

# Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints  
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages  
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## The Convincing Spirit of Truth

*"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:7-8).*

What did Jesus mean when he told the apostles that when the spirit would come to the world, it would "convict [it] ... concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin" (John 16:8)?

Remarkably, the context of the passage has been described by some commentators as "mysterious,"<sup>1</sup> and it is said that the English translation contains "too weak a word to express what is meant."<sup>2</sup> Others have said that "the exegesis of this verse is extremely difficult, and consequently it is difficult to translate."<sup>3</sup>

Brother Russell wrote, that "all of the Church, begotten of the holy Spirit and thus enlightened, are to let their light so shine before men that it will reprove the world. That which reproves the world is the holiness of the Church" (R4165:6). This should be done, "Not with that attitude which proudly says, 'I am holier than thou,' but which, on the contrary, says, 'I am no better than thou, except for the influences of divine grace, which are free to all who will accept them' " (R2099:3). "The testimony of a holy walk and conversation cannot fail to be to the glory of God, to the reproof of unrighteousness, and to the fact of a coming judgment in which righteousness shall surely triumph" (R2099).

Regarding this passage, John Walvoord, a conservative Christian scholar, states that the world has a "need to know that sin was judged in the cross, and for those who trust in Christ there is deliverance from judgment upon sin and deliverance from condemnation. The unsaved must see Christ as judged and executed for them, and their judgment for sin as already past."<sup>4</sup>

### A CLOSER LOOK

Is this really what Jesus meant? If the world cannot receive the spirit (John 14:7), why does Jesus tell his disciples that the world was to be convinced by the spirit? Certainly individuals have been touched by our examples and the words we have given them, but is it our duty to reprove the world of their sins, and to convince them of sin and righteousness today? Are we doing this in our witness efforts when we tell others about the good news of the kingdom? Convicting the world through the examples of our lives is fundamental for those of us who have already been convinced by the spirit, but is there more significance to these words from Jesus?

Earlier in his dissertation to the apostles, Jesus expresses the idea that the spirit was to testify about Christ (John 15:26-27). This message of the hope of Jesus as the world's deliverer from sin was first given to the Jews, and later to the world, yet neither the Jews nor the gentile nations have been convinced or convicted of its truth to this day. The Jews misunderstood righteousness and strove to follow the letter of the law and its works, and the world still fails to believe in Christ and his mission, for "the Spirit of truth ... the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

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The word, “reprove” (Strong 1651, *elengko*), in John 16:8, is described as having “no English word that has so wide an application as the Greek word has.”<sup>5</sup> It “involves the conceptions of authoritative examination, of unquestionable proof, of decisive judgment, and of punitive power. He who ‘convicts’ another places the truth in a clear light before him, so that it must be seen and acknowledged as truth ... He who then rejects ... rejects it with his eyes open and at his peril.”<sup>6</sup>

It also “implies the refutation of error, the discovery of wrong-doing, the bringing it home to the person convinced, and thus convicted ... making such a one see that he is open to the condemnation of conscience, or of men, or of the Law of God.”<sup>7</sup>

“Convince” would be a better word if the verse were dealing with believers, but it is dealing with the world. The Greek expression does not “designate a definitive condemnation”<sup>8</sup> and is often used “to present or expose facts, to convince of the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

### EXAMPLES OF THIS WORD

This is true in other places where this word is used in Scripture. Consider these passages where this Greek word is used in the New Testament.

“When Herod the tetrarch was **reprimanded** by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done” (Luke 3:19). John the Baptist convicted him by proving that his actions were condemned by the law, yet this did not provoke a change in the course of Herod’s life.

People often feel sorry when they are caught in sin, but this does not always lead them to repentance. Herod “was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him ... although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her” (Mark 6:20, 26).

