

The Role of Ministers

Fred Coulter—October 23, 2010

What is the government of God in relationship to the ministry? How are they to serve the congregation? You've heard it said in the past that you can't learn how to rule unless you're ruled. Who is to rule in your heart? *Christ!*

Let's begin by looking at several things that are important concerning the ministry. Let's start in Matthew 16, because this is important. Matt. 16 and John 21 both involve Peter, and that also becomes important in understanding concerning the ministry. What is the goal and what is the purpose of the ministry?

Here's the famous place where the Catholics claim primacy of Peter, but it's not so. So Jesus asked them the question, Matthew 16:13: "Now after coming into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus questioned His disciples, saying, 'Whom do men declare Me, the Son of man, to be?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets'" (vs 13-14). All what? *Opinions!*. Now, I'm sure that some of them had opinions so strong they really believed it, otherwise they wouldn't have killed Christ—right?

Verse 15: "He said to them, 'But you, whom do you declare Me to be?' Then Simon Peter answered *and* said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered *and* said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father, Who is in heaven. And I say also to you, that you are Peter...'" (vs 15-18). Now you can read the footnote here and that is 'petros,' *a small stone*, and called that in John 1:42.

Would you build a house on a small stone? Would you get a small stone, throw it on the ground, tell the contractor, 'Okay, build a house on that stone?' He'd look at you and say, 'You're nuts!' The building inspector would come along and say, 'Tear it down, it doesn't meet the code.' Likewise here.

"...you are Peter, but upon this Rock..." (v 18)—'Petra'—*massive cliff*. What did Jesus say of Himself? He said, 'The one who hears My words and builds on his house on the rock is a wise man. And the floods came, the water came, the wind blew and it didn't fall.' Are we not all built on Christ? Is Christ not the Chief Cornerstone? *Yes, indeed!* Nowhere does the Bible say that Peter, though he was the leading apostle, was the pope. And as a matter of fact if that is so, how do you explain Gal. 2? You know you need to read Gal. 2, what Paul said to Peter—right? *Yes, indeed!*

"...but upon this Rock I will build My Church, and *the* gates of the grave shall not prevail against it. And I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you may bind on the earth will have already been bound in heaven... [Showing that you must base it upon the Word of God before any decision is made on the earth.] ...and whatever you may loose on the earth will have already been loosed in heaven'" (vs 18-19). All right, so there's Peter.

What else did Peter do? What's another one that Peter did? *Two things!* What did he do? Verse 21: "From that time Jesus began to explain to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised the third day. But after taking *Him* aside, Peter personally began to rebuke Him, saying, '*God will be* favorable to you, Lord. In no way shall this *happen* to You'" (vs 21-22). And remember who was the one who took the sword and cut off the ear? *Peter!* He's saying, 'Lord, we're going to fight for you. This is not going to happen.'

Notice what Christ said in response to Peter's rebuking Him. "Then He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, because your thoughts are not *in accord* with the things of God, but the things of men'" (v 23).

What else did he do on the Passover night? What did he do after he fell asleep? *He denied Him three times!* That's correct. So Peter had some lessons to learn—didn't he? Now with this as the background, let's come to John 21 and we'll see why Jesus said this, because it would be very easy for Peter to get exalted in vanity—wouldn't it? Especially when you read in Acts 5 where just the shadow of his passing over the sick, people were healed. He could have said, 'Boy, I'm important to God.' He could have said to Paul in Galatians 2, 'You're an upstart apostle, you didn't come in when we did.' But he didn't say that—did he?

So here we have this, very important encounter. John 21:24: "This is the disciple [John] who testifies concerning these things and who wrote these things... [Notice the rest of that sentence; he's talking about 'I.']: ...and we know that his testimony is true." Who are the 'we'? When was that written? *Probably when they were canonizing the New Testament.* Who was with John? *Probably Andrew and Philip, maybe Mark.*

So what does this do to the book of John? What does God require of witnesses? *Two or three*—right? Everyone looks at the book of John

and says, ‘The book of John is separate and different, but we have Matthew, Mark, and Luke who are three witnesses.’ In reality in John, you have two or more witnesses talking about the whole gospel of John. So it meets the same test.

