

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 112

THE SOUNDING OF THE TRUMPETS (continued)

"And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a *smoke out of the pit*, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the *sun* and the *air were darkened* by reason of the smoke of the pit" (Rev. 9:2).

The "bottomless pit" or the "abyss" signifies the human heart! As soon as the abyss is unlocked it begins to belch forth columns of dirty blue-black smoke just like the smoke of a great furnace. This smoke displays a movement, a tendency coming out of the abyss. It is that which comes forth from the *deceitful* nature of the heart, for the heart of man is *"deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"* (Jer. 17:9). There are indeed wicked, vile, and corrupt things that come out of the heart, as Jesus makes plain in Matthew 7:18-23. In this writing, however, we want to look at the *deceit* of the heart and the things that arise from that deceit. The deceitfulness of the human heart was first revealed amidst the mysterious mists of the long ago Eden. God had told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. The serpent disagreed and said, "You shall not surely die!" Eve, Paul tells us, was *deceived* by the serpent! Adam then followed her in her transgression. Can we not see by this that the whole dreadful realm of sin, sorrow, darkness, error, and death came through *deception!* Satan was a liar right from that earliest beginning! The deception caused man to become joined to the delusion that is in the lie! Adam's consciousness of himself, of God, and of the true nature of all things, was now birthed in a lie, and joined in both mind and body to the dust realm instead of the spirit realm he became separated from God in his thinking, speaking, and acting. A few of the many things that arise out of the deceitfulness of the heart are ego, thoughts, imaginations, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interpretations, ideas, concepts, suggestions, opinions, propositions, and divinations. All these, and more, constitute the *smoke* that arises out of the pit!

Smoke is a cruel enemy that fills the air with darkness and penetrates the lungs of men and women, filling them with deadly gases, cutting off the oxygen supply, and endangering their lives. It is the deceitfulness of the heart by which the truth of God is *turned into a lie*, and it was by that lie that man lost his life! The smoke ascending out of the pit is the lie! It is the lie about God, the lie about truth, the lie about reality, the lie about ourselves. It is the human consciousness, the natural man's distorted perception, analysis, and definition of all things, pouring forth out of the abyss in thought, word, and expression.

THE SUN AND THE AIR DARKENED

So thick and murky is that smoke that it blots out the light of the *sun* of the glorious, illuminating truth of Christ, and darkens the *air* of our spiritual understanding, causing men to find themselves alienated from the life of God. The very atmosphere in which man moves is made fuzzy by the smoke, permeated with that negative energy which is borne along with the thoughts, imaginations, perceptions, concepts, words, and actions and becomes an oppressive atmosphere for all who walk in that realm.

It is interesting to note that the pit didn't have real fire, only "strange fire!" It does not say that the smoke came from real fire, only that it was *as the smoke* of a great furnace. The smoke "appears" to be from a great furnace, a great power, but "as the smoke" denotes that it had characteristics like the smoke from a

furnace, but it was merely a figure of speech, a parabolic comparison. The power behind the smoke is not what it appears to be, it is not *real* power, but a facade, an imagination, an illusion. This clearly reveals that the smoke is a deception, a false idea of the power of darkness. When the man of sin is revealed within us there arises a smoke out of the abyss of our heart *as of* the smoke of a great furnace. There is no furnace, but the smoke is a symbol — *as of* the smoke of a furnace. The sun and the air are darkened, the smoke clouds our perception of reality, the understanding of the spiritual realm of God's heavens is obscured by the smoke, it creates a "smoke-screen," creating the inability to think clearly or understand spiritually. It is the deceitfulness of the heart smothering the understanding until we cannot see the truth of Christ. The air is the realm of the firmament, or a dimension of heaven; therefore the air signifies the spiritual atmosphere, and the spiritual atmosphere of the realm where we walk in God becomes darkened by the smoke of the pit. The atmosphere or world of the carnal mind is darkened by the smoke, clouding the thinking, impairing the vision, veiling man's perceptions of spiritual realities until he can see neither where he is or where he is going. Simply put, it is ***carnal understanding!*** It is ***spiritual darkness!***

