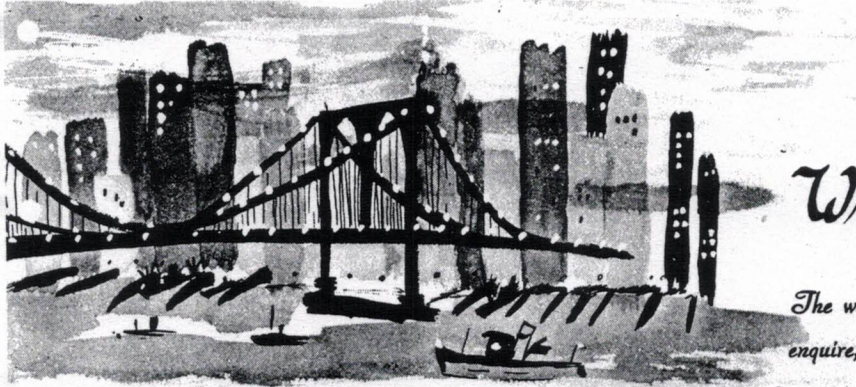


✓
Read again

April/73.



"Watchman,
what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

PAUL HAD A PROBLEM

It was a single event. It involved - apparently - just one individual. Saul of Tarsus was standing by, watching.¹ Yet in that one event, a nation as a corporate body crossed the unseen line. For thirty-six more years, the temple services in Jerusalem would continue. There was no outward change that denoted the fact that the Seventy Weeks determined for Israel as the chosen nation of God had been fulfilled.²

During this period - A. D. 34 - 70 - thousands of Jews became nominal Christians. They were zealous for the law, and thronged the temple courts at each festive call to worship.³ Also during this time, Saul who had consented to the death of Stephen became Paul the Apostle. On the road to Damascus, he had been confronted by Jesus, the Lord of glory. But this new experience presented Paul with some theological problems. The Jewish leadership would not accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. They had resisted the final pleadings of the Holy Spirit through the voice of Stephen. Having received the truth of God, they had not kept it.⁴ Could men be saved by or through mere ceremonies of worship from whence the Spirit of God had departed? Yet there was no visible evidence that God's presence had been withdrawn when Stephen was murdered. Field reports indicated that the evangelistic program was making great strides forward. Proselytes were increasing, and the number of God-fearers in attendance at the Sabbath services in the Roman Provinces could be interpreted as a marked token of God's favor. And who else but the rulers of the synagogues in these remote areas from the home base in

Jerusalem were upholding a knowledge of the true God?

What was Paul to do, and how was he to relate himself to this situation? He recognized that the truth as it was in Jesus was incompatible with the perversion of that truth that had taken place in the teachings of the established Jewish church. But "hath God cast away His *people*?" How did Paul respond to this question? He said - "God forbid. For I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham. . . God hath not cast away *His people* which He foreknew." He reminded his readers that in the days of Elijah, there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and then concluded - "Even so at this present time *also* there is a *remnant*."⁵

In clear precise language, Paul set forth the solution to his problem from a theological viewpoint. He wrote:

He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.⁶

They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.⁷

If the children of the promise were gathered together, separated from the visible corporated church made up of the children of the flesh, would not this constitute a new organization - a new church? Paul's answer was *no* because "if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches."⁸ The root of the olive tree - Paul's figure of speech - was holy. The body of truth committed to Israel - the covenants, the law, the promises, and the service of God⁹ - was holy and is the foundation upon which the household of God rests. ¹⁰ Those to whom this body of truth was committed constituted the natural branches; but their apostasy from the truth caused them to be cut off by God,

and others were grafted into their place. Thus the same *olive tree* continues and constitutes the true church. It is not a new organization but a continuation of the original. The "natural branches" because of their apostasy constitute the new organization. Or as Jesus put it in another figure of speech - the vineyard was let out to "other husbandmen", but it was the *same* vineyard!¹¹ Corporate control does not identify the vineyard or the olive tree, but truth alone marks the genuine planting of the Lord. Our loyalty before God is judged as to how we relate to the "root", and not to the "natural branches".

In Paul's day, men were looking on the outward appearances - the temple services were continuing as if all were well - but through divine inspiration, Paul declared how God viewed the *heart* of the matter. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and *heirs* according to the promise."¹² No matter how much the Jewish leadership would tell the people that they were indeed the chosen of God, and destined for the kingdom of heaven, this would not make them "Abraham's seed" - the true heirs - unless they were the possessors of the truth as it is in Jesus. The cry - "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" are we¹³ - only increased the spiritual blindness of an already deceived people.

