

(This is a computer printout; the original printing is exhausted)

I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU LIFE AND DEATH

“See, I have set before thee this day, life and good, and death and evil, in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply, and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away and worship other gods, and serve them, I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land whither thou passest over Jordan to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that **I have set before you life and death**, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live,” Deut. 30:15-19.

The majority opinion in religious circles is that every person comes into this world with a responsibility, either to choose eternal life, and live in heaven, or to reject God, to reject eternal life and to suffer in all eternity. And those who advocate that notion are convinced they have Bible proof for their doctrine.

I have heard people say that every denomination can prove their doctrine, if you will just allow them to select their own proof texts. That is not true. The only thing you can prove by the Bible is the truth. The Bible is one harmonious fabric throughout. If there is one verse in the Bible that teaches eternal heaven is conditioned on our choice, you will not find one verse that denies it. On the other hand, if you find one verse in the Bible that teaches our home in eternal heaven is based on the sovereign grace of God, you will not find one verse in the Bible to deny that.

The Bible is in agreement with itself. We cannot go through the Bible and pick out what we want, and reject all the other. I want it all. Solomon said, “Buy the truth and sell it not,” Prov. 23:23. I am not willing to surrender so much as one verse to those who advocate error.

But the objector says, “Now, wait a minute, Harold Hunt; you have contradicted yourself. You started out with a text that teaches our doctrine; listen to what it says. ‘See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.’” He says, “If that is not plain enough, verse nineteen says ‘I call heaven and earth to record against you this day that **I have set before you life and death**, blessing and cursing; therefore

choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

At first glance, those verses do seem to teach the doctrine of salvation by man’s free will. Our carnal minds are much more conditioned to accept error than they are to accept truth. And if we are not careful, we will read into a passage something it does not say.

The best way to understand the Bible is, first off, don’t argue with the Book. Let it say what it says.

The Bible does not require nearly as much interpreting as most people imagine it does. Every now and then I hear somebody make a statement that sounds very good. Error can sometimes sound very much like the truth. Somebody says, “I always interpret the Bible literally.” That sounds good, doesn’t it? “I always interpret the Bible literally.”

The fact is that you cannot *interpret* any document *literally*. Somebody says, “Now, wait a minute, Harold Hunt. What kind of statement is that?” But do you see? You either *interpret* something, or else you take it *literally*; you cannot do both. If you interpret anything, you are not taking it literally.

There are some passages that must be interpreted. The types, shadows, figures, symbols, parables, and some of the prophecies, must be interpreted in order to understand what is being said.

For instance, the metaphors of the Bible must be interpreted. The Bible refers to Christ as ‘*that Rock*. “For they drank of that spiritual *Rock* that followed them: and that *Rock* was Christ,” I Cor. 10:4. The word *rock* is a metaphor; it needs to be interpreted. The Lord is not a stone; he is represented by a stone. He is like a stone; he is solid and enduring.

There is some of the Bible that must be interpreted; but there is not much. With most of it, you should just let it say what it says.

And in this text that is all you have to do. It does not take a lot of interpreting to see what he is saying. Just keep reading. It will explain itself.

Verse fifteen, “And the Lord, thy God, shall bless thee **in the land** whither thou goest to possess it.” He is not talking about gaining a home in heaven; he is talking about life or death **in the land---the land of Canaan.**

But lest we might have missed it, in verse eighteen he says, “I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days **upon the land.**” He wants to make sure we get the point. He is talking about life in the land of Canaan. He is not talking about life in eternal heaven.

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life that both thou and thy seed may live. That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him for he is thy life and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell **in the land** which the Lord swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.” verses 19, 20.

He says the same thing three times in rapid succession, and if somebody does get it by the third time, there is not much need to say it the fourth time.

Very often, we preachers repeat ourselves. If I repeat myself, it is an indication that I probably forgot my place. I repeat myself trying to remember where I was, and where I was headed. But God never loses his place. If he repeats himself, he repeats himself for our benefit.

He repeats himself, because we might have missed it the first time. He repeats himself, generally, in slightly different words, because he knows the tendency of the sinful heart of man to gainsay and twist the Scriptures. He knows there are those who will look at a verse and say, “Well, that does not mean exactly what it says; here is what it really means,” and they twist it to fit their own point of view.

