

# Every Man Under His Fig Tree

*Glimpses Of Life In Bible Times*



**Sermons by David Padfield**

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# Under The Vines And Fig Trees

## Introduction

- I. On August 17, 1790, Moses Seixas, the warden of the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, penned a letter to George Washington, welcoming the newly elected first president of the United States on his visit to that city.
  - A. Newport had suffered greatly during the Revolutionary War.
  - B. Invaded and occupied by the British and blockaded by the American navy, hundreds of residents fled, and many of those who remained were Tories.
  - C. After the British defeat, the Tories fled.
- II. Washington's visit to Newport was largely ceremonial—part of a goodwill tour Washington was making on behalf of the new government created by the adoption of the Constitution in 1787.
  - A. Newport had historically been a good home to its Jewish residents, who numbered approximately 300 at the time of Washington's visit.
  - B. Moses Seixas's letter on behalf of the congregation expressed the Jewish community's esteem for President Washington.
  - C. The congregation expressed its pleasure that the God of Israel, who had protected King David, had also protected General Washington.
  - D. While Jews in the rest of the world lived under the rule of monarchs and despots, as American citizens the members of the Newport congregation were part of a government elected by its citizens.
  - E. It is Washington's response, rather than Seixas's letter, which is best remembered and most frequently reprinted.
  - F. In his final paragraph, Washington said, "It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy."
- III. One of the things that has always amazed me about our Founding Fathers was their use and mastery of the language of the Old Testament.
  - A. In his closing paragraph, Washington quotes from Micah 4:4.
  - B. Micah was speaking of the glorious Messianic promise—it would be the end of the Jewish age and the introduction of a new era under the Messiah.
  - C. Instead of a time of war and destruction, "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree."
- IV. Sitting under one's vine and fig tree was a symbol of peace and security.
  - A. The same language was used to describe the peaceful times during the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 4:24–25).
  - B. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, used the language in 701 B.C. when he promised the inhabitants of Jerusalem peace if they would rebel against Hezekiah and surrender to him (2 Kings 18:31–32; cf. Isa. 36:16).

- V. While visiting in Turkey, near the ancient port at Seleucia, I saw a simple house with a porch covered with grape vines and a fig tree in the front yard—a peaceful scene indeed.
- A. Most of the time when you think of grape vines, you picture cultivated grapes growing in a field.
  - B. However, the grape vines were also used for shade during the hot summer months.

*Introduction*

**I. Fig Trees And Vines**

- A. The climate of Palestine is well adapted to grape growing due to the country's bright sunshine and the heavy dew of the late summer nights.
  1. The best location of a vineyard for the direct sunshine is on the gentle slopes of the hillside where most of the vines have grown throughout the centuries in Israel (cf. Jer 31:5; Amos 9:13).
  2. When the Israelites arrived in Canaan the land was already devoted to growing grapes (cf. Deut 6:11; Josh 24:13; Neh 9:25).
  3. "Viticulture thrives best under peaceful conditions because the vines need constant care and several years of watchful cultivation are necessary before they bear fruit (Zeph 1:13). A vineyard calls for harder and more regular labor than any other form of agriculture. Constant pruning of the vines is necessary if the clusters of grapes are to grow to full maturity." (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).
  4. Vines and vineyards were often symbols of prosperity and blessing among the ancient Jews.
  5. On a personal level, every Jew wanted to have his own vine.
  6. The vine provided fresh grapes (Deut. 23:24), raisins (1 Sam. 25:18), unfermented grape juice (Joel 1:5), and wines itself.
  7. Some grape juice was boiled down to make a thick syrup call *dibs*.
    - a) The beautifully decorated exterior of the synagogue at Chorazin shows two men on either side of an enormous bunch of grapes.
    - b) Either the men are squeezing grapes or it is an allusion to where Caleb and Joshua carried the giant cluster of grapes to Moses to demonstrate the fruit of the land of Canaan (Num. 13:21-24).
- B. Fig trees in Israel.
  1. Fig trees were valued for their fruit and for their shade.
  2. Like the vine, it became a symbol of security and prosperity (Zech. 3:10).
  3. "Fig growing was widespread and the fruit ranked as a staple in the people's diet... The fig tree extended productivity in area because it thrived in rugged stony terrain unsuited for most other important food plants. A slow-growing tree requiring many years to bear substantially, the fig became symbolical of economic and political continuity and stability in the land (1 Kings 4:25). Yielding two crops annually, the tree produced the first crop in June from midsummer sprouts from the previous year, but the second crop in August was more important. The fruit generally was dried and pressed into cakes for later consumption, and its high sugar content, together with the date, was a main source of sugar in Israel's diet." (*ZPEB*).

- C. To say, “everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree” is much like Herbert Hoover’s 1928 presidential campaign slogan, “A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage.”
  - 1. Once upon a time, chicken was a treat.
  - 2. Among Protestants in America it was the centerpiece of Sunday dinner.
  - 3. The words were meant to instill a sense of prosperity among the people.
- D. While commenting on Micah 4:4, John Calvin said: “We now then understand the meaning of the Prophet to be, — that under the reign of Christ the faithful shall enjoy true and full happiness, as they shall be exempt from trembling and fear; hence he names the vine and the fig-tree.” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*).

## II. Where Can Peace And Safety Be Found?

- A. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, promised peace to the Jews, but he was not able to deliver the goods (2 Kings 18:31-35; 19:14-20, 32-36).
  - 1. “When Sennacherib and those who survived arose the next morning, they were greeted by a veritable graveyard. All around them lay bodies, dead bodies! Having already just received alarming news from home and with his army now decisively depleted, Sennacherib broke camp and returned to Nineveh. Though he would yet fight another five campaigns, he would never again return to Judah. The Israelites’ God was the living God!” (*Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*).
  - 2. The Annals of Sennacherib were found at Nineveh in 1830.
    - a) This six-sided hexagonal clay prism, commonly known as the Taylor Prism, was discovered among the ruins of Nineveh, the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire.
    - b) It contains the Annals of Sennacherib himself, the Assyrian king who had besieged Jerusalem in 701 B.C. during the reign of king Hezekiah.
    - c) In 1919 J. H. Breasted purchased the Taylor Prism for the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago from a Baghdad antiquities dealer.
    - d) The best known passage on this prism describes that because Hezekiah had not submitted to the Assyrian “yoke,” Sennacherib laid siege to forty-six fortified Judean cities, deported over 200,000 people, and shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem “like a caged bird.”
    - e) “As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city’s gate.” (From the Sennacherib Prism, as quoted by Gonzalo Baez-Camargo, *Archaeological Commentary on the Bible*, p. 109).
    - f) The prism tacitly agrees with the Biblical version by making no claim that Jerusalem was taken.