Paul was no arm-chair theologian. He sought a solution to his problem in a practical way. On his heart he carried a great burden - his "kinsmen according to the flesh."¹⁴ As he made his way on his missionary journeys through the provinces of the Roman Empire with the truth as it is in Jesus, he *first* went to the synagogues of those brethren according to the flesh. Using his previous credentials - Paul had been a member of the great Sanhedrin, and thus carried the highest papers possible - he gained access to the lecterns of these Jewish churches.¹⁵ From the *once* sacred desks, he presented the pure faith that had been delivered to the fathers of Israel. Sometimes these congregations would listen from Sab-

bath to Sabbath for weeks, and sometimes they could take the corrective voice for only a few services. In one instance - Corinth - when the leaders of the Jewish church would hear no more, Paul transferred his services to the house next to the synagogue, and continued to preach the Truth. The "brethren" of the flesh had a choice every week as to which place constituted the true house of worship. Even Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, finally walked into the house where Paul was preaching the Way of life.¹⁶ What did the "natural branches" say; how did they react? That didn't matter, for at that time God had a "remnant" who constituted the "heirs" of the church of the living God. Paul was determined to find them wherever they were, and bring them into a unity of a faith based on the Truth as it was in Jesus Christ.

The temple services and the synagogue worship were still controlled by those who assented to the deeds of their fathers in the murder of Jesus and Stephen. They not only had not repented, but they refused to repent. Paul was interested in truth, and truth alone. To him it was the hallmark of continuity. Paul could conduct worship in homes, "by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made,"¹⁷ or on the sands of the seashore. The place of worship - the building, the externals - these were not the important things to Paul. He was concerned with "all the counsel of God", and that the "church of God" be fed with the Word of truth.¹⁸ To preach such a faith when all outward evidences were contrary meant just one thing - the preaching of the cross. But Paul could testify - "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁹ Gladly did Paul walk the path set before him by his crucified and risen Lord. To the Hebrew Christians - the nominal professors and others - who were so involved with the temple, he wrote:

Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him

without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.²⁰

The "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."²¹

¹Acts 7:58-59
⁴Acts 7:51-53
⁷Romans 9:6-8
¹⁰Ephesians 2:19-20
¹³Jeremiah 7:4
¹⁶Acts 18:5-8
¹⁹Galatians 6:14

²Daniel 9:25
⁵Romans 11:1-5
⁸Romans 11:17
¹¹Matthew 21:41
¹⁴Romans 9:3
¹⁷Acts 17:13
²⁰Hebrews 13:12-14

³Acts 21:20
⁶Romans 2:28-29
⁹Romans 9:4
¹²Galatians 3:29
¹⁵Acts 13:15
¹⁸Acts 20:27-28,32
²¹Galatians 4:26

+++++++

MORE ON ZAIRE

An outstanding and popular Adventist educator interpreted the remarks in regards to Elder Kozel's letter [See Thought Paper for February, '73, p. 6] as "carping criticism" of the leadership of the church. To his letter, I replied - "Is administration above censure? . . . If not, then one must consider what is justifiable censure." To the question, he responded, "Certainly not." Underscoring the latter part, he wrote - "This is the issue, alright." I wrote further - "When I discovered that the price of existence as a community within the framework of a united Protestant church in Zaire was a sum of money equal to six months of the total budget for the whole field, then I with Paul am saying, 'the leadership ought to be blamed.' See Gal. 2:11." The educator underscored - "price of existence" - and asked: "A moral issue, or a policy decision?" Also he added: "Is 'a half-load better than no loaf at all'?" The brethren had a hard choice. Be charitable."

Is it merely a "policy decision" when principles outlined in the Book of Revelation are involved? Is "Babylon" really Babylon, or can we purchase a place in the councils of Babylon with the sacred tithe, and not have to answer for it? As to the cliché - "a half-loaf better than no loaf at all" - isn't man's extremity, a time for God to work? Isn't the God of Moses still alive? See Ex. 14:23-25. And what about the God of Elijah? See II Kings 2:14. "When we learn the power of His word, we shall not follow the suggestions of Satan in order to obtain food or save our lives. Our only questions will be, What is God's command? and what His promise? Knowing these, we shall obey the one, and trust the other." DA 121. This, the leadership of the church did not do in regard to the situation in Zaire. "To believe that evil must not be condemned because this would condemn those who practice it, is to act in favor of falsehood." Spec. Test., B, #2, p. 10

+++++++

Elder Wm. H. Grotheer
P. O. Box 237
Florence, Miss., 39073

VI-4 (Apr. 73)