But there is often another verse that says the same thing in slightly different words. I call that *the gotcha text*. A person figures out a way to dodge one text, but when he has dodged it, all of a sudden, here comes another verse, from another direction, and it catches him. By twisting the first text, he places himself squarely in the cross-hairs of *the gotcha text*.

This text has absolutely nothing to do with eternal heaven. It has everything to do with the land of Canaan. It has to do with the inheritance of Israel, in the land of promise.

I think I have said enough to demonstrate that this text does not belong to those people who teach that eternal heaven is conditioned on your works. They can twist it all they want to, but it will never fit their system.

But, on the other hand, very often we deal with this text, and others like it. We prove that it does not belong to those who teach error. And when we are satisfied we have proved our point, we leave it alone.

This text does not teach what the majority of religious people think it does, but it does teach something. And I would like for us to spend the rest of this little booklet looking at what it does teach.

What it does teach is very unsettling. Isaiah said, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins,” Isaiah 40:1.

The gospel message is a comforting message, but there are some parts of Bible truth that scare the living daylights out of me. I fear that sometimes we preachers only preach about the comforting parts, because when we preach on the warnings of the Bible, people get upset at us. But the Lord’s preaching often upsets people. God did not call us to rock people to sleep.

In Israel of old the people told the prophets, “Speak unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits,” Isa 30:10. They would much rather hear the promises than the warnings. Even today, we preachers spend too much time speaking *smooth things*.

What this text does teach can be very unsettling. I believe God’s people need to be stirred up---stirred up about those things we do wrong. We need to caution God’s children about how we suffer, when we experience the chastening rod of God.

Paul said, “**It is a fearful thing** to fall into the hands of the living God,” Heb. 10:31. “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom,” Psa. 111:10, and if the warnings of God do not scare you, they ought to.

To get the background of our text we need to go back to chapter twenty-seven. “And Moses with the elders of the children of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day,” vs 1. God was going to lead them into the land of Canaan. They would receive the land as a free gift, but if they expected to continue to enjoy the benefits of the land, there were some commandments they would have to obey.

“Therefore it shall be that when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set these stones which I command you this day in Mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with

plaster....And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly,” vss 4,8.

“And Moses charged the people the same day saying, “These shall stand upon Mount Gerizim **to bless the people** when ye come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin. And these shall stand upon Mount Ebal **to curse**, Reuben, and Gad, and Asher, and Zabulun, and Dan, and Naphtali,” vs 11-13. If Israel obeyed God, while they were in the land of Canaan, they would enjoy great *blessing*, blessing such as no nation had ever enjoyed. But if they refused and rebelled, there was a *curse* waiting for them. They would suffer as no nation ever suffered.

In chapter twenty-eight, we read the blessings that were promised. When Israel obeyed the commandments of God, they were the most blessed of all people. But when they transgressed, they were some of the most miserable of all people. Listen to the list of blessings. These are the ways God said Israel would be blessed, if they did what he commanded them to do.

“Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field,” vs 3. That pretty well covers the territory, doesn’t it? In the city, in the field, wherever they happened to be, God would shower blessings on them.

“Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, and the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep; blessed shall be thy basket and thy store; blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest; the Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face; they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.” vss. 4-7.

That fairly well covers the ground. You are going to be blessed in the city; and you are going to be blessed in the field. Your crops are going to prosper. Your herds and your flocks will increase. You enemies will flee from you. Every way you go, and every where to turn, you are going to experience the blessing of the Lord.

They were a blessed people. Do you remember when they first sent the spies to spy out the land? When the spies returned, among other things, they brought back a cluster of grapes carried by two men on a pole (Num. 13:23). Canaan was a fruitful land. Oh, the blessing God showers on his people, when we do those things he has commanded us to do.

“And it shall come to pass that if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy

God to do all his commandments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day, that **all these curses shall come upon thee**, and overtake thee. Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land. And the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out, vs. 15-19.

The word *cursed* is a strong word, isn't it? It is an even stronger word when God uses it. Men curse each other all the time, and all it does is reveal the mood somebody is in, and it reveals his manner of expressing himself. But when God pronounces a curse, that is something else again. In this text God pronounces a curse on those who despise and neglect his law.

There are some things in the Bible that scare the life out of me. One of the scariest passages in the Bible is Matthew 18:6. The Lord says, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Let me ask you; did you ever hear anybody say, "That man would be better off dead." Sure you have. Imagine that God might say that about you.