In the ecclesia arrangement we are to be our brother’s keepers. If it is seen that “your brother sins, go and **show** him his **fault** in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matthew 18:15). If we convince our brother of the error of his way we will be able to “save his soul from death” (James 5:20). In situations like this the entire case of evidence against their course of action should be brought forth. If the brother then continues in sin, he is then sinning in full light since he was given all of the evidence. At that point further action should be taken to prevent the sin from spreading within the congregation.

We should be careful that we first examine ourselves, to be sure that we are not in some manner incorrect regarding the situation, and when we speak to our brother about the matter, that we do not judge his standing with the Lord. We should keep in mind that “in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:1-2).

The Apostle Paul expresses an interesting thought in Ephesians, where he nearly defines this Greek word *elengko* in his letter. He tells them to “not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even **expose** them ... But all things become visible when they are **exposed** by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you’ ” (Ephesians 5:11-14).



Jesus, whose principles expose darkness.

Paul encourages a similar course of action in his letter to Titus regarding our brethren. We should encourage each other to continue in the faith in accordance with scripture, and if we find they are not doing this we should “**reprove** them so that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:9, 13, 2:15) and live a true life of faith (Titus 1:16-2:10), for “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11).

The epistles to Timothy also exhort us, “those who continue in sin, **rebuke** in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning” (1 Timothy 5:20), and to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, **rebuke**, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Paul encouraged the brethren in Corinth to order their services so that a visitor to the Church could be both edified and convinced about the message. “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is **convicted** by all, he is called to account by all” (1 Corinthians 14:24).

James warned that “if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are **convicted** by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9). When our conscience may not convict us of sin, a better understanding of the law, and of Scripture (and putting it into practice), will.

When we find ourselves on a path or a course of action which the Lord might not approve, he gives us the experiences we need in order to make a correction so that he can guide us in the paths of his righteousness (Psalm 23:3-4). The writer of Hebrews alludes to this when he encourages us to “not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are **reproved** by him” (Hebrews 12:5).

Jesus promised us, “Those whom I love, I **reprove** and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Jesus also warned that “everyone who does evil hates

the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be **exposed**" (John 3:20). When the Pharisees resorted to ridiculing Christ and accusing him that his father was the devil, Jesus responded stating, "which one of you **convicts** me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe me?" (John 8:46). Not a single one of them could prove anything that Jesus was saying was false.

### THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Further on in his discussion with the disciples on the way to the Garden, Jesus remarked that when "the Spirit of truth comes, it will guide you into all the truth; for it will not speak on its own initiative, but whatever it hears, it will speak; and it will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13).

What was to come? Jesus stated emphatically that he did not come into the world to judge it at that time (John 12:27). The Gospel of Luke records that while on the journey to Gethsemane, Jesus promised his apostles they would "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30).

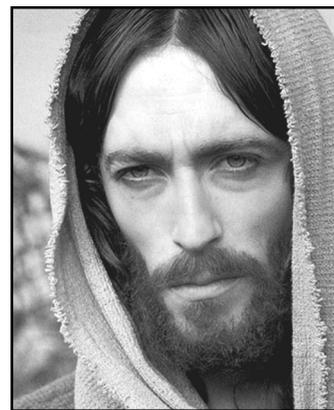
In John 16, Jesus' words about the conviction of the spirit upon the world places it "in the position which it will occupy at the last judgment ... It has been urged that the word carries the connotation of educative discipline ... it means to convict or convince someone about something."<sup>10</sup> This describes the work of the millennium and while conviction is not the same as conversion, it is a necessary prerequisite.

