

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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Choices Part 8 TRAINED CONDUCT By Rayola Kelley

It takes making the right choices to ensure that a matter comes out right. It would seem that most people would see the reason in making them, but look at our present world. It is obvious that very few people who have what we call the "bully pulpits" believe in the absolutes of truth, morality, and righteousness. Even though I have dealt with various people going into extremes because of challenging times, and ending with obsession and



in many cases possession, I am still shocked at the depth that delusion, perversion, and depravity can take people. I have watched the people who travel this terrible route to hell change from some semblance of sanity to complete insanity. It's as if nothing is left of the person, and all that remains are eyes that mirror the deep darkness of hell itself, the countenance of total delusion, insanity, and rage, and the mocking, blaring hypocrisy of actions.

Right choices seem like a "no-brainer" to most people, but the reality is that "right choices" can be redefined with logic, adjusted to fit a preferred desire with excuses, ignored to maintain delusion, and made to be right in the mind of the individuals who have been seduced and indoctrinated. Such lives will be rendered into utter depravity, making these individuals rage against truth, profane all innocence, and destroy any purity.

Truth is the great connector to the reality of the present, morality the great discerner of the soul, and righteousness the great test as to what is motivating or inspiring the individual. The challenge right now is for the mind because once the mind can be swayed, changed, or indoctrinated in

the wrong way, the affections of the heart will naturally go the way of the mind, developing wrong attitudes, misguided allegiances, and indifferent, tyrannical reactions.

The Word of God is full of that which would constitute right or wrong choices. When you study the different lives of people, you realize two scenarios emerge. The first one has to do with those who make the right decision like Abel. They often erect the mirror that exposes the wrong decisions of people like Cain. Needless to say, the fleshly Cains prove jealous of the Abels, and will try to put out their witness. However, right decisions establish lasting testimonies that can't be silenced when it comes to God upholding them (Hebrews 11:4).

The second example are those who fail to hold the line of righteousness. Mankind often attempts to bring forth what God ordains, but anytime man tries to put his two cents in a matter, he creates detours and can miss the mark of excellence. Take Abraham. When the promised son did not materialize for him in his later years, he asked God if He wanted to make his faithful servant his heir, but the Lord told him that the seed would come from his loins (Genesis 15:2-6). Abraham missed going down a very difficult trail by believing God and dropping it at that point, but Sarai's interference in Genesis 16:1-5 was a whole different story. She had to admit she sinned because she was willing to settle for man's way instead of holding the line of faith until God fulfilled His promises. Sarai used the custom of giving her servant to Abraham to produce a son. It must have seen logical enough to Abraham because he did not seek the Lord about it but obliged her. At 86 he had his son, but it was not the one that was the promised son of God. The Lord later would instruct Abraham that the son would come out of his union with Sarai and not a slave (Genesis 18:10-14).

Sarai's servant mocked her because she could not have a son and when she did, Abraham's now 13-

year old son, Ishmael, mocked the promised son (Genesis 21:9-13). As we know, that which is of the flesh and the world can't be heir to that which is an heir of faith. The fleshly and worldly are after the things of the flesh and the world, while those who are heirs of promise are by faith pursuing after that which is unseen and eternal.

Sadly, we become impatient to see promises come to pass, but if these promises are not obtained by faith that patiently waits on God and endures to the end until they are fulfilled, then like Sarah, these people end up with something that will ultimately mock them in the end.

It is not unusual for new Christians to start off with great enthusiasm but as they confront the challenges of life, their former highs prove to become great lows of darkness. Since some equate their life to experiencing the highs of a new faith, they fail to pass the test of the lows when their character is being tested, their fragile faith is set up to fail them, and their surface devotion to God is barely hanging on by a thread, swinging over some abyss of utter defeat and hopelessness. The faith walk does not make us immune from the challenges of life, nor does it guide us away from life's adversities, or keep us from being bombarded by various storms; rather, it enables us to walk through the tough terrains, weather the storms, and stand when everything from hell is hitting us from every side and every direction.

A good example of such a person is King David. David was the youngest in the family of eight sons. No doubt as the youngest, the elder brothers probably passed down the chores that were least preferred. Here at a young age David was sent out to tend the sheep, allowing his other brothers to attend to other matters of life. Think about this for a minute, David learned responsibility at a young age. He knew how to tend, protect, and care for sheep at all stages of their life. In a way David's life is much like our Cinderella story.

When his father, Jesse, was called to meet with the prophet Samuel, no one had any idea Samuel was about to anoint the next king. This king would have a heart after and for God, but how can a man discern such a matter? After all, the first king of Israel, Saul, was the people's preference. He stood out in height, looks, and presentation, but Saul did not have the heart to be king, have the character to make the right choices, the resolve to do what was right before God, or prove to be honorable concerning the people he was over-seeing.