If you go to a bar there is an atmosphere there. If you go to a brothel there is an atmosphere there. If you go to a rock concert there is an atmosphere there. If you go to a museum there is an atmosphere there. If you hike in the mountains there is an atmosphere there. If you go to a Baptist church service there is an atmosphere there. If you go to a Pentecostal church service there is an atmosphere there. The atmosphere at a Catholic mass is altogether different from the atmosphere at a Charismatic meeting. Every realm has its atmosphere! When you enter the presence of a son of God who knows the truth as it is in Jesus, who walks in the wisdom of the mind of Christ, who expresses the unconditional love of God, and dwells in the glory of God — there is a clear, powerful, victorious, confident, peaceful, transforming atmosphere there!

Plutarch, the great Greek biographer, once wrote, "I had rather a great deal men should say there was no such man at all as Plutarch than that they should say there was one Plutarch that would eat his children as soon as they were born." He preferred to have men deny his existence rather than have them hold an unworthy conception of his character. Carrying this thought into the spiritual realm we may raise the question as to whether it would be more pleasing to *God* to have His existence denied or to have men hold a distorted and unworthy conception of His character. We may not be able to answer that proposition with certainty, but the fact is that in this world far vaster multitudes of men hold distorted and unworthy concepts of God than deny His existence! There are fewer atheists in the world than religious folk who continually malign and slander the character of our heavenly Father!

It is helpful to understand how men in ancient times viewed their God; the way in which they conceived of Him who created them. Would that we could go back to those ancient days in India or China or Japan and see the hideous idols with their grimacing countenances, their devouring teeth, their many arms and sharp claws, something of the devouring, hateful nature of their deities — or go back to the cruel Assyrians or Babylonians or Egyptians and the monstrosities, the tyrannies, which they worshipped as gods. The people of Israel knew that there was only one true and living God — Yahweh. But the idea that God was a loving God was alien to them for the most part. Until Jesus came even they did not know the heart of the Father! They knew God according to the Law. To them God was Yahweh, the Law-giver; harsh, demanding, and vindictive, throwing lightning bolts off of Sinai. Yet, there was a reason why God did not reveal the fullness of His nature to them at the beginning! In the day when God called Abraham the world was mad, licentious, idolatrous, intensely and irrevocably evil — as far from God, truth, and righteousness as it is possible to go. When you have a son, a prison, or a culture that is in a state of rebellion, riot, or civil war, wildly and hopelessly *out of control*, you must first, before anything else, *restore order!* You have to *get their attention!* Then, when order is restored, you can proceed to show favor and restore or rehabilitate them. That is what God did with Israel through the law! He brought forth in the earth a people whom He saved from the utter corruption of the civilization of that day, and wisely He did so with a *strong hand!* They weren't ready for the next step yet — Jesus. In the "fullness of time" God sent forth His Son! The Old Testament world stood before the thought of God as we sometimes stand before a summer thunder-storm — black, flashing with lightning, crashing with thunder, terrible and awesome — and with fear they bowed in the dust. They conceived that God was exacting and full of wrath. God punished people and destroyed all His enemies. But that God *loved* them? God would accept their sacrifices, certainly. God would even put up with them, and they would propitiate Him and appease Him (or so they thought!), but they did not in most cases truly *love* God!

But have we really made that much progress? The same beloved John who wrote so extensively of God's marvelous love left us this solemn warning, "Little children, keep yourselves from *idols* (that is, false gods, or false ideas and representations of the true God)" (I Jn. 5:21). Do we have false ideas about God? I fear we do! Most Christians say that God is all-wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful, and then turn around and deny it. They say that God "so loved the world" and that Jesus is "the Saviour of all men" and "the Saviour of the world" and then turn around and say that only a few will be saved while God sends the vast majority to suffer the excruciating pains of fire and brimstone for all eternity without His feeling any concern for their suffering — totally impotent to win them to Himself, and eternally without mercy! They affirm that God is all-powerful, and then turn around and say that God has "provided" salvation for all men, that God is "trying" to save the world, that God is "pleading" with men to repent, but that dirty old devil who blinds and possesses men's souls is so much more powerful than God that he will carry away captive into eternal hell countless billions of men for whom Christ died! More preachers major on hell and damnation than emphasize His all-encompassing love, His ever-enduring mercy, and His great and glorious purpose of the ages. Not only does such a message not reach men's hearts with the goodness of God that leads men to repentance, but multitudes of Christians live under a sense of sin-consciousness, condemnation, and fear of God, ministered to them by the preachers!

