



Thus Saith The Lord

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You've probably heard it said that God's people, Christians, must always have a **"Thus saith the Lord"** for everything we do and practice in His name. When the Lord speaks, we listen; and most assuredly when He speaks directly to us through His word. Phrases such as, **"This is what the Lord says,"** or **"Thus says (or saith) the Lord"** or **"Hear ye Him,"** occur over 400 times in Scripture. For instance, when the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, calling him to lead His people out of Egyptian bond-

age, you'll remember Moses' remonstrations, *"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"* Ex 3:11 However, the Lord disregarded his objections and said, *"When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, **"Thus says the Lord,** 'Israel is My son, My first-born. So I said to*

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you, 'Let My son go, that he may serve Me.'" Ex 4:21-23a Moses was a meek and humble man (Num 12:3) who was also honest with himself and acknowledged that he wasn't able to deliver the children of Israel alone. However, when he uttered **"Thus says the Lord, let My people go"** to Pharaoh, the power and will of Almighty Jehovah was proclaimed; the fullness of time was at hand and God was ready and able to deliver His enslaved people and ultimately destroy the formidable Egyptian

army! Sometimes we may feel inadequate to a given task. But when we do God's work, in accordance with His will, and give Him the glory – great things He hath done and is ready to do through us!

In addition to being humble, Moses enjoyed a very special relationship with the Lord. **"Thus said the Lord,"** *" . . . If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord."* Num 12:6b-8a Moses was a powerful leader, who seemingly understood the true source of his strength and authority. As long as he spoke what the Lord spoke to him and did what the Lord commanded him to do, God was with him and blessed him.

All too often we forget that even great leaders are fallible and sometimes lose sight of the true source of their greatness. Consider Moses once again where on one recorded occasion, he disobeyed God by not following a straight-forward **"thus saith the Lord."** While wandering in the wilderness for 40 years Israel from time to time desperately needed water in that parched, arid land. This life threatening circumstance arose again in the Wilderness of Zin about the time of Miriam's death. ***"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.'"*** Num 20:7-8 Pretty simple **"thus saith**

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the Lord;” so why then did Moses sin and forfeit his opportunity to enter the promised land?

You’ll recall that on a previous occasion Moses was told to strike a rock to miraculously obtain water (Ex 17:6). But this time God clearly said, *“speak to the rock.”* *“So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’”* By addressing the people as “rebels,” Moses reveals that he was distraught, perhaps disgusted or even angry. *“Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.”* Num 20:9-11 God did His part, as He always does by lovingly providing for His people. But Moses disobeyed. Perhaps he put himself on par with God by saying, *“shall we bring forth water,”* but he definitely struck the rock—not once, but twice – instead of speaking to it.

The final **“thus saith the Lord”** in this event may seem harsh: *“the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’”* Num 20:12 We would be wise to learn from the mistake of Moses and Aaron, who seemingly deviated only slightly from the Lord’s command. When the Lord speaks, He expects us to listen and follow His **“thus saith the Lord”** without equivocation.

Ephesians 5:16-17 reads, *“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men,*

but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Another way of saying this could be, **“be wise, understand what the Lord says”** and do it precisely without delay.

In Acts 8:28-39 we find the account of the Ethiopian Eunuch and Philip the evangelist. The Spirit instructed Philip to join the Eunuch’s chariot; whereupon he heard him reading from Isaiah 53. Philip asked, *“do you understand what you are reading?”* 8:30 Most of us remember the eunuch’s reply, *“how could I, unless someone guides me?”* 8:31 Philip began from this **“thus saith the Lord”** and preached Jesus to him. Each of us holds dear the gospel treasure in our hearts. If only we could envision ourselves helping the lost and dying to understand this **“thus saith the Lord!”** Once again, God has done His part. We can almost hear Him saying, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* Luke 10:2 The words of Isaiah echo once again, *“I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I, send me!’”* Isa 6:8

Finally Peter wrote, *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. **Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**”* 1 Pet 4:10

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The following articles illustrate various ways “**thus saith the Lord**” is used in the Scriptures. We commend these thoughts to you and pray that you will be edified.

Is it to inquire of me that you have come?

Russ Ward

People have not changed over the years in the manner in which they approach God with full expectations that He will respond in a favorable manner to them. Over and over we hear of the mercy and grace of God, His longsuffering and patience, and of His love and forgiveness. By our knowledge of these things we rule out the other aspects of God which are just as relevant and true. God is a jealous God, His tolerance has a limit, and He is to be both revered and obeyed. As a whole people want to hold on to one aspect of God, while at the same time excuse the other aspect of His nature because it doesn't fit within our psyche.