This is the reason many people fail the test of faith. The people trusted in what they could see, and not in the unseen God. They chose a king based on looks and presentation and not on character and calling. Samuel almost made the same mistake in *1 Samuel 15*. David's oldest brother Eliab looked the part of a potential king, but the Lord stated that He had refused him, and Samuel was reminded that God does not look on the countenance or height of a person, but on their heart.

David had to be called in from the field to be anointed as king. This may not seem an important matter, but God never calls those who are sitting around or waiting to be served as they sit at the tables of importance. Most servants of God are called while doing what is considered insignificant, but always will prove to be necessary. David, an ordinary shepherd in from the fields, was anointed as king by a prophet.

There are those who act as if Christianity is a type of nanny state where all are chiefs sitting at the head of tables demanding service, but the reality is, if that was so there would be no servants serving the Lord or His people. David's position of a shepherd pointed to humility, but the real key as to David's character is that he was faithful to his position, gladly occupied until called in from his duty, and was ultimately entrusted with the kingdom of Israel.

We often choose the temporary based on looks instead of seeking the Lord to establish that which is lasting. I had to learn such choices based on the temporary are fleshly and worldly and cater to those who are of this world and not those who are preparing for the glory to come. It is a lesson I have had to learn time and time

again. After ending up dealing with some Saul's, taking a few detours here and there, and ending up hitting walls of dead ends, I began to train myself to ask God for His perspective first so I did not end up with the counterfeit ways represented by Eliab that God had already rejected.

Most know the story of Saul and his tragic ending, but I try to study Saul at different times to remind myself of what I need to beware of about my own character, what I need to avoid when it comes to pride, and what I must not do if I am going to end up on the right side of matters. Saul clearly had opportunities to prove himself worthy of God's consideration, confirm the people's choice as being right, and uphold his high calling as royalty, but when he was put up against the wall of testing, he proved to be impulsive, unpredictable, self-serving, and foolish. At such times, he endangered his people, proved to be fearful and jealous towards that which revealed his own ineptness, and when caught, blamed others for his miserable failures. He never really took responsibility by truly repenting for who he was, what he did, and who he was allowing himself to become because of bad choices. In the end, he lost his reign as king, his authority before God, and a future dynasty for his heirs. When he was facing the darkness of his own end, and when it was clear the Spirit of God had departed from him, and the Lord no longer spoke to him, he sought out a witch (*1 Samuel 15:19-31; 16:14; 18:6-12; 1 Samuel 28:5-19*). This man who eventually became desperate towards the end of his life had been given much, but he never really valued the God behind his blessings and as a result neglected his calling, was flippant towards his responsibility, was dismissive towards his position, and in the end lost his soul.

It all comes down to the decisions we make when we are being tempted to compromise our integrity, adjust our faith, and undermine our testimony. Many people quote *1 Corinthians 10:13* in light of grave spiritual challenges and personal crises, but the scripture is not in reference to challenges and crises but temptation. God will not give us more than we can handle when being tempted. It is important to point out that the Lord provides a way out of temptation. The way is simple, it involves faith that

believes God's Word, while trusting Him enough to submit to what is true, and becoming humble enough to walk it out in loving obedience for the sake of all of that is sacred and right.

This brings us to David. David was God's choice for king (*1 Samuel 13:10-14*). The Lord knew his heart was tender towards Him. He had withstood lions and bears while tending sheep and was prepared to stand before kings and giants without feeling intimidated (*1 Samuel 17:36-46*). He desired the ways of righteousness because he understood victory could only be secured within such boundaries. We are told in *1 Samuel 18:14-17* how he walked before King Saul, "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."

You need to realize David's walk was a matter of choice. What did he choose? He chose to conduct himself in an honorable way at all times. His conduct revealed discretion on his part that was carefully disciplined by the desire to do that which was honorable and right. It is important to point out that David's behavior was a point of discipline where he wisely showed discretion in all of his ways.

The key to true discipline is that it is trained behavior. This is true for runners and soldiers. How they run and march is a matter of trained behavior that becomes natural to them no matter what setting they are in. Disciplined behavior is not sporadic or unpredictable; rather, it is automatic.

The next thing we have to point out is that his conduct identified him to the Lord. I know there are times when my flesh takes center stage, my pride tries to hide behind some religious insight or judgments, and my humanness struggles to look humble when in reality it sees itself as a suffering martyr. To be honest with you, I can't stand myself some days. I know there is no good thing in me, that I am deserving of hell, not blessings, and it is by His grace that I stand according to the faith He gives me. These simple facts remind me of another important truth, that the righteous are scarcely saved (*1 Peter 4:18*).