"Little children, keep yourselves from *false ideas of God*." False ideas about God! How the world and the church are filled with them! Many who read these lines have gone through several rounds of smashing idols, false images of the Almighty, and will probably continue to drop false ideas until Christ is fully formed in them. Many people view God as a schoolboy did: "...the sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it." Then others make God out to be a tyrant, or a vengeful, wrath-filled FIEND. But the Bible knows no such God! No more terrible insult was given to the God of all grace who came in Jesus Christ *reconciling the world* unto Himself, *not imputing their trespasses unto them*. The story is told about a little girl. After she had heard her father preach a sermon on the awful wrath of God, and that the unsaved would go to a red-hot, sizzling, burning hell the moment they died, and that they would twist in agony and torment forever, without mercy, this little girl said, "I wish Jesus were as good and kind as my father." God does bring judgment upon sinners — swift, strong, effective, *corrective judgment* — but never meaningless, sadistic torture. All such crude notions are just SMOKE OUT OF THE PIT WHICH DARKENS THE SUN AND THE AIR!

More than two and a half centuries ago there echoed through the halls of America's churches the voice of a dynamic and prolific evangelist. His name was Jonathan Edwards. The sermon for which he was most famous drew hundreds down the aisles, weeping and trembling in fear, caused by his vivid descriptions of their alleged fate. His famous sermon was called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." It happened on the evening of July the eighth, 1741, in a rural church house in Enfield, Connecticut. Tradition has it that Jonathan Edwards was substitute speaker that evening. Since communication was rather slow in those days, it was always a good idea for a visiting preacher to keep a just-in-case sermon ready at all times, even if he wasn't scheduled to speak. The spare sermon in Edwards' saddlebag proved useful when the scheduled speaker for the evening failed to show.

When Edwards strode into the pulpit that night to deliver his sermon, the congregation had no idea what they were about to witness. Neither did they know that the words they were about to hear would drive them to their knees in gut-rending *fear*! There is no doubt that that message caused many a nightmare and sleepless night. The sinner, Edwards explained, is clutched in God's outstretched hand, hanging by a frayed thread over the flames of hell raging beneath him, with God standing ready to snip the thread at the slightest provocation, sending the sinner plummeting into the excruciating agony of the endless flames. The audience was assured that one day God most assuredly *will* release His grip, and the sinner, screaming and kicking, will plummet helplessly into the torturous depths of eternal hell fire.

So vivid was Edwards' description of the horrible fate awaiting any who had sin in their lives, the parishioners could almost feel the heat, see the smoke, and smell the sulfurous stench of hell's vengeful flames. Stephen Williams, who witnessed the occasion, wrote that *before the sermon was finished* "...there was a great moaning and crying out through the whole house." One cried, "What must I do to be saved?" Another lamented, "Oh, I am going to hell!" And yet another wailed, "Oh, what shall I do for Christ?"

Williams said the “shrieks and cries were piercing and amazing.” The people were absolutely *shot through with STARK, NAKED FEAR!* I do not hesitate to tell you that these are *false ideas about God!* THIS IS SMOKE OUT OF THE PIT OF THE DECEPTIVE HEART OF CARNAL-MINDED MAN, DARKENING THE SUN OF GOD’S GLORY AND THE AIR OF SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING!

David Wilkerson once wrote, “I’ve known families in which the children cowered in the presence of a hard, mean, abusive father. They played happily until their dad came home. But when they saw him come through the door, they ran straight to their mother and clutched her apron. I never saw them go near their father, except when he demanded something of them. They never crawled into his lap or asked to be hugged. They dreaded being in his presence. I believe this is one powerful reason why so many Christians don’t want to get close to their heavenly Father. They dread drawing near to Him because they sense they’ve failed Him somehow. They have a nagging feeling they haven’t measured up to His standard, they’ve done things wrong. All they can conceive of Him is that He’s full of consuming fire, ready to judge and condemn them. That’s not His nature! We can’t judge our heavenly Father by the measure of our human fathers. That’s not who He is! The question for all of us today is, how can we not want to be near a Father who writes love letters to us...who tells us He yearns to be with us...who’s always ready to embrace us...who says He has nothing but good thoughts about us...who assures us, ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!’”