Jerusalem is about to be overthrown, Ezekiel is living with the captives in the land of the Chaldeans and prophesying to the people there of what is to come. A group of elders come to Ezekiel to inquire of God and His response is not what they expected. God speaks through Ezekiel to them, “*As I live, declares the Lord I will not be inquired of by you.*” **Ezekiel 20:3**

Ezekiel charges them with the word of the Lord. He reminds them of their deliverance from Egypt and yet they had no regard for the Lord or His statutes clinging to the abominations and idols found in Egypt they

had taken with them rather than casting them away as they were instructed. That God had given them His statutes and His law so they would obey and live. He gave them Sabbaths as a sign between God and the people and yet they had no regard for Him. In their rebellion He made them to wander in the wilderness but He did not destroy them so that His name would not be diminished among the people in the land. **Ezekiel 20:3-17**

A new generation arose which God brought into the land of Canaan, but they like the forefathers before them, had no regard for God or His statutes. His rules which would bring forth life they refused to obey. He commanded them to abstain from the abominations of idolatry and the detestable things and yet they defiled themselves to the point of offering their children by fire. They went to the high places and offered sacrifices and poured out drink offerings and said to themselves let us be like the other people worshipping wood & stone. **Ezekiel 20:18-32** God's response is to judge them as he did their fathers. He will scatter them across the other nations, and he will cause them to bend to the rod. **Ezekiel 20:33-44**

This portion of Ezekiel speaks volumes today. Although we are bound by a new covenant the nature of God and His relationship with His people has not changed. Yet mankind has taken a similar approach as that of the children of Israel. A belief in God is proclaimed, and acknowledgement of His goodness and care, of His love and blessings yet no consideration is given to the reverence such belief should contain. We worship at the altar of greed, pride, and ego. We use His name in vain throwing it around in common

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street language. We chase after every form of physical desire, burning in lust for that which is not lawful for us to have under any condition. We satisfy self over not only God, but over our fellow man. If it is what I want then it is appropriate and there is nothing else or no one else to consider. If we dare speak out against another's action, reflecting their disregard to the statutes of God, we are branded as closed minded, intolerant, and not enlightened with this present age and new found knowledge. When we become like the world around us, feasting our eyes on every desire, we become just like these people of Israel. Now consider when we go to inquire or petition God, what makes us think that the favorable answer we are seeking is there to be given?

Yet when this does happen people want to know why and how such things happen after we have made our petition. If God is who you say He is then how can He allow such and turn a deaf ear to the believer in Him. Just like these elders of Israel there is a considered rite of passage to God because of who we are rather than who He is. Are we guilty of holding tight to one aspect of God while ignoring the other? These elders in their minds eye are saying "We are the children of God, the believers, the chosen of all people, and of all religions of the world surely He will deal favorably with us." Is that also how the world views Christianity? I am a believer of God and Christ so therefore I am a Christian and as such I have a right to petition God in prayer and have a right to receive a favorable response because of who I am. Now consider how God views Christianity in light of how he viewed his chosen peo-

ple. Such stories of old should wake us up from our slumber of self-importance, our thoughts of entitlement, and open our hearts to consider that when we petition God have we reciprocated to him our diligence in obedience.

The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us

Alyssa Johnson

As I was selecting a subject for my article, I discovered that the phrase, "Thus says the Lord" is found 422 times in the Bible. Interestingly enough, all of them are in the Old Testament. Why is that? My thoughts went to a couple of passages that could shed light on this. First, the Hebrew writer said in chapter 4:1-2, *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son."* How did God share His word in the Old Testament? It was through the prophets and when the prophets spoke, they communicated to their audience that the words they were speaking were not of their own volition, they were in fact from God, Himself – "Thus says the Lord." This placed authority, power, and holiness behind the words that they shared. When Jesus came into the world, there was no longer a need to say "Thus says the Lord," the Word was here! Those beautiful words in the first chapter of John verse 14 express the direct contact God was now having with His creation, *"And*

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the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The people who heard Jesus clearly understood the authority with which He spoke. During one of His teaching sessions, Jesus said, *"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock . . . And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."* Mt 7:24-29 See also Mark 1:21-22. Jesus shared with the people that the words He spoke should inform our actions and become the foundation for our life just as the rock on which the wise man built his house.

Jesus wants us to understand and embrace the wonderful blessing we have in hearing directly the words of God. In Matthew 13:16-17, Jesus said, *"But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."* Having never lived in a time before the Messiah, we can easily take for granted the privilege we have to access God's word anytime and anywhere.

Jesus has a special message to proclaim to His followers. In Luke 16:16 we hear, *"The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached."* And in Jesus' prayer to the Father at the Passover in John 17, He says, *"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have*

given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. . . For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me." Jesus has the words of eternal life and the authority to give this most precious of gifts to those who believe in Him.

And after His death and resurrection, Jesus reminds His disciples of the words that He said during His ministry in Luke 24:44, *"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."*

In studying for this article, I discovered the amazing blessing we have to live in a time in which we do not have to wait for revelation from God – for a "Thus says the Lord." We can pick up a bible anytime, open up its pages and see the Word in action. We can know what He calls us to do and we can act on it to receive eternal life. Praise God for His plan, for His sacrifice, and for His desire that not *"any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* 2 Pet 3:9

P.S. Look up Acts 21:11 to see the "Thus say the . . ." phrase in the New Testament.