- B. God warned the Jews in the Wilderness about the high price of low living.
  - 1. God promised His people peace and safety *if* they would obey His word (Deut. 28:1-12; 30:15-20).
  - 2. The people did not remain faithful for very long (Judges 2:11-17).
- C. The world might promise “peace and safety,” but it cannot deliver!
  - 1. Our Lord promised peace to those who follow Him (John 14:27; 16:33).
  - 2. Peace is a part of the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22).
  - 3. Peace for the soul can only come as we obey the Lord (Phil. 4:4-9).
  - 4. “The peace of God, the comfortable sense of being reconciled to God, and having a part in his favor, and the hope of the heavenly blessedness, are a greater good than can be fully expressed. This peace will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; it will keep us from sinning under troubles, and from sinking under them...” (Matthew Henry).

*Invitation*

- I. Do you have the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding”?
- II. The peace that God offers far surpasses human comprehension.
- III. The peace of God acts as a sentry to guard our hearts and thoughts from all anxiety and despair.

## Letter from Moses Seixas to George Washington

To the President of the United States of America.

Sir:

Permit the children of the stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person and merits -- and to join with our fellow citizens in welcoming you to NewPort.

With pleasure we reflect on those days -- those days of difficulty, and danger, when the God of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword, -- shielded Your head in the day of battle: -- and we rejoice to think, that the same Spirit, who rested in the Bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel enabling him to preside over the Provinces of the Babylonish Empire, rests and ever will rest, upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these States.

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People -- a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance -- but generously affording to all Liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: -- deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language equal parts of the great governmental Machine: -- This so ample and extensive Federal Union whose basis is Philanthropy, Mutual confidence and Public Virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, doing whatever seemeth him good.

For all these Blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great preserver of Men -- beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised Land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: -- And, when, like Joshua full of days and full of honour, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality.

Done and Signed by order of the Hebrew Congregation in NewPort, Rhode Island August 17th 1790.

Moses Seixas, Warden

## Letter from George Washington to Moses Seixas

To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport Rhode Island.

Gentleman.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

G. Washington

# The Potter And The Clay

## Introduction

- I. God told Jeremiah to visit a potter's house (Jer. 18:1-10).
  - A. He did not mean the home of the potter, but to his place of fabrication, where the Lord would give him a message for the people of Israel.
  - B. The potter's house was probably south of Jerusalem on the slopes of the Valley of Hinnom, where water and clay were found.
  - C. The potter's house would be near a field where clay could be weathered, stored and prepared for fashioning.
  - D. A kiln for firing the pottery and a dump for the broken and discarded pottery would also be a part of the "potter's house."
  - E. The house would provide cover for the potter's wheel so the potter could fashion his vessels in all kinds of weather.
  - F. This "potter's house" would also help control of the drying process before the firing the clay in the kiln.
  - G. Here Jeremiah was to be taught the principles of the Divine rule.
- II. At the potter's house Jeremiah saw a familiar sight.
  - A. The potter was making a vessel on the pottery wheels.
  - B. The lower wheel was worked by the foot of the potter and was attached by an axle to the smaller upper wheel, where the clay was worked.
  - C. As the ball of clay spun around rapidly, the centrifugal force upon the clay was controlled by the skillful fingers of the potter so that the desired vessel could be obtained.
- III. As often happened in the daily life of a potter, the clay did not turn out right.
  - A. Often in fashioning the clay, some defect would become evident.
    1. The clay may be the wrong kind.
    2. It may have too many impurities.
    3. The treading may not have been properly done (Isa. 41:25).
  - B. If the clay does not produce the desired result, the potter can then reshape the clay into a ball and produce another vessel.
  - C. It was this process that Jeremiah observed carefully.
  - D. The potter then rolled the clay into a lump to begin his task again to make a more suitable creation.
  - E. The point here is the power the potter had over the clay.
    1. The clay was in his hand and under his control.
    2. The defects were in the clay, not the hand of the potter.
- IV. Jeremiah was then taught the meaning of the figure.
  - A. The omnipotent power of the Lord over nations is compared with that of the potter over his clay.
  - B. Just as the potter remade the clay to conform to his purpose, it was within the Lord's power to mold Israel until it is conformed to His plan.
  - C. Though the parable is meant principally for Israel, God deals with all nations in a similar fashion.



## I. God Is The Potter

- A. God is often compared to a Potter, who fashions us according to His will.
- B. God “formed” Adam from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7).
- C. Job realized how he was formed (Job 10:8-9).
- D. Elihu told this to Job (Job 33:6).
- E. The potter has power over the clay (Isa. 29:16).
- F. We must not question our Maker (Isa. 45:9; 64:8).
- G. Jeremiah spoke of the “sons of Zion” in this way (Lam. 4:2).
- H. Paul used this illustration to show the will of God (Rom. 9:20-23).
- I. God will destroy the wicked like a piece of pottery (Jer. 19:10-11; Psa. 2:9).

