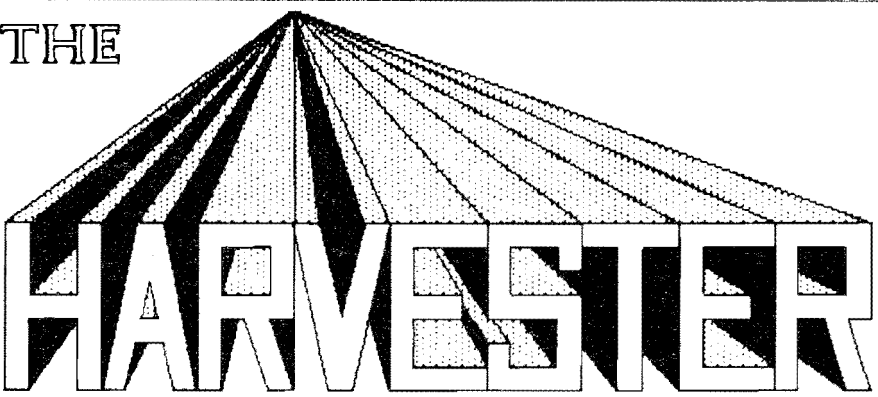


THE



"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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## THE COST OF SIN

In the North Pacific lies the little island of Iwo Jima. Its dry surface of volcanic ash has been likened to a landscape on the moon. For this tiny but vital piece of land the United States paid the price of some 21,000 casualties in our war with Japan. For the men who took the island, it was never a feeling of adequacy or inadequacy, courage or lack of courage. They took it in obedience to a command.

How strange it is that we as Christians can so easily set aside commands that we have received from God. We set them aside with a casual "I don't think God really expects me to do that" or "God is a gracious God and he will understand." I fear that sometimes instead of

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taking commands and exercising obedience, we take commands and look for reasons for God's exceptionance of our disobedience. Certainly if an army of modern day Christians was commanded to take the island of Iwo Jima, only half would obey and the other half would sit around and say, "Well our commander really didn't mean what he said" or "I think he will understand my situation and why I didn't go."

Does God mean what he commands? Yes! Many Biblical characters learned this the hard way -- through experience. The frightening thing about some of these experiences is what God required these people to do in order to repent from the things they had done in disobedience to him. Often Israel did things against the will of God and what God then required them to do in order to be forgiven of the wrong sometimes seemed unmerciful or "cold hearted." Yet, actually what it boiled down to was that God wanted and did not want certain things and when those things were not accomplished or carried out, then correcting these errors sometimes involved the sacrifice of materials, possessions, and even families. Yet, God was not to blame for the inconveniences that his people faced or the heartaches which arose due to their penalties. It was their decision to disobey! The things God required the people to do when they failed to obey him were not the requirements of an ungracious God, rather, it was a gracious God demanding that his people correct their errors and do what he said. His giving them opportunity to repent illustrated his gracefulness.

The Bible is full of examples of the above and the book of Ezra offers a splendid example for our consideration of how sin sometimes brings with it a high cost. In Deuteronomy 7:1,2 we find God giving a command to Israel that when they came to a certain land that they would

encounter "seven nations greater and mightier" than them. God commanded that they "smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them." Verse 3 says, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them ..."

So here we have God commanding his people not to marry the people of the nations about them. Yet, as so many times before, Israel did things contrary to the commandment of God and would marry the citizens of the nations about her. Ezra 10 deals with the time proceeding this transgression.

Ezra 10:1-3 says, "Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all our wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law!"

Israel was then commanded to gather herself together and Ezra proclaimed in verse 11, "Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do this pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." Did Israel agree to this? Verse 12 says they answered, "As thou hast said, so must we do." Verse 44

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*says, "And some them had wives by whom they had children?"*

Now some of the children of the priests had taken strange wives. In Ezra 2:61,62 we find the penalty that was enforced upon them. *"And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name: these sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood?"*

Let's put all these happenings into an understandable order.

1. God told them not to marry the women of other nations - Deut. 7:3
2. Israel trespassed against God and took "strange wives" - Ezra 10:2
3. Although it was a terrible thing to do, there was still "hope" for Israel to be reconciled to God - Ezra 10:2
4. The "hope" involved making a "covenant" with God - Ezra 10:3
5. The "covenant" was that Israel would "put away all the wives, and such as are born of them" - Ezra 10:3
6. Some of the men "had wives by whom they had children" - Ezra 10:44
7. Some of the sons of the priests had taken

*"strange wives"* - Ezra 2:61

8. The sons of the priests were *"put from the priesthood"* - Ezra 2:62

9. Israel confessed her sin and the men *"put away"* their *"strange wives"* - Ezra 10:10-19

Certainly this is a shocking story. Yet, it is a true story, a story illustrating to us that what God says, is what God wants and when we fail to give God those things, then it may cost us. The men of Israel took *"strange wives"* and some of them had children by these women. Before they could be right in the sight of God they had to do away with the things they had taken in disobedience to him: their wives.