That is what he said. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned (stone cold dead) in the depth of the sea."

I have never lost so much sleep over anything, as I have lost over that verse. I have lain awake, staring at the ceiling, fearful that I might have said something, or done something, that injured one of the Lord's little ones. The penalty is frightening.

Any time you have an inclination to strike out at somebody, it would be a good idea to quote that verse before you say anything. The Lord said you would be better off with a millstone around your neck, lying on the bottom of the sea, than to injure one of his little ones.

"Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out," vs. 19.

Salvation is by grace, but that does not change the fact that God has given us some guidelines as to how we ought to live, how we ought to conduct ourselves, here in this life.

The heart of the Law of Moses is expressed in the Ten Commandments. Did you ever notice that he did not say a thing about the Ten Suggestions? Those are not suggestions.

Even in our gospel day we can get confused about that. Did you ever notice the way we conduct our services? We sing; we pray; we preach; and then we give the *invitation*. I don't recall the Lord ever *inviting* anybody to be baptized. If it is an invitation, you have the option to decline. There is no option to decline. If you have a hope in Christ Jesus, God has commanded you to be repent and be baptized, and it is not an invitation; it is a commandment.

“And all the people that heard him, and the publicans *justified God*, being baptized with the baptism of John,” Luke 7:29. That does not mean they *caused* God to be just; rather they *declared* him to be just. They declared that God is just in all he says and does. He is just in all he requires of us. He is just in requiring us to be baptized. “The publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him.”

The Lord drew a clear, and distinct, boundary line between gospel obedience and disobedience. And he showed that water baptism is that line. Those who obey God, those who justify God, are those who are baptized in water, and those who refuse to follow the Lord in baptism reject the counsel of God against themselves.

What does it mean when it says they “rejected the counsel of God against themselves?”

Let me illustrate it this way. Some time or other you might have started to say something to somebody, and he knew what you were about to say. He had heard it before. And he tells you, “Don't say it; I don't want to hear it.” Let me ask you. What did he just do? **He rejected your counsel**, didn't he? He told you, “Don't say it; I don't want to hear it.”

It is amazing how simple this book gets, if you just let it say what it says. Don't argue with it; just let it say what it says.

“The publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.”

They rejected God's counsel. In effect, they told God, “Don't say it; I don't want to

hear it.”

When God tells us to repent and be baptized, he is not giving an invitation. That is a commandment. God gave the very best heaven had for my redemption and yours. There is nothing you can do to earn it. But God requires that we express our gratitude, not to gain heaven, not in order to become his child, but in order to enjoy that life of obedience, and blessing, that is available to us in this life.

Back to Deuteronomy. In chapter twenty-eight, verse twenty, he begins to specify exactly what he is talking about. He gives us the details. These would be the consequences if Israel failed to obey God’s commands.

He has already told them, “Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store.” Your flocks, your crops, and your herds, will all be under the curse.

“The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and **until thou perish quickly**; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me,” vs 20.

What does that word *perish* mean? Does it mean they would go around, perhaps, with a headache all the time? They would have a backache, an upset stomach, and just walk around in a fog? That is not what he is talking about. That is not what he means when he says they would *perish*.

Perish? That means stone cold dead, six feet under. Stone cold dead in the grave.

I know there are a lot of people, who have the idea you are not going to die until *your time* comes. You are not going to die a moment before, and you are not going to live a moment longer. The Bible does not teach that, and I don’t believe it.

Every now and then, you may run into somebody, who has some idea of what our people believe, and he may tell you, “I agree with you Primitive Baptists on one thing; you are not going to die until your time comes; and when your time comes, you are out of here.”

It is strange that the one thing they pick to agree with Primitive Baptists about is something we do not believe.

Some time ago, I had the funeral of a man who was killed in a car wreck. He was not a

religious man. In fact, he had no interest at all in religion. But I was the pastor of the church in the community, and they called on me to preach his funeral. He had been out on Saturday night, visiting the local drinking establishments. That was his custom. But anyway, he had drunk more alcohol than he could handle. It impaired his judgment, and he went blazing off down the road; he missed a curve, and hit a tree, and was killed instantly.