## II. We Are The Clay

- A. The parallel between humanity and the clay must not be carried too far—for human “clay” is not passive.
- B. When we repent of our sins God can rework us into “a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master” (2 Tim. 2:20-21).
  1. The connection between this passage and the one that immediately precedes it is very practical (2 Tim. 2:17-19).
  2. Paul had just given a high definition of the Church as consisting of those who belong to God and are on the way to righteousness.
  3. The obvious question is: How do you explain the existence of heretics in the Church?
  4. How do you explain the existence of Hymenaeus and Philetus?
  5. Paul’s reply is that in any great house there are all kinds of utensils.
    - a) There are things of precious metal and things of base metal.
    - b) There are things that have a dishonorable use and things that have an honorable use.
  6. It must be so in the Church.
  7. So long as it is an earthly body it must be a mixture.
  8. So long as it consists of men and women, it must remain a cross-section of humanity.
  9. Just as it takes all kinds of people to make a world, so it takes all kinds of people to make the Church.
- C. This is a truth that Jesus had stated long before, in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).
- D. The point of that parable is that the wheat and the tares grow together, and, in the early stages, are so like each other that it is impossible to separate them.
- E. Jesus taught it again in the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13:47-48).
  1. The dragnet gathered of every kind of fish.
  2. In both parables Jesus teaches that the Church is necessarily a mixture and that human judgment must be suspended, but that God’s judgment will in the end make the necessary separations.
  3. Those who criticize the Church because there are imperfect people in it are criticizing it because it is composed of men and women.
  4. It is not given to us to judge the heart; final judgment belongs to God.
  5. Nevertheless, it is the duty of a Christian to keep himself free from polluting influences.

### III. Marred Pottery Can Be Remade

- A. While it is true that God does have a plan for our lives, we still have our own free will—we can choose to disobey Him.
- B. Anytime we deviate from God's plan we bring misery into our lives.
  - 1. God has a plan for the home, and all those who choose to disregard His precepts suffered the consequences (Prov. 6:20-35).
  - 2. God has a plan for how you raise your children, and those who think they know more about it than the Almighty bring untold sorrow into their lives (Prov. 19:18; 10:1).
- C. Have you ever wished you could go back and start over?
  - 1. You might find yourself in some unpleasant situation of your own making.
  - 2. If only you could take back the words you said or made different choices.
  - 3. Sadly, in most cases, it is impossible to go back and start over.
  - 4. Sometimes it is like getting bad haircut—just wait for it to grow out.
    - a) Story of the new discount barbershop that opened up right across the street from an established barbershop.
    - b) The new shop opened up and put up a sign with big letters: "We Give \$7.00 Haircuts."
    - c) Not to be outdone, the established barber put up his own sign: "We Fix \$7.00 Haircuts."
- D. The good news is that no matter how bad you have messed up your life, you can be remade (1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 6:17-18; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

#### *Invitation*

- I. Clay has very little value by itself; but it can become something beautiful when it has been shaped and molded by the hands of a master!
- II. Think of the song, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord."

# Women Grinding At The Mill

## Introduction

- I. Just prior to His death on the cross, Jesus taught at the Temple in Jerusalem.
  - A. He then departed from the Temple and sat on the Mount of Olives where He told His disciples that the Temple would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1-2).
  - B. The disciples apparently thought that such a terrible thing could only be a sign of the Lord's return.
  - C. The disciples asked questions *about* when the Temple would be destroyed and about any *signs* they might see before the Lord returned (Matt. 24:3).
  - D. Jesus responded by answering their first question first—He gave them numerous signs they would observe before the destruction of Jerusalem, and then said it would happen within the next generation (Matt. 24:34-35).
  - E. Jesus then answered their question about His return, and pointed out that no signs would be given prior to that event (Matt. 24:36-42).
- II. Jesus gave several examples of what the days would be like before His return.
  - A. It would be like the days of Noah—people would be eating, drinking and going to weddings—they would be going about their everyday lives without any knowledge that the end of time was at hand.
  - B. He said it would be on a day when men were out working in a field.
  - C. He said it would be on a day when women would be “working at the mill.”
  - D. We understand what it was like prior to the Flood, and I am sure we have all seen men working in a field, but what about the women working at the mill?
- III. Because they lived in a very hot country, most Jews got up before daybreak so that they could do plenty of work before the sun got too hot.
  - A. The mother would often get up before anyone else and light the fire, if it had gone out during the night.
  - B. After breakfast the men and the older boys would go work in the fields.
  - C. Young boys went to school at the synagogue.
  - D. The mother and the girls started their daily tasks.
  - E. Young boys who were too young to go school looked after the family's animals, such as the goats or chickens, just as young Arab boys do today.
- IV. As soon as the men left the house the women would start the very important job of grinding the grain into flour to bake bread.
  - A. They ground the grain in a hand mill made of two flat, round stones about eighteen inches across.
  - B. The bottom stone had a wooden peg in the middle; the top stone had a hole in the middle and would fit over the peg.
  - C. The woman would put handfuls of grain into the hole in the top stone.
    1. The poorer people used barley grain.
    2. The wealthier used wheat.
  - D. Then she slowly turned the handle on the top stone.
  - E. As the two stones ground against each other, the grain was crushed between them.
  - F. Fine flour poured onto the cloth that was laid beneath the two millstones.
  - G. While it was possible for one woman to operate a millstone, often two women would work together, to make it less hard work.

- H. The sounds of millstones were heard in every house.
  1. Jeremiah told the Jews that when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, invaded their country, they would no longer hear that sound (Jer. 25:10).
  2. He pointed out the domestic effects of invasion.
  3. Normal life would be totally disrupted, and the land would be emptied of its inhabitants.
  4. All joy and domestic work would go.
  5. Sounds of normal human activity would cease.
  6. In the city of Van, Turkey (just a few miles from the Iranian border) there is a public statue of a woman grinding at the mill.
- V. What lessons can we learn from this passage?

*Discussion*

**I. The Return Of Christ**

- A. There is no truth more clearly taught in God's word, no fact more firmly established, and no warning more emphatic, than the forewarning of the final judgment day as presented by Paul (Acts 17:30-31).
- B. The return of Christ is spoken of throughout the New Testament.
  1. Promised by Jesus Himself (John 14:3).
  2. Promised by the angels (Acts 1:11).
  3. Desired for by the apostle Paul (2 Tim. 4:8).
  4. Promised by the apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3:10).
  5. Hoped for by the apostle John (Rev. 22:20).