These simple truths do not leave me feeling condemned but realistic about my state. If God does not do

something in me and through me, nothing gets done that will have any real eternal effect. I do not beat myself down with these truths; rather, I allow them to keep me humble before the Lord, ever aware that my flesh wars against the right spirit, my pride wants to be exalted as god, and my humanness keeps me needful of His intervention in all matters. It is from a humble state that I can be trained in the right way when it comes to my conduct to ensure the Lord is with me.

If I choose to walk according to my high calling, I will put up a mirror to those who want to remain on the outside fringes of true consecration. The reality is that the high calling in the Lord is a choice, while experiencing the world is a preference. When you challenge some people about their choices, they will say, they did not choose the world, but their unwillingness to choose Christ simply allowed them to go their preferred way of the world; therefore, preferring the world is a choice.

For a person to avoid the way of consecration simply means he or she will maintain a carnal attitude towards the world as a means to enjoy some of its pleasure, while holding onto some religious identification. These individuals will juggle aspects of the world while keeping their spiritual "fire insurance" intact, but with the mirror put up in front, they can experience discomfort in their spirit, discontentment in their soul, and an uneasiness in their conscience. Such feelings cause fear, jealousy and anger that can turn into resentment, bitterness, and rage.

We see where all of Israel and Judah loved David. Why would a nation of people love a leader? We are told David went out and came in before them. Apparently, David was transparent and sincere about who he was along with his intention. Clearly a great leader will never lie to the people, lead them astray, or sacrifice them for personal aspirations. In other words, they can be trusted, which is a rarity in a world that is often wrapped up in lies and false narratives, while walking in corruption, and operating behind propaganda. People will respect or love a person who walks a narrow line of righteousness. Such individuals will stand out because their faith will be on display, their character revealed, their attitude always taking center stage, and the right fruits com-

ing out in their conduct.

When a person walks according to God's righteousness, he or she will never be out of step with God's timing. David was anointed king but never tried to usurp his authority over Saul. Timing is everything. David was prepared among the sheep until he was called forward to be anointed as king. He took the back seat as a mere musician to the king until God presented him with a giant. This ordinary shepherd would stand before a giant because he understood who fought the real battle and he avoided the trap to take on the armor of man. He hid behind God's authority as he used a small, smooth stone to bring the giant down to defeat (1 Samuel 17:38-40).

There were many times David could have brought Saul down, but he was anointed by God as king; therefore, it was up to God to bring Saul down His way and according to His timing. Meanwhile, David recognized Saul's position as king and walked humbly before him, never assuming he had rights to be king, never settling for excuses to insert himself as king, and avoided the trap to take matters into his own hands to be king when unfairly pursued by Saul who was bent on destroying him.

David was a young man when all of these ways were established in him. For most of his life and reign as king, he pretty well stuck to the narrow ways of righteousness. It is true he greatly failed, but it is also true that when he came face to face with his sin, he repented and confessed it to God.

The truth is, our humanness will take us off the path and give us opportunities to go back to what we are most familiar with, but our preparation in the trenches will cause us to always come back in line with the right path that advances us forward to our final destination. †

IS THE SECOND AMENDMENT IMPORTANT?

"Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom of Europe. The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be, on any pretence, raised in the United States." - Noah Webster

Bridge of Honor by Joni Eareckson Tada

"Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable." 1Thessalonians 4:4

Route 1 along the California coast is dotted with bridges that traverse deep canyons, towering some two thousand feet above sea level. The integrity of these bridges has enabled us to enjoy the spectacular scenery along the ocean for years.

Steve Jensen is a middle-aged man with a wife and three kids. He's one of those bridges of the kingdom, living in a world of enormous pressures and temptations. He wrote this concerning his role:

On my bridge of honor rides the faith of my wife, to whom I have been called to be faithful. She dares to trust God for sustenance on the journey because her hands touch the strength of my honesty. Her doubts are lessened, her peace is found, her joy is made more complete as she lives for today on my bridge of honor.

On my bridge of honor journeys the hopes of children seeking life's way. They dare to dream beyond the cliffs because their feet feel the security of my integrity. Their fears are allayed, their yearnings are fanned, and their expectations are raised as they move from yesterday to tomorrow on my bridge of honor.

On my bridge of honor travels the love of the brethren in Christ. They dare to follow Jesus because they see the pillars of my love sunk deep into the heart of Jesus. Their hearts are encouraged, their hands are made strong, and their passion is ignited as they see one of their own maintain his bridge of honor.

My bridge of honor cannot bear the weight of sin's traffic. Honor is ever at risk because it is a living, breathing structure of faith made incarnate. It is fragile, prone to warp and crack under the pressures of life. It is vulnerable, exposed to elements of a sea of emotions and desires beneath it. Only God can uphold this bridge of honor over the chasm of time that is mine.

How is your bridge of honor? Protect its fragile nature by faith in Christ. It will secure a lifetime of peace for those you love.