Let me ask you. Do you believe it just came his time to die, or do you believe if he had been at home with his family, behaving himself, he might have woke up the next morning in his own bed, alive and well? I don't believe God predestinated that he would die that night, any more than I believe he predestinated that he would visit all those drinking establishments.

No, the scriptures tell us, "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days," Psa. 55:23. Again, he says, "Why shouldest thou die before thy time?" Eccl. 7:17. A person can shorten his days by the way he behaves himself. God told Israel that some of them would die because of their rebellion.

In verse twenty-one, "The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee until he have consumed thee off the land," vs 21. Disease means that somebody is sick; *pestilence* means a lot people, or maybe, most everybody is sick. That happened to Israel from time to time.

"The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with a sword, and with blasting, and with mildew, and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron," vss. 22,23.

This word *brass* is one of those words that need interpreting. It does not mean the heavens will one day be made out of metal. It means there will not be any rain. You do not get rain out of brazen heavens.

He goes on to say, "The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder, and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee until thou be destroyed," vs 24.

We are very well blessed in America in a material way. When our nation was established in the late 1700's, one of the very first things the Founding Fathers did was to prohibit interstate tariffs. That provided free trade between the various states. That has been a great benefit to America. If there is drought in one area, free trade between the states has helped to take care of us. The plenty in one area offsets the shortage in

another.

But we still see what can happen from time to time, and in some areas. There is a terrible drought at this time in Texas. I feel sorry for those people with all the hot weather, and no rain. Their crops are failing, and some of their wells are going dry. The ground is so dry, the experts tell us that if it started raining today, and rained for months, it would still be years before the ground itself can be healed.

In a limited way, God gives us demonstrations of what he can do over a much broader area, when he chooses to. Our nation has such great capacity. Our technology can accomplish things that stagger the imagination, but it has its limits. The western states have been on fire for weeks, and they cannot put out the fires. If we can build rocket ships, and computers, and microwaves, you would think we could put out fires. We have been putting out fires, since the dawn of time. But simple jobs become impossible, when they become as big as those fires are.

America is much more vulnerable than we have ever imagined we are. The Y2K crisis came and passed, and it did not amount to anything. But it certainly could have. The arguments people made about what was going to happen did not happen, but the possibility was there. How vulnerable we are here in America. Our heavens could become *brass*, and our rain could become *powder* and *dust*.

It did happen to Israel on a frequent basis. They suffered God's wrath when they rebelled.

“The Lord shall smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed,” vs 27. Egypt is in Africa. The *botch of Egypt* was a disease of Africa.

About nineteen years ago there was another ailment that came out of Africa---Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Nobody ever says the whole name anymore. We just call it A.I.D.S. So far, there is no cure.

In some states, you can be prosecuted for stating publicly that A.I.D.S. is God's judgment on that immoral segment of society. It is called a *hate crime*. Well, we don't have that law in Tennessee, and I am going to tell you that A.I.D.S. is God's judgment on that immoral segment of society. He said he would do it, and he has done exactly what he said he would do.

I feel sorry for the way those people are suffering. I feel sorry for anybody, when they

suffer the wrath of God, but it does not change the fact that God did say he was going to do exactly what he has done.

“**Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God** with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore **thou shalt serve thine enemies**, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst and in nakedness, and in want of all things, and he shall put the yoke of iron upon thy neck until he have destroyed thee,” vss. 47,48.

He told Israel they were going to serve somebody. Either they would serve God in the land, or they would serve the adversary outside the land.

God gave the land of Canaan to Israel as a free gift. He can do that. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof,” Psa. 24:1. It belongs to him, and he can give it to whoever he wants to have it. They did not pay anything for it. He divided the land to them by lot. Every family got his own plot of ground.

He commanded them to work six days, and set aside the seventh day as a Sabbath of rest. He commanded them, more than that, that they should work six years, and rest the seventh year. That seventh year was to be a *sabbatic* year. That is where we got the word *sabbatical*, an extended leave from your employment. God told them to allow the land to lie fallow the seventh year. They should not put out any crops.

The next question was: “What are we going to live on the seventh year?” God promised that he would cause the land to bring forth double the sixth year. They would not need to work the seventh year. How could he do that? He is God; he can do anything he wants to do.

He promised, “Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years,” Lev. 25:21.

He promised that, every time seven times seven years passed (that is forty-nine years), they could take off the fiftieth year as well. The land would bring forth three times as much the forty-eighth year. They would not have to work the forty-ninth year nor the fiftieth.

