

The Tabernacle of David



Charles and Sarah Faupel

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by Charles and Sarah Faupel

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Translation Note

All quotations from scripture are taken from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise specifically noted.

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PREFACE

This book was birthed out of a realization that we knew almost nothing about the Tabernacle of David. Yet, the prophet Amos prophesied that David's tabernacle would once again be rebuilt, a prophecy repeated hundreds of years later by the apostle James, as recorded in the book of Acts:

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things (Acts 15:16-17).

Clearly, this is a significant event in the history of God's people, although the Scripture has very little to say about this humble tent that David erected to house the Ark of the Covenant after returning it to Mount Zion in Jerusalem. There have been any number of books written on this topic, but they fail to answer some of the deep questions that are raised within us.

So began a year-long quest, inquiring of and listening to the Holy Spirit as to why these biblical prophets proclaimed that this "little tent" was significant for what is to come. As I (Charles) began to write, I realized that the Tabernacle of David could not be understood or appreciated apart from the history leading up to the building of that tabernacle. It is this history—the apostasy throughout the land of Israel including and especially the apostasy of the priesthood; the capture and return of the Ark of the Covenant; and David's zeal to return the Ark to its rightful place on Mount Zion—that provides the necessary context for understanding the true significance of the tabernacle that David erected. I further came to understand that if we are to fully appreciate the nature and reality of the Tabernacle of David in our day, we must also understand the spiritual history out of which this tabernacle is now being erected among God's called out ones. Consequently, much of this book focuses on the spiritual apostasy and the eventual capture of the Ark of God's Presence—not only in Israel's history, but in the history of the church throughout that past 2000 years. This dismal history is the "soil" out of which God is even now sowing, growing and reaping in His

people, His true tabernacle. Hence, after many discussions with each other which birthed a joint quest, we present the story of the capture and recapture of the Ark of the Covenant, and its eventual dwelling place in the Tabernacle of David as a shadow and type—a “picture”—of that which is even now taking place among God’s elect.

We pray that the discussion here will spark fresh insights into your own spiritual walk, and broaden our vision as to what God has in store for us as we traverse this uncharted journey of faith. We welcome any feedback or insights that you might have, as we all see “in part.”

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INTRODUCTION

We have emphasized in other writings¹ the importance of understanding the Old Testament narrative as a shadow and a type of spiritual realities to come. Indeed, we are walking through these realities even as these words are being written and read. Embedded within the storyline of the Old Testament is a curious account of some very dark days in the history of Israel that would eventually culminate in a jubilant foreshadowing of the redemptive purposes of God. This account in the first book of Samuel describes the seizing of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines, its eventual reclamation by the nation of Israel under the leadership of King David, and his bringing the Ark back to Jerusalem to be placed in a simple tent/tabernacle that would house the Ark of the Covenant for the remainder of his reign as king. In the years following their taking possession of the Promised Land, the priesthood of Israel had fallen into a state of apostasy, a condition which generally characterized the whole state of Israel. God had a redemptive plan, however, despite the foolish attempts by the people of Israel to maintain their inheritance by the arm of their own flesh. God always has a redemptive plan. It would be many years before that plan would come to fulfilment through His servant David who had a heart to bring the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem—Mount Zion in fact—which he knew with a burning inside of him, was the rightful place for the very presence of God. We witness the faithfulness of God unfold in this adventure of bringing the Ark back to Jerusalem, despite the misguided strategies that were employed in the process.

The state of affairs in which Israel found itself is not without parallel throughout much of the history of Christendom. Indeed, the history of the Tabernacle of David has great implications for the way in which God is bringing to pass His redemptive plan in our day. God has been, over the centuries, progressively revealing His plans and purposes to those whom He has been calling apart unto Himself, sharing with them the precious pearls of His heart. Especially over the past century, wonderful life-giving truths have been revealed which speak of our

¹ See especially [From Egypt to the Promised Land](#) which can be found on the Books and Articles page of www.wordforthebride.net.

identity with Christ as He is maturing us into the full stature of His sons who are to rule and reign with Him.

Increasingly, God is unveiling the glorious gospel of the restitution of all things into Christ—including ALL men and women—that at the name of Christ EVERY knee shall bow and EVERY tongue will confess that He is Lord. This confession will not come as a result of the threat of eternal torment, but in response to the irresistible love of our Heavenly Father for all of His creation. God is also now putting on the hearts of many with increasing intensity His intentions of revealing Himself in and through His sons whom He has been preparing in the secret place over the centuries. There is, in the hearts of these whom God has been preparing, a vision of the ultimate redemption of our bodies and the defeat of that last enemy, death. With this brings an increasing clarity and confidence of the nature of the Kingdom of God which is being established within these temples of clay.

Along this journey of our sanctification and further down the road from the wonderful realities of the feasts of Passover and Pentecost, there comes the dawning of yet a third important feast, that being the *Feast of Tabernacles*. Though many have either ignored this feast or have taught that this is a spiritual reality that will not become manifest until after we die, let us never forget that there is an “elect” in whom the Holy Spirit has been revealing a glorious appearing of Christ as His permanent dwelling, His living Tabernacle. There is a growing awareness in our hearts of the swallowing up of that last enemy—*death*, through the ultimate redemption of our bodies in victory—which is the very reality to which the Tabernacle of David was pointing. We dare to believe that this which has been attained, at least in a measure, in past history, is now being experienced in various *Kairos* circumstances, and will continue to be realized in the lives of His chosen few who have truly surrendered all to know Him in the power of His resurrection. This will come through the putting on of our immortality as the final blow to “death” in agreement with His salvation of the body.

It is our prayer that as you read, the Lord will enlighten the eyes of your understanding, give you grace to confront the wayward spiritual condition that we find ourselves in today as did Israel of old, and expand your vision to take in the glorious plan of God to bring redemption to all of His creation and ultimately to defeat the last enemy in our lives, death itself.

CHAPTER ONE: Trouble in the Land

Many of you will recall that when the Lord brought the children of Israel to the plains of Moab, as they were preparing to enter into the Promised Land after some 40 years in the wilderness, He gave Moses some very important instructions for possessing the land once they entered. First, He told Moses most emphatically that they were to drive out all the inhabitants of the land, to destroy their pictures and molten images and to tear down all of their high places (Numbers 33:52-53). He further made it very clear as to what the consequences would be if they failed to do this: *“But if ye do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass that those which ye let remain in them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell”* (Numbers 33:55). Anyone who has read the story of the Old Testament Israelites is very aware that this is exactly what happened because they failed to be completely obedient to the Lord here.

And so it was that after Israel had entered the Promised Land, taken possession of it and settled in it, they found themselves surrounded by foreign nations which exemplified a way of life that was contrary to that which God had ordained for His chosen people. During the waning days of his life, Joshua spoke the word of the Lord to the new settlers in the Promised Land:

[The Lord says] And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that [were] on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:13-15)

When the people assured Joshua that they intended to serve the Lord their God, Joshua replied, *“If ye forsake the LORD and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt and consume you, after that He hath done you good... Now therefore put away...the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel”* (Joshua 24:20, 23).

We are told that the Israelites failed to drive out any remaining inhabitants of the land (Judges 1:27-36). The Lord reminded them of the warning that He gave them earlier through Moses: *“Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you, but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you”* (Judges 2:3). And we know that they were indeed a snare. We read that Israel was not able to make good on its best intentions to remain faithful to the Lord. The book of Judges provides a dismal account of the *unfaithfulness* of Israel and their tendency to be continually seduced by the nations which co-existed with them in their land of promise (Judges 2:11-15).

In His great mercy, the Lord raised up judges who would deliver them from the oppression of their captors. Yet, time after time, after experiencing the Lord’s deliverance, they would turn back once again to worship the gods of the surrounding cultures. One almost gets dizzy to read of the revolving door of ***disobedience-deliverance-repentance-disobedience-deliverance-repentance*** that is repeated over and over again as God responds to their unfaithfulness by raising up yet another judge in the form of Othniel, Deborah, Gideon and Samson, and seven others in the book of Judges alone! There were also two judges, important for our discussion here, whose story is taken up in the books of Samuel. Before considering their part in the story, however, let us consider briefly how the spiritual condition of *our* day resembles that in which the children of Israel found themselves.

The Foreign Gods of Our Day

Much like our spiritual ancestors, we, too, find ourselves surrounded by a foreign culture. Those of us who have been led of the Lord to leave our customized “Egypt” have, like the children of Israel, walked through a wilderness of the Lord’s very own design. Here, He has stripped and purged us, refined and

matured us—a process that continues as we refuse to turn back to our Egypt. God has revealed to us precious truths, of which the grapes and pomegranates in the land of Canaan are shadows and types. We have basked in these revelations and have begun to walk in them as the Lord is waking us up to our true identity and inheritance. There remain, however, occupying forces in this land of promise, which would seduce us and turn our attention and even our affections away from Him who has delivered us from the land of Egypt, making it seem that we are in a worse place than which we came from...if we didn't know better.

The God of Materialism

Those of us growing up in America and most western cultures are especially seduced with the god of materialism, a false god that has been exported to almost every nation and tribe throughout the world. We have been lulled into believing that we can find security in our financial resources and the comforts that they can buy. We have even heard capitalism espoused as an economic system ordained by God. Capitalism and the lust for material gain that drives this economic system are false gods, every bit as much as the false god of communism and the dependence on government to take care of all of our material needs. Both of these economic systems, which are so diametrically opposed in almost every way, pay homage to the false god of materialism.

This god of materialism that has gripped so many cultures and societies around the world is an insidious foe because it seduces us into believing that material well-being is the source, or at least the portal to a full and satisfying life, peace and joy. All of us have been infected by this deceptive lie to some degree or another over the course of our lives. It has become common place—even expected—to chase after materialistic gain with religious fervor, as if our lives depended upon it. Indeed, in the hearts and minds of many, their lives *do* depend upon it. The materialism of our day is so insidious, in part, because we are often not even conscious of how our decisions are based upon pleasing this false god. There are many, especially among those who profess to be followers of Christ, who give lip service to their ultimate allegiance to the King of kings, but who are nevertheless driven by the demands of this foreign god. Indeed, entire ministries

have been built and thrive off of the response of gullible followers to deceptive appeals for “seed money” that is purported to result in material prosperity as their birthright as children of God.

The god of materialism has been a source of another enemy in this foreign land in which we occupy, and that is the enemy of *fear*. This fear derives largely from threats to our material and physical well-being, whether this be fear of losing our comfortable lifestyles, our means of livelihood, or even our fear of declining health and the death of our physical bodies. The world is experiencing an unprecedented level of fear as a result of the uncertainties of the times in which we live. This should not surprise us. Jesus promised that it would be this way, at the culmination of this age:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken (Luke 21:25-26).

When these events take place, however, even such as we are witnessing today, those of us who are in Christ, are instructed to *look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh (Luke 21:28)*. Friends, there is truly no reason to fear if we have set our hearts and minds on God Almighty, if we have truly surrendered to His Lordship; for just as He did with the Israelites of old, He has promised to go before us, to rout the enemy, and to bring victory. We must, however, abandon the foreign god of materialism which elevates our material and physical well-being above that which we are truly called to be. And let us remember His promise to us: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33)*.

The God of Human Reason

Still another “strange god” that is prominent in our day (and especially pronounced in western societies) is the god of human reason. The appeal to

human reason dates back to our earliest ancestors, as we read of the serpent testing Eve through precisely this false god:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which [is] in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:1-5; NKJV).

This is a very troubling god, because God Himself created us with the ability to reason, a faculty that is a good gift from God and one that we are expected to exercise *in submission to Him and His Spirit which dwells within us*. The problem that we have is that we don't submit our reason to Him, and the result of this problem is that our reasoning has become a god, as we have elevated this wonderful gift to a place of idolatry, and have not exercised it in subjection to the Holy Spirit. "Come let us reason TOGETHER" is the invitation brought to us through the prophet Isaiah. Apart from Him, we cannot reason, for He is the source of all Truth which is the basis of it. Our reasoning MUST be in subjection to the Holy Spirit.

The elevation of human reason to such a place of idolatry climaxed in the 17th and 18th centuries in what has come to be called the "Age of Enlightenment." These "Enlightenment," or "Renaissance" thinkers exalted human reasoning to such an extent that one of these philosophers by the name of Renè Descarte would declare "*Cogito, ergo sum*"—**I think, therefore I am**. How far we have come from "*I am created in the image of God!*" This foreign god has only been magnified since the days of Descarte and his Renaissance buddies. It has resulted in the development of elaborate educational and scientific agendas that have been institutionalized and raised to a place of worship. Lately the buzzword is "Follow

the science.” What they are really saying is: “Fall down and worship the god of science (reason).”²

Please do not misunderstand what is being said here. Human reason and the education, science and other achievements that follow from the exercise of our reason are not bad things in and of themselves. We are created in the image of God, and our capacity to reason is very much a part of our created self. We have, however, taken this gift of creation and elevated it to a place of god-ship. Rather than rely on the Spirit of God to direct our reasoning which would then inform our decisions and actions, we filter any such promptings through our natural human reasoning that we have acquired over years of experience and educational training. When this carnal reasoning transcends the voice of the Holy Spirit, we have bowed to the god of reason.

The consequences of bowing to the god of reason have been catastrophic in our day. Over the years, all manner of evil, masquerading as good, has been perpetrated upon the human race as a result of the idolatrous emphasis that this and other cultures have placed upon human reason. During the early part of the twentieth century a eugenics movement, targeted especially against those who were then called “feeble minded,” gained momentum, reasoning that we would have a much better and more productive world without people with these mental limitations. Later in the same century, some 600 African-American men at Tuskegee University were enrolled in an experiment to test the effects of syphilis and its treatment. The men were not told that they were merely given a placebo, and were not treated with penicillin, a known cure for the disease as this study was progressing. These men, largely sharecroppers, were regarded as expendable, being offered as a sacrifice to the god of science. Similar experiments, potentially devastating to the individuals involved, continue in our day with the justification that such sacrifices are necessary to advance knowledge and science. We have, for example, experimented with a wide variety of

² Those who tout this phrase are really saying, “Fall down and worship the god of *scientism*. Scientism is the belief that all moral and philosophical questions can be reduced to some sort of empirical investigation and verification. Consequently science, and especially the natural sciences, is raised to a god-like level. In this way, scientism is actually a religion.

pharmacological concoctions to treat everything from hyperactivity to depression to weight loss. Many of the maladies that are treated have been created by the pharmaceutical companies for purpose of peddling costly drugs (Locklear, n.d.)! More recently, experimental “vaccines” have been unleashed on populations throughout the world, often being forced upon individuals against their will. The evil behind this agenda could be a discussion filling many volumes. Suffice to say here that it is being orchestrated by a small number of people who believe that they know what is best for mankind. Such is the “logical” extreme to which the worship of the god of reason can take the human race.

God is calling us to lay down this false god. I remember so clearly being awakened to the importance of this shortly after I came to fully reaffirm my faith in Christ. I am a sociologist by training, and over my career, I honed my sense of reasoning to a grand place of idolatry in my life. I maintained a nominal faith, but I would always filter any faith claims that I would hear through the filter of my sociological reasoning. If such a claim or statement disagreed with what I had come to embrace as a sociologist, I rejected it. Shortly after coming to a place of full surrender to the Lord, I knew that the equation had to be switched. I was now evaluating all of my sociological knowledge against the faith claims that God was beginning to make on my life. I found myself rejecting much of what I had spent an entire career rigorously cultivating. I had to take reason off of the idolatrous pedestal on which I had placed it. My full surrender to the Lord also eventually resulted in the rejection of many of my childhood and teenage understandings of God, the church, and all manner of theological beliefs. Indeed, this is a process that took place within both of us and is continuing to take place.

The God of Religion

This brings us to a final “foreign god” that we want to discuss here, this being the god of religious tradition and orthodoxy. There is nothing that gets more in the way of Christ and His Life than religious tradition which keeps us bound (at best) to what God has done in the past. The history of Christianity is littered with the ghosts of past moves of God. What begins as a fresh visitation of God is quickly institutionalized, as denominations form around doctrines which are crystallized

from these precious life-giving times of God's outpouring and anointing. God captured the heart of Martin Luther with the precious truth of being justified by faith and not by works; and now we have a Lutheran denomination complete with its own doctrinal statement, hymn books and "order of worship." The same thing occurred following the great Wesleyan revival and the formation of Methodism. Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals and most other denominations also began as a fresh move of God. These life-giving events all too quickly became a source of sectarianism and division among the body of Christ as adherents became more loyal and committed to the traditions that were spawned by them than they were to the Source of Life that opened up these new revelations in the first place. There is no more life in them than there was in the religion of the Pharisees.

We have made a false god out of religion. We have worshipped foreign gods that mask themselves in the finest religious garb that calls itself "Christian." A closer examination, however, reveals a horse of quite a different color. We have, in fact, incorporated the god of this world into much of our religious practice and belief. Theologians have a special word to describe this tendency—it is called "syncretism." Such a tendency is easy to see, for example, when Protestant missionaries to foreign countries have discovered the incorporation of voodoo practices and beliefs into the beliefs and practices of Catholicism by early Roman Catholic missionaries to Haiti and some African nations. Rather than drive out the false gods in those countries, these early missionaries "married" themselves to them through this practice of syncretism. But let us not fool ourselves. Protestants have done the same thing in our own cultures, and most good church-going Christians are not even aware of it. The birth of our Lord, for example, is celebrated on a day that does not even approximate the date of His birth. This day was celebrated by the pagan Romans as the birth of their sun god. Virtually none of the traditions associated with the celebration of Christmas reflect a genuine Christian world view—including and especially the extravagant exchange of gifts that surround this pagan holiday. The traditional Christmas tree, with all of its decoration is also borrowed directly from pagan cultures.³ While we have

³ For further discussion of the pagan origins of Christmas see the excellent article by J. Preston Eby entitled ["Five Reasons Why the Sons of God Should Not Celebrate Christmas."](#)

more correctly dated the resurrection of Jesus with our Easter holiday, the very term *Easter* is also reflective of pagan worship of fertility gods, as is the Easter bunny and all the rest. Despite these realities, how many people in our Christian denominations would even consider relinquishing these pagan-posing-as-Christian celebrations? They have become sacred to the adherents of these religious traditions, just as the doctrines, order of worship and ecclesiastical structure, have become sacred. We are worshiping a foreign god that we have adopted from ancient pagan traditions that inform the culture around us.

The honoring of pagan influences in these two holidays which have become central to Christians throughout the world by no means exhaust the ways in which religion has become a foreign god to us. We have, for example, taken on the class distinctions between clergy and laity. While such a distinction was very much a part of Old Testament life—established by God in fact—this was a practice renounced by Jesus and the first century church. It would be put into practice once again with all the pomp and circumstance of a royal coronation following Constantine’s recognition of Christianity as a legitimate state religion. The ecclesiastical structure that evolved more resembled the pagan religions by which the newly-recognized church was surrounded than it did the priestly hierarchy of the Old Testament. More importantly, it bore no resemblance whatsoever to the *ecclesia* that was established by Jesus just about three centuries earlier and was driven underground by the Anti-Christ spirit that co-opted Christianity. The result of the adoption of this pagan-influenced practice has been devastating. It has, to a large degree, suffocated the Breath of Life out of the church. As we will see, it has also resulted in the exploitation of God’s people in a way prefigured by the wicked sons of Eli.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of the foreign gods that we serve in our day. However, we hope that this discussion will serve to illustrate the way in which we have joined ourselves to the “nations” around us, just as the Israelites of old had done during the time of the judges. It was this disobedience on the part of these spiritual ancestors of ours that ultimately led to the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines. As we now turn to this tragic moment in the life of the Israelites, let us remember that the Ark of the Covenant represented the very

presence of God. The loss of the Ark represented much more than merely the relinquishing of a piece of furniture, as valuable as that wooden box overlaid with gold might have been; for these Israelites, it meant the absence of the presence of God in their midst. We must understand that this is but a picture of the spiritual condition in which we find ourselves today. The presence of God has left most assemblies that call themselves “the church.” The power and the life of the Holy Spirit has departed their midst and sadly, most pastors and parishioners alike have not even noticed. They have busied themselves with their own agendas and ministries which they mistakenly believe is “the Lord’s work.” But His energizing life is not in most of the ministry efforts of churches throughout our land. “Ichabod” is written all over these efforts. The Ark of His Presence has been stolen. As we shall see, however, the Lord our God is raising up a faithful remnant in our day who, in subjection to King Jesus their Head (typified by King David), are intent on co-laboring with Him to return the Ark of His Presence and Glory to its rightful place within and among His people who, together, comprise spiritual Mount Zion!