Build and hold my bridge, O Lord, till all those whom I love have passed and my span of time has ended. †

LESSONS FROM LOT

Part Two

By Jeannette Haley

"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." - Ezekiel 2:30

There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever but that we are living in the days Jesus warned of when he said, "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 21:26. What we need to remember is that, in the midst of it all, God knows the hearts of every person, and that He still seeks for a man (or woman) to "stand in the gap" in intercession for America, that He should not completely destroy it. Who can honestly say that, as a nation, we don't deserve it? After all, the blood of over 62,000,000 murdered innocents is on our hands; fornications, sex trafficking and the abominations of "Sodom" have gained power in every level of society, drug abuse is destroying countless lives, while the deadly cancer of communism (which is merely a tool for the extremely wealthy globalists) is robbing us of our God-given right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (property). We are seeing the literal fulfillment of Revelation 9:21, "Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

Who will "stand in the gap" for America? I believe God is seeking for those who will "stand in the gap" for this nation, and I also believe there are some serious intercessors tearfully crying out to God for mercy in these end days.

As we look back through the misty corridors of time, a strong man of great faith emerges—a man who believed, loved and obeyed God and who "stood in the gap" for the people of Sodom. Even though there is no statute or monument erected to honor him, he is forever recorded in God's Word. No angry mob, no satanic army, and no attack against his memory shall ever succeed in bringing Abraham's memory down because of the covenant God made with him, and because it is recorded in God's Word, which shall never pass away. (Matthew 24:35.)

Even though this article is titled "Lessons from Lot" it's necessary to revisit the background of Lot's life, and reiterate the contrast between him and his uncle, Abram, whom God renamed "Abraham" ("father of many nations) in Genesis 17:5. Abram was ninety-nine years old when this occurred. The LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the Almighty God: walk before me and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly" Genesis 17:1b, 2. Abram did what any of us would do, he "fell on his face; and God talked with him...." At this time that God told him that his covenant was with him, that He would make him exceeding fruitful, making him the father of many nations of him, and kings would come out of him. God said to him, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" Genesis 17: 7-8. Then God gave him His covenant of circumcision. Abraham, his son Ishmael, and all the men of his household were circumcised. (See verses 10-14.)

But Lot, having separated himself from Abraham, remained uncircumcised, and became increasingly caught up with the world and the comforts it had to offer, which proved to be a terrible snare to him, and in the end, he lost it all. It wasn't that Lot was as ungodly as the people of Sodom for we read in 2 Peter 2:6-8 concerning God, "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)". Lot was innocent in the respect that he did not agree with, or participate in, the "exceeding wickedness" of Sodom, yet he put his roots down in that place because it served his purpose, and he never would have left Sodom if Abraham had not interceded for him. Lot may have been vexed in his spirit, but he

failed to stand up against the wickedness of the people. Real heroes don't care what people think!

We know that the Bible tells us "many are called, but few are chosen". Abraham was called of God, but Lot was not. Abraham followed God, but Lot followed Abraham. Abraham built four altars in his lifetime to the LORD, but Lot built none; Abraham continued to dwell in tents, and "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" Hebrews 11:10b; but Lot loved the benefits of city life; Abraham received the covenant of God, and became circumcised, whereas Lot had no promises and no covenant with God. Abraham was an honorable man of strong faith and character—a man who was looking heavenward, whereas Lot had a "form of godliness" but was weak in faith, spiritually lean and content to live in the valleys of the world.

Of course, circumcision of the flesh has spiritual aspects. Jeremiah 6:10 says, "To whom shall I speak and give warning That they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed (UNCIRCUMCISED) And they cannot listen. Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach (Hebrew - cherpah; Lxx = oneidismos) to them; They have no delight in it." Jeremiah 4:4 says, "Circumcise (command) yourselves to the LORD and remove (command) the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds." The Ellicott Commentary says, "The words show that the prophet had grasped the meaning of the symbol which to so many Jews was merely an outward sign. He saw that the "foreskin of the heart" was the fleshly, unrenewed nature, the "flesh" as contrasted with the "spirit," the "old man" which St. Paul contrasts with the new (Romans 6:6; Romans 8:7)."

Charles H. Spurgeon (in a comment on Colossians 2:11) writes "The Jew boasts that he is a circumcised man, but you have spiritually all that circumcision meant literally. Even though you have not the wounded your flesh, you have more than that, for you have the death of the flesh and your very flesh has been buried with Christ. All that circumcision can possibly mean you have in Christ." Vance Havner once said "Most Sun-

day church-goers are trying to eat spiritual food with only a natural appetite—"the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it" (*Jeremiah 6:10*). They go through the mechanics but miss the meaning."