Concerning this text, Reprint 4166 states that, "The effect of this will be three-fold ... (1) "It will reprove the world of sin" — that is to say, it will make the world conscious of its sinful condition, it will show to the world more and more the exceeding sinfulness of sin ... (2) It is not enough that the world be convicted of sin ... in his wonderful plan he has arranged for eternal life to be granted only to the righteous ... (3) The Spirit of the Lord in his people will convince their neighbors, all who come within the range of their light and their message, that the present life is not all that there is, that there is a trial purposed in God's arrangement for the whole world of mankind, a judgment, a test ... such as are not thus exercised or influenced are to be instructed through the Church ... In God's plan he has provided a day of judgment in the future for the world, in which all shall have full opportunity of being judged, of being tested along the lines of their loyalty to the Lord. Nevertheless their conduct in the present life has to do with that future judgment or trial. In proportion as they may disobey their conscience and fail to follow the leadings of the truth in the present time, they will have stripes, difficulties to overcome in the future, and to whatever extent they now seek to live in accord with righteousness they will lay up for themselves a blessing which shall assist them in that day of judgment."

The Jews were not convinced by Jesus' message. The world is not convicted by ours. The Jews did not believe that Jesus was Messiah because they were blinded by the god of this world. In the book of Romans Paul quoted an Old Testament scripture stating that "their eyes be darkened to

see not" (Romans 11:10), and the reason he gave to explain this was "God has shut up all in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32).

In the next verse (John 16:9), Jesus tells us both who he was talking about, and why they needed to be convinced of these things. He simply said that it was "because they do not believe in me." The Jewish



*Jesus of Nazareth*

nation had rejected Christ, but the prophecies promise that at some point in Israel's future the spirit will be poured out on them and they will recognize Jesus, believe in him, and recognize their sins. Then their conviction and judgment will ensue.

"In that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look unto me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:9-10, see also Zechariah 14:1-3).

Though many in the world know of a coming judgment day, the world has not yet been convinced of judgment. The counselor will be sent unto them in that day. "Counselor" is a word with legal implications. "[It means] to cross-examine for the purpose of convincing or refuting an opponent (the word being specially used of legal proceedings)."<sup>11</sup> The relation between the "comforter," the "advocate,"<sup>12</sup> and the word "convict" in this context, is striking. In it we must recognize that this is the work of the spirit, and not the work of man.

The world is not yet convinced, but it will be. This same word, convict, is also used in Jude describing the work of Jesus and his bride: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to **convince** all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15).

Then "it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 14:16).

The lesson of the permission of evil today, and the effect of the Spirit touching their hearts and minds in that future day of judgment, will help convince the world of righteousness and judgment concerning sin. "For when the earth experiences your judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9).

— Jeff Mezera

- (1) Gray, James M., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Spire Books, 1953
- (2) Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, *Commentary, Critical, Practical and Explanatory*, Jerome B. Names & Co., 1883, page 443.
- (3) UBS New Testament Translators Handbook Series, United Bible Society, 2004.
- (4) Walvoord, John F., *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, page 114, Zondervan, 1991.
- (5) Eclectic Notes, Online Bible electronic edition, www.onlinebible.net, 2008.
- (6) Wescott, Brooke Foss, *The Gospel According to John*, John Murray Printers, 1896, page 228.
- (7) Pulpit Commentary, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, Reprinted 1983, page 301.
- (8) Godet, Frederic Louis, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Funk & Wagnalls, 1886, page 309.
- (9) Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook Communications, 2004.
- (10) Sanders, J. N., *The Gospel According to St. John*, Harper and Row, 1968, page 351.
- (11) Morris, Leon Lamb, *The Gospel According to John*, William B. Eerdmans, 1995.
- (12) Strong's Greek Definition #3875.

## Elijah's Sleeping Baal

There is a pertinent and interesting parallel to Elijah's mocking words in 1 Kings 18:7 that has gone unnoticed until recently.<sup>1</sup> When the priests of Baal fail to get any response from their god, Elijah mocks them saying, "call loudly ... perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." Aside from the biting satire, Elijah's words may recall some cultic awakening of the deity in morning rites that prevailed in his day. Thus, the Pyramid Texts of the third millennium contain a composition with the refrain "awake in peace," about which Lichtheim observes, "a litany with which the gods were greeted each morning by the priests performing the daily cult service in the temples."<sup>2</sup> Elijah's words are even more pointed than this and may be intended to recall — and provide a contrast to — a particularly famous passage in Near Eastern literature.