CHAPTER TWO: The Sons of Eli

We continue in this chapter to establish the context for the forfeiture of the Ark of the Covenant into the hands of the Philistines, which itself set the stage for the eventual return of the Ark, and later, King David bringing it back to Jerusalem where he erected a tabernacle to house it. The situation that we will examine in this chapter is the spiritual apostasy of the priesthood in Israel, namely Eli and his sons. An understanding of this “priestly” context is important because the spiritual condition of the children of Israel at this time is a picture of the spiritual circumstances in which the church has been in throughout much of its existence, with occasional God-interventions.

The last judge recorded in the book of Judges was Samson. There were, however, at least two other individuals who served in the capacity of judging Israel prior to their demand for a king to rule them. These individuals were Eli and Samuel. The story of these judges is picked up in the opening chapters of the first book of Samuel. The story begins here with the longing in the heart of Hannah for a son, whom she promised to the Lord should He so bless her. We know that God did bless her with that son whom she named Samuel. We read in these opening chapters of 1 Samuel about Samuel’s apprenticeship under Eli and of his training to eventually become one of the great priests and judges over the nation of Israel. Our focus in this chapter, however, is the apostasy of Samuel’s predecessor Eli, especially as that apostasy was administered through his sons.

Eli, the Double-Minded Priest and Judge

We are first introduced to Eli in the first chapter of 1 Samuel, when Hannah shared with the Lord her deepest desires for a son while in the presence of Eli. Eli could see only her lips moving and believed her to be drunk. When Hannah explained to Eli her sorrow at not having a son, Eli told her to go in peace, that the God of Israel would grant her petition. Eli was speaking on behalf of the Lord here. He knew and understood the authority that he had in his priestly role, and indeed, Hannah did give birth to a male son whom she named Samuel. We also

take note that Eli had a heart for God in the third chapter of 1 Samuel, when Samuel hears the Lord speaking to him. Thinking that it was Eli calling him, Samuel arose and went to Eli saying to him *“Here am I, for you called me.”* Eli responded that he did not call Samuel. This happened three times, after which Eli recognized that this must be the voice of God. He instructed Samuel to speak back to the voice of the Lord and to say, *“Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.”* Samuel was obedient, and what Samuel heard must have been startling, to say the least:

Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever” (1 Samuel 3: 11-14).

The anger of the Lord was clearly upon Eli and his house. Nevertheless, Eli had a fear of the Lord and he ordered Samuel to tell him everything that the Lord had told him. With much trepidation, Samuel shared everything that the Lord had told him. Eli’s response was, *“It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to Him”* (1 Samuel 3:18; NKJV).

While Eli clearly displayed a fear of the Lord, it would seem that his fear of the Lord was secondary to the fear that he had of standing up to his own two sons, who were doing much evil at the very tabernacle of the Lord. We will be discussing their antics momentarily. Suffice to say, God’s judgment was on the house of Eli.

There have been many Eli’s throughout the history of God’s people. We are not speaking here of the many shysters who have literally swindled people with promises of a hundred-fold return on their money, etc. No, these racketeers are the sons of Eli whom we will be addressing momentarily. Virtually all of these charlatans, however, have been nurtured in the faith by others who have gone on

before them. Many of these spiritual fathers have themselves been spiritual giants at one time or another. They have, however, been the midwives of the sons of Eli—self-serving counterfeits and frauds who have taken advantage of God’s people. All the while they were doing this, their spiritual fathers—their Eli’s—were looking the other way. Surely, everyone reading this can identify names and faces with both the Eli’s and with the Hophni’s and Phinehas’s whom Eli begat.

The Eli’s in the Christian world today consist both of individuals and groups, including the major denominations in Christendom. The church, in its institutional expression, has found it much easier to accommodate to the greed and outright heresies of ambitious pastors and ministries than to confront the sin. There is a cost to denominations to confronting a successful ministry within their ranks. That ministry (or minister) can simply pull up stakes and affiliate with another denomination, or alternatively, go it alone under no organizational authority. We saw what happened, for example, when the Assemblies of God censured Jimmy Swaggart by imposing (in our opinion) a very mild sanction of a one-year hiatus from preaching and two years of rehabilitation. Swaggart rejected the denominational authorities’ offer and went out on his own after being stripped of his denominational credentials. This entailed a cost on the part of the denomination as Jimmy Swaggart Ministries contributed substantially to the coffers of the denomination.

Those ministries which are autonomous, if they are integral, will have spiritual “overseers,” which typically take the form of a governing board whose role (among other things) should be to keep that ministry true to its purpose. When the public face of that ministry becomes too popular (and thereby too powerful), it becomes ever more difficult for that governing board to function effectively in this role. One of the more publicized scandals took place during the 1980’s when Jim Bakker and the PTL club were exposed for defrauding investors and siphoning ministry funds on a grand scale for the personal use of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. The scandal ultimately resulted in a 45-year prison sentence for Jim

Bakker and the demise of PTL.⁴ This could all have been avoided if the governing board and its leadership would have had the courage to stand up to Bakker and his antics. They were, however, intimidated by Bakker and found it easier to go along with what was obviously taking place before their eyes—just as Eli found it easier to go along with the graft and extortion in which his sons were engaging.

These examples of an improper oversight and holding to accountability of ministries going rogue could be multiplied dozens and probably hundreds of times over if we were to closely examine the landscape of Christendom today. Most of these wrongdoings can in part be attributed to a spiritual failure on the part of those who have been charged with maintaining oversight over these individuals and ministries. We are in no way excusing those individuals engaged in the corruption—the Hophnis and Phinehases. Judgment will be upon them as it was upon the biological sons of Eli. We are suggesting, however, that there has been a reticence to hold individuals and ministries accountable, and to correct improper behavior by the “fathers” of these entities. Whether these “fathers” be governing boards of ministries, sessions or boards of local congregations, or simply mature individuals in the faith who have nurtured and mentored up-and-coming pastors and evangelists, these “Eli’s” have a grave responsibility to speak truth to those over whom they have spiritual authority. Too often, however, especially when a ministry is “successful,” especially as measured by church/conference attendance and dollars flowing into the coffers, it is easier to look the other way than it is to speak the truth in love. The result has been the proliferation of hundreds if not thousands of Hophnis and Phinehases exploiting God’s people throughout the land and around the world today.

This failure, and the examples we have cited which have been repeated so many times over, speak to a much deeper malaise in the body of Christ today. Whether we are speaking of churches and the denominations of which they are a part, or parachurch ministries, such expressions of the body of Christ simply do not reflect the *ecclesia* that Jesus formed some 2000 years ago and which He is raising up, largely unnoticed, among His faithful today. The corporate church and

⁴ Bakker’s prison sentence was reduced to eight years by an appeals judge. He was released on parole after five years.

parachurch ministries have modeled themselves after secular business practices whose ultimate purpose and goal is to maximize profits in the most efficient way possible.⁵ What we have created here is a series of *organizations* which compete with one another for membership and finances. What Jesus formed was an *organism*, infused with His life. Organizations are dead, and require rules and regulations to insure the realization of their goals. They also require the infusion of large amounts of capital to keep the machine of the bureaucracy running. In short, they are *life-draining* rather than *life-giving*. *Organisms*, by contrast, have life within themselves. That organism which Jesus formed and which scripture calls the *ecclesia*, has been infused with His life. Leadership and service are nurtured in this life-giving environment. When truly connected to the Head, this organism that is the true body of Christ will function properly without the need for specially appointed governing boards, etc.⁶ We would contend, therefore, that the very fact that the church in our day has relied on a secular business model is suggestive of a sobering reality—namely that the Ark of God’s presence has been taken captive by the Philistine forces in our day. We would further suggest that the concession to such a model has produced the many Phinehases and Hophnis throughout Christendom today. So to be very clear, we are not suggesting that we can fix this old wineskin. The new wine that God is pouring out in our day will require an entirely new wineskin.⁷

The Iniquity of Hophni and Phinehas

Scripture indicates that Eli’s sons were sons of *Belial*, meaning good for nothing or more strongly, morally bankrupt. As Eli was a direct descendant of Aaron, and hence part of the Levitical lineage, his sons were also a part of the priesthood lineage. They were, according to the arrangement established by God, priests over the people of Israel. The problem is that they did not have a relationship

⁵ See the article “[Bureaucrurch](http://www.wordforthebride.net)” located on the Books and Articles page of www.wordforthebride.net for a more extensive discussion of the difficulty in applying this model to the body of Christ.

⁶ This is not to say that there will never be any problems in such groups. We are very well aware of the problems that arose in the various churches in the New Testament. Scripture does lay down principles for how these problems are to be dealt with, as can be found, for example in Matthew 18:15-17.

⁷ We have suggested what some of the features of this new wineskin might look like in the article, [Beyond the Sons of God](http://www.wordforthebride.net), which can be found on the “Books and Articles page of www.wordforthebride.net. This is a topic that needs much further revelation and discussion among the body of Christ in the coming days.

with the Lord. The scripture makes it clear: *“they knew not the Lord”* (1 Samuel 2:12). We can most certainly assume that they knew *about* the Lord. After all, they grew up in the house of Eli, the high priest. It is, however, one thing to know about the Lord, and quite another to KNOW the Lord. Many millions of people have grown up in churches of various stripes, have attended Sunday school since they were toddlers, and can even quote lengthy passages of scripture. Many of these good church men and women are quite sophisticated theologically, and some have even attained advanced degrees in theology. None of this sophisticated knowledge *about* God, however, automatically signifies *knowing* God. Indeed, some of the most prolific theologians of our day are self-proclaimed atheists or agnostics. Sadly, our seminaries and theological training schools today are producing many theologians who are incredibly knowledgeable *about* God, but many, perhaps most, do not really KNOW God in intimate, deepening relationship.

Because Hophni and Phinehas lacked an intimate relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they were especially vulnerable to the dictates of their fleshly lusts. The second chapter of 1 Samuel describes at least two areas in which these men practiced their wicked deeds.

Extortion

The law given through Moses stipulated that the priests were entitled to a share of the sacrifices that were being offered by the people. Because the priestly class (the Levites) owned no land or livestock of their own, they were dependent upon contributions by members of the other tribes. Part of this provision came through a share of the sacrifices that was designated for the priests themselves. There were, however, restrictions on how much the priests were entitled to, and what was acceptable for them to eat. For example, the breast and the right shoulder of burnt offerings were stipulated to be given to the priests, while the fat was to be burned (Leviticus 7:31-34). It was also stipulated that the priests were to be given the first fruit of the corn, wine and oil (Deuteronomy 18:4). Under no circumstances, however, were the priests or any of the people to eat the fat of the animals (Leviticus 7:22-27).

Hophni and Phinehas totally disregarded the provisions established by God through Moses:

Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels who had no respect for the LORD or for their duties as priests. Whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, Eli's sons would send over a servant with a three-pronged fork. While the meat of the sacrificed animal was still boiling, the servant would stick the fork into the pot and demand that whatever it brought up be given to Eli's sons. All the Israelites who came to worship at Shiloh were treated this way. Sometimes the servant would come even before the animal's fat had been burned on the altar. He would demand raw meat before it had been boiled so that it could be used for roasting. The man offering the sacrifice might reply, "Take as much as you want, but the fat must be burned first." Then the servant would demand, "No, give it to me now, or I'll take it by force." So the sin of these young men was very serious in the LORD's sight, for they treated the LORD's offerings with contempt. (1 Samuel 2:12-17; NLT).

This passage captures the nature and extent of the extortion that took place by the sons of Eli. They did not receive these sacrifices from a people who were freely giving according to the dictates of the law at the time. They were *demanding*, even taking by force, that portion of the sacrifice that they wanted for themselves. The implication is that what they were taking was far more than what the law entitled them to. Moreover, they totally disregarded the requirement to burn the fat. They took it for themselves, even in opposition to the expressed concerns of those bringing the sacrifice.

It is important to point out here that Hophni and Phinehas were not stealing from the people. The people brought the same sacrifices that they would have brought before the Lord had Eli's sons been righteous in their conduct. No, they were stealing from God Himself! They were taking unto themselves from that which was designated to be sacrificed to the Lord, including the fat of the animals. This resulted in incurring the wrath of the people as well as the wrath of God. It

turned what was to be an offering from the heart of the people into something that was repulsive to them:

Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:17).

The scripture does not come out and say it, but we can certainly infer from this that the extortion being carried out by the sons of Eli became not only a stench in the nostrils of the people, but in all probability became a stumbling block in their faithful walk with the Lord. We can certainly imagine many of them vowing never to bring a sacrifice to the tabernacle of the Lord again because of how it was being abused by these two. Judgment was certainly about to fall on them.

Sexual Exploitation

Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them (1 Samuel 2:22-25).

The sins of Eli's sons were not limited to the extortion of sacrifices. They also indulged themselves sexually with women who were serving at the temple. This was not consensual sex in which they were engaging. They were raping these women. While some have speculated that they might have been temple prostitutes, in which case the sexual actions of Hophni and Phinehas might have been regarded as consensual, there is no such record anywhere in the biblical account that would even hint at such an understanding. The fact that Eli chastised his sons for sinning in this way certainly suggests that this is not the case. By most accounts, these were probably women who were used to carry out various and sundry tasks related to the functions of the tabernacle.

It does seem reasonable to assume, however, that Eli's sons felt perfectly justified in violating these women in this way. We must remember that the Israelites failed to drive out all of the inhabitants of the Promised Land when they took possession of it. The result of this failure was that they incorporated many of the practices of these foreign cultures into their way of life. We see this take place on a grand scale after Israel came under the authority of kings, especially during the reigns of Saul and Solomon, as well as other kings that would follow. The religions of these foreign kingdoms did indeed employ temple prostitutes as part of their rituals. Hophni and Phinehas would have been very aware of this practice. This sin was, no doubt, another terrible consequence of the failure of the Israelites to drive out all of the foreign nations inhabiting their land of promise as the Lord had instructed them to do.

The sexual exploitation of the women serving at the tabernacle was all the more egregious, however, in that this was not merely a sin against their fellow Israelites; the scriptural account indicates that it was a sin against God Himself (v. 25). There are a couple of possible reasons why God might have considered this a sin against Himself. First, these were women who were serving Him in various ways at the tabernacle. We could say that they were, in a sense, "called out ones" for this purpose. We also get a clue as to why God might have taken this so personally in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church:

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:15-19).

Paul is here, and elsewhere throughout his writings, making the claim that our bodies are the temple of the Lord. Hence, to sin against the body is to sin against

the Lord Himself. It is true that the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out as it was in those believers in the upper room on that momentous Pentecostal day. We do understand that this brought a new understanding, articulated so well by Paul, that WE are now the temple of God—an understanding and a reality that was not present at the time Eli’s sons were having their way with the women at the tabernacle. This incident in the lives of the sons of Eli does, however, as a shadow and a type, point to this marvelous reality of *Christ in us, the hope of glory*.

There is one further aspect of the actions of Hophni and Phinehas against these women that is of special relevance to what we see taking place throughout so much of the world of Christian ministry today. Eli rebukes his sons for their behavior, saying “*ye make the Lord’s people to transgress*” (v. 24). We can only imagine how it was that these sexual indecencies caused the Lord’s people to transgress. It is possible that the husbands of these women were so angered and upset that it caused them to give their wives a bill of divorcement. It may have even given these men license to do the very same things themselves! Very possibly, young Israelite men and women saw this behavior and swore they would have nothing to do with the faith of their fathers if this is what it produced. The truth is, we don’t know how it caused the Lord’s people to transgress. But it did, and Eli rebuked his sons for it.

We can look upon these scriptural accounts merely as an historical record of a tragic time in the life of the Israelite nation. It was that. But it is much more. It is the story of the carnal human condition. Moreover, it is an ominous picture of what we see taking place among far too large a segment of the “priests” of God today.

Twenty-First Century Sons of Eli

The condition of the church system today is not unlike the priesthood under the authority of Eli and his two sons. We have been conditioned to accept much of what goes on as inevitable if an organization is to function, whether that organization is a denomination, a local church, or a conference or television/radio ministry. It is inevitable, we reason, because of the operating costs of these

organizations. The bigger the organization, the larger the operating costs. We reason, therefore, that much of what takes place under the “Eli and Sons” business of the priesthood is a necessary and acceptable practice. These are *not* acceptable practices. Such practices comprise the same exploitation now as they did under the priesthood of Eli and his sons. Let us look briefly at how the Christian enterprise today—at least throughout much of the world—resembles the conditions that we read about in the opening chapters of the first book of Samuel.

Financial Extortion

Much of the fundraising that takes place within modern church systems can only be described as financial extortion. We accept most of these practices as necessary for the continued operation of these systems. Moreover, many of these practices have become so entrenched in our religious cultural experience that we do not even question them.

The first form of extortion that we want to address is the practice of the ***tithe***. This is a sacred cow to many of those established in the organized church, especially to pastors and other church leaders. The justification for the almost authoritarian imposition of the tithe upon parishioners comes primarily from the Old Testament book of Malachi:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Malachi 3:8-10).

Preachers and other Christian leaders use this single passage to pressure—even bully—their parishioners into giving one-tenth of their income to “God’s work,” which is usually the 501(c)3 organization that is called the local church. This burden of the tithe takes on highly legalistic tones in many congregations. I have

a very clear childhood memory of my father agonizing over whether he was obligated to pay a tithe on his *net* income or his *gross* income. Most of the time he based his tithe on merely his net income. You see, my father was a dairy farmer, and his net income represented an extremely small portion of his gross income because of the massive overhead that a dairy farmer (or any farmer) incurs. Had he based his tithe on his gross income he would not have been able to support his family with their basic necessities. Nevertheless, my father frequently expressed uncertainty and even guilt regarding his failure to tithe on his gross income. Oh my, how this doctrine of the tithe has extorted and brought condemnation to God's people!

We contend that the admonition in Malachi to *bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse* has been grossly misapplied in church systems today. Let us be very clear that this was a mandate rooted in the Mosaic order whereby the tribe of Levi was provided for, as they did not have a share in the ownership of land, livestock, or the fruit of that land and livestock. This was God's provision under the Mosaic covenant. The church today has extended that admonition to a "priestly" class of clergy who have *set themselves* apart to receive a tenth of the "harvest" (income) of their parishioners, just as the Levites of old were so provided for. Of course, not all of the proceeds that are brought to the storehouse goes to the preacher's salary; some are also used for the maintenance of the "tabernacle" just as it was in Moses' day. This is not, however, the New Testament model for giving. There is no mention of the tithe in the New Testament at all as it pertains to any obligation on the part of the followers of *The Way*. These believers were, instead, encouraged to "freely give" as they were moved by the Holy Spirit to so contribute to the well-being of the body of Christ. Paul, for example, exhorts the church in Macedonia to give liberally for purposes of delivering the proceeds of their cheerful giving to the financially struggling believers in Jerusalem. No mention of an obligation of a tithe here. Each one was to search their hearts and give according to the dictates of their own conscience. Moreover, while Paul does make a case for supporting those such as himself who are laboring sacrificially to extend the Kingdom of God (1 Timothy 5:18), nowhere does he suggest that he is part of a privileged "Levite" class or professional clergy

who is dependent upon the tithes of “parishioners” in local assemblies for his sustenance. Paul was bi-vocational—a tentmaker—and this was the primary basis for his daily sustenance. This is the model that he establishes for those who would become leaders in the ecclesia of God.