Every Knee Shall Bow

Ephriam Davis

Back in the late 1970's some may remember a series of television commercials promoting Fram oil filters, that featured various mechanics in automotive repair shop facilities using the following slogan, "pay me now or pay me later." The message to car owners was simple and straight forward. You have the choice of paying the mechanic for the relatively small maintenance cost of regular oil and filter changes now to help keep your engine in good working order, or paying hundreds maybe even thousands of dollars later for major repairs due to a mechanical failure, that could even result in you being left stranded in the middle of no-where. Similarly others may be familiar with the phrase, "An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure" which is applicable to a broader spectrum of what should be common sense everyday examples of the wisdom of making small investments now to avoid costly repairs later. For example: (1) regularly brushing/flossing our teeth to avoid expensive major and often painful dental work; (2) completing class assignments on time and studying for school exams to avoid failing grades and having to retake a class or even being placed on academic suspension if in college; (3) fixing a small roof leak when first detected to avoid replacing attic insulation, soggy ceiling sheet rock, rotted roof trusses, damaged furniture, and even worse, dealing with mold and mildew remediation in your house. While these physical/earthly examples represent important realities for us to ponder, these consequences

are sometimes temporary and in many situations it is possible to overcome or at least manage them in this present life. However, just like the parables of Jesus in which He used realistic earthly stories to teach heavenly concepts, there is a far more important spiritual application of these examples to help us understand that there are very certain eternal consequences of ignoring the inherent warning found in the phrase "Every Knee Shall Bow" that forms the topic of this article. A search of the exact phrases, "Every Knee Shall Bow" or "Every Knee Should Bow" occurs 3 times, (Isa 45:23, Rom 14:11, Phil 2:10) in the KJV bible translation. The bible is God's authoritative source of knowledge that defines good and evil, and helps us understand the differences, in order for honest hearts to gain the wisdom required to choose the path that leads to life, rather than death, (Heb 5:12-14, Jer 4:22). Death is separation from God because of sin (Isa 59:1-2, Jas 1:13-15), and that separation could be eternal, however the bible communicates His grand plan to redeem man from sin. It includes warnings about the need to submit to that plan now while we have opportunity, rather than waiting for a "better" time when there is no guarantee or ultimately any hope of more opportunity.

Every, is the 1st word in the phrase "Every Knee Shall Bow." It is an adjective and it is a synonym for the words All and Each. The 2nd word, Knee is the literal joint between the thigh bone, and the 2 lower leg bones, but in the scriptural context of the phrase "EKSB", the term can also be a figuration reference to the joint. Shall the 3rd, but key word is a verb, and it is a synonym to the

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word must, and it is used to express the idea that a command is mandatory. Bow is the 4th, word in the phrase, and it is also a verb. It means the same as stoop, or “bend over.” In most cultures when one bows or bends their knee to another person who is in a position of authority, it communicates a posture of humility and subjection towards that person. This humility and subjection can take place willingly as soon as the requirement is understood when it is least uncomfortable, or it can be done forcibly later when it more embarrassing because of the initial defiance of authority and possibly have even more painful consequences.

The 1st of the 3 biblical occurrences of the phrase “EKSB”, the LORD was speaking to All Israel when He said, *“Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me **every knee shall bow**, Every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, ‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, And all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him. In the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.’ ”* Isa 45:22-25 Notice here in this passage where it states “*all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him.*” To better understand this, consider the reaction of Joseph’s family and how they were “*incensed against Him*” when he told them the details of what we know in hind sight to have been prophetic dreams, in which they all would have to bow down to him, (Gen 37:5-11). In reality, it was God who was showing them all how He would

ultimately bring them salvation from a pending future famine. And we know the rest of that story, (Gen 50:15-20). The apostle Paul is actually citing Isaiah 45:22-25 in his letters to the Romans and Philippians when he uses the phrase “EKSB.” In the immediate and extended context he was speaking in regards to “all people” past, present, and future in that the blood of Jesus Christ is an integral part of God’s scheme of redemption. How many people today are incensed by the gospel message or choose to delay obedience (2 Ths 1:6-9, Acts 24:24-25)? How many refuse to hear His word, which defines and convicts men of sin (Acts 7:57; Rom 7:7; Heb 3:15)? How many would rather try and justify sin, than comply with the command to repent (Isa 5:20, Acts 17:3)? How many actually reject the name of Christ, rather than confess Him before their peers (Mt 10:32-33)? How many angrily deny that baptism in water is essential for salvation from sin (Mk 16:15-16, Acts 22:16)? Thus saith the LORD, “Every Knee **Must** Bow” either now or later.