We know that Lot was well established in the city of Sodom. He owned a house, had a wife and children, and he was considered a man of importance because he "*sat in the gate of Sodom*" *Genesis 19:1*. Concerning the importance of "sitting in the gate," here is a brief summary that gives us some idea of this ancient custom from thattheworldmayknow.com, "Since gates were the center of city life, it is not surprising that scripture writers often described important officials as "sitting in the gate." Understanding the important role of city gates brings new light to many biblical stories: When God's angels arrived in Sodom, Lot was "sitting in the gateway," apparently serving as an influential judge in that evil city (*Gen. 19:1, 9*).- Parents of a rebellious son who wouldn't submit to their discipline were told to take him to the city gate and present him to the elders there. The males of that city would stone him to death. And because the gate was at the center of city life, word of what happened would spread quickly and the people of Israel would be less likely to do evil (*Deut. 21:18-21*).- Boaz went to the town gate to settle legal matters regarding his marriage to Ruth (*Ruth 4:1-11*).- When a soldier arrived at Shiloh and reported that Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant, Eli, as a prominent city official, was sitting in the gate. When he heard the news, he fell off his chair, broke his neck, and died (*1 Sam. 4:10-18*). - King David stood by the gate when giving last minute instructions to his army, before their fight against Absalom. After Absalom's death, David returned to his place at the gate, and the people came to him (*Sam. 18:1-5; 19:1-8*). - Mordecai learned of plans to assassinate the king while "sitting at the king's gate," which indicates that he was a community leader. He told Queen Esther, who in turn told the king (*Esther 2:5-8, 19-23*)."

When Lot separated from Abraham and chose the plain because it was preferable land for his herds, he was obviously looking out for himself. No doubt when Abraham gave him his choice, he knew which land Lot would choose, and he graciously let him go.

Likewise, as Christians, God gives us the freedom to choose whom we will love, follow and serve. Jesus calls us to follow Him, and He never promised it would be a life of ease in the plush valleys. He said, "*So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple*" *Luke 14:33*. In other words, if we are to follow Jesus with all our hearts, we must forsake, or let go of anything in this world that is more important to us than the LORD Himself. The test is always about where our heart really is. For Abraham, his heart was wholly towards God, and not this world, but for Lot, his uncircumcised heart leaned towards how the world could best serve and benefit him. In other words, he believed in God, was upright in his thoughts and actions in his family and community, but, and here's the problem that so many professing Christians have, the LORD took second place to his lifestyle.

Perhaps in the beginning of his possession of the fertile area for his flocks and herds he was content to live as his godly uncle did, dwelling in tents and finding contentment. Then again, perhaps not, because somewhere along the line, and we can only guess why, when and how, he changed his lifestyle and moved into the city of Sodom. The Bible doesn't tell us how Lot made his living, but I tend to think that while he lived inside the city, his "business" of raising flocks and herds continued to thrive with the help of his hired men and this would undoubtedly provide a good source of food and other benefits for the inhabitants of Sodom, and a steady income for Lot.

Then came the unforgettable day that we read about in *Genesis 18* when the three men came to Abraham, and Abraham knew that one was the LORD. When Abraham saw them in the heat of the day "he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, *My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant.*" (*Verses 2b, 3*.) This is known as a Christophany. Christophany comes from two Greek words; *Christos*, which means Christ, and *phaneroo*, which means to be revealed or to manifest. Therefore, a Christophany is a visible manifestation or appearance of Christ before His human incarnation. What touches my heart is Abraham's reaction when he

saw them. I can just imagine how his face suddenly lit up when he saw the Lord! How his eyes must've sparkled with new life as his aged body gained strength and energy to rise, literally run to the Lord, and bow down before Him to the ground. Abraham and Sarah were instant and generous in their hospitality, and afterwards the promise of a son was given to Sarah, and they "*rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.*" How could Abraham's heart not have longed to stay as close to the Lord for as long as possible? It was then that the LORD revealed His plan for Sodom, and it was then that Abraham "stood in the gap" for any righteous souls that might dwell in that doomed city. Abraham knew that his nephew and his family lived there, of course, but he also interceded on behalf of any other righteous souls who might possibly live there.

It's interesting how Abraham's intercession began with just fifty souls when you consider that the latest scientific study shows there was a large population at that time. It has been "confirmed what students of the Bible have known all along: a catastrophe from the heavens destroyed all life in the area of the Dead Sea many thousands of years ago." The article, by Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz, Jerusalem, goes on to say: "After a decade of digging, archaeologist Phillip Silvia of Trinity Southwest University in Albuquerque reported on his research on the Dead Sea area last week at the annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research.

"Silvia led excavations at five large sites on the Jordanian side of the Jordan River. According to Silvia, the 15 square-mile circular Middle Ghor was a fertile plain, populated continuously for at least 2,500 hundred years. Some form of catastrophe 3,700 years ago brought this to a sudden end, wiping out all of the estimated 40,000 to 65,000 people who inhabited the area at the time.