“And thou shalt number seven Sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years,” Lev. 25:8. Every time seven sabbatic years passed, they were to celebrate the *Jubilee*.

“Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the *jubilee* to sound on the tenth *day* of the

seventh month, on the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land, And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout *all* the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a *jubilee* unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family,” vss 9,10.

Jubilee is the Hebrew word for a ram’s horn. On the day of atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month, of the fiftieth year they were to blow on the ram’s horn, and “proclaim liberty throughout all the land.” Every bondman was to be set free, and all property was to be returned to its original owners.

If anybody had been sold into slavery, he was to be set free on that day. If anybody had sold his ancestral home, or if, maybe, his grandfather had sold it, he was to get it back. They were to have total land reform every fifty years.

The law also provided that the closer they got to the year of Jubilee, the less they could charge for the land, because they would have to give it back before long.

The Lord said if the land did not enjoy its Sabbaths while they were in the land, it would enjoy its Sabbaths while they were gone. Well, what happened? At the end of the first sixth years, they figured they were a year ahead; the land had produced double that year. They intended to stay ahead; so they went ahead and worked the land the seventh year.

They thought they could outsmart the Lord. There is no record that Israel ever observed the sabbatic year. That was the reason they were carried away into bondage. The land did enjoy its Sabbaths while they were in Babylon (2 Chron. 36:21).

At the end of fifty years, they figured that if they had bought the property, it was theirs to keep. You have heard the expression: “Possession is nine tenths of the law.” They figured that if they had paid for the land, and they were in possession of it, they might as well keep it. And they did keep it, until God sent Nebuchadnezzar to carry them all away into Babylon. Then they lost it all. You cannot outsmart the Lord.

Every fifty years they were to have total land reform. What an economic benefit that would have been for the entire nation. The rich could have never oppressed the poor. Every Israelite, no matter how poor, would have his own farm on which he could earn a livelihood for himself and his family.

The rich could accumulate all the property they wanted, and keep it forever, so long

as they accumulated the property inside a walled city. The Law of the Jubilee did not apply to property inside walled cities (Lev. 25:30). They did not have to give that property back. But, outside the cities, all the farm land was to be redistributed every fifty years. So far as their economy was concerned, every fifty years, the entire nation would get a fresh start.

No nation has ever had a system so calculated to protect both the rich and the poor. There was no limit to how rich any person could become, so long as he accumulated his property inside the city. But no class of people could ever become rich in such manner that they could prevent their hard working neighbors from earning their livelihood by the own labors.

What happened? They ignored God's law. God said that if they would not serve him in the land, they would serve somebody else outside the land. If the land did not enjoy its Sabbaths while they were in the land, it would enjoy its Sabbaths when they were gone." If they did not set the captive free, and return the land in the year of Jubilee, they would themselves become captives, and others would live on their lands.

God sent an entire train of eastern conquerors. Pul the king of Assyria came, and then Tiglath-Pilezer, and Shalmaneser, and Sennacherib, and finally, Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was the last. He carried the last of Israel away to Babylon. Babylon was what we call Iraq today. They stayed there seventy years. God told them how long they would stay before they left (Jer. 25:11, 29:10). At the end of seventy years God sent Zerrubabel to lead them home again.

But the point is simply this: Because they would not allow the land to enjoy its Sabbaths the way God commanded, the land enjoyed its Sabbaths while they were gone. Because they would not serve God, they found themselves in bondage, serving their enemies. You cannot rob God. You cannot hold out on God.

But there is more. "Thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee in the siege and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee," Deut. 28:53.

At first sight, that sounds like cannibalism." Let's back up and read it again. "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, **the flesh of thy sons, and of thy daughters**, which the Lord thy God hath given thee." Verse 56 goes on, "The tender and delicate woman among you which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness; her eye shall be evil against the husband of

her bosom, and for her son, and for her daughter, and toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children, which she shall bear, for **she shall eat them** for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates.”

What is he talking about? This is one of those verses that do not need any interpreting. It means exactly what it sounds like it means. He was talking about a time when Israel would be reduced to such distress they would resort to cannibalism.

Bear in mind that he is not talking about natives on some remote island in the South Pacific. He is not talking about some tribe in the heart of Africa. He is talking about a highly educated people, who had enjoyed the benefit of the Law of Moses for fifteen hundred years. He is talking about Jewish people in the city of Jerusalem, practicing cannibalism.