The Transfiguration

Carol Fertig

At the time of the transfiguration, Jesus had been preaching, teaching, and performing signs and wonders for some time. Crowds gathered everywhere He went to hear Him talk of spiritual matters in a way that was new to them. Many such as Mary,

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Martha, Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, His apostles, and others believed and supported Jesus because they understood He was the Messiah. Others came to believe in Him because of the miracles they saw Him perform. Still others not only did not believe in Jesus and His message, they actively sought to destroy Him. They attempted to discredit the message and kill the messenger, Jesus. Into this atmosphere God provided a stunning display revealing exactly who Jesus is and what man's response to Him must be.

A little over a week before the transfiguration Jesus had asked His disciples, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* Mt 16:13 They replied variously John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. Jesus then asked them directly who *they* said that He is. Peter, ever ready with a quick reply, said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Mt 16:16 Jesus blessed Peter for his answer and said that God, rather than any man, had revealed this to him. Jesus told the disciples that Peter's confession of the identity of Jesus as God's Son would be the foundation of His church. Years later, Peter recalled the events of the transfiguration in his second letter:

16 *"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."*

17 *"For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son.' With whom I am well pleased,"*

18 *"We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."* 2 Pt 1:16-18

Jesus' custom was occasionally to go into a secluded place to get away from the crowds, and at the time of the transfiguration, He took Peter, James, and John with Him to a high mountain by themselves. It is significant, in light of what happened, that there were multiple eyewitnesses, as required by the Law of Moses to establish facts. This time there would be no quiet meditation, however!

Most know the facts of the transfiguration, how Jesus and His clothing attained an intense whiteness, which Mark says no one on earth could have achieved even with bleach, as He talked with Moses and Elijah who appeared with Him. (Mark 9:3) Peter's immediate inclination and response was to say that they should build a tent for each Elijah, Moses, and Jesus. A bright cloud overshadowed the three witnesses who were by this time terrified, and God spoke from the cloud. The ultimate "thus says the Lord" established that the Ages of the Prophets represented by Elijah and of the Law of Moses represented by Moses were giving way to the perfect law of liberty represented by Jesus. When Moses and Elijah faded away and disappeared, leaving Jesus alone, God said, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* Mt 17:5 Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that this is the second time God had acknowledged Jesus as His Son and expressed His approval of Him. The first time

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had been at the baptism of Jesus, just as He was beginning to be known. (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22). This time, at the transfiguration, Jesus' preeminence is established, and His position is clearly revealed.

God's statement consists of three parts: Jesus is His Son, God is pleased with Jesus, and we must listen to Jesus. The Father couches His ringing endorsement of Jesus in a spectacular setting: the transfiguration. The Old Testament foretells the coming of the Christ, and as prophecy after prophecy is fulfilled at Jesus' birth and in His life, everyone should have been able to see that Jesus is Messiah. His parables point to His relationship with God the Father. The people *"were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."* Mt 7:28b-29 Jesus tells His disciples, *"Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves,"* referring to the miracles which they had seen Him perform. John 14:11 Since Jesus is indeed the Son of God, He has complete authority to establish His kingdom and to rule it forever. The final proof that Jesus is the Son of God came when He was resurrected from the dead: *"concerning His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."* Rom 1:3-4

The second part of God's statement at the transfiguration is that He is pleased with Jesus. Jesus has not become rebellious or unrighteous by being in the world. The plan

that God made before earth time began is being carried out perfectly. (Acts 2:23; Eph 1:3-4). God said, *"... This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!"* at the transfiguration. Lu 9:35b Some translations say "my beloved" for "chosen one," but the idea is the same; God is happy with Jesus and the way things are working. Jesus is who He says He is and is integral to God's plan.

Since Jesus is the Son of God and God is pleased with Him, it logically follows that man must listen to what Jesus says. Listening includes much more than merely hearing spoken words. Listening means internalizing what has been heard and acting upon it. It means giving honor and obedience to the Lord and to His commandments. Listening means studying to "hear" what God wants us to know. The transfiguration was God's dramatic testament to the critical nature of Jesus' offering for us and how we are to react to Him. This "thus saith the Lord" is the basis for our faith and our obedience.

Joshua's Farewell Speech

Joshua 24

Ron Gray

"And now I am about to go the way of all the earth..." Joshua is revealing the fact that he is about to die. He wants to encourage those who remain to continue in the service of the Lord. Having just studied the lives of the first three kings of Israel, I notice that King David addresses his son Solomon with these exact words and a similar admonition (1 Kings 2:1-4).

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Joshua's audience is composed of all the distinguished leaders of every tribe in Israel. As they presented themselves before God, Joshua spoke these words, *"Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel ... "* The words of the Lord contained no commandments, no criticism – just a reminder. He reminded them in detail: where they came from, where they were, where they are, and how far they had come.

"Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates ..." Speaking of a time before they were God's people, He mentions Terah, the father of Abraham, who *"served other gods."* If you happen to see Terah's family tree, his descendants are found in both the husbands and the wives of three generations following him. God blessed Abraham and showed him the land of Canaan, his inheritance.