Some may point to the striking dead of Ananias and Sapphira for withholding from the local body of believers some of the proceeds from the sale of their land. Indeed, I have heard this preached, almost threateningly, as an inducement to not withhold the tithe. The “assassination” of Ananias and Sapphira had nothing to do with their withholding a tithe. It was God’s judgment for attempting to deceive that local assembly and its leaders into believing that they were contributing the entire proceeds (100 percent, not 10 percent) of the sale of their land. It is absolutely amazing how the custodians of the organized church system have perverted the New Testament practice of freely giving from a heart of love into a legalistic obligation. It is remarkable that even among those congregations that loudly reject the legalistic Old Testament mandates in almost every area cling tenaciously to the obligation of the tithe. We would go so far as to say that this practice which was instituted by God through Moses as His gracious provision for the Levites has been used by a modern day, self-appointed Levite class (the clergy and organizational leadership) as a means of exploitation of God’s people.

The imposition of the tithe is not the only way in which “Eli and Sons” extort the body of Christ today. The people of God are also exhorted to give well beyond the tithe. It is, to be sure, a righteous thing to give liberally, even beyond a tenth of our income! We are not speaking here of pastors, evangelists, missionaries and others making needs known unto a people and encouraging them to give freely as the Lord would lead them. We are, rather, referring to the various schemes that have been cultivated by ministries of all stripes to cajole funds out of their followers.

Modern day Christianity has learned the strategies of the Madison Avenue advertising industry and expertly honed these schemes in their appeals for soliciting funds from hard-working people. There is scarcely a Christian conference hosted today that does not hawk books, CD’s, DVD’s, and even costly

cruises that allow the purchaser to spend a week with their idols in the form of well-known television evangelists and the like. We are even aware of one Christian writer who has developed a curriculum on how to enter into the heavenly realm—for a hefty fee, of course.

Other high-profile Christian personalities exploit the extreme conditions of poverty in third-world countries as a vehicle for raising funds. The commercials and infomercials that they produce are the envy of Madison Avenue. Close-ups of poverty-stricken children, complete with emaciated bodies, deeply sunken eyes, and flies crawling all over their faces are used effectively to guilt would-be donors to sponsor one or more of these children. There is never an accounting provided on these infomercials of just what percentage of the funds received actually go toward direct medical and food assistance for these individuals. This percentage varies across ministries, of course, but generally these so-called ministries have a horrible reputation for keeping most of these funds for themselves—or even worse siphoning them off into the coffers of the individual personalities who are the face of these ministries. According to some reports, it is not uncommon that as little as ten percent of donated funds (or even less) actually reach the people in need. These needy children have been *used* in these massive fund-raising campaigns while receiving relatively little benefit. They have been exploited, just as the ancient Israelites bringing their sacrifices to the tabernacle were exploited by Hophni and Phinehas. These children are children of God’s heart, and so it is that it is not just they who have been exploited, but God Himself is being exploited in these schemes to raise money.

One of the most egregious forms of financial extortion that we have observed is the promise of 30, 60 and even 100-fold return to those who would give sacrificially to the ministry making such an appeal. These sacrificial donations are called “seed money,”⁸ a concept that is especially promoted by prominent leaders in what has been variously called the “prosperity gospel,” “word of faith,” or

⁸ A variant of the seed money scheme that we have heard of recently is “miracle money.” Followers of this particular ministry are instructed to be praying for “miracle money.” Then, whenever they unexpectedly receive money (e.g., a reimbursement in the mail from a previous purchase for which they had been overcharged), they are to give 50 percent of that “miracle money” to the ministry. They are told that this is the portal to receiving more “miracle money” in the future.

“health and wealth gospel.” The personalities behind this movement have become celebrities in their own right. They have become wealthy almost beyond measure, and are unabashed in making their justifications as to why they need multi-million dollar jet planes (one of these personalities has several of these aircraft), gold-plated bathroom fixtures, and even air-conditioned dog houses. All of this extravagance, of course, is bestowed upon these personalities by the sacrificial giving many struggling followers who forego the needs of their own families in many cases to support these multi-millionaires. When the thirty-, sixty-, and hundred-fold returns fail to materialize, these same scoundrels have the gall to blame any such failure on the lack of faith of the givers themselves! We have even heard these charlatans claim, in some instances, that the giving wasn’t sacrificial enough and he/she would attempt to bleed the poor souls even more. Such acts are nothing less than extortion, playing on the hopes and fears of a gullible following. This is, furthermore, taking of the forbidden fat that was so strongly forbidden by the Lord, and for which Hophni and Phinehas faced a final judgment. Please do not misunderstand us here. There is a place for sacrificial giving, and we are called to give in this way, even to the sacrificing of our own lives, as many have been called to do throughout history. We might certainly imagine any number of circumstances in which spiritual shepherds might make an appeal for such sacrificial giving. But if the effect of this giving is to primarily fatten the coffers of the ministry that is doing the fundraising or of any of its leadership, what is taking place is nothing less than extortion. There will be severe judgment on those playing this game.

Like Eli, the church and its local and national Christian leaders have failed to take a stand against these activities. In many cases, they have even welcomed these evil-doers to their platforms and pulpits, and have abetted them in the distribution of their costly books, CD’s, DVD’s and other trinkets. We are even now seeing the judgment of God on the organization that has called itself “the church.” Younger generations are increasingly choosing not to identify themselves with any denomination or even with any local assembly. Denominations are conducting study after study in an attempt to understand why they are losing membership and attendance. The fact of the matter is, *Ichabod*

has been written all over this institution. Those assemblies that have been successful in maintaining membership and attendance typically do so by becoming “seeker friendly,” in the way of offering casual services, coffee bars, feel-good sermons and emotionally appealing music. These make for a fine entertainment event, but the Spirit of God is not manifest in these places. Despite the fact that parishioners may go home feeling refreshed, it is merely a buoyancy of the soul. The life transforming word is not sounded here. *The glory has departed.*

Sexual Exploitation

Christian leaders today are not immune from the lust of the flesh, and we have seen the ministry of all too many leaders crumble because of both homosexual and heterosexual temptations. This temptation is exacerbated by the non-biblical ecclesiastical structure of the church today. Over the centuries, the church has incorporated an organizational model drawn directly from the secular “Philistine” world of which it is a part. This is a hierarchical model that makes a rigid distinction between clergy and laity, much like businesses distinguish between management and workers. Management is in a relative position of power over those who are “on the assembly line.” This distinction is found in practically every secular organization, including industry, colleges and universities (administration vs. faculty), non-profit organizations, and in politics. We have seen in the secular world how this power disparity, while perhaps necessary in these settings, has resulted in sexual harassment and intimidation of all degrees. As we began writing, a very prominent (former) governor in this nation was facing arrest and prosecution for taking advantage of women who were working under him. Wherever there is a disparity of power there is vulnerability to exploitation, and when this disparity of power is between people of different sexes, the situation is ripe for sexual exploitation.⁹

The potential for sexual exploitation and its devastating effect is magnified many times over in the context of the church. The pastor or priest is not only in a

⁹ Sexual exploitation can and does, of course, also take place between persons of the same sex, especially when the individual in the greater place of power has a homosexual preference.

position of relative power, but this position takes on an almost deified status. This person represents God Himself to many parishioners. The local pastor or priest is esteemed in a way and to an extent that is not found, say, between workers and foremen, or between faculty and academic deans. This has often had a mesmerizing and even seductive effect on parishioners who sit in awe of these leaders. They become very easy targets for pastors and priests to prey upon sexually. There has been much publicity surrounding the predatory behavior of Catholic priests toward young boys in their parishes. This problem is not restricted to Catholic priests, however. It is rampant within Protestant churches as well. This is a problem inherent with an ecclesiastical hierarchy that makes a rigid distinction between clergy and laity. We would contend that most of this problem of sexual exploitation in the church would go away if the church were truly modeled the way that Jesus intended it to be, and the way in which Paul extended it into the Gentile world. These fellowships consisted of *brothers and sisters* (not preachers and laymen). They had equal status insofar as there were no structured power differentials. Indeed, even the commonly understood class differentials were challenged by the early church. As Paul stated, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).*

There were certainly those who emerged as spiritual leaders in these groups, and they would certainly have been looked up to and admired by those in these fellowships. And certainly, this could leave them open to taking advantage of their spiritual position. This is a far cry, however, from the structured power differentials that are built into the church system today. The Old Testament tabernacle/temple system was not so different in this respect from the church system today. The priests of the tribe of Levi had a special, set-apart status. We cannot help but believe that over the centuries, these priests took on a venerated position. Hophni and Phinehas used this special position to satisfy their carnal lusts.

There is, however, an even deeper spiritual application of the sexual exploitation by these two as we consider the condition of the church today. Throughout scripture, and particularly in the Old Testament, there is a very close relationship

established between sexual sin and spiritual sin. We see, for example, in the third chapter of Jeremiah, the Lord accusing Israel of “playing the harlot” with foreign nations (see also the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel). This whoredom was so serious in Israel, that God issued the northern Kingdom of Israel a bill of divorcement. (Interestingly, the southern kingdom of Judah also played the harlot, but there is no record of divorce proceedings here...) It was not that the women of Israel were hiring themselves out for sexual services to foreign men. This certainly might have happened on occasion, but this was not what caused God to divorce Israel. It was, rather, that the nation of Israel had betrayed its allegiance to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and was now worshipping the gods of those nations around them. They had forsaken their love for, and allegiance to God for another lover.

We bluntly declare that the church system today, modeled as it is under a “Philistine” business paradigm that elevates one class of people over another, has resulted in many of God’s people playing the harlot in our day. Among denominational churches great emphasis is placed upon loyalty to denomination and the theological tradition that these denominations represent. I recall that when I was a faithful parishioner in a Presbyterian church, I would proudly declare that I was more Calvinist than was Calvin himself! I am sure that I was a stronger cheerleader for my tradition than many. The point that we are making, however, is that this sort of loyalty to denomination and tradition above Christ Himself is idolatry. I can also clearly remember forming a small group among my colleagues at work. My local church was moving in a direction of becoming “a church of small groups,” and this was also seen as an opportunity for outreach by opening up these small groups to outsiders as well. And so I identified several of my colleagues who I thought would be open to discussions of theology, current affairs from a Christian perspective, etc. We met on only a handful of occasions, but I so clearly remember how important it was for me to emphasize to my colleagues that this group was a ministry of First Presbyterian Church. This identification became more important to me than my identification with Christ. It was a bondage to me, and I’m sure to my colleagues as well. Little wonder why the group lasted only a few weeks!

The apostle Paul speaks to this sort of idolatry very directly:

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11-13).

Any individual, group, tradition or theological perspective which commands greater loyalty than the command to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves is nothing short of idolatry. When Israel participated in such idolatry, God called it harlotry. We would be so bold as to suggest that when pastors and other Christian leaders encourage such loyalty—to *their* church and its programs, or to *their* theological point of view, whether in their sermons or even in casual conversations with parishioners—they are exploiting the members of the body of Christ under their charge, often for their own ulterior purposes. They are promoting harlotry. Certainly many, probably most, of these leaders deeply believe the doctrines that they are teaching, and they believe in the goodness of the activities of their church and ministry. However, the ultimate purpose of many of them is to develop loyal parishioners who will contribute to the functioning of the organization which they oversee. Just as Hophni and his brother Phinehas took advantage of the women who were participating in the life of the tabernacle, so it is with these Christian leaders today who use their parishioners to promote their own ministries. Let us not confuse the advancing of the Kingdom of God with the promoting of individual ministries, personalities, or denominational or doctrinal loyalty. One is a matter of fidelity to the call of God to love God with all of our hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves; the other is a matter of “sexual exploitation” of gullible followers that results in them playing the part of the harlot.

There is yet one other seduction that seems especially pronounced in many contemporary churches. This is the seduction of politics. There has been a tendency in modern-day Christianity to look to politics as the solution to the

dilemma that we find ourselves in today. Involvement in the political process is most certainly a noble endeavor, and God calls many to become involved in very extensive ways, including running for political office. When we put our faith in political solutions rather than in Almighty God, however, we have been seduced by the lure of another god. We saw this taking place throughout much of the late twentieth century in what came to be called “liberation theology.” Liberation theology is nothing more than a Marxist strategy for redistribution of wealth with a theological veneer. At the end of the day, it is proposing a political solution to the problem of hunger, poverty and other inequities. Moreover, the utopian ideal that it envisions is really nothing more than the equitable distribution of goods and services. It understands the dilemma of mankind to be merely a social and political dilemma that can only be resolved through social and political means.

Conservatives have been equally seduced by the foreign god of politics. The so-called culture wars are nothing more than a call for a reinstatement of social values of a by-gone era, to be brought about by electing conservative political officials and enacting (in many cases) repressive laws. It is a political response to a spiritual dilemma. We can reinstate prayer in public school, once again make abortion illegal, make homosexuality and other varied sexual practices a crime, or enact a hundred other statutes in an effort to make our country a more “godly” nation, and we will not be successful in advancing the Kingdom of God one whit in our day. We won’t be successful because, knowingly or unknowingly, the church in our day has fallen prostrate at the feet of a foreign god—the god of politics with its many heads of social, economic, and scientific governance. Indeed, the complicity of much of the mainstream institutional church in advancing the globalist agenda of political elites is dumbfounding, as they have become handmaidens in this evil scheme. Those church systems opposing this agenda (typically more conservative bodies) predictably fall into the same trap of relying on political means to achieve their own political goals in opposition to this globalist agenda.

Regardless of the political position taken, organized religion and its leadership have been handmaidens in the seduction of the god of politics. Local church bodies and their leadership have seduced and exploited God’s people through

political sermonizing, presenting one particular political view as “Christian;” through presenting socio-political involvement as “kingdom building;” and in some cases even making their facilities and resources available for political agendas. Those religious organizations which engage in these tactics have the names of Hophni and Phinehas written all over them.

Where is the Ark of the Presence of God?

The truth of the matter is that the sins of Hophni and Phinehas, and the dereliction of duty by Eli have been taking place throughout most of the history of Christianity. The church had already been grossly compromised by early in the fourth century when Constantine officially recognized Christianity as a legitimate religion among the many religions in the Roman Empire at that time. This marriage resulted in a syncretism that is still evident today—in our traditions of Christmas and Easter, for example. Already, almost in its infancy, the church was seduced by foreign gods and playing the part of the harlot. Then in 1095, Pope Urban II formalized the selling of indulgences, ostensibly as a mechanism for reducing one’s time in purgatory. In reality, however, it was a slick, seductive means for the church to prosper financially. The church was now well on its way down a path of extortion. Luther’s reforms corrected many of the egregious practices of the Roman church, but it soon exerted its own forms of extortion and “sexual” seduction. The obligatory *tithe* was heavily imposed, and in some traditions, the “renting” of pews became a standard practice as a way of raising money for the massive church organizations that were evolving. It wasn’t long before Luther’s reform movement became fractured as loyalty was now being redirected to Zwingli, Calvin, Menno Simons, John Wesley and others. Indeed, Luther himself was the inspiration for one of these factions. The ardent devotion of the ecclesia of God was eroding and was being replaced with a devotion to a sectarian spirit. Indeed, the sins of the sons of Eli that were so critical in the eventual loss of the Ark of the Covenant into the hands of the Philistines have been manifest throughout most of the history of Christianity. The expression of these sins today, as we have described above (and in many other ways as well) is a process that has been taking place for nearly 2000 years.

The truth is, we contend, that the Ark of the Covenant has long been in the hands of the “Philistines.” The presence of God has already departed the tabernacle. There is little evidence of His living presence throughout most of official Christendom today. We emphatically declare, however, that the Davidic Spirit of Christ is being raised up in our day. God has always had His faithful remnant in preparation and hiding, and we will see the ark returned to its rightful owners; a tabernacle, hidden within, through which God will manifest His glory as it pierces the darkness of apostasy and confusion to bring peace and clarity, love and Joy...the Kingdom of God on earth!

CHAPTER THREE: The Ark Captured

The story of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines is one of the saddest tales in the biblical history of the nation of Israel. Israel had gone out to battle against the Philistines. We know that the Philistines had a mighty army, which is why the Lord led the Israelites on a wandering route through the wilderness in the first place. To go directly from Egypt to Canaan, they would have had to conquer the Philistines, and they were not prepared to do so at that time. In the meantime, Israel's army had grown in strength considerably, as had its reputation for being a mighty war machine. Nevertheless, the biblical account states that Israel was routed in this battle, losing some 4,000 men (1 Samuel 4:2).

We must remember the context for this attempted conquest of the Philistines. Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli the high priest, were doing evil in the sight of the Lord. While Eli reprimanded his sons for their wrong doing, he did not curtail their evil deeds. Indeed, these young men totally defied their father's pleas to stop what they were doing. The situation was so bad that God gave to Eli a prophetic warning, through young Samuel, that He would bring judgment on the house of Eli. The Lord had earlier spoken to Eli through a "man of God" the things that He would do among which was, as a sign of His judgment against Eli, that both of his sons would die in a single day. The situation in the house of Eli, and indeed in the nation of Israel, was dire indeed. So it should have been with much trepidation that the army of Israel would now go against the Philistines.

Israel's loss in this battle was devastating, and it struck fear in the heart of the people. The elders were perplexed, not understanding why the Lord allowed this to take place. Then, they no doubt remembered an earlier battle in which the Ark of the Covenant preceded them in battle. We are referring, of course, to the battle of Jericho. Jericho was routed, practically without a single shot fired, so to speak. The elders no doubt reasoned, "Well, if God did it then, why not now?" And so emissaries were sent to Shiloh, to retrieve the Ark of the Covenant for purposes of taking it into battle against the Philistines. They almost certainly felt

confident that they couldn't help but be victorious as they were taking the very presence of the Lord before them.

There are a couple of red warning flags, however, as we read this account. In the first place, the elders failed to consult with the Lord before they engaged in this bold mission. They thought that they knew based on past experience that the Lord would go before them in battle. There are repeated instances in the life of Israel, in which they suffer defeat in one fashion or another because they fail to take the time to get the mind of the Lord. One of the more recent defeats was the first time that the Israelites went up against Ai. The reader may recall that the scouts came back with a report that the army of Ai was extremely small, and that they could be taken with but a small number of soldiers. Based on this report, Joshua assembled 3,000 men, and to his shock and dismay, the army of Israel was soundly defeated. Joshua failed to consult with the Lord, but if he had, he would have learned that there was sin in the camp—that of Achan—that needed to be dealt with before going into battle. Israel was now in a very similar circumstance. Only this time, they were going against the mighty army of the Philistines.

The other red flag in this account is that Hophni and Phinehas accompanied the Ark into battle (1 Samuel 4:4). Now, it is possible, even likely, that neither the elders nor the officers of the army knew of the Lord's wrath against the house of Eli, nor of the prophetic word of the Lord against this house. Had they consulted the Lord, God would surely have been faithful to warn them to first deal with the sin of these two rascals. Because they did not get the mind of the Lord, not only did they go into battle with sin in the camp, the very perpetrators of this sin accompanied them with the Ark! This was a set up for the fulfillment of the dire prophecy that God had given to Eli earlier.