In the Mesopotamian epic, the *Atrahasis*, there is a non-Biblical account of the flood. Here the god Enlil is angered at men and, after several failed attempts to reduce their population, he brings great rains that flood the earth and destroy most of humanity.<sup>3</sup> The cause of his anger is straightforward. Mankind makes too much noise and keeps him awake: "With their uproar I am deprived of sleep."<sup>4</sup> "With their uproar sleep does not overcome me."<sup>5</sup> In con-



Elijah fed by an angel

trast, 1 Kings' Baal seems oblivious to the noise of his priests and sleeps undisturbed. The Bible's narrative will also culminate with a rainstorm (1 Kings 18:45), but this rain, brought by one who does not sleep, will not bring destruction but salvation for his people.

- (1) Jacobson, H., "Elijah's Sleeping Baal," *Biblica* 79 (1998) page 413.
- (2) Lichtheim, L., *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Volume 1, Berkeley (1973) pages 35, 49. Similarly, Porphyrius attests to such a practice at the Egyptian temple of Sarapis (*abstin.* 4.9.5).
- (3) Lambert, W.G. and A.R. Millard, *Atrahasis* (Oxford 1969) pp. 67-129.
- (4) Lambert, *op. cit.*, pages 67, 73.
- (5) Lambert, *op. cit.*, page 107. The non-Biblical traditions testimony to man's noisiness prior to the flood may provide some insight into the antediluvian world.

## Jeremiah's Enemies Uncovered

In Jeremiah 20:1-6, 38:1, Pashur was a priest, and Gedaliah his son. Both were enemies of Jeremiah. Recently evidence directly linked to this passage of scripture was unearthed at Jerusalem's ancient City of David, this time corroborating the Book of Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup>

A completely intact seal impression, or "bula," bearing the name Gedaliahu ben Pashur was uncovered. The bula is actually a stamped engraving made of mortar. Gedaliahu ben Pashur's bula was found a bare few meters away from the site where a second such seal, this one belonging to Yuchal ben Shlemiyahu, was found three years ago, at the entrance to the City of David.

In the Book of Jeremiah (38:1-4), both men are mentioned as ministers to King Tzidkiyahu (Zedekiah). The two, along with another pair, demanded the death penalty for the prophet Jeremiah in response to his plea for the king to surrender the city to the oncoming hordes of the Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar.

According to Professor Eilat Mazar of Jerusalem's Hebrew University, who led the dig, the ancient Hebrew letters "are very clearly preserved." The seal impression was found in clay, she said. The verses, as translated by the article, read as follows:

"Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashur, Yuchal son of Shelemiah and Pashur son of Malchiah heard the things that Jeremiah was speaking to the people, saying: Thus said Hashem:<sup>2</sup> 'Whoever remains in this city will die by the sword, by the famine or by the pestilence, whereas whoever goes out [in surrender] to the Chaldeans will live; he will have his life as a booty, and he will live.' Thus said Hashem: 'This city will surely be delivered into the hand of the army of the king of Babylonia, and he will capture it.'

"And the[se] officers said to the king, 'Let this man be put to death now, because he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who remain in this city, and the hands of all the

people, by speaking to them such things. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but rather [their] detriment.’ ”

“How absolutely fantastic and special this find is, can only be realized when you hold in your hand this magnificent one-centimeter piece of clay and know that it survived 2,600 years in the debris of the destruction, and came to us complete and in perfect condition,” said Mazar.

Mazar’s team of archaeologists focused its efforts on the layer of artifacts from the First Temple period located just outside the walls of the Old City, near the Dung Gate. The seal impression that was found three years ago was uncovered inside a stone structure that Mazar said she believed was the Palace of David. Gedaliahu’s seal impression was unearthed at the foot of the external wall of the same structure, under a tower that appeared to have been built in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah).