To Esau God gave the hill country of Seir. But, for Jacob and his sons' descendants, Egypt would be their new home for the next 400 years. After that, God sent Moses and Aaron to bring His children out of slavery. *"I plagued Egypt ... I brought you out."*

Bringing them through the Red Sea and destroying the Egyptian army behind them, He set them in the wilderness. Even at this point of God's reminder, He simply says, *"And you lived in the wilderness a long time."* There is neither chiding here nor a reminder that their sin had caused the long stay in the wilderness.

God brought them into the land that their fathers had feared to enter forty years earlier. *"They fought with you, and I gave*

them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you." God even drove out the Amorites with hornets! *"... It was not by your sword or your bow."*

He ends with this beautiful statement. *"I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant."*

After the people had heard God's message, Joshua then urges them to take action, saying, *"Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness."* This statement basically says, Look at all that the Lord has done for you and give Him the respect, love, and service that He deserves. Joshua tells them that the time to choose the "god" that you will serve is *now*. *"Put away the gods your fathers served..."* Make that choice! *"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

I have a plaque with those words on it. I am sure that many of you do as well. They are powerful words and I love this scripture, but I need to remember the choice that I made over 50 years ago. My service in the Lord's army began that April day when I arose from the water which hid the tears of joy from my eyes. Jesus gave his life for me and I owe him no less than to give myself as a living sacrifice for him; that means serving him all the days of my life.

Those people in hearing God's words, from his servant Joshua, received "a wakeup call" that should have caused each of them to ponder. He reminded them in detail:

where they came from, where they were, where they are, and how far they had come. It would be beneficial for each of us to reflect upon these points in regard to our own lives.

I am one of those people who love digging up family in genealogical records. In going back through the years and even centuries, I have found branches on my family tree that include: Quakers, Methodist preachers, Revolutionary soldiers, Confederate soldiers, Union soldiers, and even an “overseer” of slaves. I can see from this study, *where I came from*. My ancestors were engaged in many pursuits that I could not and would not condone. Though I am a compilation of their genes, I am neither a part of nor responsible for their religion or lack thereof.

Though each of us were born into this life as innocent little babies, we soon found ourselves entangled in a web of sin that would condemn us with a sentence of death. Like insects that wander into a spider’s web, we were helpless to free ourselves from that predicament. Looking back at *where we were* makes us appreciate God’s gift. “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Rom. 6:23.

Those of us, who are Christians, need to take a serious look at *where we are*. We have broken many family ties that may have been anchored in worldliness, denominationalism, or ignorance and apathy towards the Word of God. We have broken free of the web of sin that Satan had laid out for each of us in our personal lives. We have a Savior who was willing to take *our* sins to the cross with Him and there to pay the price of redemption to set us free. “*His divine power has granted to*

us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.” 2 Pet. 1:3

How often have you taken an inventory of *how far you have come*? Do you remember the fire that was in your soul when you arose from your baptism? When you look back on that day do you see a spiritual babe who was just learning to walk spiritually? Hopefully every one of us has matured in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. If we are growing in these things, we can say that God has given us a place “on which we had not labored and a city that we had not built.” We live lives filled with blessings that we have not earned.” That is the very definition of Grace.

There will come a time when each of us is “*about to go the way of all the earth.*” At that time, will my thoughts be on the state of the Kingdom of Christ and its wellbeing? Can I say to my fellow soldiers of Christ “take up my faith, my strength, and my service to our Lord?” Or will those things that I seek to impart, be seen as a meager inheritance?

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin

Steven D. Baxley

One of the more memorable “Thus Says the Lord” statements in the Bible is found in Daniel 5. In this chapter, God sends a message to a pagan king, a message important not only to him, but a message that has potent meaning even for us today.

Daniel 5 contains the fifth out of six sto-

ries that concern the Jews in Babylonian (later Persian) captivity. This particular episode sets the stage for the forceful change-over from Babylonian to Persian rule.

In the text, King Belshazzar is feasting with his nobles in the palace in Babylon. During this feast, Belshazzar commands that the vessels of gold and silver which had been taken from the Temple in Jerusalem nearly 70 years earlier be brought out and used as drinking vessels by those at the feast. As this was happening, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote a cryptic message in the plaster of the palace wall. Terrified, the king called out for anyone who could read the message and show its interpretation. The queen came into the feast and told Belshazzar of Daniel, who had already proven his worth earlier, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel is brought before the king, but is completely disinterested in whatever gifts and rewards the king might bestow for his service. The message that Daniel brings is directly from God, and is not a happy one for Belshazzar. Daniel reminds Belshazzar of how God had given Nebuchadnezzar his, *"kingship and greatness and glory and majesty."* 5:18 and of how Nebuchadnezzar had allowed his heart to be "lifted up" and his spirit "hardened" so that God humbled him by removing him from his throne and causing him to live like a beast (5:20-21; related in Daniel 4). Daniel also makes it clear that Nebuchadnezzar had been left in that state until, *"he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will."* 5:21 Belshazzar, in spite of knowing all of this, had not humbled his

heart but had made the same mistake as Nebuchadnezzar, and had praised false idols instead of honoring the God *"in whose hand is your breath"* and *"whose are all your ways."* 5:23