"Studies of the remains of 120 small settlements in the region showed signs of extreme, collapse-inducing heat and wind. Pottery was discovered to have been exposed to heat so intense that it melted into glass. Zircon crystals in those glassy coats formed within one second at extremely high temperatures, perhaps as hot as the surface of the sun. Pot-

tery fragments discovered at the Tall el-Hammam site contained tiny, spherical mineral grains that apparently rained down on the area.

"The event was so catastrophic that the area remained unpopulated for 600 years.

"The signs were clear but the precise nature of the catastrophe eluded researchers until they turned their eyes heavenward." The article goes on to explain that their conclusion is a meteorite hit the earth and brought about the fiery destruction. One way or the other, there is ample evidence that this major event happened just as the Bible tells us.

Turning our attention back to Lot, we are told that the two angels went to Sodom in the evening, and "*Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground*" *Genesis 19:1b*. Lot knew what the people of Sodom would try to do to these visitors, so he pressed them to stay in his home. We all know the sordid events that took place afterwards as the mob, made up of young and old from every quarter surrounded Lot's house demanding that he send the two men out to them, and we know how Lot tried in vain to placate them, even to the point of offering to give them his two daughters to do with as they chose. Such unrighteous appeasement, or "apologetic, political correctness" never has and never will satisfy the insatiable appetites of the ungodly.

No doubt Lot's daughters were thankful that the angels rescued their father from the angry mob, pulling him into the house and blinding his attackers who wore themselves out trying to find the door. Sometime in the dark of night Lot went out that night to warn his sons-in-law of the coming destruction, but they mocked him, just as mockers do today when warned of the judgment to come. Amazingly, early in the morning Lot "lingered in the house." In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Lot couldn't overcome his reluctance to leave! This gives me pause to ask myself how long it would take me to obey an emergency evacuation order, and if I'd "linger" like Lot did. I tend to think that's a real possibility considering that everything we've worked for, created, and accomplished for over thirty years is in our home. Books and paintings, musical instruments, personal items, and

two Chihuahuas couldn't all be squeezed into two Hondas! (On the very day after I wrote this, a terrible fire broke out about six miles from our home. The wind was gusting at 55mph and people in the immediate area were forced to evacuate. Needless to say, this situation was most sobering. Praise the Lord, He heard and answered all our prayers.)

The threat of sudden calamity is shocking, and no doubt Lot was in shock. Who wouldn't be, knowing that two heavenly angels had been sent by God to destroy everything but you, your spouse and two daughters? His head had to be spinning with mind-numbing fear while his heart was undoubtedly breaking over the reality that his home and all that he had worked for, along with other family members and people he knew, would all vanish, never to be seen again. Finally, the angels had to literally take hold of his hand, and the hands of his wife, and two daughters and lead them out of Sodom. Once outside of the city Lot was told, "*Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed*" *verse 17b*. But, what did Lot do? He argued, and begged to be allowed to flee into a small city called Zoar so his "soul shall live."

How amazingly patient and long-suffering the LORD was in His dealings with Lot—and is in all mankind! Sending two angels to warn him of the judgment that was about to fall, then rescuing Lot from the angry mob by pulling him into his house, blinding his would-be murderers, and watching over him. The LORD's patience and longsuffering can be seen as the angels watched Lot lingering in the home he would see no more forever, along with other possessions. We see God's grace, gentleness and kindness to each of us demonstrated by the angels when they took the hands of Lot, his wife, and two daughters to lead them away from Sodom. The bottom line is, Lot was "scarcely saved" and so are we. *1 Peter 4:18* says, "*And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*"

The thought of escaping to a wilderness setting devoid of city life was more than Lot could bear; his fear of how he and his family would survive was stronger than his fear of God's judgment, and so the LORD in His

mercy allowed him to go to Zoar even though he had been instructed to flee to the mountain. Tragically, when the overthrow took place, Lot's wife looked back behind him and he lost her as a result, leaving him with just his two daughters. *Genesis 19:29-20* says "*And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar; and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.*" So, we see that Lot and his two daughters ended up where they were told to go, but as someone once said, "There is no honor in reluctant obedience."

We do not know how long Lot and his daughters, who plotted to "preserve seed of their father" (*Genesis 19:32*) and thus became pregnant, lived in a cave in the mountain, but we do know that each gave birth to a son. One became the father of the Moabites, and the other the father of the Ammonites. Since *Smith's Bible Dictionary* states, "Zoar was the cradle of the race of Lot" I assume that Lot and his daughters eventually returned to Zoar to take up residence there. By the time of Ruth, the religion of the Moabites was Chemosh, Molech and Peor. As for the Ammonites, they were hated by Israel and the god they worshipped was Molech, plus they were gross idolaters.