Yes, their transgression was bad, but what they had to do in order to be forgiven of this sin was heart breaking. Husbands had to put away their wives and children! Families were broken up! Children were left with no father to raise them! Men were kicked out of the priesthood! But by doing these things Israel stood justified once more with their God. In fact, this was, as Shechaniah said in Ezra 10:2, the only *"hope"* they had and that was to reverse their wrong by putting away their unlawful wives.

This brings to mind a story told by a Lutheran preacher. He said, "I often wondered if my message gets across until one day, I received a telephone call from the thief who took the tape recorder from the church. He was conscience-stricken and had decided to return the recorder after listening to a recorded sermon on repentance." And as Christians when it comes to repentance we should be like this thief and the soldiers who captured the island of Iwo Jima. Removing sinful things from our life should never be due to a "feeling of adequacy or inadequacy, courage or lack of

courage." We should remove sin from our life in "obedience to a command" and forget the cost which this removal may involve. And as Shechaniah told Israel, we should do so while there is still "hope."

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## CHRIST IN THE BIBLE

While most people can see some references to Christ in the first five books of the Bible, it certainly does not end there. Why, this is just the beginning of the greatest story ever recorded in written form. The next three books (Joshua, Judges, and Ruth) will continue to show us that the Redeemer of mankind is a theme not easily hid.

The book of JOSHUA is so named after the next leader following Moses. As we read about Joshua and his life events, we are no doubt looking directly into the face of the Messiah. It is Joshua who finally leads God's people into the Promised Land. It is Joshua who teaches the people that faith in God and obedience to His word will produce victory every time. Failure to do so spells certain defeat. Interestingly enough, 'Joshua' translated to the Greek language is equivalent to 'Jesus'. Thus, Joshua is another "figure" of the Christ. Also in this special book we meet an important ancestor of the Anointed One: Rahab the harlot. Her scarlet thread, bound to her window in obedient faith, is symbolic of the salvation to be found in Christ.

After Joshua's death the period of the JUDGES came into effect. When Israel fell to the sin of idolatry in the land of Canaan, the Lord would raise up a new leader, a judge, to deliver His people. Thirteen such judges are found in this book; another four would arrive later. But men like Othniel and Gideon were too few and far between. After their disappearance, Israel would once again slip into the pit of disobedience, only to await another judge who would provide a momentary restoration. God's people needed a saviour. Truly, they needed the Messiah.

On the surface, the book of RUTH is a story of love and devotion. To the careful and searching reader it is also a lesson in the concept of "kinsman." The term, appearing thirteen times in this short book, means someone who redeems those who are related by blood. A "kinsman" must be willing and able to pay the price of redemption. He also must be a free man. The widow Ruth had such a "kinsman" in the man Boaz. Similarly, we have a "near-kinsman" in Christ. Neither must the setting for the book of Ruth be overlooked. We are masterfully introduced to Bethlehem, a small town of insignificant value that will one day become the door to earth in which our Saviour enters.

Ray

It is better to live for Christ than to wish you had.

If absence makes the heart grow fonder, how some people must *love* the church.

Did you ever notice that a knocker is always outside of the door?

# SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What prisoner entertained the Philistines in Judges 16?
2. How much was Job's final prosperity, compared to his original possessions?
3. To what was Jesus referring when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?
4. What weapon did the early church use against the authorities?
5. What was the woman given in the book of Revelation to escape the dragon?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH ...

and remember last month's questions?

1. When Abraham took Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice, on what day of the journey did they see their destination? **THIRD DAY (Gen. 22:4)**
2. How did Nicodemus know Jesus was a teacher sent from God? **NO ONE COULD DO THE MIRACULOUS SIGNS IF GOD WERE NOT WITH HIM (John 3:2)**
3. Who paid the Roman soldiers to lie about the resurrection? **THE CHIEF PRIESTS (Matt. 28:12)**
4. According to Proverbs, who was the craftsman at God's side during the creation? **WISDOM (Prov. 8:22-30)**
5. Who was the last judge of Israel before the kings? **SAMUEL (1 Sam. 7:15-17 and 8:5)**

Too many churches are singing "Standing on the Promises" when they are in reality just sitting on the premises.