Mazar has been excavating the site since 2005. She is a senior fellow at the Shalem Center, a Jerusalem-based research and educational institute, and heads its Institute of Archaeology. The Ir David (City of David) Foundation was the principal sponsor of the excavation, together with the Israel Antiquities Authority, the Hebrew University, and the Shalem Center.

(1) This archeological dig was reported by Hana Levi Julian as an E-article in *Arutz Sheva*, 2008 August 04.

(2) *Ha Shem* means “the Name.” The Hebrew word here is the tetragrammaton, commonly transliterated, *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*.

## Solomon — and his Glory

In Matthew 6:28, 29 Jesus speaks of how splendidly our Heavenly Father clothes the lilies of the field. He tells us that their beauty rivals even Solomon’s glory. We see that despite Solomon’s failings, memories of his glorious reign were one of his abiding legacies. Let us ask two questions about the life of Solomon.

First, are his failings consistent with his prayer for wisdom recorded in 2 Chronicles 1:11?

Second, should we expect Solomon to be among those receiving the “good report” and promise of Hebrews 11:39-40? That is, is Solomon an Ancient Worthy?

### PROMISE OF WISDOM

We recall the promise to the young king in 2 Chronicles 1:7-12. “In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask, ‘what I shall give thee?’ ” Because of his humility and good sense in his prayer “God said to Solomon, Because this was in thy heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honor, nor the life of them that hate thee, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over

whom I have made thee king: wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee; neither shall there any after thee have the like.”

### SOLOMON’S GLORY

What is the testimony to Solomon’s Glory?

In 1 Kings 6:1 we read, “And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month Ziv (or Zif), which is the second month, that he began to build the house of Jehovah.”

The historian Josephus tells us that the foundations of the temple were laid very deep, and the materials were strong stones, such as would resist the force of time. They were to be strong enough to sustain with ease the vast superstructure and precious ornaments of great weight. The entire building was of white stone. Its height was sixty cubits, its length was the same, and its breadth twenty cubits. The roof and the walls were of cedar and over all this cedar were affixed plates of gold that had relief work upon them, so that the whole temple dazzled the eyes of those who entered. The whole structure of the temple was made with great skill of polished stones, and those laid together harmoniously and smoothly. As we read in 1 Kings 6:7, “The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready at the quarry; and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.”

In this noiseless assembly of the stones there is clearly prefigured the shaping experiences of each precious member of the Church. “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5).

No doubt partly for this reason, in Reprint 1901 Pastor Russell wrote, “It required the two reigns of David and Solomon to represent the great work of the Lord’s Anointed. David’s reign represented the work of the church in the flesh, while Solomon’s reign represented the work of the church glorified and at rest from all her enemies.”



*The Glory of Solomon*

1 Kings 6:37, 38 explicitly tells us the temple was started in the fourth year of Solomon's reign in the month of Zif (the second month, corresponding to April or May) and was finished "throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it." Hence the temple was completed in year number 11 of the reign of Solomon. 1 Kings 8:2 tells us the month of the temple's dedication was the seventh month, corresponding to September or October: "And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month."

Though there is a difference of view in the scholarly community about how to interpret 1 Kings 9:10, the meaning seems clear enough. The scriptures explicitly affirm that the Temple took seven years, and that the house of Solomon took 13. The sum is twenty. Perhaps out of reverence, Solomon would not start his own house before completing the LORD's house.

How thrilled the expectant multitude must have been on the day of the temple's dedication, pride, both religious and patriotic, washing through the crowd as waves on the sea. Israel's hopes now stood in golden splendor before their eyes. We read in 1 Kings 8:5, "And king Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be counted nor numbered for multitude. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Jehovah unto its place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim ... [then in verse 10] And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of Jehovah ... I have surely built thee a house of habitation, a place for thee to dwell in for ever. And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the assembly of Israel; and all the assembly of Israel stood. And he said, "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, who spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it."