**II. He Will Return Unexpectedly**

- A. The one thing we know more than anything else about our Lord's return is that we don't know when it will be!
- B. We must always be watchful (Mark 13:32-37).
  1. Of "that day" neither the angels of heaven nor Jesus Himself knows the time—only the Father knows that time.
  2. Jesus, at His ascension, said it was not for the disciples "to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).
  3. A map of the future would be a hindrance, not a help, to faith.
  4. Their responsibility—and ours—is to get busy and do His work without being concerned about date setting.
- C. "Finally, in these verses, Jesus comes to the question concerning the time when the end will appear, but His answer is likely to be disappointing to anyone wishing to be able to calculate the end, as is the fashion of some ancient and modern so-called prophecy experts. In the preceding verses (vv. 28-31), Jesus has assured His disciples in the strongest terms that the prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem (which triggered the whole discussion) and the attendant distresses of verses 5-13 will be fulfilled within a generation (v. 30). Here, when speaking of the end, however, Jesus refuses to give a time (v. 32) and instead places emphasis upon constant watchfulness." (*NIBC*)

- D. “*All, Watch*. This command was proper, not only for those who were expecting the calamities that were soon to come upon the Jews, but for all who are soon to die, and to go to the judgment. We know not the time of our death. We know not how soon we shall be called to the judgment. The Son of man may come at any moment, and we should, therefore, be ready. If we are His friends—if we have been renewed and pardoned—if we have repented of our sins, and have believed on Him, and are leading a holy life—we are ready. If not, we are unprepared; and soon, probably while we are not expecting it, the cold hand of death will be laid on us, and we shall be hurried to the place where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Oh, how important it is to be ready, and to escape the awful sufferings of an **eternal hell!**” (*Albert Barnes*)
- E. “As to the destruction of Jerusalem, expect it to come very shortly. As to the end of the world, do not inquire when it will come, for of that day and that hour knoweth no man. Christ, as God, could not be ignorant of anything; but the Divine wisdom which dwelt in our Savior, communicated itself to His human soul according to the Divine pleasure. As to both, our duty is to watch and pray. Our Lord Jesus, when He ascended on high, left something for all his servants to do. We ought to be always upon our watch, in expectation of His return. This applies to Christ’s coming to us at our death, as well as to the general judgment. We know not whether our Master will come in the days of youth, or middle age, or old age; but, as soon as we are born, we begin to die, and therefore we must expect death. Our great care must be, that, whenever our Lord comes, He may not find us secure, indulging in ease and sloth, mindless of our work and duty. He says to all, ‘Watch,’ that you may be found in peace, without spot, and blameless.” (*Matthew Henry*)

### III. We Will Work Till He Returns

- A. Until the Lord returns we must go about our daily tasks.
1. There was nothing wrong with the women working at the mill.
  2. Domestic duties must continue till our Lord returns.
  3. “What words can more strongly describe the suddenness of our Savior’s coming! Men will be at their respective businesses, and suddenly the Lord of glory will appear. Women will be in their house employments, but in that moment every other work will be laid aside, and every heart will turn inward and say, ‘It is the Lord! Am I prepared to meet him? Can I stand before Him?’ And what, in fact, is the day of judgment to the whole world, but the day of death to every one?” (*Matthew Henry*)
- B. Some at Thessalonica quit their jobs as they were waiting for the Lord’s return (2 Thes. 3:6–15).
- C. We need to labor (Eph. 4:28), but also recognize that labor in this life will not bring us anything in eternity.
- D. Labor for the eternal (1 Cor. 3:10–11).

#### IV. Not Everyone Will Be Saved

- A. The two women working their hand mill were apt to be sisters, a mother and daughter, or two household slaves—yet no matter how close their relationship, at the return of Christ they were separated.
- B. The gospel can bring division in the home (cf. Matt. 10:35–36).
  - 1. Since many Jews in Jesus' day thought the coming of Messiah would bring them political peace and material prosperity, so today many in the church think that Jesus' presence will bring them a kind of tranquility.
  - 2. However, Jesus insists that His mission entails strife and division.
  - 3. Though He is the Prince of Peace, the world will so violently reject Him and His reign that men and women will divide over him.
  - 4. The peace Jesus gives His disciples will have its setting in the midst of a hostile world (John 16:33).
- C. At the final judgment, the Great Judge “will separate them one from another” (Matt. 25:31–33).
  - 1. A line shall be drawn separating the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, and the righteous from the unrighteous.
  - 2. That line may separate husband from wife, parents from children, and friends from friends.
- D. There is sufficient evidence for a final judgment (Acts 17:31).
  - 1. The judgments of this Judge will be final and irrevocable.
  - 2. There is no possibility of appealing to a higher court, for this is the court of proper jurisdiction and the court of final appeals.
  - 3. The sentence will not be commuted to “time served,” nor will anyone get time off for good behavior.

#### *Invitation*

- I. What will the day be like when the Lord returns?
- II. It will be an ordinary day, a day when people are doing ordinary things and going about their ordinary tasks.
- III. It will be a day much like today—in fact, it could today?
- IV. Are you ready for the Lord's return?

