

A Thing of Bronze

Neil Girard

The Lord said to Isaiah:

“Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; who swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness; for they call themselves after the holy city, and lean on the God of Israel; the LORD of hosts is His name:

“I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. Because I knew that you were hardened and obstinate, and your neck an iron sinew, and your brow bronze, even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them.’” (Isa. 48:1-5)

As we seek to make spiritual application of this passage to our own lives, let us note the key characteristics for which God was rebuking the people of Israel:

- They made vows and promises (to God and to one another) in the name of God but did not fulfill them.
- They talked about God but their talk was tainted with error and wickedness.
- They had heard the prophecies and promises of God but, rather than attribute them to the one true God, they would attribute His promises to a false god and worthless idol (which they possessed in disobedience to God’s laws).
- Though they named themselves as the people of God, their hearts were hardened toward God and His Spirit, they were stubbornly disobedient to God and completely unrepentant in their sins to the point they called their idolatry their “confidence.” (see Jer. 48:13)

But let us note well *why* God gave them His promises and prophecies: so that the Israelites *could not* attribute His works (which He had foretold) to a false god and worthless idol!

Consider the extent to which the Israelites practiced idolatry:

“Then the Israelites journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people become very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.’

“So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and

it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” (Num. 21:4-9)

Some eight hundred years after this event, we find recorded:

“Hezekiah broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and Hezekiah called it Nehushtan, literally, a thing of bronze.” (2 Ki. 18:4)

Not only, as the Lord had said to Isaiah, were the Israelites willing to ascribe the works of the Lord to some false god or worthless idol, the Israelites had, by worshiping some *icon* of a true work of God, turned a memorable, glorious event into an act of idolatry. King Hezekiah is hailed as a hero for destroying the icon that enabled the idolatry. Anyone who thinks the Israelites of Hezekiah’s day were somehow fundamentally different from people alive today are naïve indeed.

We know that Jesus Himself linked His crucifixion to Moses’ bronze serpent. Jesus said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (Jn. 3:14-15) What looking to Moses’ bronze casting of a fiery serpent did for the Israelite bitten by a live fiery serpent in the wilderness, looking in faith to Jesus (who knew no sin but was made sin for us – 2 Cor. 5:21- and who took our rightful death upon Himself - Rom. 5:6) does now for the one bitten by the sting of sin and death.

Jesus prophesied:

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended (Greek – skandalizo [4624], stumbled), will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Mt. 24:7-14)

God has foretold these things so that, when these things happen, we cannot ascribe them to a false god or to a worthless idol. Further, the way of following Christ – that of looking to Christ on the cross – will become a thing of bronze. Love is the characteristic sign of life truly lived in Christ and God. (1 Jn. 4:7-8) The nominal end-time followers of Christ will be stumbled and fallen away from the true faith (see also 2 Ths. 2:3) and the fruit of their religion will be betrayal, hatred, deception, lawlessness (doing what is right in one’s own eyes) and selfishness. Many of these elements are firmly in place in today’s “church” which teaches the many to do whatever they like and prefer in the name of Christ and God. Paul clearly told us that those who prefer and take pleasure in unrighteousness (anything not right in God’s eyes) will perish under strong delusion sent by God. (2 Ths. 2:11-12)

Paul also wrote:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

Let us note carefully what Paul calls nothing here:

- The spiritual ability to speak in tongues,
- The ability to speak forth the purpose and counsel of God,
- The ability to know, understand and teach the hidden, deeper truths of God,
- The spiritual ability to do the physically impossible,
- Charitable good works, and
- Martyrdom.

None of these things are the characteristic that proves our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life – only divine agape love is that. Paul clearly prophesied that “the coming of the lawless one...” (whether that be one worldwide ruler or the general description of mankind) “...is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders...” (2 Ths. 2:9) Paul also foretold, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...” (see Tit. 2:1-15) “...but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.” (2 Tim. 4:3) The end-time “church” – the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith – is characterized by *all* of the things that Paul said amounted to nothing!

The end times will be a test of endurance for the true saints of God. (Mt. 24:13, Rev. 12:11, 13:10, Dan. 7:21, 25) Daniel was told that two thousand three hundred days would be required for the sanctuary to be cleansed. (Dan. 8:14) Is this a reference to the savage purifying of His body (which is His temple – 2 Cor. 6:16, also see Rev. 3:16) which has been leavened and even poisoned by the deceptive work of the demonic for centuries? (see Mt. 13:31-33)

Daniel heard Christ swear by God with both hands raised toward heaven that, in a time span of three and one-half years, “when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.” Daniel, not understanding, asked for clarification and was told, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.” (Dan. 12:7-12)

As we enter the time of the end, those who are wise by the work of the Spirit of God – a work characterized by our patient enduring all our time in the wilderness, looking only to Christ and learning to feed on the “bread” which God provides (which the world and the “church” spurn as worthless) so that we will be prepared to overcome in the time of the end – will understand these prophecies. Be certain you gain your wisdom about these prophecies from the Spirit of God alone –

insights gained secondhand through some man about these things that are “closed up and sealed till the time of the end” are almost certain to be counterfeit “revelations” from some false spirit. Maybe not today, but in the time of the end, on that day, we (those whom *God* understands to belong in the words “we” and “us”) will understand why “the power of the holy people” (Self-will and desire? The last remaining residue of Christian influence in the world?) must be “completely shattered.” We will understand “the mark of the beast” (Rev. 13:16-18 - consider the UPC code and computer chip technology which *is* somehow some part of that prediction). But those who are not united with God (in *His* understanding of “we” and “us”) will not understand these things. They will be under strong delusion and the gospel of the kingdom of Christ and God is veiled to them precisely because they are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3) even as they preach the lawless “gospel” of the “church.” (see Gal. 1:6-9)

The words that come near the end of John’s *Revelation* stand as the bottom-line instruction for all who are entering the time of the end: “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.” (Rev. 22:11) The season in which we may repent and change our lives (and eternal destinies) is soon to be closed forever. The die is nearly cast and all that will remain is to live out whichever nature is truly first, foremost and supreme in our lives. If goodness (the true goodness which comes from God – Jas. 1:17) then so *be* it. If evil (that evil which comes from either the defiled human heart or the deep-seated hatred for all that is of Christ and God which is the devil and the demonic), then so *be* it. Each will reap his own rewards.

But let us not be deceived in any way – the kingdom of God is not a matter of words but is demonstrated in power. (1 Cor. 4:20) The power of Christ is demonstrated and evidenced by His divine, self-sacrificing agape love poured out through our lives upon the very ones who deserve it least. Everything else is Nehushtan, a thing of bronze. It is merely another form of “church” – the lie concocted by the devil and the demonic to keep us from entering, experiencing and expanding God’s kingdom among men.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org
Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org
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