And so round two of the battle against the Philistines took place, this time with the Ark of the Covenant going before them. Israel was very confident that they could win this battle because the Ark was, for them, almost a magic potion. They had seen the Lord go before in battle previously, and it seemed that the army of Israel was invincible on these occasions. We read also that the Philistines were in great fear and trepidation when they saw the ark going before the army because

they had heard of the mighty exploits of the Israelite army when God went before. *“Woe unto us!”* they said. *“Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness”* (1 Samuel 4:8). Rather than retreat, however, the Philistines galvanized their forces and dug in their heels for battle. We are told that the Philistines roundly defeated the Israelite army, this time killing about 30,000 soldiers (1 Samuel 4:10). What a devastating and totally unexpected loss for Israel. In addition to the 30,000 foot soldiers who lost their lives, Hophni and Phinehas both died at the hands of the Philistines. Even more significantly, the Ark of the Covenant, the representation of the very presence of God, was captured by the Philistines. We will see that the possession of the Ark by the Philistines was nothing but a curse for them and they would eventually make haste in returning it to its rightful owners. In the meantime, the capture of the Ark of the Covenant was devastating to the Israelites. The very presence of God was taken from them, a fact that was recognized by the wife of Phinehas when she gave birth to a son after Phinehas’ death and after it was reported to Eli that the Ark had been taken. She named her son ***Ichabod***, saying *“The glory is departed from Israel”* (1 Samuel 4:21)¹⁰

The Glory Has Indeed Departed

We have, in the last chapter, highlighted the parallels between the fallen state of the priesthood of Eli and his sons, and the church systems of today throughout much of the world. These parallels are further manifest with the events surrounding the capture of the Ark of the Covenant. In our observation, most of the attempts to “conquer the enemy” in our land today are rooted in the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Those leading the charge, at best, give only lip service to consulting the Spirit of the Lord before they proceed with whatever plans that they may have. This is, in part, because the church today does not really know the nature of the land that they are to conquer, nor are they aware of the nature of the enemy that occupies that land.

¹⁰ A most direct translation of the Hebrew word *Ichabod* would probably be “inglorious,” “without glory,” or “without substance.” The name given the child captures well the dire situation that Israel now found itself in.

Some traditions believe that the purpose of the church today is to get as many people “saved”¹¹ as possible before Jesus returns and the vast majority who have not been reached with the gospel will be doomed to burn forever in hell. The enemy that needs to be conquered, in the minds of those who adhere to this understanding, is the lust of the flesh and other temptations that this world has to offer which would lure people away from responding to an invitation to accept Christ. The real enemy mastermind behind this, in this view, is an all-powerful adversary who is apparently even more powerful than God because that old devil will succeed in seducing ninety-plus percent of the people in the world straight to an eternal hell, leaving God with a paltry ten percent.

Other traditions believe that the promised land of our inheritance consists of social and economic justice, where poverty will be eliminated through some sort of radical redistribution of wealth throughout the world. This is the utopian ideal of liberation theology which, as we have stated earlier, gets most of its inspiration from the writings of Karl Marx and his followers. Participating in this ideal, in varied expressions, is understood as the purpose of the church in many of the more “liberal” expressions of Christianity.

There are, of course, many variations and expressions that have been put forth by denominations and theological traditions as to the purpose of the church. The point that we would make here is that as these understandings have been codified into doctrines, confessions of faith, and theological traditions they take on a life of their own, apart from the life of the Spirit. These centuries-old traditions then falsely dictate the nature of our destiny; they redefine the nature of the enemy; and they determine the impotent battle plan to defeat this perceived enemy. There is no need to consult the Spirit for what HIS plans and purposes are in any given situation. How many social outreach programs have been implemented simply in response to pressure from a denominational hierarchy, using pre-determined strategies developed by bureaucrats in some office at headquarters? How many evangelistic efforts have followed “tried and true” curricula developed by parachurch organizations for “leading someone to

¹¹ That is to elicit, through emotional manipulation, some version of a “sinner’s prayer” that will somehow make them feel they are winning souls.

Christ,” involving the passing out of tracts among other time-worn methods? How many congregations have simply gotten on board with social and economic justice efforts such as Habitat for Humanity or competing in food drives for local food banks simply because this is a trendy thing to do in a community and it raises the visibility of that local congregation? The answer, we fear, is that nearly ALL of these efforts have gone forth without seriously consulting God Himself as to whether this is what he would have this individual or group to be involved in.¹² It is *assumed* that this is what we should be doing because this is what good Christians of this particular denominational or theological stripe *should* be doing. But there is no life in it. Those engaged in these activities bustle about at a frenetic pace doing what they *think* God is calling them to do and before you know it they have burned themselves out. At the end of the day, the result is a bunch of religious organizations who are going about doing good works, accomplishing what just about any secular organization could do (and often do much more effectively than the churches). The Promised Land is not conquered, nor is it possessed or occupied. This is because the church as it is represented in the world today does not even know what that land of promise really is, nor has it really taken the time to seek after the Lord, to listen to the Spirit of God for what HE is doing.

This important act of seeking after the Lord and listening for the direction of the Spirit of God is rarely to be observed among organizational church leaders today. This undertaking has been taken on by a small remnant of faithful followers of Christ who have left family, careers, communities, reputations and, for many of

¹² This is not to say that many of these efforts were not originally birthed by the moving of the Holy Spirit on an individual or group. Just as many denominations today were birthed out of a fresh move of the Spirit, so too many of these parachurch organizations were undoubtedly motivated out of obedience to the Spirit. Habitat for Humanity, for example, was founded by an extremely successful businessman who had accumulated an estate worth millions of dollars. His marriage was in trouble, and the Lord spoke to him to divest himself of everything he owned and give it to worthy causes. He turned over all of his money to a trusted friend and told him to give it all away. Having done this, the Lord gave him a vision of building houses for the poor. Habitat for Humanity was thus born out of obedience to the Holy Spirit. Our point here, however, is that churches throughout the country simply get on the band wagon of this and other causes which are persuasively presented to them, without consulting the Lord as to whether or not they should be part of these. I watched this happen while I was the point person to solicit church involvement for one local Habitat for Humanity chapter. They may be leading the procession with the Ark of the Covenant by using spiritual language to validate their involvement, but if they have not consulted the Lord, He is not in that effort any more than He was going before the Israelites against the Philistines that fateful day.

them, the organized church itself to pursue the heart of God with abandon. They have decapitated the “false head” within themselves to be attached to their true Head, and to be directed by His voice alone.

One result of the impotence of the church to deal with the evils in the world today has been the rise of some very well-intentioned, but self-appointed “spiritual leaders” contending that what we have been missing is a moral compass. We must, they argue, bring God back into the market place, the schools, and into our political and legal endeavors. So they, too, have gone back to Shiloh to fetch the Ark of the Covenant and parade it before the people. Their intent is to figuratively take the Ark of the Covenant into battle and in so doing, turn this country back to God. This effort took to the national stage in the 1980’s in what became known as the Moral Majority.

The Moral Majority has its roots all the way back into the 1960’s, though it was not formally founded until 1979 under the leadership of Reverend Jerry Falwell. Falwell and his cohorts were responding to major social change that was taking place in society, and in their view, massive social upheaval. Those who have lived through the 1960’s and 1970’s will remember the civil rights movement; the Vietnam War and the protests surrounding that war; Woodstock and the summer of free love; the rise of recreational drug use among America’s middle class; and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers, John and Robert. These events, taken together, represented to people like Jerry Falwell a complete takeover of this country by Philistine forces intent on destroying the values that were believed to be sacred in American society. These forces required the response of an army, with God at the helm, if they were to be defeated.

There were two events, however, which seemed to galvanize the Moral Majority and subsequent “culture wars” initiatives over the long term. The first of these was the Supreme Court decision *Abington School District vs. Schempp* in 1963. This was a case originally filed against the Baltimore school district by renowned atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hare. She claimed that her son Bill was bullied and discriminated against because he refused to participate in public prayers held at the school. Her case was later joined by Edward Schempp, a Pennsylvania

resident who objected to his children being forced to participate in daily Bible studies at school. The Supreme Court combined both cases, and in 1963 found these public acts of religious expression unconstitutional, and essentially banned prayer and Bible reading from public schools. This was a slap in the face of most conservative Christians, and was seen by them as an attempt to remove God altogether from civil life in America.

The other event was another Supreme Court decision, *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. The case involved a young Texas woman who found herself pregnant. Texas law at the time allowed for abortion only “on medical advice for the purpose of saving the life of the mother.” The young woman, dubbed Jane Roe,¹³ sued Henry Wade, the Attorney General of Texas, for the right to an abortion. Three years later, in 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States heard that case and ruled the Texas law unconstitutional, effectively making illegal the banning of first trimester abortions nationwide. The successful arguments for the case were based on grounds of personal liberty and right to privacy guaranteed in the First, Fourth, Fourteenth and other amendments to the United States Constitution. Opponents were horrified, as this decision represented to them a total disregard for the sanctity of life, and particularly the protection of the most vulnerable in our society, unborn children. Conservative Protestants and Catholics were united in their opposition to this landmark case, and have been fighting it ever since both in the courts and in the court of public opinion. This decision gave fuel to the likes of Jerry Falwell, James Dobson and other culture warriors, both Catholic and Protestant, in their efforts to make this country a “godly nation” once again.¹⁴

What these and other culture warriors like them have done is nothing less than to make a public display of religiosity, using God as a banner under which to wage and win the battle for the hearts, minds and culture of American society. These leaders of the culture wars are no other than the “priesthood” of our day

¹³ Jane Roe’s identity was later revealed as Norma McCorvey. Ironically, Norma would later become a Christian and took part in the anti-abortion movement.

¹⁴ These culture warriors were indeed successful in their efforts to overturn *Roe vs. Wade* with the Supreme Court decision in June, 2022, *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. There was much celebration among those who had been fighting this culture war. This reaction by many conservative Christians is just another example of the misplaced belief that the Kingdom of God can somehow be ushered in through political and/or legal means.

parading the Ark of the Covenant before the mighty Philistine army in an effort to intimidate and eliminate this foe by electing “Christian” legislators and office holders at local, state and national levels; and by enacting laws that reflect their own “Christian” values, which are really values derived from the old (Mosaic) order that the writer to the Hebrews said has passed away (Hebrews 8:13). These efforts are nothing more than a feast at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They fail to draw from the Tree of Life!

Any number of the leaders at the forefront of these efforts have been guilty of the same sorts of atrocities as were Hophni and Phinehas, and have justified their wrongdoing as Eli’s sons almost certainly did. We are not in any way attempting to disparage the values that have given rise to these movements. They are, on the whole, good and godly values. There is nothing more sacred than a human life, except possibly the voluntary giving up of that life in obedience to God. And the life of a totally vulnerable unborn child is especially precious to God. Similarly, the value of prayer in the life of an individual, family, community or nation cannot be overstated.

We would ask, however, “How successful have these efforts been at fighting the culture wars?” Israel of old lost that war. Likewise today, while many churches and parachurch organizations continue to flail their arms and raise their religious voices in protest about the degradation of our society, that war has been lost, despite apparent victories along the way. Even these victories have failed to somehow make America into what these culture warriors would deem a “Christian” nation.

We want to make it clear that the ultimate battle for righteousness has not been lost; God is in control over all things, and what He has purposed WILL come to pass! However, that war for a dominant “Christian” culture—a Christian Moral Majority, if you will—as has been envisioned by religious elites and their followers, has indeed been lost.

Some Indicators of the Lost War

We will, in this brief section, be looking at some statistical indicators that are often used to measure the level of religiosity, and some would say spirituality, of a society¹⁵. One indicator that is frequently used as a measure of spiritual strength in a society is church membership. The Gallup poll first began measuring United States church membership in 1937, at which time 73 percent of their randomly sampled respondents indicated that they belonged to a church or synagogue. That number remained at about 70 percent throughout most of the twentieth century, at which time it began a fairly steep decline. In 2020, a mere 47 percent of those surveyed reported membership in a church, synagogue or mosque. While some may argue that the 2020 figure may be due to Covid, the figure for 2018 is not much better, with 50 percent affirming membership in a religious organization (Jones, 2021). Weekly church attendance reflects an even more dismal picture, declining from 45 percent in 1993 to a mere 29 percent in 2020 (Anonymous (25 Church Statistics), 2021). Again, this drop cannot be attributed to the so-called pandemic that we have been experiencing, as the weekly attendance figure was only 27 percent in 2017. On the contrary, the percentage of those surveyed reporting that they did not identify with *any* religion grew from eight percent in the late 1990's to 21 percent in 2020 (Frishberg, 2021). Clearly, at least in the United States, all of the valiant efforts of the Moral Majority and groups like them did not achieve the desired effect of making Americans more religious or spiritual, at least as measured by church attendance or membership.

Divorce rates seem to present, on the surface, a somewhat more optimistic picture. According to the United States Bureau of the Census, while there was a steady—at times even steep—increase in the divorce rate from the late nineteenth century until about 1970 (Plateris, 1973), this rate has leveled off and even declined since 1970 (Anderson and Sherer, 2020). There are a number of factors accounting for this more recent trend. First, and possibly most

¹⁵ We want to make it clear here that we are not espousing any of the measures that we are discussing in this section as an authentic indicator of spirituality. These are the measures that are frequently used by modern day church leaders, however, to ascertain the spiritual “temperature” of a society.

significantly, fewer people are choosing to get married, and those who do are marrying at a later age. Marrying later typically carries the benefit of greater maturity at the time of marriage and also a greater likelihood of having established one's career and lifestyle prior to marriage. Generally, one would expect more marital stability under such conditions. While fewer people might be getting married,¹⁶ this does not mean that these individuals are remaining celibate. According to the Census Bureau, in 1970, 39.2 percent of adults aged 18-24 were living with a spouse, while a mere 0.1 percent were cohabiting, unmarried and living with a partner. By 2018, these figures had changed dramatically: Only 7.3 percent of individuals in this age category were living with a spouse, while 9.4 percent were cohabiting rather than marrying. Astoundingly, more young adults are now cohabiting than marrying! It is also worth pointing out that many of those in cohabitation arrangements are living with gay or lesbian partners. While we are not aware of any reliable statistics showing the percentage of gay Americans who are cohabiting, annual Gallup polls reveal an ever increasing percentage of Americans who identify as gay or lesbian. It is therefore reasonable to assume that many gay and lesbian individuals are in cohabiting or (since its legalization in 2015) marital relationships. Given these statistics, we might conclude that while the overall divorce rate is decreasing since the 1970's, a smaller percentage of people are getting married in the first place, and those who do marry more likely bring into the marriage more conservative values concerning marriage and divorce. In the meantime, more and more Americans are opting for alternative sexual lifestyles—lifestyles which hardly reflect the ideals toward which the culture warriors have been striving in their battle to make this nation more “Christian.”

One final statistic that might be used as an indicator of the effectiveness of the cultural battle that churches and religious leaders have been engaging in is the rate of suicide in society. The data are not encouraging. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of suicide in 1999 was 10.9 per 100,000 population; that rate increased to 13.9 in 2019. This represents an increase of over 32

¹⁶ As measured by the marriage rate of the number of marriages per 1,000 population. (Sometimes measured as the number of marriages per 1,000 female population.)

percent in these 20 years (Hedegaard et al, 2021). Deteriorating political, economic and spiritual conditions over the past few years have led to even greater levels of despair. The rate of suicide in this country reached 16.4 per 100,000 population in 2021, with some states reporting nearly 30 suicides per 100,000 (World Population Review, 2021).

These are but three indicators of the failure of the efforts to defeat the Philistines of our day by parading the Ark of the Covenant in its various expressions before the perceived enemies of Christ in government, schools and in the public square generally. These efforts have failed by just about any measure that we might want to use. We now live in a culture which unabashedly promotes gay, lesbian and transgender lifestyles; which has eroded the authority of parents over their own children; which restricts religious gatherings, but which allows unhindered access to strip clubs; in short, a culture which calls good evil, and evil good. God has not honored the trumpeting of His name in the cause of political and cultural ends today any more than He honored the attempt by the Israelites to win the battle against the Philistines by parading the Ark of the Covenant at the front of the battle line. These leaders of the culture wars and their minions have used God as a pretext to attempt to bring about social, cultural, economic and political change that reflects a particular understanding of that which is “good” and opposing the “evil” (at least in their minds) of a more liberal political and social agenda. The problem is, they have been drawing from the same tree as the supposed evildoers against whom they are fighting—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are merely drawing from what they see as the “good” side of that tree. They have, in large part, failed to go before the Lord Himself, to draw from the Tree of Life, and proceed only out of that place. All of their efforts have been little more than a religious charade, a charade that has failed to produce the desired victory. The church has missed what the Ark represents today and it goes on attempting to use the “Ark” (doing things under the banner of “righteousness”, which is only righteousness as defined by the law) thinking that God is in it. He is not. It is Ihabod.

The Philistines have Stolen the Ark!

When the Philistine army defeated Israel for the second time, the loss was much greater than the first time. Whereas Israel lost 3,000 men when they went up against the Philistines initially, their scheme to win in battle by using the Ark of the Covenant—representing to them the very presence of God—as some sort of talisman that would guarantee their victory, backfired horribly. They truly believed that they could not lose against the Philistines with the Ark of God's Presence leading the way. But they were attempting to use and exploit the Lord their God despite the sin and corruption in the priesthood. The Ark became nothing but a sham and a charade. They lost, not 3,000 soldiers this time, but 30,000! Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's corrupt sons and representatives of the priesthood, were also slaughtered in that massacre. Most significant of all, the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines. It became very evident that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was *not* going before Israel in this epic battle. So evident was it that Phinehas' wife, who delivered a child at this time, named her son *Ichabod*, for she recognized and gave testimony to the fact that the glory of God had departed from their midst.

We must recognize, however, that God's refusal to go before the Israelites in this battle did not mean that His blessings were on the Philistines. The scriptural account tells us that the Philistines placed the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Dagon in Ashdod. They set it next to a statue of Dagon. Understand that the Philistines were a polytheistic culture, and they probably believed that placing another "god" next to Dagon would somehow bring them greater success in battle as well as agriculturally and every other way. They, too, were attempting to exploit the Ark of God's presence for their own selfish ends. The account in 1 Samuel indicates that the next morning the men awoke to find that Dagon had inexplicably fallen from his perch. They set him back up only to have found him fallen again the next day, this time minus his head and hands. This caused great fear among the Philistines as they were witnessing the power and the wrath of God directed against their chief god. We must remember that it was not all that many years before that the Nazirite judge Samson literally brought down the temple of Dagon in Gaza killing thousands of Philistines, many of them lords and

other important leaders in that society. This took place after the Philistines thought that they had effectively rendered Samson impotent by cutting his hair. This incident was no doubt in their minds when they came into the temple at Ashdod and found Dagon fallen to the floor and effectively decapitated. Upon this discovery, the Philistines found it to be in their interest to return the Ark of the Covenant to Israel.

Before going there, however, it would behoove us to consider briefly the manner in which the Philistine army of our day has captured the “Ark” that has been so ineffectively paraded before them by church and parachurch leaders who have sought to organize under various organizational banners so as to win the culture war on its various fronts.

How Has the Ark Been Captured Today?

Worse than losing the so-called culture wars, these very high-profile and even pretentious efforts involving religio-political rallies, media blitzes and other displays of spiritual pomp have resulted in that very Ark being captured. This section examines two important contemporary “Philistine armies” that have captured the Ark of God’s Presence and in significant ways wrested it from the church, as it has become apostate over the many hundreds of years of its existence.