The question is, why did God choose Abram and not Lot? A. W. Tozer said something that is simple, yet profound which gives us some understanding on this subject. He said, "God seeks out those who are willing that their lives should be fashioned according to His own grace and love. He sifts out those who cannot see God's purpose and design for our blessing." Abraham's vision was set upon the eternal, heavenly, unseen realm whereas Lot, even though he was a just man, was pre-occupied with self and this temporal world; and down the line the results of their decisions, and the direction of their lives, were in sharp contrast to one another. Lot represents so many Christians whose affections are set upon this world and not on things above, even though they do know right from

wrong, acknowledge that God is who He says He is, are content to remain where they are spiritually, and have no desire to grow in their knowledge and relationship with God. Such people simply assume that when they leave this world they will land in heaven.

The lives of these two men should serve as examples to us concerning where our hearts really are, and what we are committed to. Have we truly and fully dedicated our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, or are there still some areas in our lives over which we still want to maintain control, as did Lot who was totally unprepared when the day of God's visitation and judgment came? Tozer said, "Those who live in this state of perpetual contradiction cannot be happy Christians. A man who is always on the cross, just piece after piece, cannot be happy in that process. But when that man takes his place on the cross with Jesus Christ once and for all, and commends his spirit to God, lets go of everything and ceases to defend himself—sure, he has died, but there is a resurrection that follows!

"If we are willing to go this route of victory with Jesus Christ, we cannot continue to be mediocre Christians, stopped halfway to the peak. Until we give up our own interests, there will never be enough stirring within our beings to find His highest will."

The question is, is your spirit stirred up within you, so that like Abraham your heart is prepared to hear, follow and obey the Lord? Or, are your roots so deeply entrenched in this world that you, like Lot, will find yourself totally unprepared to hear, believe, trust and obey the Lord when everything in your world falls apart? †

Chuck Baldwin Quotes

"Christians, above all people, should desire that their elected representatives submit to the Constitution, because it is constitutional government that has done more to protect Christian liberty than any governing document ever devised by man."

"Without allegiance to the Constitution it doesn't matter one hill of beans which party is in power!"

"A caged canary is secure; but it is not free. It is easier for free men to resist terrorism from afar than tyranny from within."

"Our own government has become our enemy."

PREDICTION AND CONTROL

By Skip Moen

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 NASB

Seek first – We live in a world that relies on a magnificent lie. That lie is fundamental to our way of life. It gives us the illusion of control, the expectation of a better future, the hope of heaven. What is this insidious falsity? Ah, simple: it is the lie that the world is predictable, that knowing *how* the processes of the world work will enable us to *control* them in predictable ways. So, we think that if we just knew *all* the causal factors behind some event, we could extract from that analysis the principles behind *every similar* event and then we would be able to predict with complete accuracy the outcome of a future event. The lie, in its basic terms, is that the world consists of repetitive causal chains. *Understandable* repetitive causal chains! The lie that the world can be reduced to formulae, to algorithms, to rational control.

We even apply this lie to our religion. Here, in this verse, we think that if we *seek* His kingdom, we can *control* the outcome, namely, all these *good things* will be given to us. In other words, it's up to us. If we do *x*, we will get *y*. If we do certain religious things, God *guarantees* that certain results will happen. The results are part of a causal chain which we superintend.

And then we come across a statement from Abraham Heschel: "It is within man's power to seek Him; it is not within man's power to find Him." [1] If we paid attention to the grammar of Yeshua's statement (even in Greek) we would have drawn the same conclusion. The verb translated "will be added" is a future, *passive* conjugation of *prostith mi* (to add). That means it is *done to us*. It is not something we do. You and I can seek the Kingdom, but the results are *not up to us*, just as Heschel points out. We have the capacity, and the obligation, to seek God, but it is God *who finds us as we are seeking Him*. The Western paradigm of prediction and control is *not* a biblical idea, and it does *not* apply to the call of God. As Heschel points out, "All Abraham had was wonder, and all he could achieve on his own was readiness to perceive. The answer

was disclosed to him; it was not found by him." [2]

The measure of your faith is determined by your willingness to seek, not your experience of the answer. The measure of your faith is determined by the persistence of your questions. God determines if He will give an answer. All you have to do (and it's a lot) is be ready to hear.

[1] Abraham Heschel *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (Free Press Paperbacks, 1959), p. 72.

