepts here which might help you to see this.

Take for example the idols of Israel. As we read the Old Testament we see that idols, whether made of gold, silver, wood, or stone, were common. All the nations around Israel worshiped idols. Israel soon fell to the temptation, and also took idols as their gods. Now, this is not just a historical event of the Israelites, but is also a historical event of we Christians. We look to items of this world to meet our personal needs, rather than looking to God. Our idols are not physically shaped the same as the idols of Israel were, but may be shaped in the form of banks, credit cards, automobiles, investment securities, our jobs, scientists, and medicine. We worship these idols in the same way that Israel worshiped their idols, by giving them glory and admiration; by telling everyone around us how wonderful they are. This is worship.

In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 8, we see an example of this. In these verses, God is escorting Ezekiel through the temple, giving a visual description of Israel's wickedness. Let me list three or four things which are described here.

First, Ezekiel sees all kinds of creeping things and abominable beasts in the temple, and idols are portrayed on the walls. In addition, seventy men of the ancients of Israel are gathered there with them and are offering clouds of incense to them. Second, there are women in the temple who are

weeping for Tammuz, who is the secular love god of mythology. Third, there were 25 men who turned their backs to the temple, and faced the sun in the East, and worshiped it.

Now, it's easy to see that what is described here is very wicked. And we certainly cannot blame God for punishing Israel because of it. But as we point our finger at Israel, we must realize that if we condemn their actions, then we would also be condemned if we did the same things. But take a look at the sins of Israel, and compare them to some of the things that take place in our own Christianity. The reference to creeping things and abominable beasts might just as well represent that which is unclean in our current Christian society, and the incense offered by the ancients of the people might easily represent the leadership of our churches, leading the people into forms of worship which actually give praise and glory to the beast nature, and to evil spirits, rather than pure praise and glory to God. Women weeping for Tammuz can easily be compared to Christians desiring secular love forms rather than the spiritual love for God. The men who turned their backs to the temple and worshiped the sun, can be compared to Christians who are more enamored with the knowledge of science and technology, the physical knowledge of man, then they are for the knowledge and wisdom of God.

Israel continued to waver back and forth between righteousness and wickedness all through its history. If we are to benefit from Israel's example, then we must acknowledge that what their history describes should be used as a warning for us. I would suggest to you, quite plainly, that all is not sweetness and light in the church, for God's people certainly do remain sinful. And although we have attained righteousness through the blood of Jesus Christ, nowhere in scripture is it suggested that this initial righteousness through Jesus Christ is enough of itself. Yes, it is enough to attain salvation initially, but to maintain salvation you must not only believe in Jesus Christ, but you must desire him enough that works of righteousness follow. When Christians forget what it means to be fervent in spirit, forget what it means to love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, when Christians forget what it means to take up your cross and follow Jesus to Calvary, then it's easy to see how similar our history is compared to the history of Israel. Just as Israel was still called Israel even when they worshiped idols, Christians are still called Christians even when they seek continually after gold and silver and all the dainty things of the earth. It is Satan who offers us the dainty things of earth, and if we swoon after them, then we are acknowledging the gifts of Satan more than the gifts of God. The gifts of Satan are all the trinkets and baubles of the earth, but the gifts of the Lord are righteousness and peace and joy, in the Holy Spirit.

Because of the sins of Israel, God brought destruction to them, and they were taken captive by the nations of the world. And because of the sins of God's people today, we are also, to a great extent, taken captive. However, our captivity is not a physical captivity, but a spiritual captivity. We have been taken away from the spiritual city of Jerusalem in order that might serve the spiritual king of Babylon. Satan is the king of Great Babylon. In essence, we are worshiping idols. And notice something here. Idolatry is nothing more and nothing less than adultery against God. When we revel in the delights of the flesh, we are giving praise and glory to the

prince of this world for the things he gives us. But if we are truly serving the Lord, we will be content with the things he gives us and we won't be trying to get all the delights of the flesh.

As we look back in history, we see the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, where the people of Israel were brought back to a realization that the God of heaven was truly God, and that they had been worshiping Baal, who was not really a god at all. The Bible explains in Ezekiel 28, that Satan shows himself as if he is God, but that God states plainly that he is not God, but a man, in the sense that he will die the eternal death just as all wicked men will die the eternal death. The people of Israel in the days of Elijah had gone so far from God that all but a few of them were completely ignorant that the God of heaven was truly the real God. When God's true fire came down from heaven in acceptance of Elijah's sacrifice, the people exclaimed in awe, "The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God." In the end of times, this is exactly what will happen to God's people. They will be brought back to the knowledge of who the true God really is. Many Christians do love God in truth and in spirit, but many are deceived by that man of sin, that son of perdition. This mystery of iniquity, as expressed in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, is Satan himself, who sits in God's current temple, God's church, trying to show himself as if he is God. But the Old Testament history of Elijah on Mount Carmel will be replayed in our current day, and reveal to man who he has really been serving all this time. Those who do love God, but have been deceived into thinking they can worship the things of this world, and allow all kinds of worldly things to permeate their lives, will then recognize that, "The Lord, he is God."

We are sitting on the threshold of the Great Tribulation, if not already into the beginning of it. There is already a famine for the word of God, as it says in Revelation 6:6. This famine is explained in Amos 8:11 as being, "not a famine for food, but a famine for the word of God." We, as Christians, need to call out to the Lord for restoration, for understanding, before it's too late. The Bible tells us that at the end, Elijah will come and set all things right. In the days of Jesus, John the Baptist was the symbolic equivalent to Elijah, for he called the people of God to repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. It is time, as we see all these things begin to come to pass, to look up, for our salvation truly does draw near. It is time to pray for God to open our ears, that we might hear the word of God plainly, so that we might repent from our love of earthly things. Truly, Satan is sitting in the temple of God, attempting to show himself that he is God. It is time that this false god is revealed to God's people, so that the deception can cease, and God's people can wash their robes. It is time to stop worshiping the prince of this world because of all the delicate things of earth he tempts us with. It is time to come out from among the wicked and be separate, and to be content with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.