The New Age Movement

We began to see this capture take place in the 1960’s with the rise of Eastern religion in the West, and what came to be known as the “New Age Movement.” The New Age Movement borrowed heavily from Eastern religion as even most casual observers will attest. What is not always so obvious, however, is how this movement has borrowed from a Christian worldview. New Agers, for example, have a very “holistic” understanding of divinity which encompasses all of creation, including individual human beings. There is an important kernel of truth in this understanding, of which Christians by and large have abandoned and have lost possession, creating a need for another religion to recapture it. That truth is that, indeed, the Spirit of God resides in each of us, and as we yield to that Spirit we

speak and act with the authority of God Himself. Such is the divinity incarnate in those of us who have received the Spirit of God through the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord—a truth to which Jesus Himself attests (John 10:34). The church today, in its near total neglect of this reality, has allowed this truth to be totally captured and misrepresented by New Age and Eastern philosophies. Western Christianity has, instead, been preoccupied with the sin nature that came with the fall—the power of which has been broken once and for all with the death and resurrection of Christ. Modern Christianity, however, continues to live under the bondage of a deep sin consciousness which keeps it shackled to the law and the futile efforts of that sin-conscious self to keep it. And we fail every time. Meanwhile, New Agers, who have captured, in part, the precious truth of our divinity, live free without a consciousness of sin—at least insofar as they are not condemned by the law—as God has intended for us all to live. Again, we would emphasize that New Age religion has perverted this wonderful truth. They have no appreciation or recognition of the price that was paid for that freedom. Nor do they acknowledge Christ as the Head of this body that He is creating through the purging and refining processes that constitute the taking up of our own crosses. The point that we are making, however, is that the church today has allowed this wonderful and life-giving truth of *Christ in us, the hope of glory* to be captured and taken over by Philistine forces in our culture today.

The church's abandonment of this important truth has been manifested in one of the most "hellish" doctrines that has been promulgated throughout just about all of Christendom. We are referring to the doctrine of hell itself. The doctrine of hell as most believe it today did not make its way into the church for the first 300-400 years of its existence. Writings of the early church fathers, with the exception of one or two, clearly embraced the idea of the ultimate reconciliation of all things and all men to Jesus Christ. It was not until after Christianity became officially recognized as a religion in the Roman Empire under the rulership of Constantine that we see this doctrine creeping into the church. Perhaps the most ardent proponent of this doctrine was Augustine, writing in the fourth century. Ironically, Augustine was not even a student of the Greek language, resulting in great mistranslation and misconception of the biblical understanding of the

purpose of God's refining fires. He would later develop the concept of purgatory to attempt to accommodate those scriptures which would suggest an ultimate universal salvation. The truth is that Augustine and other writers around this time who advocated for the concept of an eternal hell borrowed heavily from pagan traditions. It was a very effective doctrine in keeping the laity compliant to the authoritarian monolith that the Roman church had already become. This doctrine has become so firmly entrenched among both Catholics and Protestants that the multitude of scriptures that firmly establish the salvation of *all* mankind are either ignored or explained away. Instead, the small handful of scriptures that have reference to hell are *misinterpreted* to fortify an age-old tradition with roots in pagan religion.¹⁷

And so the church replaced the precious gospel of the reconciliation of all things to Christ with a doctrine of hell that made God out to be a cruel and capricious executioner who is willing to send 90 percent (or more) of His creation to an eternal torment. Such a doctrine simply does not square with the lip service that is given in Christian circles to a *loving* God, a God who "*so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son*" for the redemption of that world. Such a contradiction leaves a hungry and hurting world still starving and stinging. The message of the church becomes nothing more than an empty echo, a clanging symbol with little substance, void of love. Millions of young people (and older people) then become easy prey for a New Age understanding of the inherent goodness and divinity of all people.

Another way in which the New Age Movement has captured the hearts of so many people is in its recognition of the spirit world, a reality that was established by Jesus and was fully operational among those of His ecclesia during most of the first century. The church today has, in large part, rejected that reality, at least in practice, creating a spiritual vacuum waiting to be filled by an "invading army." Once again, the New Age and other movements such as the growing popularity of

¹⁷ These passages are misinterpreted in large part because of mistranslations in the King James and other translations of the Bible which render the Greek word *aonian* and its variations as "eternal" or "everlasting," rather than "age-lasting" which is the correct Greek meaning. When understood in context, the purpose of such "age lasting" punishment is for ultimate redemption. The earliest church fathers understood this.

Wiccan practices have distorted this reality through their methods of channeling, astral-projection, the use of questionable “spirit guides,” etc. Such distortions, however, do not negate the reality of the spirit world, a reality that is much more “real” than the material world that we can apprehend with our five senses. Over the centuries, the Christian church largely abandoned any recognition of this world, and certainly ceased to operate in it.¹⁸ Little wonder that the New Age Movement swooped in to fill this vacuum that had been left by the church. This is, thankfully, a reality that is being recognized by various groups across the Christian landscape today. Recognition of the realm of the Spirit was dominant in the Pentecostal revival that took place around the turn of the twentieth century, and later extended into new dimensions with what came to be known as the “Latter Rain” outpouring. Ironically, both of these movements were rejected by the larger church body, and Latter Rain was explicitly rejected by the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal denominations! Those who enter and possess the Kingdom today continue to be rejected by mainstream Christians. But praise the Lord, despite the enemy’s “capture” (albeit temporary and in appearance only) of this expression of the Ark of God’s presence, His remnant is recapturing the wonderful reality of the Spirit within as they learn to take the Kingdom by force with violent passion and unconventional expressions of love and worship for their King.

One World Government and the New World Order

We are witnessing today the (attempted) rise of a one world government, with totally centralized control over the economy, politics, religion, and ultimately over virtually every facet of social and personal life. The use of the term “new world order” first came to public prominence in a 1991 address to congress by then President George H.W. Bush:

Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a *new world order*. In the words of Winston Churchill, a "world order" in which "the principles of justice

¹⁸ There are important exceptions, of course. Mystics such as Madame Jeanne Guyon, St. Theresa of Avila, Joseph Fenelon and others had powerful experiences in the world of Spirit, and attempted to articulate it through their writings. They were largely persecuted by the church for it.

and fair play ... protect the weak against the strong ..." A world where the United Nations, freed from cold war stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations (Bush, 1991; emphasis mine).

This statement sounded innocuous, even noble at the time that our then president uttered these words. Little did most of us know, however, that plans were being laid for decades—even centuries—for such a centralized government. This would be a monolith that would entail a convergence of economies, religions, and political and justice infrastructures under a centralized controlling regime. Most of us were not able to imagine then what such a global government might look like, though we did see the potential ruthlessness of such a regime carried out on a national scale in the former Soviet Union and also in China. We now, however, are having a glimpse into the horrific scenarios that would likely emerge from such a global regime. We have witnessed the reality of widespread lockdowns due to a pandemic which many believe was contrived for the express purpose of forcing compliance on global populations. We have watched the horrors of forced vaccinations and arrests of those who refuse to comply, and the herding of people into what can only be described as internment camps in countries such as Australia where we could never have imagined such atrocities taking place. We could go on and on about the disregard for the health of citizens, the almost total curtailment of freedom of expression in many countries and the injustices perpetrated against people who do not comply with various mandates.

Our purpose here is to point out how this effort represents an attempt to capture and distort the ultimate purposes of God which He has put in the heart of those who are pursuing Him in Spirit and Truth. God will, indeed, establish His One World Government throughout the face of this earth, indeed throughout the cosmos. He has proclaimed that *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to His Lordship* (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Phillipians 2:10). He has, moreover, declared

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

Might we suggest that most of Christendom has missed the import of this powerful message? The church does indeed speak of Christ as the “coming King,” referring to a millennial age that, for many, will take place in the near or distant future after some physical manifestation of the return of a singular, though glorified Jesus breaking through the physical atmosphere. Only then, in that future time will God establish some otherworldly divine order.

We have lost the consciousness of who we are down through the millennia as the church has told us that we are nothing but sinners saved by grace. We have failed to understand that *we* (that remnant who have been called out and remain spotless) are the shoulders upon which His government shall rest. We are His body (shoulders and all) which is taking direction from our Head, Jesus Christ. It is through *us*, His called out ones, that His Kingdom—if you will, His One World Government, His New World Order—will be established as we move and have our being centered in Christ Himself. As He is King of kings, we are the kings of which He is King over, who with Christ at the helm will overcome the beast (Revelation 17:14). The church as we know it today has failed to understand the nature of God’s Kingdom, and of our role in the advancement of that Kingdom. The apostate church has, instead, carried the Ark of the Covenant to the front lines of battle through the carnal efforts of the Moral Majority and other typically conservative religio-political groups; but the presence of God has not been in those efforts—just as it was not with Israel when it took on the Philistines. Failing to inquire of the Lord as to what *His* agenda was; failing to submit to the purging and refining of the cross; and because of this, failing to walk in the power and authority of God—these efforts of the culture warriors were doomed to failure. Worse than that, the very plan of God for the establishment of His Kingdom throughout the world, was counterfeited by enemy forces and they are now pursuing *their* version of such a government with a vengeance. In the meantime, we sit back, bemoan the inevitable trajectory of this evil world and confess the

false reality that the leaders of this so-called “New World Order” would have us believe and pay homage to. The so-called Christian world has, on this front as well, allowed the Philistines to capture the Ark of God’s Truth.

God’s New World Order. There is, however, a remnant who sees clearly that God is establishing *His* New World Order even now. This is not a government as we would envision through natural eyes. This government, rather, is one that is exercised out of love, His pure love for all of His creation. It is, even now, being established in the hearts of those whom He has called out as He is taking them through trials, tribulations, strippings and purgings, all designed to conform us into His very image. This is a remnant who is coming to understand who they really are in Christ. They understand that they are not mere “sinners saved by grace,” but are being made to carry His very divine likeness in their human vessels just as Christ carried the Father’s likeness. They comprise the body of Christ and conform to the dictates of the Head, Jesus, of whom they are a part—not to the dictates of some self-appointed global governing body. As truly the body of Christ, they understand that they are the “shoulders” upon which His government shall rest.

These who are called out in this hour also understand that the power of life and death is in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). They know and understand that the world itself was brought into existence by the spoken word. We are that remnant who are now the instruments through which that Word, which is Jesus Christ, is being spoken. We are establishing that government which has been promised to us with every faithful word that we speak. We may not *see* that which we speak, but we apprehend that reality by faith and so we give utterance to it. We, like Abraham, are learning to “*call those things which be not as though they were*” (Romans 4:17). We are indeed learning that as we become ever more conformed to the image of Christ, through all of the dealings that He is taking us through, we are being equipped to rule and to reign with Him—NOW, in this world, as His Kingdom is advancing through us and as we execute His judgment.

Praise God, He is revealing Himself afresh in this hour. He is, first, revealing Himself *in* His saints, *to* His saints. That is to say, those whom God has called out

are being made aware of whom they truly are in Him as He is in us. As we become ever more conformed to Him, living in the divine union with Christ and one another, His likeness will be made increasingly manifest to the world around us. His love will penetrate the hardest hearts. Oh yes, the return of Christ is, even now, being realized!

CHAPTER FOUR: The Return of the Ark

What a jubilant day for the enemies of God’s people! Not only did they rout the Israelites in a most humiliating way, but they captured the most sacred and treasured object in all of Israel—the Ark of the Covenant. What celebration there must have been in the pubs and in the temples alike all across the land of the Philistines. Almost as to rub it into the faces of the Israelites, the Philistines took the Ark to Ashdod and placed it right next to the statue of Dagon in the temple of their false god. How humiliating for the people of Israel!

A Short Philistine Possession

The celebration did not last long. The very next day when the citizens of Ashdod arose and went into the temple, they discovered that Dagon had fallen face down to the ground before the Ark of the Covenant. It was as though Dagon was recognizing the power and the authority of the Lord God of Israel whose presence was still in the Ark. The people set Dagon back on his perch, only to discover the next morning that he had fallen again—this time with his head and hands broken off. Clearly, the Lord had not switched His allegiance from Israel to the Philistines. The defeat in battle at Ebenezer in no way meant that the Lord had abandoned His chosen Israel. And He was making this clear to the Philistines through the throwing down of their god, Dagon. He made this even more clear in subsequent days and weeks. The Philistines carried the Ark of the Covenant out of the temple of Dagon to various places. As they did, the Lord began to come against them and the scripture indicates that He smote them with “emerods” in their secret parts.¹⁹ The scriptural account indicates that the Ark of the Covenant was in Philistine hands only seven months.

Friends, let us take heart. The glory has indeed departed the church as we know it today. This does not mean that the Lord has abandoned His people, however. It is significant that Israel was deprived of the Ark for seven months. Numbers have meaning in scripture, and the number seven almost always denotes

¹⁹ Probably hemorrhoids.

perfection or rest; completion. God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. Creation was completed, and it was good (perfect) in God's eyes. We also see the number seven prominently evident at the battle of Jericho, when the Israelite army marched around the city for six days, and on the seventh day, they marched around seven times followed by a blowing of the trumpets. Their work was completed and they simply watched (rested) as the Lord brought the walls of Jericho down. We read in the book of Revelation of the seven churches, signifying the complete, universal Body of Christ, with each named *ecclesia* in the first three chapters of Revelation representing a part or aspect of that universal Body. The number seven is so frequently used in scripture to denote God's completed work, that it would behoove us to consider the significance of this time span of seven months that the Philistines had control of the Ark before returning it to Israel.

God had a deep work that needed to be accomplished in the heart of the nation of Israel. We have seen in the preceding chapters that the priesthood of Israel had become corrupted from the very top. There was a purging that had to take place in the leadership of this people, particularly among its spiritual leaders. The Bible does not go into any detail about how God dealt with the priesthood of that time, but we do know that He totally wiped out those at the top—Eli and his two sons. And then, at His appointed time—after the seven month time of completion—He saw fit to have the Ark returned to its rightful owners.

The church as we have known it has been, we believe, in that “seven month” period without the Ark of the Presence of God for centuries now. God has been speaking to the established priesthood through many messengers and prophets calling for repentance, just as He did with Eli those millennia ago. They have ignored God's warnings, opting instead to present a very easy “user friendly” gospel; or alternatively a “gospel” that is so focused on what the enemy is doing that it has lost sight of the majestic plan of God for all of creation. He has been speaking through His prophets who have not been heard, or have even been despised because of their challenging word. The result, as we have pointed out in the last chapter, is that the Ark has been captured by such forces as the New Age and the New World Order Movements among others. Christendom has, for the

most part, been in a “seven month” period without the Ark of God’s presence, essentially since the first century witness, and certainly since it became officially recognized by Constantine in the fourth century. To be sure, there have been times when God has visited His people during what have been called “revivals,” or “times of refreshing.” These have been temporary visitations, however. He has not truly dwelt and ruled in the minds and hearts of those who profess His name. Dagon, the god of the Philistines has ruled in the form of a multitude of philosophies and political agendas down through the centuries.

We proclaim, however, that Dagon has fallen. This is not readily apparent to anyone looking on from the outside, but reports are leaking out, for instance, of dissension and rancor at the highest levels of governments around the world. Despite the best face of unity that the international political, economic and religious community is attempting to put on, we see rogue countries—including some powerful ones as well as several smaller ones—which are defying these efforts. World leaders are desperately trying to put Dagon back on his perch, but all of these efforts will only result eventually in the decapitation of this false god that is attempting to foist itself upon the people of the world through all the various schemes of its leaders around the world.

Dagon can also be seen falling in the religious world. We have pointed out in the last chapter that church membership and attendance has declined dramatically over the past 50 years. The influence that the church has had over individuals and communities is also diminished. Regardless of age, many in our day no longer accept many of the moral and theological precepts of established, institutional Christianity. This is because these precepts were based on a moral code rooted in law, devoid of the Spirit and of the Life emanating from union and communion with Christ. The headship of Christ within these institutions has been replaced with the false gods of religion, denominationalism, materialism and reason. Yes, Dagon is falling! So much of what the church has promoted as “truth” has been found wanting and people are now looking elsewhere for answers. But let us be reassured: while these “Dagonish” gods are falling, the Ark of God’s presence remains and is even now placed right within the Tabernacle of David, wherever this may be found in His ecclesia today.

The Return of the Ark

The Philistines eventually returned the Ark of the Covenant to Israel because they knew that the Ark in their temple was a curse to them. Not only did they return the Ark, however, but made offerings of golden emerods and golden mice to the Israelites. They were, no doubt, attempting to appease what they perceived as an angry god for having wrongly taking the Ark. The Philistines of today are still trying to appease the God of the Israelites, the God who lowered Himself to become a baby and suffer the humiliation of the most despised of humanity. Churches are offered what is called a “501(c)3” status from the government, which allows them to offer tax deductions to donors, thereby increasing their fund raising power. The government has, in recent years, provided unprecedented funding for “faith based” ministries. Iconic religious leaders are invited to the White House to participate in prayer breakfasts, and in some instances to advise the president and others. All of these are ways in which the government—one expression of the “Philistines” in our world today—attempts to appease the so-called representatives of God. Indeed, modern day Christianity has found itself married to government to a degree never before even imagined. It is hardly surprising that many highly prominent Christian leaders, including evangelical leaders, are publicly supporting a recent move to unification with the Roman Catholic Church (Hobbus, 2015). This is an amazing move, which aligns perfectly with the goals and purposes of the New World Order mandate to bring about one world religion that will prop up their one world government. We can see clearly the goal of the various appeasement efforts to smooth the way for a peaceful co-existence between the Philistine forces of our day and what they believe to be the Kingdom of God—that Kingdom reality of which ancient Israel was a shadow and type.

The problem with these efforts, of course, is that the visible, institutional church is not a true representative of the Kingdom of God in our day. The efforts of the globalists, various governments, and other secular elements to seduce and pacify the church have largely been misplaced. The true Kingdom of God is comprised of individuals who have been called apart, who have counted the cost and have taken up their crosses in obedience to their Lord. Many, if not most of these, in

fact, have left the institutional church altogether with the understanding that the admonition to “come out from among them and be ye separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17) refers especially to the compromised institutional church. This is the Kingdom that will later be typed by David as he is passionate in his pursuit of Yahweh. As we know, David roundly defeated the Philistines as a young lad with but a smooth stone and a slingshot. There was no more co-existence with them following this defeat.

The Ark is Kept in a Hidden Place

We are told that after the Philistines returned the Ark of the Covenant to Israel, the men of the city of Kirjath-jearim took the Ark to the house of Abinidab. We are told nothing more about the Ark until we come to the sixth chapter of 2 Samuel, at which time the Lord put it in the heart of David, now King of all of Israel, to fetch the Ark and bring it up to Zion. What we *are* told in the brief verses that account for the Ark being brought to the house of Abinidab, however, is that the Ark remained in that place for “a long time.”²⁰ We really know nothing more about what transpired at Kirjath-jearim, nor with the house of Abinidab during that long period of time.

It is strangely appropriate that any events that might have been taking place during this time have been kept from us. The presence of the Lord was in that place, as the Ark represents the very presence of the Lord. Nevertheless, it was hidden. Israel went through the reign of an entire king, fought many battles, including the famous battle with the Philistines where young David smote the giant Goliath. Yet, we are never told of the Ark of the Covenant. It is as though it has disappeared off the face of the earth—until David remembered it after he became King and determined to bring it to Zion.

²⁰ The text in 1Samuel 7:2 indicates that the Ark was in the house of Abinidab for 20 years. We read, however, that David retrieved the Ark after he became king of Israel. We know that Saul reigned for about 40 years, which would suggest that the Ark was in this hidden place for more than 40 years because it was captured during the time of the judges, before Saul ever became king. One source suggests that while this verse in Samuel says 20 years, this 20-year period refers to the time between when the Ark was placed in the house of Abinadab and when Samuel spoke to Israel in verse 3. This is plausible, as the historic record would seem to indicate more than 40 years until David retrieved the Ark.