In the year 70 A.D. the Roman general Vespasian invaded the land of Palestine. He was called back to Rome, and became the next emperor of the Roman Empire. He left his son Titus in charge. Titus besieged the city of Jerusalem from April til September of the year 70 A.D. The people in the city were starving. Finally, some of them began to eat their own children.

Even then, it was not a general practice. There were only a few instances of it; but it did happen.

The cannibals of the South Pacific, and the cannibals of Africa, and the Aztecs of Central America killed their enemies in battle, and ate them. Cannibalism in Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. was worse. In the siege of Jerusalem, the Jews ate their own children.

After five months, the city of Jerusalem fell; the Jewish people who survived were sold into slavery.

In these last several verses of chapter twenty-eight, we have the history of the Jewish people for the last two thousand years. God can do that. All is one eternal now with him; he can write history in advance as well as he can after the fact. It is a very concise history of what has happened to them; but concise as it is, it is very clear and to the point.

“And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people from the one end of the earth even unto the other,” vs. 64. Jewish historians call that scattering, the *diapsora*. For two

thousand years now, the Jewish people have been scattered to the four winds.

“And there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among all these nations, thou shalt find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest. And the Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind,” vss 64,65.

That is so true to their history for the last two thousand years that comment is hardly necessary. For two thousand they have been scattered among the gentiles. They have found *no ease*; their foot has found no *rest*. What they have found has been “a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind.”

There can be no question that the Jewish people are, even today, suffering the consequence of their own rejection of God. But that does not give anybody else the right to pitch in and try to help the Lord to punish them.

In the year 1348, when the Black Death spread all over Europe, one third of the population of Europe died. The plague destroyed the entire economy of the Western World. That was used as an excuse to kill Jews and run them out of the land. They were run out of England about the same time. The Spanish ran them out of Spain in 1492, the same year Columbus came to America. We all know the way they suffered in Germany and Poland in the thirties and forties. That has been the pattern for two thousand years. No people have ever suffered the way the Jewish people have suffered.

Let me make one point. It is one thing to make the objective statement that the Jews have suffered the chastening rod of God. When the Lord was crucified, they cried out, “His blood be on us, and on our children,” Matt. 27:25. There can be no doubt that God granted that request. It is one thing to talk about that as an objective fact. It is something entirely different to talk as if we would like to pitch in and help the Lord to chastise them.

God told them the consequences, and it did happen. I read about the way they have suffered, and I learn from it, but I gain no joy in seeing the way they have suffered. We should be very careful lest we glory in the suffering of others.

“And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life,” vs. 66. There has never been a people to whom this passage applies the way it has applied to the Jewish people for the last two thousand years.

“In the morning thou shalt say, ‘Would God it were evening; and at evening thou shalt say, Would God it were morning, for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear and the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships by the way whereof I spake unto thee. Thou shalt see it no more again, and there thou shalt be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you,” vss 67,68.

Those Jews who survived the siege of Jerusalem were sold into slavery, and scattered all over the Roman Empire. That is how *the diaspora*, the scattering, began.

First it says, “Ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen.” That indicates that some of them were successfully sold as slaves. But then it goes on to say, “No man shall buy you.” That is no contradiction. Some of them were sold, and others could not be sold. After the fall of Jerusalem, the slave market was so glutted with Jewish slaves, that sometimes there was nobody willing to bid.

That was in the year 70 A.D. I do not know what the price of a Jewish slave was in that year, but I do know what the price was 60 years later. Jerusalem fell the second time in 130 A.D. In that year the price of a Jewish slave was a little less than the price of a plow horse. Think about that; if somebody bought a plow horse, and a Jewish slave to work the horse, he would pay more for the horse than he did for the slave. But, sometimes, they did not bring even that much. They could always sell the horse, but sometimes the slave could not be sold for any price. It is hard to imagine anything more humiliating than for a man to be valued less than an animal. Truly, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” Heb. 10:31.

I have said all of that to get to this. How do you think all of this applies to believers in this day?

Do you believe that in this gospel day it is easier for gentiles to get away with sin than it was for the Jews in that day? Do you believe God is more tolerant of sin today? Do you believe he has mellowed in these last days?