You go back and read the Epistle of 1-John. The Epistle of 1-John is *we, we, we, we*. Then it comes to the second chapter and it is *I, I, I, I*, almost all the way through. Why? Because John edited certain things into it when they were canonizing the New Testament. So, it’s very likely that he added this twenty-first chapter at that time and it’s indispensable that he has other witnesses declaring that what he wrote was true, especially concerning Peter. Could it be that he wrote this after Peter was already dead? *Undoubtedly!* Little apostolic courtesy, but God wanted this in there for the sake of answering the question:

- What are the ministers and servants of God to do?
- What is their primary responsibility?

Verse 15: “Therefore, when they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me more than these?’ ... [Now you can read about the difference between ‘phileo’ and ‘agapao’ at the footnote (*Faithful Version Bible*).] ...*And* he said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’” ‘Feed My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me?’ *And* he said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep’” (vs 15-16). So you have to ***feed them and shepherd them.***

- *Feeding* them is so that they will grow, that they will produce.
- *Shepherding* them is leading them in the right direction.

Verse 17: ...He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” ***That’s the primary purpose of any elder or minister.*** It doesn’t matter whatever he may be doing, whether he’s an apostle, whether he’s a prophet, whether he’s an evangelist, or whatever. Those are all *functions*. Those are not titles. Those are not offices.

Paul said, ‘I’m a teacher, apostle, and minister.’

- When he was ‘apostling,’ he was an *apostle*.
 - When he was teaching, he was a *teacher*.
 - When he was ministering, he was a *minister*.
- So he was all three. ‘Feed My sheep.’

Now let’s come to 1-Peter 5:1, and we’re going to see that Peter did indeed learn that lesson. “*The elders who are among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder... [Did he exalt himself? Did he say, ‘I exhort you as the pope, as the chief minister of Christ.’ No!]* (he said): ...as a fellow elder... [very important] ...and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed: Feed the flock of God *that* is among you... [He learned the lesson—didn’t he? This was later in his life. ‘Feed the flock.’] ...**exercising oversight not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain...** [not to merchandise, not to take advantage of financially] ...but *with an eager attitude...* [or with eagerness to what? *Serve God!*] ...Not as exercising lordship over *your* possessions...” (vs 1-3).

That’s one of the biggest problems that ministers have today and have had down through history. They think that the brethren are their *possessions*, the tithes of God are *theirs*. It’s much like politicians, especially those who like to tax and spend. All the taxing money is theirs. *No! It’s the people’s!* We’re to give tithes and offerings willingly, but not to berate people, beat them over the head and constrain them to give. *No!* Inspire them to love and serve God and let God inspire them to give as God desires them to give. Some can give more, some can give less, but we have to have the right hearts toward God. Likewise, those who are elders and ministers they have to have the right understanding and attitude toward the brethren.]

“Not as exercising lordship over *your* possessions; but *by* being examples to the flock of God” (v 3). How do you be an example?

1. your personal relationship with God
2. by how you live your life
3. by how you preach and teach

It’s completely different. This is a key as to understanding why there are church wars. And the real church war is God fighting against the ministers that do such things. Whenever there are problems and difficulties, what always happens in church wars? Rather than declaring a fast and leading the brethren in prayer and repentance to find the will of God, and understanding the proper servant relationship that elders need to have with the brethren—what do they do? *They beat upon the brethren, they threaten them!* They give fearful edicts, such as, ‘I’m the only apostle on earth and you better follow me. If you don’t follow me, you’re going to lose salvation.’

Now, stop and think just a minute. We’ve all experienced that—correct? How many have heard that? *All of us!* Stop and think for just a minute. What happened to that church with that attitude? Did

God bless it or did He eliminate it? *He eliminated it!* It's the same thing that's happening today. God is judging His Church, because we're all being judged all the time—isn't that correct? 'Now the judgment of God is upon the house of God'—correct? 'And if the righteous be saved with difficulty, what's going to happen to the sinners and ungodly?'