The Ark of God's presence remains with us in this hour, friends, even though there seems to be little evidence of its presence. People naturally look for the evidence of the presence of God in corporate meetings, where there are public words of prophecy, and where there are signs and wonders of various sorts. Many have built ministries around such grandiose expressions of God's presence. Many of these so-called ministers are nothing more than charlatans who have learned the language and the techniques that will rouse people to a state of expectation and susceptibility to whatever suggestions that the evangelist might make. These ministers are the rogue "priests" prefigured by Hophni and Phinehas. There are, however, genuine outpourings of the Holy Spirit that transform those who participate in those corporate worship experiences. I have been privileged to be part of these expressions of God's awesome holiness and grandeur when, as a freshman at Asbury College in 1970, the Spirit of God swept that campus and impacted colleges and churches throughout the nation and around the world. We are always exceedingly grateful when we have the opportunity to participate in such genuine manifestations of the Great I AM.

There is, however, a "hidden" presence of God which I believe is much more significant for the hour that we are now in. God has been calling out a people to be separate—to come "outside the camp"—for purposes of participating in His great plan for the ages. He has been doing this throughout history. We read, for example, the incredible story of the prophet Elijah. This was a man who God used in mighty ways, including the miracle of calling down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifices that had been drenched in water as a sign to the prophets of Baal of the power of Almighty God. Shortly after this, Elijah went into a very deep depression, even asking the Lord to take his life. He believed that he was totally alone in his faithfulness to God. He wanted to die. He no doubt felt that all of his efforts were for naught. It was at this low point that the Lord showed him that He had preserved a remnant of seven thousand (there is that number seven again) who had NOT bowed the knee to Baal. This was a hidden bunch. Elijah himself was not aware of them or even of their existence until the Lord revealed this fact to him (1 Kings 19).

We might also remember David's flight from Saul, his own king and countryman, who was attempting to kill him. David took refuge in the cave of Adullam along with a band of about 400 misfits. Here, in the hiddenness of that cave, under threat of their very annihilation, and later in exile in Moab, these men were in preparation for the ultimate leadership role that they were destined to play in the history of Israel (1 Samuel 22).

There has been a hidden remnant throughout the history of God's people that remains hidden in our day. God is calling men and women out of the church systems of today, setting them apart for a divine purpose of establishing His presence throughout the earth. Like Elijah, they feel like they are alone. Like David and his men, they are rejected and they are misunderstood. But they are being called apart, first, for purposes of refining and purging. They are being made into worthy vessels of the presence of the Lord. They are His hidden representatives throughout the world. They will be called to do and say things that they do not understand, but they are obedient to this call nonetheless. They will often be rejected, especially by religious leaders, because their word is often a hard word—possibly a word of repentance, or a word that exposes hidden motives. They are the very presence of God, disguised as troublemakers, misfits, hellions, and heathen.

Other times they will say nothing. Their very presence will produce any number of effects. Very shortly after coming to Arkansas to participate in a local ministry here, the pastor of that fellowship became very uncomfortable with us. When I (Sarah) agreed to lead worship on one occasion, he immediately got up and made a caustic remark regarding something that I had shared. In that same service the Spirit of the Lord came over me (Charles) with a deep sobbing that was coming out of grief for what was going on in the service. I could say or do nothing but sob. Just the day before, I had given the Lord permission to use my emotions in whatever way He would choose. Little did I know that I would make a fool of myself in front of the entire congregation the very next day. I received a sharp rebuke from that pastor. I recognized that this simple act of obedience was piercing his very soul. This did lead eventually to a hard word that I later had to

share with this man, which resulted in our being informed that we were not welcome in “his church.”²¹

The presence of God in His elect transforms a situation, even when we do not understand what is taking place. We must understand that, albeit unconventional, God is working through these hidden vessels, which are you and me. I recall so very clearly a time when we were on a motorcycle trip to the east coast. We didn’t understand why we were going out. We did not have a big evangelistic program, and seldom even talked about spiritual things to the people we met. Those conversations only took place when God so ordered the circumstances. While on the east coast, the Lord showed us in a vision that we were to “set tread” in every state that we saw on the map in the vision, which was the continental United States. We didn’t know exactly why then. We simply know that we bring the presence of Christ, and His presence is transforming to individuals and situations wherever we go. We have observed that transforming seed take effect on more than one occasion as we have observed the demeanor of people change, even when we spoke little more than exchanging greetings. We have now laid down our tire tracks in all of these states, as well as Alaska and several Canadian provinces. We are trusting that this “hidden presence of God” is accomplishing its work in these places.

Those who house the Ark of the Covenant while hidden away in Kirjath-jearim at the house of Abinidab in our day will not generally be found on the marquees of churches as visiting evangelists; nor will they be featured on Christian television or radio. The Ark today is much more likely to be found among those caring for an aging parent or a handicapped child. It is often found among the ranks of the divorced, those with drug and criminal histories, or of blue-collar workers or those unable to find work. These who embody the Ark of the Covenant today are, in short, those who did NOT get an invitation to society’s dance. They are hidden and they are often despised by the world and even more so by the religious world. God is doing a purifying work in them at this house of Abinidab. He is

²¹We encourage the reader to read *Torch of the Testimony* by John Kennedy. This book recounts the faithfulness of little-known groups throughout history who have been a faithful remnant of God’s presence despite great persecution.

living through them here to rule and reign with Him! Their time of appearing with Christ to be revealed as His demonstration and glory comes after many years of waiting in this remote outpost of Kirjath-jearim. When His glory comes through His people it will mean life to some and death to others; yet even the darkness is light to Him. Their David—Jesus Christ, their Head—comes to bring them and ultimately all of creation back to Mount Zion—the place that God has intended for them all along.

The Ark is Brought to Mount Zion

The Lord put it in the heart of David to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Zion. Let us remember that David is a type of the Christ which was to come. Prior to going to the house of Abinidab to fetch the Ark, David had overcome many obstacles and battles that would bring him into his position as king of Israel. He had, as a young lad, confronted and killed the giant Goliath who caused so much fear among the Israelite army. He was taken in to the royal court of Saul, only to have his life threatened by the very man whose kingship he saved by the slaying of Goliath. After numerous attempts on his life by Saul, David became king over the southern kingdom of Judah, and eventually over the northern Kingdom of Israel as well. David then captured Jerusalem, the city of Zion, the eventual residence of the Ark of the Covenant.

This is all to say that David, the type of our Christ, battled and conquered to come to the place of ruling and reigning all of Israel from Jerusalem, the City of David. Christ is now on His throne in the hearts of His saints—our hearts being the Zion of which Mount Zion in Jerusalem was the type. The battle to take Zion was ultimately won by Jesus' submission to the cross and His defeat of death three days later. That which looked like total defeat on that dark Friday was a necessary part of the ultimate victory that would be won over sin and death. In the meantime, the Ark of God's presence remained hidden in the house of Abinidab.

Just as David conquered Mount Zion, Jesus conquered sin and death at the cross, and He declared it so: ***"It is finished!"*** The last enemy, even death, has been defeated. But, you say, God's people are still suffering. Sickness and death

abound among His saints. Obstacles still threaten the overcoming life of God's people, and fear grips the hearts of even His called out and chosen ones. Any honest person must acknowledge these realities. Friends, despite the seeming impotence of the Christ within us, He is coming as our David to bring forth the Ark—His presence—from its hidden place. He has a destiny for us, and that destiny is ultimately to be manifest to the world around us. Our David is coming for us, to take us out of the house of Abinidab and on to Mount Zion.

A Wrinkle on the Way to Mount Zion

The scripture says that David gathered all the chosen men of Israel—some 30,000—to go with him to fetch the Ark to bring it back from the house of Abinidab to Mount Zion. There was, in addition, much singing and playing of instruments to celebrate the return of the Ark to its proper home. David was serious about bringing the Ark to Zion! And so is Christ, our David, serious about bringing us to that high and holy mount into Him. There was, however, a bit of a wrinkle along the way. It seems that after the men put the Ark on the newly made cart—no doubt made especially for the purpose of transporting the Ark—the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, putting the Ark at risk for falling on the ground. Abinidab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio, were in charge of driving the oxen. Quite naturally, as part of his responsibility for driving the cart, Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark so that it would not fall to the ground (and presumably, in their minds at least) be desecrated. We read of a strange reaction by God to this effort. The scripture indicates that the anger of God was kindled against Uzzah, and He killed him on the spot!

I have always wondered why God responded in this way. After all, Uzzah was only doing his duty, and he was trying to protect the Ark from an even worse fate. Apparently David couldn't understand it either, for the scripture says that he was displeased with the Lord for striking Uzzah dead. He would remind the Lord and the people of Israel of this act of God by naming the place of this occurrence Perez-uzzah; meaning the "breach" or "breaking" of Uzzah. God had reasons for His displeasure with Uzzah, however. It would be well for us to consider His reasoning for its implications for that which is taking place among His people

today. What we are about to share regarding what was in the mind of God in bringing down Uzzah is, of course, somewhat speculative, as scripture does not tell us exactly why God did this. We urge you to check your own spirit as you read.

We would suggest, first, that the return party violated the commandment of God as to who was to transport the Ark of the Covenant.

After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 4:15).

Only the tribe of Levi was to ever carry those things that were in the tabernacle, including the Ark of the Covenant. Even more specifically, it was only the family of Kohath that was to carry the sacred items in the Tent of Meeting. David, in his zeal to bring back the Ark bringing with him 30,000 men, did not consider this commandment of God that only Levites, and only those Levites of the family of Kohath, were to carry the ark. Instead, Uzzah and Ahio, who were very convenient and very familiar with the Ark because it had been in their father's house most of their growing up years, were used to guide this Ark to its place of destiny. Indeed, there was probably a familiarity with the Ark that resulted in a lack of awe and wonder for the very presence of God contained therein.

This same familiarity has, we fear, crept into the ranks of those who have understood themselves to have been designated to bring the Ark of God's Presence unto Mount Zion today. We are speaking here especially of many "Kingdom" ministers and ministries, as these are speaking and moving with greater revelation regarding the bringing forth and manifestation of God's sons. We have observed any number of ministers of this gospel message who are operating out of carnal ambitions despite the greater revelation that they have received. There is a trend today of appointing people as "pastors," "prophets," "apostles," "bishops," and all manner of titles that are then used to elevate one's self into a position of lordship and control over others. These are not God's

appointed Levites of the family of Kohath to bring forth the Ark of His presence. They may be ordained by men to function under these labels, but they are not, for the most part, ordained by God. We would venture to say that anyone who seeks such a title is probably NOT ordained by God for this role. God has a Kohath family of Levites whom He is training and preparing for this incredible task of calling forth the sons of God from their place of hiddenness (many even hidden from their own conscious awareness). They do not need or want titles that would separate them from the rest of God's people. These are the ones who will function under the unction of the Holy Spirit, and who will bring forth the Ark, embodied in the people of God, to Mount Zion. The "Uzzah's" will ultimately experience death of one fashion or another in their attempts at ministry and controlling (i.e. "steadying the Ark") to the point of squelching the presence of God.

Second, David and his men violated God's commandment for the *method* of transporting the Ark. God's instruction was that no man should touch the Ark, and that the Ark was to be carried only by the family of Kohath with poles made of Acacia wood overlaid with gold (Exodus 25:12-14). The men probably used poles to place the Ark on the cart that was newly made for its transport. Otherwise, God would likely have struck dead anyone who was handling the Ark to place it on the cart in the first place. No such event is recorded. Nevertheless, the chosen men of Israel opted to transport the Ark to Jerusalem by cart—certainly much less laborious and no doubt much quicker than to tote it by men walking it with poles. One source suggests that Kirjath-jearim is about 16 kilometers (roughly 10 miles) from Jerusalem. It would certainly be much easier and faster to carry the Ark by ox cart rather than walking it by hand! The problem is, this was not God's ordained way of carrying the Ark.

The church today, including so-called "Kingdom" churches, similarly operate out of a mode of efficiency, according to that which seems most effective according to the mind of man. Teachers and preachers are appointed based on degrees that they hold from seminaries and other educational institutions; or according to their charismatic appeal. There is far too little seeking the mind of God for His wisdom and ways in these matters so as to move only by a common peace and

harmony of the Holy Spirit. The very structure out of which the church today operates more closely resembles a bureaucracy than it does a living organism, which it was intended to be. Pastors are hired as CEO's to oversee the smooth operation of this bureaucracy. "Success" in these bureaucracies is measured by the number of members, number of "souls saved," the size of the budget, or some other quantitative measure. Advertising gimmicks straight from Madison Avenue are used to attract more members and more dollars into the coffers. Television and radio ministries are designed to reach the largest audiences possible—again gauging success by quantitative measures. All of these strategies are variations of the use of the ox cart to implement what is *believed to be* the advancing of the Kingdom of God. In point of fact, we believe that the goals of most churches have little to do with establishing the Kingdom of God and more to do with establishing temporal ministries geared to building a kingdom to honor man.

God has another plan. He has ordained a means by which He is calling out His hidden ones today. He is moving by His Spirit upon *whomever He will* to bring forth His Ark. These whom He is calling are not the "chosen men of Israel," but rather the family of Kohath of the tribe of Levi. They know who they are by the witness of the Spirit within, and they speak and move according to the dictates of that same Spirit. They are not impressed by titles, degrees or other accoutrements that look impressive to the mind of man. These of the family of Kohath take the road less traveled as they carefully transport God's precious Ark with His specified gold-overlaid Acacia wood poles. The specific instructions will vary with each person and with each circumstance. This requires a priesthood who is acutely sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and demands true relationship and communication with God.

David was, it seems, greatly humbled by the harshly corrective hand of the Lord in smiting Uzzah. The scripture tells us that David was afraid of the Lord that day and inquired how the Ark of the Lord would come. Rather than carry the Ark into Jerusalem at that time, he carried into the house of Obed-edom, where it remained for three months. David probably used this time to repent of the folly of moving forward as he did in his own wisdom; and to seek the Lord as to how

God would have him proceed. God honored the humility of David's heart, and we are told that He blessed the house of Obed-edom. It was only then, after David saw the blessing of God over the Ark and the household that sheltered it, that he proceeded to move forward to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. This time, David did it according to the will and purposes of God.

The Ark is Established in Zion

According to the account in 1 Chronicles, when David knew that it was time to take the Ark from the house of Obed-edom, he knew that the Ark was to be carried only by the Levites of the house of Kohath. These were those who owned nothing and were set apart for the worship of the Lord. He ordered them to sanctify themselves so that they would be prepared to bring the Ark up to Jerusalem. The bringing of the Ark was accompanied by singing, dancing and the playing of instruments. This was a joyful celebration, with singers accompanied by harps and trumpets and cymbals. According to the account in 2 Samuel, the procession had moved only six paces when David offered oxen and fatlings as a sacrifice.

David himself seems to be a central figure in the procession. It is said that he was shouting and leaping and dancing before the Lord as the Ark was making its way into the city of Jerusalem. What is particularly noteworthy is that David, in spite of all of his royalty had stripped down to a linen ephod as he was publicly dancing before the Lord and before the people with absolutely no inhibitions. We must understand that the linen ephod was little more than one's underwear. This is what the priest's wore when they humbled themselves to enter into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle of Moses and came into the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. David displayed this same fear of the Lord. The problem was that such attire was not particularly befitting royalty. David was reminded of this by Michal—Saul's daughter and David's wife—who was watching the entire ordeal from the palace window. It is said that she despised David for his uncouth behavior and she said to him,

How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself! (2 Samuel 6:20).

David was not the least bit disquieted by her accusations. He was unabashedly and exuberantly undignified before his Lord, and his response to Michal speaks volumes of the singleness of vision that he had:

It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour (2 Samuel 6:21-22).

If David was a type of the Christ, which he was, what an incredible older brother and cheerleader that we have! There is no level of abasement that He will not go to bring forth His presence in every man! We know this, of course, from the life He lived while walking the shores of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem some 2000 years ago. He humbled Himself, first, by coming to this earth in the form of a defenseless infant, lowering Himself to take on the character of a man. His ultimate abasement came when He was charged as a common criminal and hung on a cross between two thieves. And there were certainly Michals in the crowd that day, despising the fact that someone of His royalty could stoop so low. His closest disciples became disheartened. But He did this because, like David, He had His heart and mind set on establishing the presence of God on Zion's holy hill, namely in you and me. This He did not only during His time here in the flesh a couple of millennia ago. He has continued to bring forth this Ark of His Presence through men and women down through the ages who have not been afraid to make fools of themselves for the sake of Christ. Indeed, many of these "Davidic tabernacles" have laid down their very lives for the purpose of establishing the Kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of men and women—the true Tabernacle of David.

David had prepared a tabernacle ahead of time to house the Ark of the Covenant once it arrived in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. While the scripture does not provide a detailed description of this tabernacle, it would seem that it was not as elaborate as the tabernacle that God instructed Moses to build in the desert; and certainly not the exquisite edifice that Solomon would build some 40 years later. It seems it was a very simple tent made solely for the purpose of sheltering and displaying the Ark of the Covenant.

Our David has also gone ahead and prepared a place for His presence. That place is US. Jesus said to His disciples, when He told them of his coming betrayal and death,

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Even Paul referred to these common “earthly tents” as our bodies and the very temples of the Lord. The incredible power of this gospel is the reality that Christ is in us and we are in Him. We are joined to the Lord as one Spirit and we are His dwelling place, just as He is ours.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Tabernacle of David

We come now to consider the Tabernacle of David as this which David erected to be a temporary tent speaks to the realities and nature of us as His eternal abode. “David’s tabernacle” is a significant structure, and its erection an important event in the life of Israel. It is important for us to understand its meaning for us in this life and especially this day and time we are living in.

The Urgency of the Tabernacle

We know that David had it in his heart to build an elaborate temple to the Lord on Mount Zion. We read in the first verse of 1 Chronicles 17 that David came to Nathan the prophet and said, *“Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the Ark of the covenant remaineth under curtains.”* We know the story of how Nathan initially gave David the green light to proceed with the desires of his heart with respect to building such a temple, but later came back with the word that it was not for David to build such an edifice. This structure would be built under the direction of Solomon, David’s son, who would succeed him as king.

These brief verses suggest a couple of points of importance as we consider this tabernacle that David built. First, it gives us a glimpse into the heart of David and his zeal for the house of the Lord. It would seem that this consumed him. You will remember from the last chapter that he took 30,000 men to retrieve the Ark from the house of Abinidab where it had been basically sitting in storage. The Ark had been captured from the Philistines many years before. There was no army that he must conquer in order to retrieve the Ark, as the Ark was already in the possession of one of Israel’s own countrymen. There was no need to take 30,000 men to simply retrieve the Ark from the house of his countryman Abinidab. We would suggest that David took all of these men in his zeal, possibly as a definitive statement that the loss of the 30,000 men while going to war against the Philistines earlier is now being redeemed. We also see his exuberant zeal displayed as the Ark was making its way into Jerusalem. We read that David *“danced before the Lord with all his might,”* and that he wore a linen ephod. He

literally made a spectacle of himself as evidenced by Michal's scornful reaction to this humiliating display. David was shameless. He told Michal, *“I will yet be more vile thus, and will be base in mine own sight;”* (2 Samuel 6:22). His zeal for the Lord did not even consider his own abasement. David was absolutely delirious with the joy that he was experiencing in bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to its rightful place.

We have suggested in an earlier chapter that David is an Old Testament type of Christ. His ecstasy represents nothing less than the ecstasy of Christ Himself coming to arrive in His rightful place, His temple, our very beings! Most of the church world does not fully appreciate (and in many cases does not even recognize) that the habitat of God, His kingdom, is within us even now; opting instead to speak of a heaven to be gained only *after* our physical bodies see the grave. But friends, not only has He chosen our being, our very bodies, as His place of abode; He is ecstatic every time the Ark of His very presence comes to take its place in another human temple. We are His Jerusalem—His *New Jerusalem*—and He is dancing deliriously as He is unveiled in another living soul! Oh that we would experience His endless delight at His presence in us, His temple.