The sons of God have been called to proclaim a full salvation, a salvation that includes every man that has ever lived, and every man that ever shall live! God is raising up in us, His firstfruits, His full salvation — salvation in spirit, soul, *and* body! That is the fullness of the full salvation! Full salvation — you don’t hear that preached in the churches today. They have what they call “Full Gospel” but in reality it is only about one-tenth gospel. It’s not “full” — it’s full of something, but not gospel! “Gospel” means GOOD NEWS. What you get in most so-called gospels today is a little bit of good news, and the rest is “You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I’m telling you why — Jesus Christ is coming and *is He mad!*” So you get one-tenth good news and nine-tenths bad news, and they call that FULL GOSPEL. No it’s not!

It is time to come aside from the crude beliefs that teach myths to children in Sunday School, showing them pictures of the devil with horns and his demons around him shoveling coals into a fire, with people screaming and the fire never going out. They picture God up in the sky, with a long white beard and angels with wings and halos, floating on clouds and playing harps. This picture of God and heaven is as primitive as the mother in Africa who sacrifices her new born baby to appease an angry god! Oh, yes! MORE SMOKE OUT OF THE PIT!

Those of us who grew up in a legalistic religious system, know that many times sin was preached about on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. Sin was preached good and long and hard and loud, and we came away with a “sin-consciousness.” But a careful study of the New Testament makes plain that the power of Jesus Christ and His blood removes even the *consciousness* of sin! “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers *once purged* should have no more *conscience (consciousness) of sins*. But this man (Jesus), after He had offered *one sacrifice for sins for ever*, sat down on the right hand of God. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that He had said before, Their sins and iniquities *will I remember no more*. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:1-18).

God has given us a new mind, even the mind of Christ! Christ has made an end of sin, He has taken away sin, He has borne all our iniquities, because of His sacrifice for sins He no longer remembers our sins and is not holding them over our head. The mind of Christ in us will also take away *our sin-consciousness!* The Holy Spirit is giving us a change of vision — and anytime the scriptures speak of vision they are talking about our understanding. One of the greatest hindrances in the lives of the Lord’s people is double-mindedness. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). To be double minded signifies a double vision. It’s two visions at once. It means a vacillating back and forth between the flesh and the spirit, between what God says is true and what we feel in our emotions.

Double minded people hear the word of God, experience the moving of the Spirit, get all built up in the inner man, and then somebody gets up and preaches about the devil, preaches about the weakness of the flesh, and begins to lay the law on them, “Don’t do this, don’t do that,” and creates a whole system of legalism, beating them to death with man-made rules and traditions, and their victory is all swept away. In one of his books, Philip Yancey tells the story of a prostitute with a drug habit who had reached the end of her rope. She knew she needed help desperately. Someone suggested that she go to church and get help. This was her answer: “Church? Why would I ever go there? I’m already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse!” Oh, yes! She may have been a prostitute, but she knew more than most Christians about *religious sin-consciousness*!

I read the testimony of a man who said, “Religion drove the fear of God into my heart. When I heard the term *God* I’d never break out into a smile or begin dancing. When someone mentioned God to me, I recoiled in dread and my inner child would shrink. This was not surprising to me. God had always been an enemy. Not just an enemy, but THE enemy! I could run from my human enemies, but I had nowhere to hide from my Divine enemy. ‘He sees everything’ I was told as a child. ‘He will find you wherever you may be!’ I still remember the morning, twenty-one years ago, when my best friend was frantically chased by his religious school teacher who set out to discipline him. The frightened boy locked himself in the bathroom while his teacher yelled, ‘God will get you in the bathroom too!’ That day, as a six-year old child, I learned that God hangs out even in the bathroom so that He can zap us at any given moment.”