God does not want that, brethren! That's not the mission of the ministry, to rule over the brethren. Whenever that happens, you know for sure that God is going to intervene and it's on its way down, regardless of what age or what time it'll take place.

- Are we not all to learn to love God with all our hearts and mind and soul and being? *Yes!*
- Are we not to learn to love each other as Christ loved us? *Yes!*
- Where does that kind of behavior then come in?
- Is not God going to judge for it?

I don't know what's happening and the details, but I do know that that's how God operates. So the ministers need to learn what Christ has to say here—*to feed the flock.*

Let's come to Ephesians 4, and let's see what we are to do. (Just put in your margin, read all of 1 & 2-Timothy and Titus on how to serve. Not once did Paul say, 'Rule over the brethren.' He said, 'Rebuke, exhort, encourage,' but he never said rule over. He said be an example, he said to serve them. Are we all going to make mistakes? *Yes!* I make mistakes, you make mistakes—isn't that true? Are we not to repent every day, all of us, to God? *Yes, indeed!* That's all of it.

We've heard this thundered many, many different ways, but let's read it the way that Paul wrote it here, Ephesians 1:20, talking about the power of God and the resurrection here: "Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above every principality and authority... [And remember what Jesus told the apostles, all what? 'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me.'] ...and power and lordship, and every name that is named—not only in this age, but also in the *age* to come. For He has subordinated all things under His feet, and has given Him *to be* head over all things to the church, Which is His body—the fullness of Him Who fills all things in all" (vs 20-23).

Ephesians 4:11: "And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets... [*prophets* does not necessarily mean foretelling the future, it means forth-telling the Word of God] ...and some evangelists... [If you're evangelizing, you're an evangelist. Remember Paul told Timothy, 'Do the

work of an evangelist.' If you're an elder and you're evangelizing, then you're an evangelist as long as you're evangelizing. If you're not, you're an elder, just like Peter said, 'whom am also an elder.'] ...and some, pastors and teachers **for the perfecting of the saints...**" (vs 11-12).

Since we are to feed the flock, shepherd the sheep—how do you do that?

1. with the love of God
2. with the Word of God
3. with your relationship between you and God

—as a minister. That's how it's done. *Perfecting!* Put in your margin there, Matt. 5:48. 'Become perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect'—right? We're to what?

- *help* them,
- *teach* them
- *feed* them

and we'll see for what purpose here in just a minute.

Let me explain something about sheep. Now there was a movie years ago in which Doris Day was one of the main characters in it. I think it was that she had a big flock of sheep and the cattlemen didn't want her to have the sheep there. I think she had another man working for her and she had a sheep dog. The cattlemen came in and said, 'Get your sheep out of here, they're grazing down all the grass, leaving nothing for the cattle.' She said, 'Well, I was here before you came.' *We'll get them out of here ourselves.* So there were five cowboys on their horses and they were going to try and drive the sheep like cattle.

They go charging into the flock of sheep and the sheep just separated and the horses went right through. The sheep all came back together. They tried this, they couldn't get the sheep to go. Why? *They were using the wrong method!* So the fellow who was working for Doris Day, he looked at the sheep dog and said, 'Dog, go get 'em.' So the dog went out there and knew how to move the sheep. So there's a way to move sheep and there's a way to teach sheep.

Now what did the dog do, go bite at them, growl at them? *No!* He just had his presence there in a certain way and led them. When there's a shepherd, he has one lead sheep or it can be a goat, put a bell on. When they hear the bell, all the sheep follow the bell.

Let's see the purpose of this, brethren. Remember Jesus said, 'Feed My sheep.' Verse 12: "For the perfecting of the saints, for *the* work of *the* ministry..." Let's stop right here. Whatever the ministers do is ***not*** the work of God. What is the

work of God? ‘*We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus*’ (Eph. 2:10). He is doing the work of God within us. But what are the elders and ministers doing? *They’re doing the work of the ministry, not the work of God!* They are assisting God in His work, but it has to be conformed to doing what God wants, that God is creating in us the very image of Christ, the mind of Christ, and preparing us for the resurrection—correct?