# On The Doorposts Of Your House

## Introduction

- I. On the Tuesday before His death on the cross, our Lord was asked to identify “the greatest commandment in the Law” (Matt. 22:34–36).
  - A. “The A.V. and REV. alike miss the point of this question, which is: *which kind of command is great in the law?* That is, what kind of a commandment must it be to constitute it a great one? Not, which commandment is greatest as compared with the others? The scribes declared that there were 248 affirmative precepts, as many as the members of the human body; and 365 negative precepts, as many as the days in the year; the total being 613, the number of letters in the Decalogue. Of these they called some *light* and some *heavy*. Some thought that the law about the fringes on the garments was the greatest; some that the omission of washings was as bad as homicide; some that the third commandment was the greatest. It was in view of this kind of distinction that the scribe asked the question; not as desiring a declaration as to which commandment was greatest, but as wanting to know the *principle* upon which a commandment was to be regarded as a *great* commandment.” (Marvin Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*).
  - B. Jesus not only gave “the greatest commandment,” but also the second “great commandment” as well (Matt. 22:37–40).
  - C. “Jesus’ answer comes from Deuteronomy 6:4–5, which is the opening of the Shema, the fundamental creed of Judaism” (NIBC).
  - D. The *Shema* is a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to One God.
    1. Shema Yisrael—“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”—is perhaps the most famous of all Jewish sayings.
    2. It is said upon arising in the morning and upon going to sleep at night.
    3. It is said when praising God and when beseeching Him.
    4. It is the first prayer that a Jewish child is taught to say.
    5. It is the last words a Jew says prior to death.
    6. Throughout the ages, the cry of Shema has always symbolized the ultimate manifestation of faith in the gravest situations.
    7. With the Shema on their lips, Jews accepted martyrdom at the Inquisitor’s stake and in the Nazi gas chambers.
    8. Colonel Ilan Ramon was an Israeli pilot and member of the *Columbia* space shuttle crew.
      - a) Before the terrible crash of the *Columbia* he sent a message from space to Israel’s president, Moshe Katsav.
      - b) The message said, “This morning we flew over Israel. From space I could clearly see Jerusalem. When I looked at our capital, I said one small prayer: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord in One.’”
- II. On the doorposts of every Observant-Jewish home, you will find a little rectangular case.
  - A. Inside that case is a *mezuzah*—two sections of Old Testament Scripture written on a piece of parchment.
  - B. The parchment is then rolled into a scroll, wrapped in paper or plastic, inserted into a hard-plastic or metal case, and affixed to the doorpost.

- C. A mezuzah must contain in Hebrew, in a special alphabet, the following two chapters: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Deuteronomy 11:13-21.
    - 1. Anything else, or anything more or less is completely unacceptable.
    - 2. The mezuzah must be written on special, handmade parchment.
    - 3. The parchment must come from a kosher animal, such as a cow, or a goat, and must be prepared by means of specific processes.
    - 4. The person who writes the mezuzah is called a *sofer*.
    - 5. Let us read the passages now (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21).
  - D. The mezuzah stands at the door of a private dwelling.
    - 1. Every time a Jew enters their home the mezuzah is there to remind them of God's blessings.
    - 2. When they leave their homes they take one last look at the mezuzah to remember family values as they go out into the world.
    - 3. It shows the world that they are not embarrassed by their religion—the mezuzah is a declaration that a Jew lives within—without fear, without shame, without a desire to assimilate or hide their faith.
- III. What lessons can we learn from the passages on the doorpost?

*Discussion*

**I. There Is But One God (Deut. 6:4)**

- A. The acceptance of monotheism was a radical departure from what the Israelites saw while in Egyptian bondage.
- B. This passage not only prohibits polytheism, but also syncretism, which reduces the one absolute God to a national deity, like a Baal.
- C. "The truth revealed to Israel that God is one and that this one God created all things, sustains all things and governs all things stood in radical opposition to all the religions of the ancient Near Eastern world. All of Israel's neighbors had to come to terms in their daily lives with scores of gods, each with its own sphere of influence, its own limitations, its own petty self-interests and its own morally erratic ways. But Israel could live serenely in the knowledge that all things and all times were under the rule of one divine King, whose ways are righteous and whose purpose with her and through her is salvation for humankind—from sin and judgment and every evil that has burdened human life. Such serenity in the midst of the ragings of history and all its seeming chaos remains the precious gift of faith for all who know and trust the God of Israel." (*NIV Study Bible Notes*).
- D. "The grand design of all the institutions prescribed to Israel was to form a religious people, whose national character should be distinguished by that fear of the Lord their God which would ensure their divine observance of His worship and their steadfast obedience to His will. The basis of their religion was an acknowledgment of the unity of God with the understanding and the love of God in the heart (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). Compared with the religious creed of all their contemporaries, how sound in principle, how elevated in character, how unlimited in the extent of its moral influence on the heart and habits of the people!" (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*).



## II. Love For God (Deut. 6:5)

- A. To love God is to be His loyal and obedient servant.
  - 1. Love for God and neighbor (cf. Lev 19:18) is built on the love that the Lord has for His people and on His identification with them.
  - 2. Such love is to be total, involving one's whole being.
- B. The demand "with all the heart" excludes all half-heartedness.
  - 1. The heart is mentioned first, as the seat of the emotions.
  - 2. Then follows the soul as the center of personality in man, to depict the love as pervading the entire self-consciousness.
  - 3. To this is added, "with all the strength" of body and soul.
  - 4. Loving the Lord with all the heart and soul and strength is placed at the head, as the spiritual principle from which the observance of the commandments was to flow.
- C. Even the gospel knows no greater principle than this (Matt. 22:37-38).
  - 1. "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*, etc. The meaning of this is, thou shalt love him with all thy faculties or powers. Thou shalt love him supremely, more than all other beings and things, and with all the ardor possible. To love him with all the heart is to fix the affections supremely on him, more strongly than on anything else, and to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at his command. *With all thy soul*. Or, with all thy *life*. This means, to be willing to give up the life to him, and to devote it all to his service; to live to him, and to be willing to die at his command. *With all thy mind*. To submit the intellect to his will. To love his law and gospel more than we do the decisions of our own minds. To be willing to submit all our faculties to his teaching and guidance, and to devote to him all our intellectual attainments, and all the results of our intellectual efforts. *With all thy strength*, (Mark.) With all the faculties of soul and body. To labor and toil for his glory, and to make that the great object of all our efforts." (Albert Barnes).
  - 2. All our love is too little to bestow upon Him, therefore all the powers of the soul must be engaged for Him, and carried out toward Him.