The LORD was so pleased with Solomon that he appeared unto him again. We read in 1 Kings 9:2, "Jehovah appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon. And Jehovah said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there forever; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually. [And now comes the significant and "big" two-letter word "if"] And as for thee, *if* thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and mine ordinances; then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom over Israel for ever."

We leave off our reading here, passing over the well-known account of 1 Kings 10 that testifies further to a glory in Solomon's day unrivaled by any of his successors:

- The visit of the Queen of Sheba,
- Solomon's trade alliance with Hiram King of Tyre, that made the treasures of Egypt, the Indian Ocean, and Africa flow through Israel, bringing it great wealth,<sup>1</sup>
- Solomon's other construction projects that reflected the wealth of the kingdom,
- Solomon's preparations for the defense of the kingdom.

### TURNING OF THE HEART

Solomon would take 700 wives and 300 concubines, an interesting example of the 7:3 ratio that we find elsewhere in scripture.<sup>2</sup> "Now king Solomon loved many foreign women ... of the nations concerning which Jehovah said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.' Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11:1).

We have no scriptural evidence that establishes all the significant chronology of Solomon's life. If Solomon survived the threat to his life from the rebellion of Absalom when he was about ten years old he then may have ascended to the throne at about age of twenty, started construction of the temple at 24, and saw its dedication seven years later at age 31. If from about age 35 and for nearly 20 years he took one new wife or concubine, this comes out to an average of one every week, for the sum of "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines."

He abandoned himself to indulgence, mirth, pleasure and excess. He then had a change of heart at about age 55. At that age his life-style choices had prematurely aged him, the vanity of his course came clearly into focus, and it weighed upon his soul. Solomon expired at age 60 not reaching to the measure of 70 years as had his father David.

As with Saul and David, the eternal God was grieved during this period when Solomon's heart was turned away. Reading verse 9, "And Jehovah was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from Jehovah, the God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice."

Saul's response to Jehovah's anger was the most tragic of the kings. David, the man after God's own heart, turned to prayer, contrition, and the poetry of the Psalms. But Solomon was forged from a different metal than his father. So now, nearly 20 years after that glorious day of dedication for the temple, we meet a wizened and prematurely elderly preacher sitting in the shade of the porch that bears Solomon's name.

"Vanity of vanities," saith the Preacher, "All is Vanity!"

This term "the Preacher," when rendered in Greek, gives the book its name "Ecclesiastes." In the original Hebrew it is called *Koheleth* (Strong 6953). The Preacher asserts that "a good name is better than adornment of anointing oil" (Ecclesiastes 7:1), and yet does not tell us his name.

He engages in discussion those worshippers seeking the deeper things of God. The Preacher claims both kingship (Ecclesiastes 1:1) and to have been greater than any other



An older and wiser King Solomon

king in public works, servants, and wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10).

Who is this nameless figure blazing a new path — fraught with its own shortcomings as in all human endeavor? It seems most reasonable to concur with tradition that this preacher is none other than Solomon who now says — “I find more bitter than death the woman

whose heart is snares and nets, [and] whose hands are bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher ... one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found” (Ecclesiastes 7:26-28).

If the Preacher is indeed Solomon we now see a change of heart from his time dissipated with 700 wives and 300 concubines. It should not be a surprise that a new consort each week did not provide the basis for a deep and meaningful relationship of trust.

In the end, all that Solomon had accumulated of wealth and security was lost — Egypt overran Israel five years after his death (1 Kings 14:25).<sup>3</sup> With the Lord’s approval, the 12 tribes were irrevocably torn apart by the unwise leadership of his son Rehoboam, which we read about in 1 Kings 12.

This book of Ecclesiastes foresees and warns of these dangers. It is not to be read superficially, for the language is woven throughout with riddles, subtle thought, and traps for the careless. What the Preacher does is lay a foundation far more important than that of a stone temple. In this book he inaugurates the pattern of thought and critical thinking upon which the rabbinical tradition is built. Rabbinical style stresses not just rote memorization and the copying of “classic” examples, but an active engaged questioning.