“...for *the* edifying of the body of Christ” (v 12). So we have

- the *perfecting*
- the *work*
- the *edifying* of the body of Christ.

Now what is edifying? *Edifying means to build up*—up-build. Ever heard of an edifice? Comes from that word. Edifice is a fine piece of construction. “...for the edifying...”—for the up-building of the Church

- to give us strength
- to give us help
- to give us understanding in times of need
- to instruct us in the way of Christ so that we are prepared with the Spirit of God all together
- to be perfected toward the resurrection

“...for *the* edifying of the body of Christ; until we all come into the unity of the faith... [So we’re working at the unity of the faith—correct?] (But notice what he says: *we*. Paul is saying me and all the brethren together, all the other elders together): ...until ***we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ***” (vs 12-13). That’s the job of the ministry.

It’s not like what so many people have experienced. It’s not like what the Catholics have done and we mimic the Catholics.

(go to the next track)

Let’s come here to 2-Timothy 3, where I want to concentrate on what we need to cover here as far as the aspect of teaching. Another thing that’s very important in teaching, brethren, not only teaching the Word of God, but also with the Word of God to teach you how to solve your own problems. What happens so many times in a corporate church? Now they’ve sent me some advertising, sample copies of church CEO, church executive things. The church is not to be run like a corporation of the world. That’s not the way that God said it should be run. ***‘Feed the flock,’*** that’s the important thing.

2-Timothy 3:15: “And that from a child you have known the Holy Writings... [Now that’s the Old Testament. Every Protestant needs to read this.] ...which are able to make you wise unto salvation

through faith, which *is* in Christ Jesus.” Remember Psalms 19 says that the ‘law of God is perfect, converting the soul.’ That is, with the Spirit of God. So salvation doesn’t come through just the New Testament. If you don’t have the Old Testament first, the New Testament is not going to do you any good, because if you say the Old Testament has been done away, then what you need to do is take out every Scripture in the New Testament that refers to the Old Testament, and you will have indeed, a very leaky bag—won’t you?

Verse 16: “All Scripture... [And this is how we are to teach and preach with the Word of God. That’s why I have my cowbell. When I give my opinion, I ring the bell. Sometimes they’re right, sometimes they’re not right. So I ring the bell so everyone knows that this is not a dogma from the Bible.] ...All Scripture *is* God-breathed...” Now what does that mean?

Remember that only eight men wrote the New Testament. Let’s ask a couple of questions:

- Is God *God Almighty*? *Yes!*
- Can God even make someone do His will, though He doesn’t want to, like Baalim? He wanted to curse, took the money to curse, but he could only bless. *Yes!*

That tells us that God can even control people that are against Him—correct? What about those who love Him? What about those who serve Him? What about those that God chose to write the New Testament? What about that? When you come to understand that of the New Testament, Paul wrote approximately sixty percent of the New Testament, when you count up the book of Acts and Luke which were written under Paul’s supervision.

But notice what Peter wrote here concerning the Scriptures, 2-Peter 1:14: “Knowing that shortly the putting off of my tabernacle *will come*, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has signified to me. But I will make every effort *that*, after my departure, you may always have a *written* remembrance... [I added the word ‘written’ in italics, because the word ‘remembrance’ means *remembrance like something carved in stone, like a memorial stone for someone who has died.*] ...*written* remembrance of these things *in order* to practice *them* for yourselves” (vs 14-15). So there we go.

Teach the brethren how to live the way God wants them to, not make them dependent upon a ministry where everything they have to do, they have to go get clearance from the minister to do it.

Then he makes it very clear here. “For we did not follow... [Now ‘we’ includes Peter, James, and John. James was beheaded. Paul filled his place.] ...For we did not follow cleverly concocted

myths *as our authority*, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory. Because He received glory and honor from God *the Father* when *the voice* came to Him from the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My son, the Beloved, in Whom I am well pleased’” (vs 16-17).