A second important consideration that we need to take away from the first verse of 1 Chronicles 17 is that David understood this tabernacle to be a temporary arrangement until the more permanent temple would be built. While it was in David's heart to build an elaborate temple unto the Lord in which to house the Ark, he knew that this would be years in the building. In the meantime, he felt it imperative to move the Ark to its rightful place on Mount Zion in the city of Jerusalem. The tabernacle that David constructed was, it would seem, a rather makeshift tent, probably constructed rather quickly. The important consideration here is that this tabernacle was intended by David to be only a temporary shelter for the Ark of the Covenant.

When we consider that the Tabernacle of David is a *type*, however, and that we are ultimately the fulfillment of that type, we have opened up to us, first, the incredible truth that the powerful presence of God is housed within us. This is a critically important understanding because throughout most of our lives, whether

in the church or in the secular world, we have been given the understanding that God is an entity that exists “out there” somewhere. The church world—even and especially the Pentecostal church world—is continually “calling down fire from heaven,” or pleading with the Lord to “open up the windows of heaven and send down His rain.” The truth is that heaven already resides within us. We are His heaven in earth, a dwelling place for the Most High. We need to have a *metanoeo*—a repentance—in our understanding of God and where He actually resides. We need an actual paradigm shift in our understanding of the geography of God. This is not merely a matter of “semantics” as one dear Pentecostal brother has tried to convince me. If it were but a matter of semantics, this makes us but an inn or boarding house that God chooses to visit on occasion, and maybe even reside in for weeks or months. If we are the place of His habitation, however, this body of ours is where He is taking up *permanent residence*. He does not come occasionally, and then leave if we are failing to consciously walk in the reality of His presence (as this same Pentecostal brother would contend). To use a different analogy, we are not like a radio receiver which receives signals, but then out of range the signal is no longer present. Oh no! We are the dwelling of the *source* of that signal that is transmitted to the world around us. This shift in our understanding of the “geographical location of God” is absolutely central to our understanding of who we truly are. We are the *abode* of God, the place where He is taking up permanent residence—not merely a resort or cabin that He chooses to visit occasionally! If this were the case, how could Jesus keep His promise that we abide in Him and He and us, and that He will never leave?

There is, however, another important truth about the temporary nature of David’s tabernacle that is also important for us to understand. This truth will be elaborated more in the next chapter, but we must mention it here. We are speaking here of the fact that while Christ has, indeed, taken up residence within us (as opposed to blessing us with a visitation from time to time), this temple of clay in which He has taken up residence is itself *temporary*. We have just said in the paragraph above that He has taken up *permanent* residence in us; yet this tabernacle in which He abides is *temporary*. How can this be? This is a divine mystery that we will take up in the next chapter. First, however, let us take a little

closer look at the tent or tabernacle that David built to house the Ark of the Covenant.

Features of the Tabernacle

The Bible tells us very little about the physical features of David's Tabernacle. Unlike the Tabernacle of Moses, where God gave very explicit instructions as to dimensions, materials used, etc., we have no such instruction recorded regarding the edifice that David constructed. This is almost certainly because God didn't give any instructions. This would seem to speak to the fact that our Divinely created bodies in the flesh that are temporary, have no specific type and that there are infinite configurations of these earthly tents. In other words, it wasn't about the structure, but rather that this was a simple earthly tent. This tabernacle was conceived from the heart of David in his passion for constructing a shelter for the Ark on Mount Zion. Because of the relative lack of information in scripture, therefore, much of what we have to say will be inferred from the limited text available to us.

Let us consider what the text does NOT say regarding the tent that David pitched to house the Ark of the Covenant. There is no mention anywhere of three sections to this tent, as we find with the Tabernacle of Moses, or later with Solomon's temple. There is not a mention of an outer court, a holy place, or a Holy of holies. The scripture simply says that *"...they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it"* (2 Samuel 6:17). There is no mention here of placing the Ark in the Holy of holies, in the inner chamber, nor any other reference which would suggest that there was a division within the tent. The Ark was simply placed "in the midst of the tabernacle," which would suggest that David's tabernacle was a very simple, one-room tent that had been erected to house the Ark. This has important implications for the nature and significance of the Tabernacle of David for us today. There is no "outer court" where blood sacrifices are offered for sins of the people. There is no laver in which the priests must cleanse themselves before entering into a "holy place" accessible only by the priests. And there is no "Holy of holies" reserved only for the high priest to enter once a year, and separated

from the holy place with a veil. None of the old Mosaic order is found in this simple tabernacle.

It is worthy of note that while the Ark of the Covenant was residing in the Tabernacle of David, sacrifices and priestly intercession were also taking place in the Tabernacle of Moses which was located in Gibeon. Even while the old Mosaic order was being carried out in compliance with the traditions established many hundreds of years earlier, a new order was being anticipated in this simple one room tent in Jerusalem.

There is also a curious shift in the nature of worship that takes place at the Tabernacle of David which differentiates it from that which took place in the Tabernacle of Moses. The Mosaic tabernacle entailed the offering of blood sacrifices of animals without blemish, as well as grain offerings. There were elaborate instructions given as to how these sacrifices were to be carried out, with careful instruction given for both the one making the offering and for the priest who was carrying out the sacrificial ritual itself.²² These sacrifices were carried out in careful obedience to the instruction of God. As we read the text surrounding these sacrifices, they were highly ritualistic in nature, with great care given to every detail.

In contrast, the picture that is presented of the Tabernacle of David depicts a much more spontaneous, yet highly intentional worship. While the scripture does indicate that the people offered burnt offerings there (1 Chronicles 16:1), much attention is given to the gathering together of musical instruments—cymbals, harps, trumpets and singers—for purposes of all out worship of the Lord. There would be no veil that would separate the Ark of the Covenant from the people as they worshipped; nor is there any indication that access to the Ark of the Covenant was restricted to the high priest, or to any priest for that matter. This tabernacle in Jerusalem was a place for *everyone* to worship with all of their hearts before the very presence of the Lord.

²² There were five offerings specified in the opening chapters of Leviticus: *the burnt offering*, *the grain offering*, *the peace offering*, *the sin offering*, and *the guilt offering*.

What we have, then, is a very simple tent structure sheltering the Ark of God's presence. There is nothing in its physical attributes that are particularly striking. It would be easily overlooked by an uninitiated sojourner to the city of Jerusalem, and if noticed (were it not for its location on Mount Zion), it might even be assumed to be the humble abode of one of Jerusalem's lower caste. This humble structure and its contents were, nevertheless, the center of King David's attention; so much so that he was delirious with joy as he brought the Ark to this simple edifice. And this simple edifice, and the Ark contained within it was freely made available to all who would worship the Lord in Spirit and Truth. What a contrast to the highly ordered, ritualistically precise ceremony that took place at the Tabernacle of Moses.

We are the Tabernacle of David!

As we come into an understanding of the meaning of the Tabernacle of David for our day, we must grasp the reality that the Tabernacle of David is none other than US—the beloved saints in whom the presence of Christ now dwells. We are the house not made with hands (2 Corinthians 5:1) for God to dwell, and as His tabernacles there is no certain type of man-made edifice or a particular style of worship or gathering that is required. For our worship is in Spirit and Truth and this is not to be measured by outward observance or observation. Our God judges the heart. This Tabernacle—which scripture itself has given little more than passing attention, and theological and religious commentators of our day have almost totally overlooked—represents the very essence of the dwelling place of God today and even more openly in the days to come! This dwelling place is in the very spirit of those whom He has called apart unto Himself. We carry the presence of Christ, His glory and His resurrection power and His Kingdom within. We are the Tabernacle of David!

CHAPTER SIX:

We are the Tabernacle of David!

In considering the reality of the Tabernacle of David as a representation of the true dwelling place of God, let us remember the promise regarding the Tabernacle in scripture. Referring to the prophecy by Amos (Amos 9:11), James reiterates:

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things (Acts 15:16-17).

That tabernacle is you and me and all those whom God has chosen to represent Him in the earth today! Paul stated it most directly and succinctly, *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (1 Corinthians 3:16; NKJV) We approach this topic with a holy reverence, as this reality encompasses the very purposes of God for the climactic fulfillment of this current age in which we now are living.

From the Tabernacle of Moses to the Tabernacle of David to Solomon's Temple

As we examine the "journey" of the Ark of the Covenant through a spiritual lens, a number of parallels with the history of the ecclesia since it was established by Jesus in the first century can be observed. We see, for example, that Jesus established His presence in the tabernacle of His people. Whereas Moses was given very explicit instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle that would house the Ark of the Covenant, Jesus made it very clear that the Ark of His Presence was now within those who would leave all and follow Him. When He was asked by the Pharisees when His kingdom would come, he replied, *"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke 17:21). Elsewhere, He tells His disciples, *"At that day ye shall know that I [am] in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you* (John 14:20). Furthermore, just as Moses was also given very specific instruction as to sacrifices to be offered and,

generally, how the priests and the people were to conduct themselves as they approached the tabernacle in the desert; so it is that Jesus has given His disciples (of the first century and today) a template for conducting business in the tabernacle in which He now resides. He states very clearly that he who does not hate his family members cannot be his disciples (Luke 14:26). Elsewhere, He states that anyone putting his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom (Luke 9:62). He told the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, and follow Him, and he would have treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22). Jesus also spoke of those who were to make up this tabernacle as being meek, poor in spirit, as hungering after righteousness, and suffering persecution. (Matthew 5:3-10). Indeed, those first disciples of Jesus all faced a martyr's death and became dying seed for what was to be harvested as the vision of ecclesia. They were given a vision by Jesus of the nature of that Tabernacle that they were, but first must come the death of this vision. Out of death comes life. Please understand, we are *not* suggesting that Jesus has given us an entirely new legal code of conduct that we must obey if we are to be worthy tabernacles for His presence. Rather, we are saying that Jesus is establishing spiritual principles that highlight the characteristics of a noble tabernacle worthy of His habitation. The specifics as to what the walking out of these principles will be are tailor-made to each individual when we are taken through the circumstances that prepare us to be the tabernacle of His presence, both individually and corporately.

The early church understood these instructions clearly (at least when compared to the centuries that would follow). Those faithful followers of Christ in the Gospel and Acts accounts abandoned all to follow Him, and once putting their hand to the plow, they did not look back. The disciples followed the instructions for the building of the tabernacle carefully, and they experienced the glorious presence of God in their comings and goings. They saw the sick healed; they witnessed transformation as demons came out of people who had been held in bondage for years; they witnessed the miraculous deliverance of Peter from prison; and yes, they even experienced the powerful presence of God that could be seen by all those present, even while they were being stoned to death. They even saw the power of the resurrection come to life in Lazarus being raised from

the dead; not to mention the resurrection of Jesus Himself. They had all the proof they ever needed of Christ come in human flesh as Savior of the world. So what could possibly go wrong?

Something happened in the life of the church that resulted in the presence of the Lord departing His tabernacle not made with human hands. We have made the point in earlier chapters that it was taken over by an enemy force, just as the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines and placed in their temple of Dagon. The disciples of Jesus in the decades and centuries to come lost their first love, that fervent love that those early persecuted and martyred disciples had. They grew tired of the persecution, and found a way to avoid it when Constantine supposedly had a visionary encounter that left him sympathetic to these followers of Christ. We have, throughout the earlier chapters of this book, highlighted the ways in which the marriage of the ecclesia with the state was “consummated” as they attempted to unite and contain the presence of God within the Dagon-ish temples that would syncretize their cherished beliefs with pagan beliefs and practices. Furthermore, they began to codify and substitute the inner workings of the carriers of Christ with elaborate doctrine, culminating in the Nicene Council which essentially wrote in stone the doctrines that the church would hold for nearly two thousand years. A short time later, the doctrine of hell as a place of *eternal torment* would make its way into church doctrine. These and other doctrines would take on paramount importance and would come to replace the simple but life-giving instruction of Jesus: to sell all that you have, give to the poor and follow Me; to place our very own families in such a place of comparative disregard that Jesus would use the word *miseo* to describe this relative place—a strong word that implies the detesting of our families in contrast to our love and loyalty to Him; and to not look back after we had put our hand to the plow. Christendom began to lose sight of—even reject—the characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount as it now found favor with the ruling elites of the day.

We have also suggested that despite the reforms that Luther and others brought to the church, Protestantism is just as guilty of forsaking its first love as is the Roman church. The body of Christ has been divided over doctrinal and other

issues because we have raised doctrine, ecclesiology and even eschatology to a place of primary importance over Christ Himself, and His indwelling presence within us. The reforms attempted over the past 1500 years might be seen as valiant attempts to recover the ark of the presence of God from the temple of Dagon, but every genuine move of God throughout history has followed the same path of being taken captive by “Philistine forces” and taken into the myriad of “temples” represented by the some 40,000 Christian denominations throughout the world today.

The taking captive of the Ark of the Covenant is also discernable at the level of individual experience. It is not uncommon for new disciples of Christ to have such a passion for Christ that they forsake family and friends for the cause of Christ, as well as their careers and their very reputations. They are, as one young convert put it to me, “wasting myself for Christ.” Indeed, they are eagerly obeying the instruction of their Master for the building of His tabernacle. So often, however, the cares of life, the indoctrination of a church or denomination, or even the desire to “build a ministry” begins to take precedence over that flame that once resided within them. They then become protagonists for a particular denomination, church, doctrine or ministry rather than the magnificent reality of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” At this point, we might say that their “ark” has been stolen, taken captive by the enemy of their soul. The presence of Christ and the glory of our Lord is now *Ichabod*; it has departed. We are lost and in desperate need of being found and His presence or manifest glory must be recaptured and returned to His rightful place.

We would suggest that the reason for the “*Ichabod*” that the church has experienced throughout the past two millennia is that the attempts to recapture the powerful presence of God that the first-century church experienced has been done in the arm of the flesh. We have been making the case throughout this book that the ark of God’s presence has been captured by Philistine forces over the past 2,000 years. We have described some of the ways in which this has taken place. *We want to take a slightly different perspective in the following section by suggesting that the efforts to advance the Kingdom of God through the spread of denominational Christianity (and much of non-denominational*

Christianity) over the last two thousand years has been largely an attempt by human agents to rebuild Solomon's Temple. The presence of God manifested in David's Tabernacle, that simple tabernacle on Zion's hill, has been replaced by edifices and institutions devoid of the Ark of God's Presence with the exception of occasional visitations throughout the history of Christendom.

Solomon's Temple and the Tabernacle of David

You will recall that David had it in his heart to build a more "permanent" temple unto the Lord. He believed that the primitive tabernacle that he erected in Jerusalem was to be but a temporary structure until a more magnificent edifice worthy of housing the Ark of the Covenant could be built. We know, of course, the story of how God did not allow David to build the temple because of all the blood that was on his hands from the various wars that he had fought. The task of building the temple would be left to his son Solomon. This leaves us with the question: If Solomon's temple was to be the more permanent structure, and Solomon's (rebuilt) temple—that supposedly more permanent structure—was standing at the time that James made this prophecy, why is it that James quotes Amos' prophecy of the rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David? .

Solomon's Temple was Never Intended to be a Permanent Structure

The answer to this puzzling question is multifaceted. First, however, we need to be clear that while David desired a more permanent temple of bricks and mortar, Solomon's temple simply was never God's intention to be His permanent dwelling place. David, at least in his natural mind, did indeed believe that it was to be so, as the scripture indicates that he desired to build a more permanent dwelling place for the Ark of the Covenant. However, this temple was destroyed somewhere around 600 BC, less than 400 years after it was built! It is true that the temple was rebuilt after the exiled Israelites returned to Jerusalem, though we know that it did not compare to the grandeur of the original temple (see Ezra 3:11-13); nor was it permanent. Jesus Himself prophesied its demise:

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to [him] for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus

said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down (Matthew 24:1-2).

Within about 40 years, Jesus' prophecy would come to fruition. The second temple was razed to the ground in 70 AD, never to be rebuilt. It turns out that Solomon's temple was, in fact, only temporary. It had to be destroyed to make way for the mystery of Christ in us, the hope of a glorious temple.

Jesus was introducing a new idea, namely that our very bodies are the temple of God—a truth that Paul elaborates on in his letters, especially his first letter to the church at Corinth. We will return to this point later. Presently, however, let us look historically at the way in which Solomon's temple, as it has come to be represented down through the last 2000 years of history, represents, not a permanent structure but merely a temporal one.

There is great temptation to erect edifices. This was the desire of David's heart. And this was apparently the desire of some of the post first-century Christian fathers who had been suffering persecution at the hands of the Roman authorities. So it was surely with great delight that these early church fathers welcomed Constantine's gesture of officially recognizing Christianity as an official religion of the Roman Empire. With due haste, doctrines were established at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Magnificent edifices were constructed and in a short time the dominance of what became known as the Roman Catholic Church was established. Solomon's temple was erected. The absolute dominance of the Roman church was challenged along the way, but the first threatening challenge would come in 1517 with the nailing of 95 theses authored by Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, to the door of the All Saint's Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This small act would fracture the monopoly of the Roman church. Within decades Protestantism would become institutionalized and flourish throughout most regions of Europe. Solomon's temple was being rebuilt once again. Indeed, it would be rebuilt many times over as denomination after denomination would splinter from mother churches and form their own institutional structures.

We know that these structures, which are the modern attempts to represent Solomon's temple, are not the body of Christ. These denominations have come and gone. Ministries built around them have come and gone. There is nothing permanent about these modern expressions of Solomon's temple any more than his temple of old was permanent. ***The ultimate expression of the temple of God is foreshadowed in the Tabernacle of David, and is something far more precious than bricks and mortar.***

How We Fulfill the "Type" of David's Tabernacle

There are a number of ways in which the story of the Tabernacle of David finds its fulfillment in God's elect today. As you read on, you must understand this account as a "picture," a shadow and a type of a greater spiritual reality that we are even now walking into. Indeed, it is our belief that virtually all of the Old Testament must be understood in this way if we are to fully understand and appreciate the significance of scripture for us today.

The Tabernacle of David has been in preparation over many years and indeed centuries. Those who comprise this tabernacle have been anointed as kings and priests, and, like David himself, have been spending years in the back country as God is preparing them to fulfill His purpose of returning the Ark of the Covenant to its rightful place upon Mount Zion. David, of course, is a type of Christ, and Christ our head is, like David, directing and guiding this operation. We, however, are the body of Christ who have been anointed as the vessels—the tabernacles—to carry out this task. These vessels are largely unnoticed by the world, and especially by the church world. Most have, in fact, been called out of the world of institutional Christianity. Many of us have been called out literally, renouncing membership in these institutions altogether. Some have found fellowship with others in their communities who have similarly been called out of organized religion, meeting in small groups in their homes and elsewhere. There are others whose fellowship consists primarily of phone calls, email, and text exchanges. These are those referred by Jackie Caparoso as "the wire church" (Caparoso, n.d.) There are still others who remain in their local churches, but whose call takes them far beyond the boundaries of institutional Christianity. These often have a

prophetic voice in their local congregations, speaking forth realms of the Spirit that are quite foreign to most fellow parishioners and even to the pastors and congregational leaders. They are often regarded as pariahs in their congregations, and forceful attempts are made to silence their voices. They will not be silenced. Despite their regular attendance at scheduled events in these religious bodies, they remain “outside the camp” as fully as those who have been called by the Lord out of institutional Christianity altogether.

These are, in an important sense, David’s “30,000” (the body of Christ) who are bringing forth the presence of God to Mount Zion today. We recognize, of course, that David is a type of Christ, and it is Christ our Head who is leading the procession carrying the Ark of the Covenant—God’s very presence and life—to its proper place on Jerusalem’s holy hill. And arriving finally on Mount Zion, we are the humble tabernacle that is housing the very life of God. As we shall see momentarily, this vessel that we are still awaits its final transformation that will fulfill the prophecy that Amos and then James prophesied, and we will, in our glorified bodies, *fully become* the Tabernacle of David. Until then, the Ark of the Covenant remains behind a veil within us, as it were, much as it did in Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple. That is to say, we are largely hidden to this world except as He chooses to appear through us—His tabernacle—at times and circumstances of His choosing. That renting of that veil at the time of Jesus’ death, to be sure, represented the abolition of the old covenant with its human priestly intermediaries. More than this, however, this ripping of the veil was a prophetic picture of the tabernacle of glorified bodies which have been prepared for us. Here we will find ourselves directly in the presence of God with no veil to dim or warp that presence. Others who enter into our presence will also experience, without veil, the brilliance of His glory.