## III. The Need Of Teaching Our Children (Deut. 6:6-7; 11:19-20)

- A. The teaching and instruction of our children is taught in the New Testament as well (Eph. 6:1-4; cf. Prov. 22:6).
  - 1. Two surveys in Israel (1993 and 2000) showed that 95% of Israeli Jews put mezuzahs on their doors, but they know almost nothing about its meaning.
  - 2. You might bring your children to worship services every week, but what are they learning at home?
- B. What should we teach our children?
  - 1. Teach about Christ and His death at Calvary (Matt. 27).
  - 2. Enjoy life, but remind them that all of life is overshadowed by final judgment (Ecc. 11:9; 3:9-13).
  - 3. Permanency of marriage (Matt. 19:1-9; Mal. 2:16).
  - 4. Respect for civil authority (Rom. 13:1-2).
  - 5. To work with honest labor (2 Thes. 3:10).

#### IV. The Study Of God's Word (Deut. 6:8–9)

- A. This is an obligation to review God's words constantly so that they become a part of our beings.
  - 1. I believe Moses used metaphorical language in Deuteronomy 6:8, but the Israelites interpreted it literally.
    - a) Some writers suppose that a reference was made to a superstitious custom borrowed from the Egyptians.
    - b) The Egyptians wore jewels and ornamental trinkets on the forehead and arm, inscribed with certain words and sentences, as good-luck charms to protect them from danger.
  - 2. As a result, the Jews understood Moses to command the wearing of the *Tephilin*, or frontlets, a permanent obligation.
  - 3. In the New Testament they are called *phylacteries* (Matt. 23:5).
  - 4. Phylacteries are small leather boxes containing parchment scrolls on which with excerpts from the Law (Deut. 6:4–9, 11:13–20; Exo. 13:1–16).
  - 5. Observant Jewish men past *bar-mitzvah* age (13) strap one on one arm and the other around the head during the morning weekday synagogue service, in literal obedience to Deuteronomy 6:8.
- B. While the New Testament does not command the wearing of any such outward sign of God's word, it does require that His word become a part of our lives (2 Tim. 2:15).
- C. Some people will twist the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15–16).

#### V. God Is Involved In Our Lives (Deut. 11:13–17)

- A. He is directly and constantly involved in our lives.
- B. In order to be able to conquer the land of Canaan and to live long in it as a nation, the people were to observe the Lord's commands.
- C. The description of the land introduces a new element (Deut. 11:8–12).
  - 1. Not only was it a land "flowing with milk and honey"—it was a land "which drinks water from the rain of heaven."
  - 2. It was not like Egypt, where the planted seed was irrigated by foot because water had to be brought from the Nile.
  - 3. An Egyptian would use his feet to clear a channel for the flow of water to where he wanted it in his garden.
  - 4. In Egypt water for growing grains, vegetables, and fruits depended on the people's labors.
  - 5. In Canaan the water came in its season from the heavens by the providence of God; and if the people faithfully obeyed him, He would send the rain.
- D. However, if the Israelites were enticed to turn away from the Lord and to worship other gods, He would shut the heavens so that it would not rain.
  - 1. They were to learn that the storm- and fertility-god Baal did not control the rains that brought fertility to Canaan; rather, it was the Lord who governed the incidence of rainfall.
  - 2. If the people did not worship and obey Him, He would shut the heavens (Deut. 28:23–24; cf. Mal 3:10).

- E. This passage teaches that God is a rewarder of the righteous and a punisher of the wicked.
  - 1. Moses sets before them, for the future, life and death, the blessing and the curse, according as they did or did not keep God's commandment.
  - 2. Sin tends to shorten the days of all men, and to shorten the days of a people's prosperity.
  - 3. God will bless them with an abundance of all good things, if they would love Him and serve Him.
  - 4. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is and of the life that is to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

*Invitation*

- I. Today, God wants His law written on our hearts (Heb. 10:15-17; cf. Jer. 31:33).
- II. The Hebrew writer emphasizes the fact that Christ has established the new covenant and that He has done so by providing for the forgiveness of sins.

# What The Centurion Saw

## *Introduction*

- I. After our Lord was condemned to death, Pilate ordered Him to be scourged.
  - A. Roman scourging was a terrible torture.
  - B. The victim was stripped; he would be tied to a post with his back bent double and conveniently exposed to the lash.
  - C. The lash itself was a long leather thong, studded at intervals with sharpened pieces of bone and pellets of lead.
  - D. Such scourging always preceded crucifixion and it reduced the naked body to strips of raw flesh, with inflamed and bleeding open wounds.
  - E. Some men died under it, men often lost their reason under it, and very few remained conscious to the end of it.
  - F. After this Jesus was handed over to the soldiers, while the last details of crucifixion were arranged, and while the Cross itself was prepared.
- II. Jesus was taken “into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around Him” (Matt. 27:27).
  - A. These soldiers were Pilate’s bodyguard who had accompanied him from Caesarea Maritima, where his permanent headquarters were.
    1. We may shudder at what the soldiers did.
    2. They had no idea who Jesus was.
    3. They were conscripts who may well have come from the ends of the empire to serve here.
    4. They indulged in their rough horseplay; but, unlike the Jews and unlike Pilate, they acted in ignorance.
  - B. There our Lord was stripped of His clothing and then mocked by the whole garrison of soldiers.
  - C. They made a crown of thorns and placed it on His precious head.
  - D. They put a reed in His right hand and bowed before Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews.”
  - E. Matthew tells us they spat upon Him and struck Him on the head with the reed, and then they led Him away to be crucified.
    1. One Jewish writer said crucifixion was “the most terrible and cruel death which man has ever devised for taking vengeance on his fellow-men.”
    2. Marcus Tullius Cicero, a Roman statesman, called it “the most cruel and the most horrible torture.”
    3. Tacitus, the Roman historian, called it “a torture only fit for slaves.”
  - F. Crucifixion as a means of punishment originated in Persia.
    1. From Persia crucifixion passed to Carthage in North Africa.
    2. It was from Carthage that Rome learned it, although the Romans kept it exclusively for rebels, runaway slaves, and the lowest type of criminal.
    3. It was a punishment that it was illegal to inflict on a Roman citizen.