Daniel then gives Belshazzar the message, and its interpretation:

"Mene" – "God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end"

"Tekel" – "you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting"

"Peres" – "your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians"

Belshazzar gives Daniel (it appears to be forced upon him) the promised reward, including being declared the third ruler in the kingdom. This is truly a hollow reward, since *"that very night Belshazzar ... was killed, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom."* 5:30 Historical records outside of the Bible indicate that the Persian Army gained access to the city while the rulers of Babylon were having a drunken feast. The transfer of power from the Babylonian rulers to Persian rule was carried out almost seamlessly. In fact, Daniel 6 opens with Daniel serving faultlessly in the Persian administration.

This "Thus Says the Lord" has powerful lessons for us today. We would do well to hear these messages.

The first message is the one that was intended for Belshazzar, and also has application today. God is the ultimate "king-maker" He had set Belshazzar on his throne, and now He was going to remove him from his throne. Those who rule, rule because it is God's will that they rule (Romans 13:1-7).

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Christians disagree as to how God carries this out, they may even disagree as to what extent God carries this out, but there can be no mistaking that God *“rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.”* Daniel 5:21; (see also 4:17; 4:25; 4:32) Every ruler at every level should recognize their own responsibility not only to the people they govern, but also to the God of Heaven to whom they must also give an account. Christians, especially in turbulent political times, should recognize the over-arching principle that God is in control, and that He works out His will in the affairs of men. This realization should cause rulers to rule better, and should ease the anxiety that Christians often feel due to their government’s policies and actions.

The second message is one that is intended for all people at all times. Belshazzar had sinned in not humbling himself before the God of Heaven. Instead, he had placed his reliance on gods that aren’t really gods, but rather empty idols. This was not a problem unique to Belshazzar, but describes many people in this world throughout time, who place their confidence in anything and everything besides the God *“in whose hand is your {our} breath.”* People trust in their own abilities, their own wisdom, their own wealth, their own power rather than realizing that it is God who has given these things to each. This being the case, each should give honor to the One who is the ultimate provider and sustainer in all things. Christians need to be careful as well, that even though they theoretically acknowledge God’s provision, they don’t fall into the trap of placing more confidence in themselves than in God.

In this regard, regular thankfulness puts before one’s mind the fact that he is dependent upon God. Daniel’s good example contrasts sharply with Belshazzar’s attitude. Daniel 6:10 records that Daniel *“got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.”* Daniel expressed his thankfulness to God daily, not just once or twice but three times regularly. Belshazzar thanked mute idols that could not hear, see or speak. Those idols didn’t give him his blessings, nor did they take them from him. But, the God of heaven, whom he had not acknowledged, did give them. That night in the palace God also took them from him.

Restoration

Gary Mangus

“Thus says (or saith) the LORD” occurs 17 times in the first 8 chapters of Zechariah with 10 occurring in chapter 8.

The book of Zechariah is about GOD wanting the people of Israel to return to Him and to return from their evil ways. *“The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.”* Zec 1:2-3 Jerusalem was to be a holy city again and GOD wanted His people to return to Him.

God worked through a number of people of the old testament to stir up the people to return to Jerusalem and Judah after

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70 years of captivity. In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia (Ezra 1:1-3)(539 BC), *"the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia,"* and he made a proclamation to *"rebuild the house of the LORD"* in Jerusalem. *"Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem."* Ezra 1:5 *"The whole assembly together was 42,360, besides their male and female servants ..."* Ezra 2:64

When the remnant returned they began work on the temple, but the people of the land thwarted their efforts and misrepresented their intentions to a new Persian king and the new king ordered the work to stop. The people obeyed the king, but were discouraged and weak in faith. Then the prophet Zechariah recorded his visions as the word of the LORD of hosts came to him in the first 8 chapters from 520-518 BC while temple construction was stopped. Chapter 8 encourages the remnant to be faithful and to learn and abide by the laws of GOD. Temple reconstruction resumed again and the work was finally completed in 516 BC.

"Thus says (or saith) the LORD" occurs 10 times in Zechariah 8 (ESV) in these verses:

2. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath."*

3. *"Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain."*

4-5. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old*

men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."

6. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts?"*

7-8. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness."*

9-10. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets who were present on the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in, for I set every man against his neighbor."*

11-13. *"But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O*

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house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong."

14-17. For thus says the LORD of hosts: As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not. These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD."

19. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace."

20. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.' Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD."

23. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

Through Zechariah, God says He is jealous for Zion. He can't bear to be separated from His chosen people brought about by

their sin and will not tolerate the enemies of Israel. He will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and Jerusalem will be called the faithful city. God will bless His people and Jerusalem will prosper until seeing old men and women in the streets and young children playing in the streets will become common. When this occurs, if it be marvelous in the sight of the remnant, then it will also be marvelous in God's sight.

God says *"I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem."* Since there were no Jews in the West this is most likely a reference to the coming of Jesus, His sacrifice on the cross, and offering salvation to whosoever will of the whole earth. *"And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness."* Note that first they must be His people and then He will be their God.

God encourages His people to use strong hands (or work hard) and complete the rebuilding of the temple. He reminds His people how bad it was before they started the work. Their crops would not even produce enough for their own labor and there was no safety. But now God will not deal with the remnant as He did before. Instead God will bless them greatly with living in peace, producing vines, producing crops, and the right amount of rain as long as they worked.

God tells His people, *"so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah."* This promise comes with the condition that they shall do these things: speak the truth to your

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neighbor; make sure your judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil against one another, and love no false oath.

In the past their fasts had been for others and were not happy occasions. In the fourth month they commemorated the breaching of the wall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:3; Jer 39:2-4). In the fifth month they commemorated the burning the house of the LORD, the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:8-9). In the seventh month they remembered the murder of Gedaliah (Chaldean appointed governor of Jerusalem and Judah), and the tenth month they remembered the beginning of the final siege of Jerusalem which began in 588 B.C. (2 Kings 25;1; Jer. 39:1). God tells his people to enjoy the fasts: the 4th month, the 5th month, the 7th month, and the 10th month as seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts and to love truth and peace.

The fame of Jerusalem will grow and many people will come from the inhabitants of many cities. *"Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD."* Word will spread about the great Jerusalem, so that ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, *"Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."*

God went to great lengths to bring His people together, to encourage them, and to teach them to love truth and faith in the LORD. They had to turn to God and keep their faithfulness. We have to do the same to day. It is very clear that God wants to love His people if they will just return back to Him.

Saul and the Amalekites

Charlotte Jobe

In the beginning ... God said. Gen. 1. We stand in awe of all God created from nothing. His power through His spoken word should be evident. Also, this power shows that He has authority over all. We should take special note, determine to follow, and appreciate the power in the phrase "Thus saith the Lord."

King Saul did not do this. In I Samuel 15, the phrase "thus saith the Lord," in some form, is given eight times. This is important to this text and also to another text where it is used.

Years before Saul's reign, The Israelites were going from Egypt to the promised land – Canaan. The Amalekites hindered their journey. God's admonition in Deuteronomy 25:17-19 was *"Amalekites attacked you. Because of this, you shall blot out the memory of Amalekite."* As we study I Samuel 15, we see that Saul was commissioned to do this.

Samuel comes to Saul and begins by reminding Saul that he is king by the authority of the Lord. This first statement should have been enough for Saul to see that the Lord has the right to tell him what to do. To emphasize this, Samuel calls on the power that is in the word of the Lord. Saul is exactly instructed by the Lord. (I Sam 15:2-3) Because of Amalek opposing the Israelites, you are to destroy them and all they have. Clear and to the point.

Saul summoned his troops. They defeated the Amalekites BUT spared King Agag and took all that was good. vs 7-9 *"The word*

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of the Lord came to Samuel” vs 10. “Saul did not do what I commanded.” What was Samuel’s reaction? He was angry and cried to the Lord all night. After the Lord talked to him, he set out to seek Saul.

When he found him, Saul’s word to Samuel were, *“I have done the commandment of the Lord.”* Samuel asked *“Why do I hear sheep and oxen?”* Saul said they were from the Amalekites. The people saved them to be sacrificed.

The explanations of Saul begin. I went on the mission. I saved King Agag but the people are destroyed. The army took the spoils to sacrifice. Samuel replies in verses 22-24. *“Does the Lord delight more in sacrifices or obedience?”* Rebellion and presumption are sins. Because you rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.

Now, Saul admits his sin – transgression of God’s commandment. However, he begins to make excuses. vs 24. I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Even though he admitted disobedience, he still wanted the blessing of Samuel and worship the Lord. This could not be.

Samuel took care of completing accurately what Saul should have done. Then King Saul and Samuel went to their own homes. The account ends with Samuel grieving over Saul and the Lord regretting that he made Saul King.

As we look at this piece of history, are there things that we can learn for our lives? I Cor. 10:11-12. For us, “Thus saith the Lord” is His written word.