[2] *Ibid.*

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QUOTABLE

"The job of every Christian is to pray. Yet we want to do something important for God;... Prayer seems like such a small thing to do.... But to Jesus, prayer is everything; it's a duty as well as a privilege, a right as well as a responsibility. We tend to use prayer as a last resort, but Jesus wants it to be our first line of defense. We pray when there is nothing else we can do, but Jesus wants us to pray *before* we do anything at all. Most of us...don't want to wait for God to resolve matters in His good time...And so we try to help God along. Many times we even try to answer our own prayers. We have the idea that more people will become Christians if we can make God look good to them. So we try to convince them of God's generosity by proving that He answers prayer. If we can just help God spruce up His image a little, we can get more people on His side, right? Wrong! He wants us to *pray*. Always, and about everything. During times of joy [and] sorrow. He wants us to talk *to* Him, not *about* Him. He even wants us to talk to Him about unbelievers before we talk to unbelievers about Him. Prayer is our holy occupation. Plain and simple." — Oswald Chambers

"The devil is in constant conspiracy against a preacher who really prays, for it has been said that what a minister is in his prayer closet is what he is, no more, no less." - Vance Havner

"God answers our prayers not because we are good, but because He is good." - A. W. Tozer

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: "I have heard that we are to rejoice over the death of the wicked, but in another Scripture we are told not to rejoice when our enemies fall. This seems a contradiction to me. Can you explain?"

A: This is a good question and there is an explanation. We are told in *Proverbs 11:10-11*, "When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting." If you notice this Scripture has to do with those in government. Keep in mind God holds all government officials and religious leaders to a greater level of accountability because they have been entrusted with much.

When the righteous are overseeing a city, God is able to bless it because righteous practices are in place and fair justice is being executed. However, when the wicked are in charge, God's blessings will be profaned or quenched and people will find themselves oppressed, while such wicked people abuse their power by robbing from whoever, as well as killing what stands in the way, and destroying what is pure and just.

Needless to say, when wicked leaders are brought down, people shout with joy. I have seen this in my lifetime. I remember after the fall of a communistic regime, the leader along with his wife were led to face a firing squad that was televised to the world. Upon his death some people sighed, many shouted, and the rest tried to swallow the last of the bitter pill of death, destruction, and despair that this wicked husband and wife team had forced them to swallow for decades. Likewise, when Iraq fell, we watched the people of that country rejoice and tear down the statue of Saddam. The truth remains so that the people never mourn the fall or death of a wicked, unjust, tyrannical leader because of the great wave of destruction they have left behind.

In *Proverbs 24:16-20* we are told, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall

be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out."

There are some simple truths in the above scriptures. Concerning leaders, they affect many people's lives and ultimately the only one who brings leaders down is God, but in *Proverbs 24*, it is talking about a personal enemy who **falls** into sin and will come under judgment. It can be hard to watch an enemy get away with various things without paying any real consequences. It is natural to become angry at our enemy, bitter towards them when there are no apparent consequences, and desire vengeance when they seem to be blessed, but the Lord makes some sound principles clear.

The first one is that the wicked will **fall** into mischief. In other words, they will naturally do wrong and as a result they will eventually come under judgment. The second thing we must notice is that we must not concern ourselves with whether the wicked man gets his just reward here, nor should we be envious of worldly blessings for in the end they will receive their just reward.

This brings us to God's concern about our attitudes towards personal enemies. We are called to a higher way of looking at our enemy. We need to be an example and witness before them. Our relationship with our enemies will test and expose our character. As Christians, we are to care for their soul as the Lord cared for our soul when we were His enemy, pray for them that they will see their need for Jesus, and do not wish their destruction or rejoice over their fall because that would point to a type of vengeful spirit on our part. Such a spirit reveals one as having a wrong attitude. Judgment always begins in the house of God, with God's people and there are times we stand in the way of God dealing with our enemies because our attitude is wrong about them (*Matthew 5:16, 43-46; James 4:4; 1 Peter 4:17*). The truth is God sometimes puts off judging our enemy in order to avoid judging us for what would be clearly unscriptural and unacceptable to Him.

The wicked will always be what they are, but as Christians we can't be any less than what we are being called to be as far as having a right spirit, displaying an upright attitude, and responding in honorable conduct towards everyone, regardless of whether they are family, friend, or foe. †

OUR CHRISTIAN DUTY

OH GOD! FORGIVE US!

(NOAH WEBSTER QUOTES)

"In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government ought to be instructed."

"No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people."

"The Bible must be considered as the great source of all the truth by which men are to be guided in government as well as in all social transactions."

"Education is useless without the Bible. The Bible was America's basic text book in all fields. God's Word, contained in the Bible, has furnished all necessary rules to direct our conduct."

"Every civil government is based upon some religion or philosophy of life. Education in a nation will propagate the religion of that nation. In America, the foundational religion was Christianity. And it was sown in the hearts of Americans through the home and private and public schools for centuries. Our liberty, growth, and prosperity was the result of a Biblical philosophy of life. Our continued freedom and success is dependent on our educating the youth of America in the principles of Christianity."

"All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible."

"...if the citizens neglect their Duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the Laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizen will be violated or disregarded."

"Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice. As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country."