- G. Normally, four Roman soldiers were assigned to each condemned man, and such was the case here (John 19:23).
  - 1. Criminals were crucified naked, except for a loincloth; and the criminal's clothes became the property of the soldiers as a perk of the job.
  - 2. Every Jew wore five articles of clothing—his shoes, his turban, his girdle, his inner garment, and his outer cloak.
  - 3. There were thus five articles of clothing and four soldiers.
  - 4. The first four articles were all of equal value; but the outer cloak was more valuable than all the others.
  - 5. It was for our Lord's outer cloak the soldiers drew lots (John 19:23–24).
  - 6. When the soldiers had divided the clothes, they sat down, on guard until the end should come.
  - 7. So there on Golgotha we see a group of three crosses, in the middle the Son of God, and on either side a thief.
  - 8. Truly, He was with sinners in His death.
- H. Matthew records the death of Christ on the cross (Matt. 27:27–54).
  - I. “The terrible preparations were soon made: the hammer, the nails, the Cross, the very food for the soldiers who were to watch under each Cross. Four soldiers would be detailed for each Cross, the whole being under the command of a centurion. As always, the Cross was borne to the execution by Him who was to suffer on it—perhaps His arms bound to it with cords ... Ordinarily, the procession was headed by the centurion, or rather, preceded by one who proclaimed the nature of the crime, and carried a white, wooden board, on which it was written. Commonly, also, it took the longest road to the place of execution, and through the most crowded streets, so as to attract most public attention.” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*).
- III. The centurion was the highest-ranking noncommissioned officer in the Roman army.
  - A. The rank is designated for the commander of a Roman *centuria*, a subdivision of a cohort.
  - B. At full strength the *centuria* would consist of 80 to 100 soldiers.
  - C. Centurions are mentioned several times in the Four Gospels and in the Book of Acts, always in a positive manner, and two are mentioned by name:
    - 1. Cornelius (Acts 10:1–2).
    - 2. Julius (Acts 27:1).
  - D. A centurion was ready to supervise the flogging of Paul after the “sermon on the stairs” in Jerusalem (Acts 22:25).
  - E. The Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, called out a considerable number of troops to rescue the apostle Paul, who was then escorted from Jerusalem by the two centurions with their centuries as well as by the cavalry (Acts 23:23).
- IV. Although not counted among the aristocracy in Roman society, centurions were Roman citizens and often became influential in local affairs.
  - A. Jesus extolled the centurion's faith at Capernaum (Luke 7:1–5; Matt. 8:5–10).
  - B. Cornelius was well respected at Caesarea Maritima (Acts 10:22).
  - C. “...centurions were chosen by merit, and so were men remarkable not so much for their daring courage as for their deliberation, constancy, and strength of mind” (*Easton's Bible Dictionary*).
- V. The Roman centurion who witnessed the death of Christ had probably never seen Jesus until that day.
  - A. The centurion had probably only been in Jerusalem for a few days.
  - B. He might have heard something about our Lord's triumphal entry into the city a few days before, but probably little else until this day.

- VI. Normally, as we talk about the cross, we discuss it from the standpoint of Old Testament prophecy.
- A. We talk at great length about the “lamb of God” who died for our sins.
  - B. However, this Roman centurion knew nothing about Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.
  - C. He would not have understood the significance of Psalms 22, the psalm of the cross.
  - D. He had never read Isaiah 53, the “suffering servant” passage.
  - E. He truly had a unique viewpoint at the foot of the cross.
  - F. What did this pagan outsider see as he observed the events of that day?

*Discussion*

**I. The Hatred Of The Jewish Leaders**

- A. The Chief Priests delivered Christ because of envy (Matt. 27:15-18).
  1. “Pilate sized up the real motivation of the Jewish leaders. They had no special loyalty to Rome; so if they were accusing Jesus of being a traitor to Rome, he must have been disturbing them for other reasons; and they were simply using Pilate to eliminate Jesus’ challenge to them. Pilate, with his network of spies and informers, would be aware of how much popularity Jesus enjoyed among the people at large. He could hardly have been unaware of the upsurge of acclaim the previous Sunday (Matt. 21:1-16).” (*Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*).
  2. The Jewish leaders were envious of His popularity with the people.
  3. They loved the praise of men (John 12:42-43).
- B. The centurion saw the hatred of the Jewish leaders as they mocked a dying man (Mark 15:29-32).
- C. These religious leaders were dishonest—Jesus had gone throughout all Galilee performing miracles and healing the sick (Matt. 4:23-25).
- D. The miracles Jesus performed were to prove His Deity (John 20:30-31).

**II. The Tears Of Mary**

- A. Mary, the mother of Jesus, stood at the foot of the cross watching her Son die (John 19:25-27).
- B. I don’t know to what extent Mary realized the significance of the birth of her child and the extent of His divine nature and mission (Luke 1:26-38).
  1. At times she appears to understand.
  2. At other times she appears totally astounded at some of His actions.
- C. Mary did not realize the price she would be called upon to pay for the salvation of mankind as she accepted the will of God into her life.
  1. She would give birth to her son in a stable, and then be forced to flee to a strange land to protect Him from an insane king.
  2. Ultimately she would stand at the foot of a Roman cross watching Him writhe in pain and suffering for sins He had never committed.
  3. She would watch as they took His broken body down from the cross and placed it in a borrowed tomb.
  4. She would watch as they rolled the stone into place, sealing His tomb.
  5. It is beyond our comprehension to know her pain.
  6. Her reward came when early on a Sunday morning word came that He had been resurrected from the grave and was alive.

- D. Mary could have saved Jesus from the cross.
  - 1. If He was really born as the result of fornication, as the Jewish leaders implied (John 8:41), then Mary could have pointed out His real father.
  - 2. She could have denounced His claims of Divine Sonship and she her Son was mentally deranged, for He said, "I am the Son of God."
  - 3. But, Mary knew the truth and therefore had to suffer at the foot of the cross of her Son died.