- Who was on the mountain? *Peter, James and John!*
- Who was the only other apostle to see Christ after His resurrection? *Paul!*

Verse 19: “We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word... [This phrase means *the confirmed inspired Word*, not just prophetic in the sense of prophecy. Where did that come from? *Christ!* He confirmed it to them—didn’t He? *Yes!*] ...confirmed prophetic Word to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place... [the light of God’s Word.] ...until the day dawns... [That’s the return of Christ] ...and *the morning star* arises in your hearts.” That’s the resurrection. We’ll shine as the stars—right? *Yes, indeed!*

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone’s own *private* interpretation.... [So anyone who says it’s just written by men—yeah, it was written by men, but what men and what kind of men?] ...no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone’s own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by *the Holy Spirit*” (vs 20-21).

Can God use men to write things that are inspired? *Yes!* Paul says, ‘God-breathed.’ Now do you think a Holy man of God who loves God and serves Him will write a lie, will preach lies, will teach falsehoods? *No!* That’s why we can have complete confidence in the Word of God. This is why, when we undertook to do the Bible, our goal was the Truth.

I was talking to a man the other day. He was talking about something and he thought it was very sensitive and he said, ‘Now, don’t be offended.’ I said, ‘Look, I want you to understand one thing. I’m not hung up on anything except the Truth. That’s it! If you have something for us that’s better that we should do, tell us. If it’s good, we’ll do it.’ What’s wrong with that? Are we not all seeking the Truth? How many different ones of you have come to me and brought up things that you thought should be this or that or the other and if it was so, we did it. Right? *Yes, indeed!* That’s the way—until ‘we all come into the unity of the faith’—correct? Because if you’re right and I’m wrong, I appreciate the correction, that’s fine, that’s the way it has to be.

Now let’s come back to 2-Timothy 3:16. This is a very important verse here. I know we’ve covered this in the past, but this has to be in the mix of the obligation of the work of a minister in shepherding and teaching the flock. And when churches get off the path of what they should be doing, and elders become important things to themselves, and if they become lords over the brethren, then you know that the sword of judgment and correction is sooner or later going to come. Bound to come! So don’t be upset what’s happening with the Churches of God. Ask God that His will be done, work it out; He’s separating, He’s sifting. We’re sorry that it has to be that way, but that’s the way it is with human nature. Do we have to correct ourselves when we study the Word of God? And every minister needs to learn this: You who teach others, don’t you teach yourself? Then Paul went on to say, ‘You who say don’t commit adultery, do you commit sacrilege?’ *Same thing!*

One of the most important things any minister or elder is this—after his relationship with God—***that you live what you teach!*** You don’t become an example to say, ‘Oh, I’m an example, I’m coming into church, I will act properly.’ No! You live what you teach. ***Likewise with the brethren!*** We all live what we are taught. And who’s the one who is teaching us anyway? Is it not Christ? Is it not the Word of God? *Yes!* Are we not following everything together? *Yes!* Did not Paul say, ‘Till we all come into the unity of the faith?’ *Yes!* That’s the way the ministry needs to be done.

2-Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture... [This is interesting, the word ‘all’—because it means *each and every one*. In seeking to produce this Bible, what was our goal? *Truth!* That’s what it was. What were we aiming to do? *To make the Truth correct and easy to understand!* No more! That’s how we approached it.] ...**All Scriptures is God-breathed** and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction...”

This is important, because if you love God and have faith in God and know what is right—what do you have? *You have conviction!* You’re not wishy-washy, one way one time, one way another time. You have conviction because it is true. And you believe it because it is true. And you’ve seen it in action and you know that it works. Just look at us here today. Has not the love of God been here and all the brethren who visited us here in the morning, was it not all the love of God? Weren’t we inspired to see them, glad to see them, happy to see them, wishing them well? *Yes, indeed!* That’s what it needs to be.