Ultimately, this work in his final years as the “Preacher” were to have a far more reaching effect on Israel and serve them far better than the short term political and military success of a single ruler of “splendor.” The lessons from the “Preacher’s” mode of thinking were to create for his people far more wealth than one king of strong personality could ever hope to bring.

Adam Cohen in the Soncino Press commentary on this work writes<sup>4</sup>: “[The preacher] is a daring teacher, restless and courageous in his search for the abiding meaning of life. He looks out on life with wide open eyes, hating hypocrisy and sham, despising injustice and wrong.

“He knows the sadness of things, but the mood of dejection never freezes over him. Thus he can speak of the joy and beauty of life and set it against the haunting echo of the world’s vanity.”

Cohen then goes to his core argument — “The juxtaposition of piety and skepticism, irreconcilable as they may appear, seems to belong to the whole paradox of the Jewish mind ... Every reader of this book with a knowledge of the Hebrew must admit that the literary style ... differs widely from that of the rest of the Bible ... the contents are unique in the Hebrew scriptures. [For] the argumentation which is its principle feature is far removed from the declarations of the prophet, the songs and prayers of the Psalmists, or the annals of the historians. ... Boldness of reasoning and humility of disposition are the two characteristics of [the Preacher, *Koheleth*] which contend for mastery within the arena of mind and heart. ... For [a] long [time] the issue remains in doubt. Often faith appears defeated under the blows of hard facts; in the end it triumphs.”

Now, for one of those subtle tests to see whether the student is paying close attention, we read in Ecclesiastes 8:15: “Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be joyful: for that shall abide with him in his labor [all] the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun.”

Does Solomon really want us to take away this lesson that we also should commend mirth? It can be seen that this is not the case. Rather, in this confession he is sharing a life experience as a warning to us. This overstatement is to stop us and have us ask, “Does he really mean for us to do that?”

It is possible to see Solomon as a lonely man. His proverbs were loved, but this book of Ecclesiastes was 500 years ahead of its time. It is the superlative start of the rabbinical tradition that our Lord himself used in training his apostles. We see Jesus cajoling them in the rabbinical style to get them thinking deeply. Let us take one example from John 6:5: “Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?”

Do we see that what we have here is a rabbinical style question? But just in case we missed that this is that type of instruction, we find this word “prove” coming in the next verse telling us that this is a rabbinical examination: “And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred shillings’ worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little” (John 6:6-7).

Then one of Jesus’ inner circle answered back in rabbinical style; that is, with a question. “One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, who hath five barley loaves, and two fishes: but what are these among so many?” (John 6:8-9). Now we know the rest of the story and the multitude’s response in verse 14: When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, “This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world.”

So in answer to our first question — Are Solomon’s failings consistent with his prayer for wisdom recorded in 2 Chronicles 1:11? In his life we can see a journey:

- The sunny days of one who has it all
- Tasting the “Exceeding sinfulness of sin”
- Losing God’s blessing
- Learning from bitter experience
- Going back to God, but now much wiser.

In answer, “Yes.”

Second, should we expect Solomon to be among those receiving the “good report” and promise of Hebrews 11:39-40? That is, “Is Solomon an Ancient Worthy?” This writer thinks the Preacher would have us answer in the rabbinical style — “So what do you think?” Though not mentioned in Hebrews 11, it would not be surprising to find him in that blessed company, sharing his life experience with mankind in the kingdom.

— Richard Doctor

(1) Possibly these expeditions came to Western America for the silver, hence the need for three-year missions. Western America alone, from Chile to Alaska, has 60% of the world’s silver deposits.

(2) For further discussion on 7:3 numerology please see “Our Lord’s Resurrection Appearances,” *Beauties of the Truth* (7:3) August 1996.

(3) “Solomon’s Splendor Affirmed,” *Beauties of the Truth* (15:4) November 2004.