### III. The Agony Of Jesus

- A. While Jesus was on the cross, the centurion heard Jesus make seven brief utterances.
- B. While soldiers were gambling for His garments (John 19:23-24), He says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).
- C. To the penitent thief: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).
- D. Looking into the eyes of Mary He says, "Woman, behold your son!" and to grief-stricken John, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26-27).
- E. From noon till 3:00 P.M. Jewish time, there was darkness over the face of the earth (Matt. 27:45).
  - 1. This could not have been an eclipse of the sun, for the Passover was celebrated during the full moon, when the moon is opposite to the sun.
  - 2. A pagan writer in Rome noticed this darkness.
  - 3. Phlegon (also known as Thallus), a Roman astronomer in 52 A.D., speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, which is supposed to be that in which our Savior died, says, that "the greatest eclipse of the sun that was ever known happened then, for the day was so turned into night that the stars appeared."
- F. As He feels His Father's presence leaving Him, He cries out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46-48; cf. Psa. 22:1).
  - 1. Jesus had now been upon the cross for six hours, and fever and loss of blood and the strain upon the muscles of His chest had rendered His articulation difficult and indistinct.
  - 2. For this reason some of those who stood by, though perfectly familiar with the language, misunderstood Him and thought that He called upon Elijah.
  - 3. Immediately afterwards Jesus speaks of His thirst, and vinegar is given to Him to remove the dryness from His throat.
- G. "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!'" (John 19:28).
- H. Then, in a tone possibly little more than a whisper, He declares, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).
  - 1. He had come, had ministered, had suffered, and had conquered.
  - 2. There now remained but the simple act of taking possession of the citadel of the grave, and the overthrowing of death.
  - 3. By His righteousness Jesus had triumphed in man's behalf and the mighty task of human redemption was accomplished.
- I. One last time He presses against the nails and says, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

- J. Death by crucifixion could come very slowly—sometimes taking up to eight days for the victim to die.
  - 1. If the victim were slow in dying, his legs would be broken by a club to hasten suffocation.
  - 2. Jesus had been so brutally beaten and lost so much blood that when the soldiers came to Him to see whether they would have to break his legs, He was dead already.
  - 3. In order to make doubly sure of His death, a legionnaire drives a lance into His side (John 19:31–35).

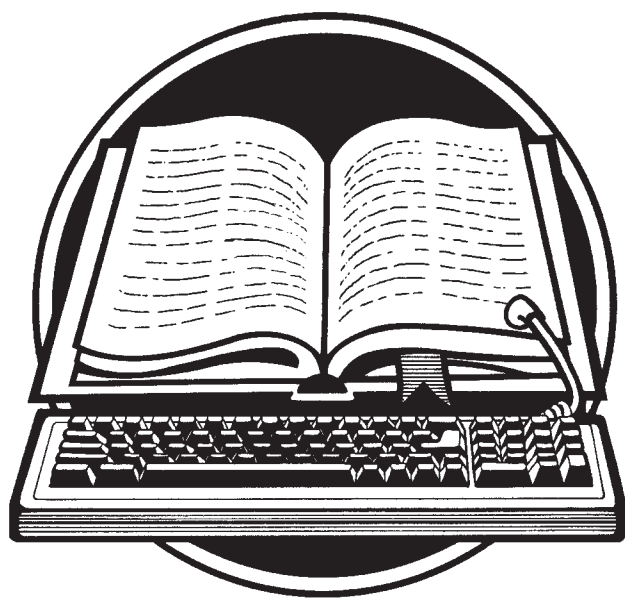
#### IV. The “Son Of God”

- A. The centurion’s confession (Matt. 27:51–54).
  - 1. Evidently the centurion was deeply moved by the events that he had witnessed that day.
  - 2. He had heard the taunts at Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God and may even have heard of His claim before the Sanhedrin and Pilate.
  - 3. His opinion might have been shaped by what the soldiers had heard from the chief priests and others that Christ had claimed to be God’s son.
- B. The darkness, the earthquake, and the cry of Jesus to His Father convinced the soldiers that this was no ordinary execution.
  - 1. The events terrified them and probably led them to believe that these things testified to heaven’s wrath at the perpetration of such a crime, in which the soldiers had participated.
  - 2. The centurion’s confession tells Matthew’s readers that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the Son of God.
- C. “The conduct of Jesus upon the cross and the disturbances of nature which accompanied His death convinced the centurion that Jesus was a righteous man. But knowing that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and this claim was the real cause for which the Jews were crucifying Him, he concludes, since he concedes that Jesus is righteous, that He is also all that He professed to be—the Son of God. There is no just reason for minimizing his confession, as though he had said, ‘A son of the gods;’ for he said nothing of that kind, and those err as to the use of Scriptural language who think so.” (J. W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*).
- D. “But on those who stood under the Cross, and near it, did all that was witnessed make the deepest and most lasting impression. Among them we specially mark the Centurion under whose command the soldiers had been. Many a scene of horror must he have witnessed in those sad times of the Crucifixion, but none like this. Only one conclusion could force itself on his mind. It was that which, we cannot doubt, had made its impression on his heart and conscience. Jesus was not what the Jews, His infuriated enemies, had described Him. He was what He professed to be, what His bearing on the Cross and His Death attested Him to be: ‘righteous,’ and hence, ‘the Son of God.’ From this there was only a step to personal allegiance to Him, and, as previously suggested, we may possibly owe to him some of those details which St. Luke alone has preserved.” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*).
- E. The Roman guards were the first to acknowledge that Jesus was no mere man paying with His life for His religious convictions.
- F. The centurion was a heathen soldier, believing in many gods, but the scenes of the cross had convinced him that Jesus was more than a mere man, but was as He claimed, “The Son of God.”



*Invitation*

- I. Less than week before the Cross, Jesus told His disciples, “If I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32–33).
  - A. Jesus foretold the drawing power of the Cross; and this Roman centurion was its first fruit.
  - B. The Cross of Christ had moved this centurion to see the majesty of Jesus as nothing else could do.
  - C. The story of the death of Christ, when told plainly and without addition, possesses an attraction over the whole world.
- II. Will you allow the scene of the Cross to draw you to repentance?



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