I can sympathize with that poor man! I remember coming up as a little child under the legalistic teachings of the Pentecostal church. I came from a Mennonite family, but my parents had received the baptism in the Spirit and had left the Mennonite denomination. My father became a Pentecostal preacher and was the pastor of our church. As a young person there was very little we could do, because just about everything was considered to be of the “world.” We weren’t permitted to go to movies, dances, ball games, or even the county fair. Every Friday they showed a movie at school. Admission was fifteen cents. I skipped lunch one Friday and used my lunch money to go to the movie. It was a dog story, something like Lassie Come Home or Rin-Tin-Tin. A girl told my dad that she had seen me at the movie. I had to get up in church on Sunday morning and publicly apologize to the congregation for my “sin” and ask their forgiveness. We were told that we had to live right and measure up to all the self-righteous standards of legalism, or we could not enter the presence of the Lord. Oh! How I longed to live in the presence of God! I had a heart after God from my earliest memory. My soul cried out for reality, for life, for glory. But the air was dark to me, the smoke from the pit obscured the heavens and choked the life out of me! The sun and the air were darkened because of my weaknesses and failures and the emphasis on sin-consciousness and the law of condemnation made the heavens as brass and God seemed a million miles away. In my imagination, in my vain, religious imagination, I thought that somehow my Father couldn’t love me because of what I knew was in me, or He was judging me, I wasn’t good enough for Him, I wasn’t worthy to stand in the glory of His presence or even worthy of His blessings. The sun of Christ’s glory and the air of my spiritual understanding were darkened because there was this man-made standard I had to live up to, and, of course, I *always failed*!

Just a few weeks ago I received a letter from a dear brother who shared his heart with me. He wrote, “I grieve for those who have gone all their lives trying to serve God, but never coming to the reality of *His life in them*. Setting their sights on dying to go to ‘heaven.’ My mother and father met in Bible School where they attended four years each. Then they were missionaries for a while. They were ‘Holiness.’ They taught me all about God to the best of their own knowledge. But it made me run from God! There was no way anyone could live up to that outward standard. Those in their church simply faked it, or else went insane trying to live the ‘Christian’ life in an outward manner. Now I realize this was all God’s doing to show us the error of that way! I was never running from God, I was only running from an erroneous concept of Him.”

There are hundreds of thousands, probably millions, around the world today who have experienced physical abuse. This abuse comes most often from parents or spouses. There are nearly the same amount who have experienced sexual abuse. And millions more who have suffered verbal and emotional abuse. There are parents who are angry, who don’t know how to love and nurture their children. They heap verbal abuse upon them with constant threats, often yelling or screaming at them for little reason. They constantly

demoralize the young ones with denigrating statements like, “You can’t do that,” “You’re no good,” “You’ll never amount to anything!” But do you know that there are also thousands, maybe hundreds of millions, who have experienced *spiritual abuse*? Spiritual abuse is rampant throughout religious circles today!

Spiritual abuse is that which others do to us, or we do to ourselves, when we no longer sense and feel and totally understand God’s *unconditional love* for us, that God is not a vindictive tyrant out to punish us, but He is our heavenly Father who deeply loves, cares for, and nurtures us so that we can grow spiritually and *become all* that He has planned and purposed for us. When people represent God as a God to fear, who is watching our every move to reprimand us, judge us, to cast us into eternal doom and damnation in a fiery hell if we do not keep all His laws and commandments — *that is spiritual abuse!!* People who have been spiritually abused can’t believe in the unconditional love and acceptance of God because they have, in their memory system, confusion and distortions about God. False ideas about God! Smoke out of the pit! Can you not see the mystery? When preachers preach a message of sin-consciousness, how God *hates* sin, because of His infinite holiness He cannot tolerate any sin, and His hand is *against* the sinner — that is a vicious, blasphemous lie and it is *spiritual abuse!* When our consciences are conditioned (brainwashed) to feel terrible guilt, condemnation, and separation from the favor and blessing of God over the smallest failure to measure up to God’s standard of holiness — that is *spiritual abuse!*

We have a whole religious culture today that lives and thrives off of the negative realm of legalism. There are literally millions of Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Holiness people who love the kind of preaching that constantly steps on your toes. I call it perversion, myself. Out in the world without the spirit of Christ there are people who can’t receive any kind of gratification sexually or otherwise unless they are beat upon or beating someone else. They are aroused by either receiving or inflicting pain. Norman Elliott describes it so well in one of his books. “When we find a person who is in love with sickness and delights in pain, we say he is mentally ill. There are people of that sort. When they delight to have pain inflicted upon themselves we call them *masochists*; and when they delight in inflicting pain upon others we call them *sadists*. We say they are perverted, their energies and goals have become turned about, upside-down, inside-out, and directed toward ends for which they were never intended. They are sick.

