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*“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)*

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## FLATTERING DIVINATION

The more things change, the more things stay the same. Prophets' messages to a stubborn people in the Old Testament appear as though they would not be out of place today. Although the Babylonian captivity seems like such a different time, place, and involved such a different group of people, a message sent through Ezekiel in Ezekiel 12 is as relevant today as it was then:

*And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vi-*

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*sion faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. (Eze. 12:21-24)*

Both the northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah had long been warned through numerous prophets of impending captivity if they did not cease from their sin, primarily idolatry. The people failed to heed to the pleas to change their ways. Of course, we know the prophecies were entirely true and accurate. If we were among them back then, would we have been as stubborn as they were? That is, would we have been as stubborn if we didn't have the benefit of history and hindsight as we do now? Unfortunately, our attitude today is not so different from that of the Israelites back then. We can think that if we're in the Church, then we're immune or resistant to such attitudes; but we're not. God's message through Ezekiel in chapter 12 strikes on a problem that persists to this day and even so in the Church.

God notes to Ezekiel that the people have become callused to the warnings. Ezekiel, already living in captivity, is bringing God's message to those also with Ezekiel from the first deportation of the residents of Judah to Babylon. Ezekiel has been warning of the impending siege and destruction coming to those who still remain back in Jerusalem. Yet, the people physically with Ezekiel still doubt that this warning of God will come true...while they're already in captivity. You would think that God having fulfilled promises of the prophesied captivity would be more than convincing enough to make believers of those who are in the middle of living the very fulfillment of prophecy. However, they still

resist. This doubt has persisted so long, that they've developed a saying in regards to God's prophecies, and this is what God refers to in his message to Ezekiel: "...*what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel...The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?*" (12:22). This saying among the Israelites was essentially, "They've been threatening judgment and punishment forever. It won't happen in our lifetime, if at all."

Their attitude towards God's judgment, promises, and prophecies sounds far from us, but I'll admit I have carried a similar attitude towards other things. For example, the Israelites' doubt of seeing prophecies fulfilled were the same as mine have been towards the United States adopting the metric system of unit measurement. All of my life, I've been told that one day the United States will convert to the metric system. Come to think of it, preceding my lifetime my parents and their generation were told that the metric system was coming. I'm now at the point that I think, "I'll believe we've converted to the metric system when I see it." This is the same attitude rampant amongst captive Israelites as well as their brethren that were assumed to be in a safer situation back home in Jerusalem (who were also busy ignoring Jeremiah's prophecies). Problematic enough, this attitude preceding and persisting in the midst of captivity was compounded by false prophets.

Without much study, the issues of false prophets seem clear enough: Such messages are untrue and are not from God. The

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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people had been warned of false messaging and even false leadership. As the time of captivity and destruction drew closer, it was evident that the people preferred a different message than God's:

*Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD. They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jer. 23:16-17)*

Here, through Jeremiah, God warns of false prophets who are not sending His message. However, don't those false messages sound more comforting or more encouraging? Of course, you and I know these messages are false, no matter how much better they made the people at the time feel. Even if the people think they find more positivity and comfort in such a message, albeit false, it doesn't change the true promises of God. Such false messaging is what God refers to in our opening passage of Ezekiel 12: "...*there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel*" (v. 24).

God has given clear promises with clear directions and clear consequences should said directions not be followed. Doubting God's promises and/or heeding to what seems like a more comforting message neither changes God's directions nor His

FELLOWSHIP GATHERING

Saturday, April 19, 2025 at 12:00p.m.(CT)

The Venue at Smith Farm

1821 County Road 112

Woodland, AL 36280

Covered dish lunch and singing

promised consequences. This brings us to today's issues. Initially, it sounds extreme to suggest the same stubborn resistance exhibited by the Israelites pre- and mid-captivity could be among us in the Church. However, have we not lost members because they sought a more comforting or encouraging message? Of those lost members, had they not heard God's directions and associated consequences for violating them? In some cases, had they not been aware of these directions and consequences for most, if not all, of their lives?

Whether or not we're losing members because of doubt of seeing God's promises fulfilled, the fact remains the same of our shrinking congregations: We've heard God's directions, we've heard God's consequences, but we're seeking a more "flattering divination." As they did in times of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the messages that sound more pleasant than the realities of God's promises come from equally pleasant-seeming voices. As the prophets of old did, Jesus too had to warn of the pleasing packaging that veiled poisonous contents: "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*" (Mat. 7:15).

Being told that everything will be okay is a comforting message. It really is. It feels far more encouraging to be told that your faults are ok, there's nothing you need to do, and that you're loved and accepted no matter what. However, no matter how comforted or encouraged we feel, it won't change reality. It will not matter how comforting a doctrine or lifestyle is if it doesn't align with God's Word. If our lives are not patterned after God's directions, we can expect God's consequences. It's these pleasant sounding false doctrines that are, unfortunately, still to this day drawing people away from heeding God's Word. All around us we still see the message cited above in Jeremiah 23:17: "*...Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.*"

The solution to this ongoing problem is easy to acknowledge

but hard to implement in a world full of flattering divinations. That said, no prophet with the aim of relaying God's message had an easy job, nor is it a responsibility from which we should run (see Jonah). For one, we should find great comfort in God's Word and the fact that He does indeed fulfill His promises. Although the focus has been on the negative consequences for violating God's directions, there are great rewards for those upholding God's directions. This message, too, is nothing new: "*Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken*" (Amos 5:14).

Whether consequences for failure or rewards for success, the resulting point is as we earlier cited from Ezekiel 12:23: "*...The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.*" We can doubt all we want, but God will do as promised. Those in captivity and probably of the opinion that Ezekiel was a lunatic were in great, stubborn, callused doubt. However, it became clear that they were about to both see and live the same prophecies they doubted (v 25):

*For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God.*

We too will reap the consequences or rewards of our actions as promised:

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10).*

We should find great comfort in this, because it puts the power to achieve the outcome we desire squarely in our hands. The knowledge that God wants to fulfill His promises of rewards for us more than He wants to punish us is more comforting and encouraging than any flattering divination that false prophecy will sell to us:

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)*

If we want God's rewards, then we must follow His Word: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door..." (Gen. 4:7). As for the flattering divinations plaguing the Israelites a few thousand years ago and those affecting the Church today, the message has remained the same: We know better, so do better.

BEN

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## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What did God do on the seventh day, after he had finished creating everything?
2. What was Esau doing while Jacob stole his blessing?
3. Who lied when he was asked to reveal the source of his great strength?
4. What miracle did Jesus perform at the marriage in Cana?
5. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on water, what did they think he was?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. Who did Abram marry? SARAI (Gen. 11:29)
2. What was the second plague upon Egypt? FROGS (Exo. 8:1-6)
3. What animals were carved on Solomon's throne? LIONS (1 Kings 10:19)
4. Which disciple looked after Mary, after the death of Jesus? JOHN (John 19:26-27)
5. For how many days did Jesus appear to his disciples after his resurrection? FORTY (Acts 1:3)

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

| DATES            | PLACE                    | SPEAKER                           |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| April<br>25 - 27 | Oak Grove<br>Eubank, KY  | J. D. McDonald<br>(Woodbury, TN)  |
| May<br>2 - 4     | Van Lear<br>Van Lear, KY | Hunter Bulger<br>(Prattville, AL) |

### MALACHI'S PROPHECY OF JUDGMENT DAY (Malachi 3:13-18; 4:1-3)

*Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.*

*Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*

*For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.*