1. What is our mission in life? I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live

but Christ lives in me ... Gal 2:20
Also, Phil 1:22

2. Do we have instructions on how to complete this mission? *“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”* II Pet. 1:3 Also, I Tim 3:14,15; II Tim 3:16,17

3. Do we ever make excuses for our own practices, living, beliefs? *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves...”* Jas 1:22-25 Also, Mt.25:31-46; Lu 9:57-62; II John 9

4. Even though others may not follow the Lord, can we continue to follow Him? *“Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”* Phil 2:14-15 Also, contrast II Tim. 4:3-4 with II Tim 4:7 and Mt 7:24-25 with Mt 7:26-27

John 12:48 *“THE ONE THAT REJECTS ME AND DOES NOT RECEIVE MY WORDS HAS A JUDGE, THE WORD THAT I HAVE SPOKEN WILL JUDGE HIM ON THE LAST DAY.”*

Knowing God

Craig Sweet

Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man

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boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.” Jer 9:23-24

When thinking about the wisest men who have ever lived, Solomon would probably be at the top of almost everyone’s list. When he took the throne, God gave him an opportunity to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon chose wisdom so he could rule God’s people justly. However, even with all of that wisdom, Solomon spent his days in search of the meaning of life. His conclusion: all is vanity without God (Ecc 1:2; 12:8) and the only thing that is really important is to “... *fear God and keep His commandments because this applies to every person.*” Ecc 12:13

When you think of the mightiest men in the Bible, names like Joshua, Samson, and of course, David would likely come to mind. These men destroyed thousands of the enemies of God’s people in order to obtain the promised land. When they were called upon to lead God’s people, with God’s help, they were able to be victorious over oppression and even giants! God’s people became a powerful nation through their mighty leadership.

When you think of the wealthiest men in the Bible, Abraham (Gen 13:2), Isaac (Gen 26:12-14), and Jacob (Gen 36:6-7) come to mind along with Solomon (2 Chr 9:22) who was the wealthiest of them all. They obtained their riches by the grace of God and knew that God was the one who provided such wealth. They also knew that He could easily take it away at any point.

Today, wisdom, power, and wealth seems to be the focus of what is important for most people in the world. Credibility may come from how many letters are after your name. Some, focus on reaching positions of power and prestige, and others work harder and longer to obtain all the good things that money can buy. If we are successful and obtain wisdom, power or riches, can we use any of this to help us get to heaven? Jesus asked a pointed question, “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*” Mt 16:26 The world has lost focus on what is really important.

Jeremiah clearly quoted, “*Thus says the Lord*” cautioning against such pursuits. *We are so tempted, in our accomplishments, to pat ourselves on the back and think, “look what I have done.”* God reminds us that what is really important in this life is knowing Him. There is a huge difference in knowing who God is and knowing God. An acquaintance is someone who you might know, but an intimate relationship such as a husband or wife or best friend, are the relationships where we really know the depth of a person. This is knowing what a person likes and doesn’t like, what is important to him and what is not, what makes him angry or what makes him sad. God wants us to desire to know Him, not just about Him. Jeremiah tells us in this passage (Jer 9:23-24) what is important to God and how we can really know Him and His lovingkindness.

Throughout all of history, the Lord showed His lovingkindness for His people. It

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has always been based upon the condition that His people love Him. When the Israelites turned their backs on the Lord, He was patient. When they cried out in repentance and asked for relief from their oppressors, He sent them someone to rescue them. The Lord told Jeremiah, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness."* Jer 31:3 God expects us to know Him through His lovingkindness. When Jesus was asked what is the most important thing of all, he said: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all of your mind."* Mt 22:37 Love is a basic nature of God and He wants us to be loving people. By us loving, we better understand God's lovingkindness. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."* John 3:16

God's lovingkindness has a complimentary set of attributes; justice and righteousness. The two terms appear to be synonyms when used in the scriptures. Our modern day thoughts of "justice" are far different than what was used in ancient times. Webster defines justice as, "the process or result of using laws to fairly judge and punish crimes and criminals". However, in scripture, the clear meaning of justice is "what is right" or "what is normal." It is the way things are supposed to be. The fairness of laws coupled with fair and equal treatment under the law are common biblical issues. Throughout scripture, God is the defender and protector of those who need Him and He defends everyone equally. His justice is a basic attribute of God and He is just in the

final judgment.

The other part of justice is righteousness. Today, we might think of "righteous" as someone who is morally pure, but the thought in scripture is much more global in doing what is right. If everyone in the world followed God's commandments, worshipped Him, and did what was right, everyone would be living in the right relationship to everyone else. We would all be righteous. Then, it would be unnecessary for God to provide justice. But, as we know in this world, that is not the case. So, therefore, our loving and righteous God provides justice for those who need Him.

God does not owe us anything in this world. We owe Him everything. If we think we are wise, we need to thank God for providing us wisdom. If we end up with a life that is powerful and influential, it is only because God allows it. If we are blessed in riches of this world, then God needs to be thanked for those blessings. We need to show Him our love with the same everlasting lovingkindness that He provides. God delights in doing these things for us and we need to be thankful by giving Him the credit for all that we have and all that He does for us. Through all of this, we will know God.

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