Sometimes, grandparents will let the grandchildren get away with things that would have gotten their children’s backsides dusted. Very often a parent says, “If I send those kids to Momma’s house, she lets them get away with things she would have set me on fire for. She can keep those kids for one day, and it takes me a week to bring them back under control.”

Do you think God is that way? Do you think God has mellowed in these last days?

Don't you believe it. Paul dealt with this very question. Listen to what he said in Hebrews chapter ten, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' Law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. **Of how much sorer punishment** suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace," Heb. 10:26-29.

To paraphrase it, Paul is saying, "Don't think you are going to get off as light as those Jews did."

It may sound strange to talk about not getting off *as light as the Jews did* after we have been talking about all the horrific suffering they have experienced; but is exactly what the Bible teaches. Listen to what it says.

"Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace. For we know him that hath said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord, and again, **The Lord shall judge his people,**" vss. 29,30.

This is not talking about eternal judgment; this is talking about judging *his people* right here and now. "It is a fearful to fall into the hands of the living God," vs. 31.

Who is that talking about? Is he talking about the wicked who are going to suffer eternally? No. He has already explained it. He says, "**The Lord shall judge his people.**" This is talking about God dealing with his people here in this life.

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat, because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it, Matt. 7:13,14"

This is not talking about eternal damnation, but it is talking about some kind of *destruction*. And when God calls something *destruction*, and tells us, this destruction is in store for somebody---this side of the grave---we do well to take notice.

On the cross the Lord took care of everything on the other side of the grave. But on this side of the grave, he says, “This *destruction* is waiting for you, if you continue to walk the road to destruction.”

“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat,” Matt.7:13. There are a lot of people who will tell you the child of God cannot make shipwreck of his life. Don’t you believe it. Every one of us knows children of God who have done just that.

At this point I am inclined to give specific examples of friends of mine who have made shipwreck of their lives. They have followed that broad road, and they have brought destruction on themselves. But I fear that if I become too explicit in describing their experiences, it will be too easy for others to recognize the individuals I am talking about, and I certainly do not want to embarrass anybody. They have suffered enough; I do not want to add further embarrassment.

Most of you could furnish examples of your own. Most of us have friends, who, we are convinced, are children of God. We have worshiped with them in church. We have seen evidence of the Spirit of God in their lives. We have seen them rejoice under the power of the Spirit. Nobody could convince us they are not children of God. And yet they have made shipwreck of their lives.

How very often a child of God becomes careless and unconcerned about spiritual things. Perhaps, he is not doing anything that would get him in trouble, or even embarrass him. He is just not as spiritual as he once was. He becomes more concerned with material things than he is about his own spiritual well being. Then he begins to allow little transgressions to creep into his life.

Solomon said, “Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil our vines, for our vines have tender grapes,” Songs 2:15. At the outset he has no trouble with the most grievous offences. He would never consider doing anything that would jeopardize his reputation. But those little foxes grow up. Little offences give way to worse transgressions. Before long he begins to cover things up, until he begins to do things he would never have considered before.

Any of you can finish the story. We all know somebody who has lost his home in the church. Perhaps, his wife finds out about his conduct, and she puts him in the street. She takes his home, his business, his bank account.

He loses his home, his income, his security. One thing leads to another. Before long he is destitute. Sometimes, when a person begins to trifle with sin, it does not take long to go from comparative affluence to being a virtual derelict. How often we have seen somebody lose a profitable business, a beautiful home, a loving family, all because of his own misconduct.

He gets in distress, emotionally, physically, and financially. His health fails. His judgment failed when he began to experiment with sin; but it gets worse. His friends begin to wonder if he is losing his mind. I could give examples, with which some of you are well acquainted. They have lost everything worth having. But, again, I do not want to embarrass anybody.

In the text we quoted before, “Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth unto destruction, and many there be that go in thereat,” Mat. 7:13. How very many of the children of God we have watched go through that broad gate of destruction.

“**Of how much sorer punishment** suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace. For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord, and again, **The Lord shall judge his people,**” Heb. 10:29,30.

When the Lord said, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing” (Deut. 30:19), he was not talking about eternal life and eternal death, he was not warning against eternal damnation, but he was warning against the dreadful suffering the Jewish people have suffered for almost two thousand years now. **And he was talking about the living death** many of his people are experiencing in this day.

Indeed, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:27).