(4) Cohen, A., *The Five Megilloth*, The Soncino Books of the Bible; Soncino Press, London (1983), pages 103-108.

## Newton Republished

While working for civil defense in Washington, a former congressman showed me through the old building of the Library of Congress. In the rare book section, I decided to look in the card catalogue under Isaac Newton. I heard he wrote about religion but had never seen any published materials. The library had a complete list of Newton’s published work with only one book about religion, that published in 1733. I asked to see it and soon found myself reading Thomas Jefferson’s personal copy!

For 323 pages, the greatest scientist who ever lived wrote about his efforts to understand two books of the Bible. The real message is between the lines. Newton accepted every word in the Bible as absolute truth. He only sought to understand it. We have now reprinted a photographic duplicate of Thomas Jefferson’s copy of this book. Only one book of Newton’s about the Bible was ever published. In 1733, six years after his death, J. Darby and T. Browne published *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*.<sup>1</sup> The book is in excellent condition and has Thomas Jefferson’s initials on pages 57 and 137.

With his prodigious knowledge of ancient history and languages and his unequalled mental powers, Isaac Newton is the best qualified individual in this millennium to have written about the prophecies. His study of Daniel began at age 12 and continued throughout his life. He writes of the prophecies with a modesty that indicates he, himself, is in awe of the words he has been given an opportunity to read.

Newton concluded that Revelation would be understood by very few until near the end of history, the time of judg-

ment, and beginning of the everlasting kingdom of the Saints. Newton says these books of prophecy were provided so that, as they are fulfilled, they provide a continuing testimony that the world is governed by the Providence of God.

Newton objected to using the prophecies to predict the future. On page 251, for example, he writes: “The folly of interpreters has been to foretell times and things by this Prophecy, as if God designed to make them prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the Prophecy also into contempt.”

Through 323 pages, he traces history since the writing of the prophecies. He shows that at his time in the early 18th century, part of the prophecies had been fulfilled and part remained to be fulfilled — this is still true in 1991.

Decorated, as are his scientific works, with interesting asides such as comments on the exact date of Easter and the number of years during which Jesus taught, and permeated with a depth of scholarship that no longer exists among modern scholars, this book by Isaac Newton may be the most important work of its kind that has ever been written. The central message of this book for modern readers may not be so much in what it says but in what it is. Newton continually compared his experimental and theoretical understanding of science with his reading of the Bible. He found the content of these two sources of truth to be completely compatible, and regarded every word in the Bible to be as correct as the equations of mathematics and physics.

Therefore, throughout this book, Isaac Newton takes each word of the Prophecies to be exactly correct. He never doubts the content. He only seeks to understand it.

He never strays from his determination not to present predictions of the future based upon the Biblical Prophecies. On pages 113 and 114, he does give an identification of the last horn of the Beast and a numerical evaluation of the length of his reign. He also gives the approximate time of the beginning of this reign, but does not add the numbers or make a prediction. Addition of these numbers, however, places the time of judgment and the beginning of the everlasting kingdom. To Dr. Bentley he had written, “When I wrote my Treatise about our System, I had an Eye upon such Principles as might work with considering Men, for the Belief of a Deity, and nothing can rejoice me more than to find it useful for that Purpose.”

Newton formed the basis for the scientific revolution and the industrial revolution which created our current civilization. This incredible power of his discoveries, however, is minor compared with their role as 17th and 18th century miracles that serve as continuing testimony of the truth of the Bible and of the remarkable creations of the Lord.

The reprint is \$19.50 — Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine (OISM), Box 1279, Cave Junction, OR 97523.

(1) This is not strictly correct. *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms* was published in 1727 (H. McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton, Theological Manuscripts*; Liverpool Univ. Press, 1950). Two other works were also published, one on chronology of the time of Jesus, another on two notable corruptions of Holy Scripture (1 Timothy 3:16 and 1 John 5:7-8).