“Such perversions can be refined; they are not always as obvious as physical whipping. Once I attended a meeting high in the mountains in a little tar-papered shack. The preacher held the listeners in terror for over an hour as she whipped them with *words* of an impending hell, the fall of brimstone that would burn but never consume, the inherent sinfulness of their nature that could only result in such a holocaust. Yes, there was the call to repent, and to repent, and to repent — meaning to beg forgiveness. From what I could learn, all those who were present were members of the little mountain sect and the service was normal for them. It was not long before people were literally screaming to God for mercy, and the time came when some were writhing on the floor in apparent agony as they continued to cry for mercy. The picture of God that must have been etched on the sensitive minds of the little children who were present can only be imagined.

“After the meeting we met the preacher and some of her flock and told them that we were at a nearby church-campgrounds for a week-long series of meetings, and we invited them to attend if they desired. A few days later I was speaking when I noticed three or four of them enter the room. They sat far in the back and listened. That day I was talking on the theme that *the love of God is broader than the reaches of men’s minds*. A remarkable thing happened. The people became positively angry! It was reflected in their faces and the way they shook heads at each other. That was not the gospel to them! They had become so accustomed to verbal beratement, mental beatings, fear and terror that they had come to enjoy it! It was not too long before they left the meeting. One wonders how they could enjoy heaven when they had habituated all their attitudes and feelings toward hell!” — end quote.

It gives me no joy to find it necessary to say these things, but the simple truth is that such people are *spiritual deviants*. It is *spiritual perversion*. Their teaching and preaching is naught but billowing smoke out of the pit of hearts full of deceit which puts a devilish twist upon the word of God, turns the truth of God into a lie, and grotesquely distorts, deforms, and disfigures the image and character of God. In the spirit realm, people come into the assembly of God’s people and expect the preacher to just beat them up with the word of God, and they call that good preaching! The preacher gets great satisfaction out of how “hot” he can preach it, and the people get all excited the harder he lays it on them! If you did not grow up in that kind of a

system you may be unaware of that kind of abuse, but it *is* abuse! That kind of activity stems from a spirit of anger, it comes out of a spirit of hate, and it originates from a perverted notion of who and what God is. It comes from worshipping Yahwey the lawgiver from mount Sinai, the angry God throwing lightning bolts from His fingertips, just waiting to zap you on the head at the slightest infraction.

Now, there is a side of God where He finds stern discipline necessary, and He is fully capable of correcting and chastening His sons as well as the whole creation. But I tell you today that GOD IS NOT AN ABUSER! A normal, balanced, wise, and loving parent does not go around with a scowl on his face breathing out threatenings, berating, slapping, and beating His children all the time. If he does he is an abusive parent with a vicious personality and a violent temperament. Jesus picked up little children and His disciples said, "Wait a minute!" They thought He was too important and busy to be concerned about little children who probably weren't capable of understanding the deep teaching of the kingdom of God anyway! Jesus replied, "You wait a minute — suffer the little children to come unto me, for *of such is the kingdom of heaven!*"

Jesus put a face on God, the firstborn Son of God was the image of the invisible God! He only castigated the wicked rulers of the people, the misguided, self-righteous and hypocritical religious leaders. But He ate with sinners! He went into Simon's house and here came this woman — a prostitute. If you were a preacher, put yourself in that position. She gets down and begins to anoint His feet (which could be construed as caressing!) and drying them with her hair, and He did not get that agitated look on His face, squirming uncomfortably, wishing she would hurry up and leave, nor did He turn her away. He talked to the immoral woman at the well. She was "shacked up" with a man who wasn't her husband! He never said a word of correction or rebuke to her about her lifestyle. He didn't remind her that she had to acknowledge that she was a sinner, and leave this bum, before she could ask for God's mercy. Oh, no! He just told her He had some living water and would like to give her a drink! He told her that when she drank of this water that it would become an artesian well within her, springing up unto eternal life! He imparted no sin-consciousness to her — He just offered her the unconditional gift of transforming life! Isn't it wonderful!

