

THE

# HARVESTER

*"Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)*

September 1988

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## A HISTORY OF IDOLATRY

Idolatry is almost as old in nature as man himself. We can trace its beginning to the mind of man as it is a product of his own foolishness. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things ... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." (Rom. 1:21-25)

THE HARVESTER  
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The first mention of idols in the Bible are the household gods belonging to Laban. Rachel had stolen the images as she and Jacob left for the land of Canaan. Laban quickly pursued them and searched for his idols but could not find them since Rachel was sitting on them (Genesis 31).

More importantly we find that idols existed in Egypt while the children of Israel were held there as slaves (Num. 33:4). This became an evil influence to God's people for many of them served these "other gods". As Israel left the land of bondage, they then made the terrible mistake of bringing the idols with them. Notice carefully the exhortation by Joshua: *"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord."* (Joshua 24:14)

God recognized the dangers that idolatry would pose to His children. At Sinai the first two commandments dealt with this threat. *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ..."* (Exo. 20:3-5) Although God warned against idolatry (Exo. 34:13-16), Israel did not heed well. The making of the golden calf became a very shameful point in history (Exodus 32). After Sinai,

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Israel still found itself surrounded by idolatrous worshippers. The false god of the Moabites, Baal-peor, claimed many (Num. 25) and so did the gods of the Canaanites, Baal and Ashtaroath (Judges 2:11-13).

The time of the Judges was another struggle with idolatry. While one young man named Gideon was destroying the altar of Baal that belonged to his father (Judges 6:25-32), the Israelites continued to serve other gods (Judg. 10:6). In particular, there was one man who had a significant role in establishing idolatry among God's people. Micah (Judg. 17) was the first person to consecrate a Levite man to be a priest in his house of idols! Later Micah's images and priest became the center of idolatry in the city of Dan (Judg. 18).

Samuel was a good priest, judge and prophet of God. Under his reign an important revival took place. *"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroath from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroath, and served the Lord only."* (1 Samuel 7:3,4) This response basically carried over to the era of the Kings. Idolatry was not a major problem during the rule of Saul and David.

Probably the worst period began with the supposedly wisest king of Israel. *"But King Solomon loved many strange women ... And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives ... turned away his heart after other gods ... For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites ... Then did Solomon build an high*

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*place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab ... And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel ..."* (1 Kings 11:1-10)

After Solomon's death the kingdom split in two. Jeroboam, king of Israel, made two calves of gold and set them in Bethel and Dan (1 Ki. 12:26-33). Meanwhile Rehoboam, king of Judah, tolerated the idolatrous practices of his people (1 Ki. 14:22-24). Of course this also was the time of the famous encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18).

The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell first. Their wicked kings did much to encourage the worshipping of other gods (1 Ki. 21:26 ; 2 Ki. 16:3). God's prophet Hosea denounced this sin (Hosea 4:12-19) but idolatry prevailed and Israel was taken captive by Assyria (2 Ki. 17).

Unfortunately the Southern Kingdom followed a similar pattern. Their wicked kings also encouraged idolatry (2 Ki. 21 ; 2 Chr. 28:1-4 ; 2 Chr. 33:1-11). However, the downfall of Judah took longer to complete due to the temporary reformations under the good kings: Asa (2 Chr. 14:3-5), Hezekiah (2 Chr. 29:15-19), and Josiah (2 Ki. 23:1-20). The prophet Jeremiah also denounced idolatry (Jer. 16:11-21) but again sin prevailed and Judah was taken captive by Babylon (2 Ki. 23:26,27).

It is interesting to note that after their return from exile, the Jews had a different outlook on serving "other gods". No longer do we read of a dominant behavior toward idolatry in their lives. Perhaps time in captivity made them realize the seriousness of this sin.

Today it seems we are slowly drifting back into that particular sin of idolatry just as God's people did in the OT days. How is this so? Anytime we choose to do something else instead of serving the Lord God, we are practicing idolatry! *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matt. 6:24) If we are not serving God today, then we must be serving another god elsewhere: money, man, pride, belly, or lust? If we are not worshipping the Lord, then we must be worshipping another god: television, politics, sports, gardens, or career? Is not this very thing happening now?

As God's prophets warned the kingdoms in times past, so God's word is warning us today. *"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."* (1 Cor. 10:14) *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."* (1 John 5:21) Will we heed the warnings and change our ways or will we allow ourselves to fall captive to our enemy, the devil?

RAY McMANUS

## FROM THE SCRIPTURES . . . .

### ABOUT OBEDIENCE

*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: (Exo. 19:5)*

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Sam. 15:22)

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: (Isa. 1:19)

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, He ought to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (Rom. 6:17)

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12)

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (Rev. 22:14)

### "STABBED ANYONE LATELY?"

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

When is the last time you stabbed someone with the word of God, cutting their heart open and showing them what was inside, alarming their fears and causing them to tremble and think of judgment to come? The word of God has the power to do this because it "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

One who has been stabbed by the word of God has been slain from his old life of sin. All the

changes we have made in our life for the better have been the results of our being stabbed or slain by the word of God. Paul was slain by the word of God. Paul said, "*For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*" (Rom. 7:9) When the sinner is stabbed by the word of God he dies. That is, he becomes dead to his former hopes or life of sin. We would then say that he has been slain by the word of God. What a way to be slain!

Realizing the power that is in the word of God I ask you, "Have you stabbed anyone lately?"

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[Editor's Note: Last month we printed the article, "Which Side of the Cross Do You Live On?" by Tony Whiddon. As expected, we received several comments and letters. We do appreciate all these and are carefully studying all the arguments that were presented. In time, Tony and I hope to answer all the letters. Some of the comments were very interesting and it is our intention to publish some of these with our replies in future issues of The Harvester.

As you may have noticed from my address in this issue, I have been relocated again in my job. This is only a temporary assignment and I hope to return to Satsuma at the end of this year. I should have no trouble keeping this publication on schedule but if a problem should arise, then please have patience with me. Any and all correspondence sent to my Satsuma address will be forwarded to my new location. Continue to pray for our work in the Lord and God bless. ]

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Place &amp; Time</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Sept. 9-11	Freefield Church near State Line, MS	Tony Whiddon (Mobile, AL)
Sept. 12-18	Jigger, LA	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
Sept. 16-18	West Gadsden Church Gadsden, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
Sept. 23-25 (F-Su)	Moffat Road Church Mobile, AL 7:30pm Fri. & Sat. 10:00am & 6:00pm Sun.	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
Oct. 2-7	Rich Hill Church near Liberty, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
Oct. 14-16	Marrowbone, KY	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
Oct. 17-21	Bethel Church near Stanford, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
Oct. 24-29	Athens Church near Liberty, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

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