“...for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; So that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good

work” (vs 16-17). That means not only those who are teaching, but everyone who is learning.

Now here’s the charge. This adds to what we’ve just covered and we’ll finish here. In preaching and teaching, this is the ultimate of what needs to be done. This is why everyone who is a minister, elder, teacher, you must study.

- you must study every day
- you must read the Bible
- you must study the Bible
- you must put it together

That’s why the program that Albert had is really great. Bring it here one Sabbath and show everyone. It’s absolutely amazing. It’s got as many books as you want on there that you’ll ever care to read. I don’t know what the size of the chips are in it, but I tell you what, they’re getting it smaller and smaller and smaller—aren’t they? *Yes, indeed!* The only difficulty, like I told Albert was when he was showing it to me was this, I said when I have my Bible I don’t need a battery. If yours goes out, you’re in trouble.

Anyone who wants to speak and teach, listen up. This is what God says. 2-Timothy 4:1: “**I charge you...** [Now a charge is a very direct command.] ...therefore, in the sight of God... [that’s nothing in-between—is it?] ...even the Lord Jesus Christ... [Isn’t that interesting? In the sight of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ Who is what? *God! Yes!*] ...Who is ready to judge *the* living and *the* dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” That’s the final judgment. Judgment is happening all the time, every day.

“**Preach the Word!**.... [Now what did we cover this morning? ‘*The one who loves Me, keeps My Word.*’ That’s what we’re to preach—preach the Word.] ...Be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine” (v 2). Now I’ve learned this: *it’s true!* You go back over all my sermons and we have hundreds you can go back on if you go on site. You won’t find any where I do the typical correction of brethren. That was promulgated from past ministries.

In my second year of being a minister we were told by the church administration evangelist that once a year you’ve got to preach a fire-brand sermon against sin in the congregation. So I did. It took me two years to overcome that mistake. Because the truth is, you do not get people to change by beating them over the head! You get people to change as a work of the Spirit. So they must be inspired to change. How do you get people to change then? *Be inspired with the Word of God and inspire them to change!*

- Do you love God with all your heart and mind and soul and being? *Yes, you do!*
- Do you want to overcome the sin that is in your life? *Yes, you do!*

But God gives us the latitude in our prayer and our repentance to discover those sins through our study and yielding to God.

Verse 3: “For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves *a great number of* teachers, having ears itching to hear what satisfies their cravings; and they shall turn away their own ears from the Truth; and they shall be turned aside unto myths.... [We’ve seen that happen—haven’t we? *Yes, indeed!*] ...But *as for* you, be vigilant in all things, endure hardships, do *the* work of an evangelist... [He wasn’t an evangelist, but he said do the work of an evangelist. If he did the work of an evangelist, what he was doing, then he was an evangelist.] ...fully carry out your ministry” (vs 3-5).

Now, let’s come back to 2-Chronicles 32 for just a minute. We know that God is going to test us—don’t we? Did God test Abraham, Isaac, Jacob? *Yes!* Does God test us? *Yes, indeed!* ‘Let the testing or proving of your faith...’ Now here’s something here in 2-Chronicles 32 that really grabbed my attention and I spoke on this several times during the Feast. I may yet bring a full sermon on it.

At this time Hezekiah had the intervention of God to overcome the attack of the Assyrians and King Sennacherib. They had passed by Judah and went down to Egypt. They conquered all the countries from Assyria, all the way down into Egypt and they came back and they were ready to take Judea and Jerusalem. They had all of the booty and all of the wealth and all of the things that they had taken from the spoils of war with them. Jerusalem was going to be the last place that they were going to conquer. So the general sent one of his spokesmen up there to tell the people, ‘Don’t believe anything that Hezekiah says to you. We’ve destroyed all these other nations and their gods and we’re going to do it to you. Now why don’t you make it easy on yourself and surrender to us and that way we won’t have to slaughter you.’