Unfettered Worship

An important characteristic of the Tabernacle of David for its relevance to our day was demonstrated in the procession from the house of Abinidab, and later from the house of Obed-Edom from which it was carried to Mount Zion. Scripture tells of dancing, singing, and musical instruments as “David danced before the Lord

with all his might” girded only with a linen ephod. There was also much celebration after the Ark made it to Mount Zion and was placed in the humble tent that David had constructed.

Many congregations have attempted to replicate what they imagine this celebration to look like, complete with free emotional expression, swaying and raising of the hands and even with teams of dancers and the waving of flags. Others have structured 24/7 worship and prayer vigils in an attempt to capture the essence of the non-stop worship that took place around the primitive tabernacle that David had erected in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant. As laudable as such attempts might be, they will never capture the essence of David’s tabernacle, nor its significance for our day. All of these are attempts to recreate a *form* of free “Davidic” worship within the temples of Solomon that have been erected. We have also known any number of people who have roamed from congregation to congregation, always seeking a more “spirit filled” pastor, or “real Bible preaching,” “freer worship,” or any of a myriad of criteria that they believe would somehow bring them closer to God and free them to worship in a more authentic way. When we think about these people in our lives we are reminded once again of Jesus’ words to the woman at the well who essentially asked Jesus, “Where (How?) are we to worship? Jesus’ reply cut through to the chase.

...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him (John 4:23; NKJV).

God is freeing a people from the bondage of all religious traditions, to simply walk in union with Him, their words and actions being but a response to that which they are experiencing within their inner man. The words that usher forth may be words of encouragement, or they may be words of correction; they may sound gentle or they may come across as harsh. But they will freely come forth from the spirit within. The actions of these who are freely worshipping *as* the Tabernacle of David may be actions that bless and that appear most godly to those observing; or they may appear to be cruel, even sinful to those who can see only through the

lens of the law. They are, however, actions which are freely done in obedience to the Spirit of God within. These individuals are worshipping the Father in Spirit and in truth. These are the true worshippers *as* the Tabernacle of David.

Let us emphasize again that David's tabernacle, like virtually all of the experiences of our spiritual ancestors in the Old Testament, must be understood as a *shadow and a type*—not a *prototype*—of the worship that God has in store for His people in our day. That is to say, the worship experience that we see portrayed in scripture taking place at the Tabernacle of David is not something to be copied or mimicked. It is, rather a picture of a greater spiritual reality that God has in store for His people. ***That reality to which David's tabernacle is pointing, we believe, is first and foremost a releasing of every chain of tradition, form, self-doubt and condemnation and any other bondage that would get in the way of an unfettered spirit-to-spirit communion with the Living God, as we acknowledge having been spiritually lost in the shuffle by all these replacements and substitutes for the manifested glory of God within His people.*** The characteristic feature of this Davidic worship is *freedom*. Whether this take place in a church building or a casual gathering of spiritual kinfolk, or even conversations in a grocery store, over the phone or by text—if you will, “*neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem*”—when the Spirit of God is released from within an individual such that his or her spirit touches the Spirit of God with holy awe and humility, one is experiencing the unfettered worship that characterized the worship around that little tabernacle in Jerusalem so many centuries ago. This total freedom will ultimately be experienced when we shed these mortal bodies and put on immortality as we don our glorified spiritual bodies.

Such worship will be a response to a sovereign act of God that cannot help but express itself. It will not consist of any attempts to “imitate” what took place back then in Jerusalem. Indeed, these attempts only quench true worship in spirit and in truth with a failed attempt to harness this sovereign act of God. These attempts, generally speaking, encourage if not force conformity to a particular structure of worship. Worship *as* the Tabernacles of David is nothing less than the invasion of the Spirit of God into the life of an individual and into the life of the corporate body of Christ wherever and however that should express itself by

the Spirit of the living God. As this incursion of the Holy Spirit takes place there is true freedom of worship where the captives are set free.

Unfettered Access to the Holy of Holies

We observe in the tabernacle of David a particularly significant difference with Moses' tabernacle and, for that matter, with Solomon's temple. Whereas in these places of worship, it was the high priest only who could enter the Holy of Holies wherein was placed the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle of David allowed access to all, and at any time. In fact, in David's tabernacle, there was no outer court, nor was there that middle room, the Holy Place, where the various priests would enter at established times throughout the various seasons to offer unto God the sacrifices of the people. There was but one simple room, in an earthy, primitive tent in which the Ark of the Covenant was placed. What better picture could there be of that which was yet to come? The three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) speak of the veil being rent from top to bottom at the time that Jesus took His last breath on the cross. This torn veil that was ripped from top to bottom represents, at one level, the veil in the Tabernacle of Moses as well as in Solomon's Temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. Far more significantly, however, it represents the opening of the "Door" via Jesus' crucified and torn flesh which grants the free and unfettered access that all of us now have to the presence of God Himself. This is an incredible reality that most Christians have yet to fully grasp or experience today. It is a reality, however, that mysteriously both *has come* and *is yet to fully come* or be realized in all men. Once again, James, quoting the prophet Amos declared:

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up (Acts 15:16).

Please note that James spoke these words *after* Jesus' crucifixion and after the veil was rent. Indeed, it was spoken after the experience of Pentecost in the upper room. James was not suggesting that this was a fully present reality in his time; it was a reality that was yet to fully come. We would quickly point out here, that the renting of the veil at Jesus' death did indeed have an immediate

consequence. We take note, for example, of Christ's return in those who waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit to descend upon them in the upper room at Pentecost, and they were all filled with the Spirit. They did indeed have direct access to God Himself, and this access was demonstrated in power by the miracles that they performed! We, too, have the same access that these early disciples did. Indeed, this was the thrust of Martin Luther's 95 theses on the Wittenberg door that launched the Protestant Reformation. This revelation to Martin Luther was, in our minds, the lasting and eternal truth that came out of this Great Reformation. It is a truth that freed men and women from the incredible bondage and corruption that the Roman church of that day had inflicted on the people of God. What we are suggesting, however, is that this revelation to Martin Luther, and the many visitations of God that would follow over the centuries, were, at best, but an in-part fulfillment of that which the Tabernacle of David represents. This is why we believe that James was speaking of a yet future time that was upon them in the early church when he spoke forth the prophecy of Amos. This prophecy would continue its unfolding fulfillment in the many brethren ever after who would come to embrace the *musterion*, or mystery, that was activated by the cross, earthquake and tearing of the veil.

Our Bodies, the Temple of God

The apostle Paul said,

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [who is] in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own (1 Corinthians 6:19; NKJV)?

There is probably no clearer exposition in scripture as to the identity of the true temple of God than that which can be found in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. Much of Paul's instruction comes as a warning to this church not to defile this body because in defiling it one defiles the very temple of God. The very important point that Paul is making here is that the Spirit of God (*pnuema*) now resides within our very bodies (*soma*). The Greek word that is used for temple in this letter to the Corinthians is *naos*, which refers to the innermost part of Solomon's temple—the Holy of Holies.

The true temple of God today has a corporate expression as well. The body of Christ consists of all of those who have been called according to His great purpose and who have taken up their cross to follow Him. With Christ as the Head, we, together, make up His body.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many (1 Corinthians 12:12-14; NKJV).

This body comprises the corporate temple of God, each part of that body having a function to play. Elsewhere, Paul uses the analogy of a building, with each stone being fitted together, with Christ as the cornerstone. Here the representation of the corporate body of Christ comprising the temple becomes more clear:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner[stone], in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22; NKJV).

Solomon's (rebuilt) temple was destroyed in 70 AD, not to be rebuilt again. Jesus prophesied it. He made reference to Himself as the temple of God which, when destroyed, would be raised again in three days (John 2:19). Paul extends this theme, and makes it very clear that we, the entire body of Christ are that temple corporately with Christ being the cornerstone that binds this temple together.

This, then raises the question: If we are the temple of God and Christ is the chief cornerstone, why does James then quote the prophet Amos that the Tabernacle of David will be rebuilt (future tense)? The answer to that question can be found in Jesus' response to the Jews who demanded a sign that He was the Messiah:

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

That which would ultimately be raised up was not merely His individual body alone, but a much larger corporate body who, through their connection to the Head, would change the world of their day through His Spirit which dwelt in them. But may we suggest that this exchange with the Jewish leaders portended something even greater? Jesus was pointing to a reality which we have yet to fully experience.

Our Glorified Bodies, the Tabernacle of David

When Jesus was raised from the dead, he arose with a new body, a glorified body. This is evidenced, for example, when He appeared before the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they did not recognize Him. It is even more clearly demonstrated when Jesus suddenly appeared to the disciples in the room in which they were gathered despite the door being shut tight. *We are also promised new immortal and glorified bodies.* The apostle Paul declares in that glorious declaration of our freedom in Christ penned to the church in Rome:

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you

And not only [they], but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, [to wit], the redemption of our body (Romans 8:11,23).

It is as though Paul is putting an exclamation point on the freedom that he is proclaiming for the saints in this eighth chapter of Romans by declaring that this freedom even includes the freedom of our bodies from the corruption of their very mortality! Is this not the ultimate freedom to worship God in spirit and in truth?

Consider the characteristics of the Tabernacle of David for a moment. There was unfettered worship. Such worship as David's tabernacle portends is not limited

by the distractions of our mortality. There will be no dimness of understanding, for we will not be worshiping through the veil of the mortality of our mind and soul. The chains of the soulical realm permeating these bodies of mortality will be loosed. We will dance, as did David, oblivious to the observations and judgments of whatever Michals might be around us. Our worship will be continuous, never ceasing simply because we are in continual spirit-to-spirit communion with the Father. There will, as the Tabernacle of David foreshadows, be unfettered access to the very presence of God. There will be no veil, no Holy of Holies wherein only the chief priest will be allowed to enter. God's presence will be continuously with us. Indeed, *we* will be the priests as we, together with Christ who is our Head and Chief Priest, minister reconciliation to all of God's creation.

This promise is ours. Jesus is the Pattern Son who has blazed the trail before us. He endured the shame of the cross and rose from that grave with a glorified body, victorious over sin and death. This is the same victory and destiny that is promised us, as we also endure the shame of the cross.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares [us], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2; NKJV).

Yes, friends, we are indeed being constructed into the Tabernacle of David. We are enduring the shame of His suffering. Many of us are going through the dark night as Jesus did. It is this very death which is metamorphosing us into the very image of God. James echoed Amos' prophecy correctly: the Tabernacle of David is indeed being raised again!

Do you catch the curious irony with regard to the Old Testament's foreshadowing of things to come? David understood the tabernacle that he erected on Mount Zion to be a temporary structure, as scripture tells us that it was in his heart to build a more permanent temple unto the Lord that would house the Ark of His

Presence. That “permanent temple” would not be built until *after his death*, under the reign of his son Solomon. This seemingly permanent temple of Solomon was glorious, indeed, but it was the Tabernacle of David that prefigured something even more glorious and profound—that is, that the temple in which God now abides is, in reality, our very bodies. *We* are that glorious temple which now houses the Ark of the Covenant. But here is the irony: this bodily temple which was foreshadowed by the Tabernacle of David, to use the analogy of the metamorphosis from a cocoon to a butterfly, *is the temporary encasement through which will emerge the very presence of God!* It is the cocoon that houses the beautiful butterfly that is forming within each of us. His final, permanent dwelling place—the emergent butterfly if you will—is our spiritual bodies, both individual and corporate. This hope of Christ coming in His saints, as He fashions that dwelling place through this metamorphosis from mortality to immortality, is the glorified body of His saints which is what was prefigured by that simple tent known as the Tabernacle of David.

CHAPTER SEVEN: David's Tabernacle, Our Destiny

We want to share some final thoughts on the process that we are experiencing in becoming the embodiment of the Tabernacle of David. These thoughts are but as a fertilized egg that is being nurtured and growing within the womb of our being. Hence, we offer them with a tentativeness that maintains a spirit of humility.

What Will This Transition From Mortality to Immortality Look Like?

The simple answer to this question is that it is even now taking place. There has been much speculation as to when this transformation will take place, and what it will look like. Is this transformation something that will take place as the sons of God are manifested? Will this be a sudden, corporate experience to be observed in *chronos* time? Or is this transformation simply that which takes place for the saint at the time of his or her death—or even at some later time? These are all questions which have plagued those who embrace the truth of the shedding of our mortal bodies and the taking on of a spiritual, glorified body. The answer to all of these questions remains a mystery, at least in any detail. We do believe, however, that the Lord is shedding a greater light on some very important aspects of this transformation that is taking place.

A Process, Not an Event

Much of the reading that we have done among those for whom these questions seem to be most central²³ generally suggests (either explicitly or implicitly) that there will come a time in human (*chronos*) history when the sons of God will suddenly be manifested to the rest of the world. While not usually stated, the implication would seem to be that this is the time when we will shed our mortal bodies and take on our spiritual, glorified bodies. We have suggested elsewhere that this manifestation may not be a grand event taking place sometime in future *chronos* time, but rather should be understood as something that has been, and continues to be taking place in *kairos* time, as the saints become manifested to

²³ We refer here to what has been called the Sons of God Movement, which places great emphasis on the manifestation of the sons of God as presented by Paul in Romans 8.

specific individuals at God-ordained moments for His specific purposes at that precise time.²⁴ This understanding would suggest that the saints of God have been manifested throughout history, and continue to be manifested as they appear with Christ as Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians.²⁵ Paul states this transformation, or “change” as he calls it, happens in a twinkling of an eye and at the sound of the last trumpet. We are aware that this verse has been used as proof text for a “rapture” whereby the people leave terra-firma to meet the Lord in the air. We, as many of you reading, reject the “rapture theory” which has been handed down through the institutional church with the help of Hollywood and the “Left Behind” book and movie series. We understand the origins of this man-made doctrine and see this as a “snare” or trap for God’s people in many ways.²⁶ We would suggest that the context of this statement in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians makes it clear that he is talking about putting on immortality. The “change” is about this metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly not about a change in geographical location. Remember that the tombs broke open after the veil was rent in two and the dead came out of the grave after the death of Christ on the cross took place. This must happen at some point on our journey on a spiritual and physical level and it is this that we are in the process of working out and getting a vision for.

A Purging Process, Involving a Dark Night of the Soul and Spirit

This process of transformation from mortality to immortality entails a great purging of all of the dross and contaminants in our lives which prevent the absolute transcendence of the Spirit in our beings. This purging can be ruthless as it exposes areas of our lives deep below the level of consciousness that have stunted our spiritual development and ultimate transformation into the beings

²⁴ See the article [Hidden with Christ](http://www.wordforthebride.net), which can be found on the Books and Articles page at www.wordforthebride.net.

²⁵ It may well be that there will come a time when there is a greater manifestation which will take place at a corporate level, whereby the world will see Christ manifested in His saints on a greater scale. To become preoccupied with any such future occurrence, however, is a distraction that will result in our missing the manifestation of the sons of God that is taking place *now*.

²⁶ If you are not familiar with the origins of the rapture theory, we would encourage you to read Elwin Roach’s wonderful treatment of this entitled “[The Rapture Question](http://www.godfire.net)” available at www.godfire.net.

that we were originally intended to be.²⁷ This is a painful process that will often bring one to the very brink of despair. Here, we are confronted with old Adam within each of us. Thoughts and actions which before were not even noticed, or at most trivialized, are magnified to a degree that we desperately want to look away because of the ugliness in ourselves that we now see. But we cannot look away. Because of this deepened awareness of this Man of Lawlessness, all sense of spirituality seems gone. God is distant, and if not distant, often seems to us not caring one whit about our agony and despair. We have entered the dark night of the soul, and eventually the even more profound dark night of the spirit.

This dark night is the very birth canal through which we will eventually be birthed into that glorious state for which God has originally intended us. Without it we cannot come into this place of glorification because nothing impure can remain in the presence of His glory. This dark night represents, in large part, the sharing in His sufferings so that we can also share in His glory.

A Hidden Process

This process of purging is not one that is generally seen by the world. Those around us, unless they have themselves experienced this marvelous work of God in their lives, will be ready to diagnose us with any number of maladies. Some may think that we are suffering from clinical depression, and in need of medical attention. Others, of a more religious bent, may assume that there is sin in our lives of which we must repent—particularly if this dark night is accompanied by unfavorable external circumstances such as sickness or financial hardship. Still others may be oblivious to it all and simply regard our demeanor as the result of one who is getting old and losing a zest for life. While all of the above are conditions that affect mankind, the point that we are making is that even when this purging that is taking place manifests itself with outward symptoms, the true nature of what is going on remains hidden to the outside world. We are certainly not regarded as the elect sons of God that we are, whom God is molding into His very image.

²⁷ See *The Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of The Cross for a most thorough and profound treatment of this purging process. It can also be found on the Books and Articles page at the website www.wordforthebride.net under the heading "By Other Writers."

It is also true that this process often remains hidden to ourselves as we are going through it. This is no fault of our own. God will often keep the true nature of this struggle from us, as it is necessary that we have such a sense of deprivation from the blessings of God to the point that we actually feel alienated from God. He is bringing us to that point he brought Job to when he said, *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”* Will we continue to trust Him even though it feels as though he has abandoned us? Will we, like Peter, continue to trust Him, even though we have denied Him multiple times through this dark time? Indeed, our inability to fully understand the nature and purpose of what we are experiencing as we are going through it is what makes this purging process so excruciating.

Yet, even during this time of great tribulation in our souls, there is a manifestation of that glorified personage that we are becoming that occurs from time to time in various situations in which we find ourselves. We may speak a Word²⁸ to a friend or stranger that is transformative to a situation in their life, unbeknownst to us. We may not even be aware of why we are speaking this Word. But it is life to them, and we are life to them at that moment. Our true identity is being revealed to that brother or sister in the sharing of that Word, even though neither they nor we may fully understand what is transpiring here. Nevertheless, a life is transformed, even if just a bit. Such transformation only takes place as His Life is brought forth in them, in this case through a vessel in the process of being transformed into the very image of God.

The transformation that we are experiencing through this hidden purging is the very thing that leads to the metamorphosis from this mortal body to the glorified spiritual body to which we are ultimately destined. Jesus, the Pattern Son, experienced this painful process throughout His life, culminating in Gethsemane, and then the excruciating death on the cross. His glorified body would never have become a reality had it not been for His resurrection from the dead and walking out of that tomb. And His resurrection would never have taken place had it not been for His death on that cross. And friends, His death on the cross would never

²⁸ We are capitalizing Word here, to indicate that this is an anointed Word of Life, which is truly His life that will ultimately become incarnate in the person receiving it. See [The Bible, Honky Tonk Music and the Word of God](#) in the Books and Articles page of www.wordforthebride.net.

have occurred had it not been for the processing of God throughout His life culminating in that excruciating and fateful night in the garden. All of this—His testing, His persecution, His agony in Gethsemane, and His death and resurrection were all preludes to the final stage in this progression, His glorification! Paul points us to the centrality of suffering in our ultimate glorification:

And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering (Romans 8:17).

Peter also recognizes the integral role of suffering in our being transformed into His divine nature:

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires (1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:4; NLT).

We emphatically proclaim that this divine nature which Peter declares that we will be sharing, is ultimately our sharing in Christ's glorification, and that includes our shedding this mortal body and the putting on of immortality. And so it is that the Tabernacle of David is even now being raised up in us, even as James prophesied some 20 centuries ago.

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