Jesus gave not one word of condemnation to the adulteress the Pharisees wanted to stone. "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more!" Instead of joining the condemners, reminding her that she really was guilty and deserved to die, He simply spoke a word of release from sin into her life. Oh, the beauty of it! He showed infinite mercy to the sinner and the ungodly, and He took the little children up in His loving arms and *blessed* them! He didn't beat them over the head with a stick or with the word of God. Children need love, nurture, counsel, and example. Jesus loved people! He came not to call the righteous, but sinners. And He didn't win them by beating them about their sins and dangling them over the fires of hell. Jesus was no Jonathan Edwards! He won them with unconditional love, mercy, and goodness.

It is a mystery too deep to fathom, but God in His great mercy *honors His word* on whatever level it is preached, and in spite of the intent and character of those who preach it. Paul proclaimed this great truth when he wrote to the Philippians, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, *Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice*" (Phil. 1:15-18).

It is a fact that multitudes of men have been turned to seek and find God even by words that are pitiful mixtures of truth and error and preached even by men and systems of reprobate minds. Their children are born of mixed natures as was Ishmael, truly born of God by the Spirit, yet born of Hagar, the Egyptian bondwoman, through the fleshly word, the word of God mingled with the ideas of men. The many and varied erroneous ideas about God and His kingdom, contorted representations of truth and reality, each bring forth spiritual expressions of their religious lineage. Some of these unfortunate children are born completely paralyzed spiritually and others are still-born, conceived by a totally dead word. Those who preach the word of God as a *dead letter* of literalism, legalism, and carnality, void of spiritual understanding or the breath of life, fill the earth with children of God having inherited an Egyptian heart, weaknesses, deformities, and pathetic imperfections.

I do not doubt for one moment that many who read these lines were first conceived in their spiritual life by a *defective word*! Only as each of us is miraculously and supernaturally *healed* can we hope to come into the image and likeness of God as His sons! How precious the knowledge that regardless of the poor and wretched condition of our early conception, **GOD IS A GREAT HEALER!** He can heal the embryo in the womb, or He can heal the child of tragic birth. As this great healing work takes place in our lives, through the gracious dealings and faithful processings of the Lord, we are dramatically and gloriously transformed in our spiritual lives. Gone are those “religious” spirits, bondages, customs, speech, mannerisms, methods, practices, fleshly efforts, false doctrines, static creeds, empty rituals, ceremonies, and ordinances, lifeless programs, dead works, and denominational hype which once characterized all our understanding, attitudes, and activities. All the marks of Babylon were upon us — not impressed merely from without, but genetically reproduced within us by the very Word that conceived us!

Today, my beloved, I point you to **CHRIST THE HEALER!** Think not for one moment that Jesus Christ is the healer only of diseases of the body! He has come to cleanse His church, to sanctify and purify His called and chosen elect, to purge and refine and make every whit whole those apprehended to be His sons. I declare to you today that **HE IS THE HEALER AND RESTORER OF HIS FAMILY!** He purges out of His kingdom all things that defile and offend. Listen! The great and wonderful mercy of the Christ receives those who have blemishes, and His power heals all who humbly come unto Him. Think of how He put up with the unspeakable carnality of His very closest disciples for three and a half years! But in due time they were changed, healed. Have you received the call to sonship? The Holy Ghost is closely examining candidates for this ministry. The qualifying time is **NOW**. The “in-part” ministries of the church age may get by with blemishes, defects, and deformities, but the King-Priest ministry destined to deliver the whole creation from the bondage of corruption must itself first be freed from every vestige of carnality, weakness, limitation, sin, and death, transformed into the image of God. “Faithful is He that calleth you, **WHO ALSO WILL DO IT!**” Aren’t you glad!