Isaiah and Hezekiah took the letter to the Lord, prayed about it, and God gave the answer, ‘I’ll fight for you. You won’t have to fight this battle.’ So, what happened? The night before the battle, God killed all the soldiers except the king and maybe a couple of his top aides—185,000! I’ve often thought when the general got up in the morning, deathly silent. Wonder what he thought? ‘What’s happening?’ He opened the tent and looked out there and everything was dead.

If God will fight for you that way, how grateful should you be? So what happened? They were three days bringing all the loot into Jerusalem and they had to build treasuries for gold, treasuries for silver, treasuries for sword, treasuries for shields—stacked them all up there. And then Hezekiah got sick in the foot. Sent Isaiah and told him, ‘Go tell Hezekiah set his house in order, he’s going to die.’ So Hezekiah turned to the wall and wept sore. God added fifteen years to him. Then the ambassadors from Babylon came over and said, ‘Oh, we heard of the great miracle of this battle and fight and everything that took place there. And then you got sick and you were made well.’

So what happened to Hezekiah? *He got all lifted up in vanity!* What did he do? He opened up and showed them everything, all the treasuries. So Isaiah came and said, ‘Who were these men?’ *Oh, they some ambassadors and they wished me well, because I was healed.* ‘What did you show them?’ *I showed them everything.* And Isaiah said, ‘Because you showed them everything, they’re going to carry it off.’

Now then, let’s see what happened here, 2-Chronicles 32:24: “In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death and prayed to the LORD. And He spoke to him, and He gave him a sign.... [That’s the sundial going back ten degrees.] ...But Hezekiah responded not again according to the good *done* to him... [That’s including the victory of the battle and the whole thing.] ...for his heart was lifted up” (vs 24-25). You go back and look at all the kings of Israel and Judah. And how many times in old age someone gets lifted up. Now I take this as personal correction for me, because I’m 76. And we have seen it happen—haven’t we? *Yes!*

“...Therefore, there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the people of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (vs 25-26). It’s very telling about the statement that you find in parallel accounts in Isaiah and 2-Kings, where when he was told it won’t come in your days he said, ‘Oh, that’s good. I’ll have peace in my day.’ Well, he got an additional punishment. After he died, who succeeded him? *His son Manasseh!* For how long? *55-years!* The irony of it was, Manasseh repented and was brought back.

God does this when there is testing and they don’t turn to God the way that they should. Verse 31: “Nevertheless, *in the business of* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to ask about the wonder that was done in the land, **God left him in order to try him, to know all that was in his heart.**” Reading that recently, it just really hit me like a ton of bricks, because that’s

exactly what has happened in the Churches of God. If we don’t repent and yield to God, God is going to leave us to try us. Ever felt like where is God? *Yes, indeed!* Ever felt like that something was missing? *Yes, indeed!* That’s what happened. **“God left him in order to try him, to know all that was in his heart.”**

What is happening now in the churches of God is the same thing. God wants to know:

- Do you love Me?
- Do you believe Me?
- Are you going to follow Me?
- What is it that you are doing?

There are terrible times that are coming. Unless we love God and stay close to Him, it’s going to be really difficult. That’s the time you want God with you. We don’t want to be in a situation where God leaves us.

- Pray for the brethren.
- Pray for the different Churches of God.
- Pray that they’ll repent, that God will work with them.

What a terrible thing to have churches of God that God has to leave them, to test them, to know what is in their hearts.

Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 16:13-19, 21-23
- 2) John 21: 24, 15-17
- 3) 1-Peter 5:1-3
- 4) Ephesians 1:20-23
- 5) Ephesians 4:11-13
- 6) 2-Timothy 3:15-16
- 7) 2-Peter 1:14-17, 19-21
- 8) 2-Timothy 3:16-17
- 9) 2-Timothy 4:1-5
- 10) 2-Chronicles 32:24-26, 31

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- John 1:42
- Galatians 2
- Acts 5
- 1-John 1 & 2
- 1-2 Timothy
- Titus
- Matthew 5:48
- Ephesians 2:10
- Psalm 19

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