With this exhortation fresh upon our minds let us consider some events from the Old Testament that are reminiscent of the vision John beholds here in chapter nine of the Revelation. John saw the abyss, and the smoke pouring out of the abyss. Then he saw swarming locusts coming out of the smoke, to torment men upon the earth. I would remind you that when Moses was sent to deliver God’s people out of the bondage of Egypt there was a plague of locusts sent into the land of Egypt! The plague of locusts was directed at one of the gods of Egypt, Serapis, protector from locusts, who was shown to be powerless as the plague of locusts covered the land, devouring everything that grew. There was also a great darkness that came upon the land of Egypt, a darkness so dense that it could be felt.

It is time to stop, look, and listen! The imagery of what transpires when Christ opens the abyss corresponds with the imagery of those plagues in Egypt! All the plagues God sent by the hand of Moses upon Egypt were designed to *get God’s people out of Egypt!* These symbolisms reveal the great truth that something similar to what happened in Egypt is happening here in the book of Revelation! There is indeed a great similarity, but there is also a vast difference. You see, my beloved, the plagues of Egypt were sent to get God’s people out of Egypt, whereas in the revelation of Jesus Christ it is not merely getting us out of the bondage of our spiritual Egypt, but *getting Egypt out of us!* That is the mystery. From the Old Covenant to the New Covenant everything is opposite. In Moses’ day the Lord’s called and chosen people were in Egypt and He moved to bring them forth out of the house of bondage.

Today, through the blood of Jesus, we are free! We have been called out from under the taskmasters of this present world! We have been separated unto God and His high purpose! Yet — we find that there have been some gods in the hearts of God’s elect! There have been idols, false images, false ideas about God and truth, natural reasoning, carnal understanding, human ways of looking at things, literal interpretations of spiritual realities, residues of old-order religious concepts, doctrines, methods, anointings, orders, and fleshly ways from which our hearts have not been completely purged. As we follow on to know the Lord it becomes more and more clear to us that many of the things we have cherished even to this day, did not come from God! We have all been taught by man. To one degree or another we are still walking about *in the smoke of the pit, in a darkened atmosphere*. We are still in the process of our faithful Father’s dealings to purge, purify, cleanse, refine, and purify our hearts!

We can only fully know God as we *see Him as He is!* We can only see Him as He is when *all the smoke of the pit has cleared away!* We have been like the little girl that was diligently drawing a picture of some mysterious creature, who, when asked by her father what she was drawing, said, "I am drawing a picture of God." "Well," said her father, "you cannot draw a picture of God because no one knows what God looks like." "Well," replied the child, "when I am finished with this picture, *they will know.*" We smile at this and well we might, but is her answer more simple than the vanity of men who, not having seen God in the spirit and by the spirit, describe His characteristics and, not having known Him by the spirit of truth, take pride in their explanations?

The reason there is darkness today is because of the false doctrines and dark traditions of the church systems. No wonder God's people are full of unbelief, filled with doubts, and overwhelmed with fears. No wonder they magnify the works of the devil and declare him more than they declare God. They know not the *day* in which we are living, because of the smoky darkness of their minds! They walk about in the swirling smoke, receiving death and feeding on darkness all about them. But God has called you, and raised you up, my brother, my sister, as a light this very day, that you might dispel the darkness and remove these heavens that men have been dwelling under and establish something completely new in the earth, a new heavens in which the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His rays. Bring forth in your life a new likeness, the image of God, that you may declare HIM that is supreme throughout all the earth and that He may reign in every heart. Behold the dawn!

But the popular churches are still lost in dreams. They have not yet awakened. They know not of the dawn! But we who are of the day, and who are not lovers of the drunkenness of false doctrine nor sleepers of the night, have a higher heritage. "We are not of the night, nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others" (I Thes. 5:5-6). We who have received the love of the truth are heirs to a higher calling. We have privileges, and we have duties to perform. We must be about our Father's business! There has been a parting of the ways. God has called upon us to forsake the shame and error of the harlot systems of man, to look up, to arise and shine. Our light has come. The glory of the Lord is rising upon us. The day is at hand! The night is far spent. We must go forth and lead the way for all who will follow!

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY