

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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Solomon by Solomon

The Bible is notable for recording the faults along with the virtues of the characters that cross its pages. Rather than portraits of black and white, people of the Bible are sketched in various shades of gray. Few of its actors are more mottled in gray than Solomon, son of David, king of Israel at the zenith of its power.

He was infamous for his "seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines." Many of his marriages were for the purpose of establishing political alliances with neighboring countries, thus ensuring the peace that marked his name.

He was infamous for the idolatry which he permitted to please his foreign wives, and even more so for the proximity of this worship to the environs of the magnificent temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem.

Though noted for his ambitious building programs, including his own palatial estate and those of his wives, these came at great cost. The national debt and trade deficits, especially to the Tyrian kingdom of Hiram, nearly placed Israel in bankruptcy. Taxes had been raised to such a level that when his son Rehoboam threatened to raise them again to finance the rising cost of government, it fomented rebellion and the kingdom was split, the larger portion going to his rival Jeroboam.

Defense costs demanded an ever-larger part of the budget, as Solomon built military fortress cities, such as Megiddo, throughout his realm. Horses were imported from Egypt and chariots were introduced into the Hebrew arsenal. Commercial expansion exceeded the power to finance it, with the development of copper mining and smelting industries near Eilat calling for a large fleet of ships to be built and the most modern port of its time established on the nearby island of Ezion Geber. The capital expenditures for these developments provided a further drain on the national treasury.

Thus self-indulgence, idolatry, and profligate spending were the three strikes against this remarkable king.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Balanced against this one must make the following observations on the positive side:

- He humbly asks in prayer for wisdom rather than riches
- He is the tool for realizing David's prayer of building a fitting house for Jehovah.

- His prayer at the dedication of the Temple was a model example of repentance and the accompanying petition for forgiveness.

- He was the only king of Israel to expand the borders to those promised by God to Abraham.

- Jesus refers to himself as "the greater than Solomon."

- His kingdom of 40 years, following reigns of the same length by Saul and David, pictures the glorious Millennial age following the Jewish and Gospel ages.

How is such a complex life to be judged? Fortunately that decision is not ours, safely entrusted to the hands of God. We may make various subjective judgments, but these are based on limited knowledge far removed in time from first hand witnesses and conflicting circumstantial evidence.

However, there is one source testimony well worth consideration. No one knew Solomon better than Solomon himself. He left behind three autobiographies, none of which appear to be self-serving. These are the books of Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Though the canonical order is different than this, we suggest that internal evidence supports this order as the chronological order of these writings.

SONG OF SOLOMON

Solomon must have inherited the poetic gene from his psalmist father. The phrasing of the Song of Solomon is eloquent in any language, the imagery expressive, and the Hebrew meter precise. While the story line and its spiritual

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significance are open to various interpretations, the song itself is a moving love poem. It is the emotional autobiography of Solomon, enthralled over the deep romantic love of his life.

The first recorded marriage of the king is with the daughter of the pharaoh of Egypt (1 Kings 3:1). Notably, this precedes Solomon's prayer for wisdom. However Canticles celebrates his marriage with a Shulamite and not an Egyptian. Although there is no record of it, this wedding with the Shulamite may well have been an even earlier union. Clearly, the events described take place during the lifetime of Bathsheba for he receives his marital diadem from his mother (Canticles 3:11).

Although sensuous, even erotic, in its imagery, the underlying theme is of the deepest love a man can have for a woman. Taken in connection with the description of a hard working and devoted wife in Proverbs 31:10-31, this book provides a picture of the Old Testament ideal for marriage.

PROVERBS

If the Song of Solomon is the emotional biography of Solomon, Proverbs is his mental biography, detailing his lifelong search for wisdom.

It is probable that the book of Proverbs was compiled, and partially written, by Solomon in the earlier part of his reign. The theme may have been suggested by Solomon's request for wisdom shortly after the onset of his kingship. The book naturally divides into four sections, the first and third being messages to Solomon while the second and last portions were sayings either compiled or penned by the king.

After a short introduction, the first section opens with the words "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:8). Since David died at the beginning of Solomon's reign it is reasonable to suppose that his mother Bathsheba wrote this first section (and probably the third as well).

This section includes a call to wisdom as the prime attribute of life and defines wisdom as that which is in harmony with the Creator. The section concludes with the longest parable in the Bible, covering chapters 7, 8, and 9 in which the rival claims of wisdom, personified as a woman, and foolishness, represented by a harlot, are presented.

Solomon's response to this call to wisdom is in a series of short adages in chapters 10 through 22:16. This section was so valued in latter times that Hezekiah had his scribes copy them (Proverbs 25:1). He is then given further instruction (through the 24th chapter) before concluding with his own responses. The last two chapters, though attributed by the Jewish rabbis to Solomon, are a collection from other sources (chapter 30) and a closing admonition from his mother in chapter 31 (note verse 1).

ECCLESIASTES

It is in the third autobiography of Solomon, however, where we see the biography of his heart. Ecclesiastes is a deeply introspective book. Written in his old age, when his sight was



The Wisdom of Solomon

failing and sleep was difficult (Ecclesiastes 12:2-7), it records the reflections of a chastened and wiser king. The wisdom, for which he had spent his life searching, seems finally within his grasp.

The first six chapters delineate the disappointments of his seemingly fruitless search for meaning in life, while the last six catalog the lessons learned from his search. The word "vanity," the key word of the entire book, is well rendered "meaningless" by the New International Version.

In the first portion he bemoans the transitoriness of all he has tried (Ecclesiastes 1:4-11); how all is spoiled by the existence of evil (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18); and how the rewards of pleasure, work, and riches (Ecclesiastes 2) are all cut short by the certainty of death (Ecclesiastes 3). He recalls the inequities of injustice and how riches are unsatisfying because their enjoyment is limited to the short life span of man (Ecclesiastes 4-6).

In the second section he concludes that the problem is human sin and selfishness and that the final conclusion lies in the inscrutable providence of God, which purposefully uses natural disorders to chastise men. With these observations Solomon moves on to the conclusions his life has brought. The light he has discovered through his introspection is indeed "sweet" and not to gather that lesson would be indeed vanity, "meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 11:7, 8).

Ruefully he bemoans a fact that was not his lot — "remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth" and thus avoid the darkness that plagued his life.

Now, having gained the wisdom that was his life-long quest, he resolves to continue being a teacher to his people, setting forth even more proverbs for reverential living. Now his instruction will aim toward one single goal — “fear God and keep his commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

While others may look at Solomon as a man who fell far short of his youthful promise — and such was surely the case — Solomon sees the sum of his life as a repentant penitent who, having gone widely astray, seeks to return to the God of his ancestors, the God of his father and mother, and the God for whom the prophet Nathan, his childhood tutor, taught him to worship and serve.

— *Carl Hagensick*

Salt and its Lost Savor

Salt is one of the main products of tears and is essential to life. Its amazing properties captured the imagination of early scientific inquiry into the laws of God’s nature. While salt remains unchanged by the flame of a fire, one drop of water accomplishes the dissolution of the salt that the fire for all of its power cannot achieve. By the time of our Lord, the technology and art of salt making, its trade, and its commerce all were ancient. In some of humanity’s earliest preserved writings, the Chinese author Png-tzao-kan-mu described the methods of extracting and processing more than 40 types of salt. It is believed that the very oldest trade routes were created for salt traffic (R2099).

Among inland peoples a salt spring was regarded as a special gift of the gods, and so a religious significance began to be attached to it. Homer called salt “divine” and Plato called it “a substance dear to the gods.” It is not surprising then that place names should mark salt production centers. In Great Britain, “Wich,” the Anglo Saxon word for “salt town,” appears in the important salt production centers of Northwich, Middlewich and Nantwich. “Sal,” the Latin word for salt, was part of the pay for Roman soldiers who received a “salary” or salt allotment. Salt was an unofficial form of money in the Lord’s day, and even as late as the 20th century served as currency in Ethiopia, Tibet, and Borneo.

SALT — THE WISDOM OF CHRIST’S SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Early in our Lord’s ministry, word that he was to teach near the Sea of Galilee spread throughout the district (Matthew 4:25). In response, a multitude gathered to learn for themselves about this compelling new rabbi. On the appointed day, Jesus and the disciples gathered the multitude and he set himself down. For a teacher to thus sit was the custom for rabbinical style instruction. Following his example, his close disciples and the multitude also settled down (Matthew 5:1). When all were comfortable, Christ spoke to the quieted crowd and delivered his beloved Sermon on the Mount.

His was not the excited sermonizing that might ignite a crowd’s frenzy. His was not the harangue of a political zealot

stirring up smoldering embers of hate and rebellion against Rome. If some of the multitude came to hear a “reed shaking in the wind” (Matthew 11:7) they were to be disappointed.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the words of Jesus were to “distil as the dew” (Deuteronomy 32:2), refreshing the hearts of the faithful with their wisdom and giving pause even to the skeptical. So powerful were his words thus quietly delivered that on one occasion officers sent from the Sanhedrin to spy on him would confess, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). Christ’s words were “seasoned with salt.” In rabbinical writings, “saltiness” is frequently contrasted with “foolishness” (Latham, J., *Religious Symbolism of Salt*, Editions Beauchesne, Paris, 1982, p. 31).

This allusion to wisdom was ancient and seems to be the sense of the “salt” in the account of Job: “Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?” (Job 6:6). The Jewish commentator Ramban suggests the sense of this passage should be, “your words do not enter my ears, for a thing that hath no savor is not eaten willingly” (Reichert, V., et al., *Job*, Soncino Press, 1985, p. 23).

As Christ closed the beatitudes, he enjoined the hearers to consider that they were blessed even in persecution (Matthew 5:11,12): “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” How strikingly unanticipated it was that Jesus should now direct the attention of his rapt audience towards the consideration of salt, declaring “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).

SALT A PICTURE OF FELLOWSHIP, THE “COVENANT OF SALT”

So rich in meaning is salt that its symbolism operates on many levels. Salt was a regular part of the meal and in this age it was a necessity rather than a garnish the way we use it today. Typically salt was sprinkled on the bread and eating salt was a social affair. In that era, six grams per day of salt, nearly twice the currently recommended dietary intake, was necessitated by a combination of heat, sweating from the high level of physical demands, and the inherently lower salt content of the principally vegetarian diet.

The disciples “assembled” (Acts 1:4) in Jerusalem to wait for the promise. This word “assembled” literally means “they came together to take salt.” Here the Strong’s Concordance word 4871 is a compound of 4862, “together,” and 233, “salt.” Salt thus understood is a picture of our fellowship and bonding as brethren. In this way salt may refer to our sharing in the fellowship of Jesus and witnessing to it. This understanding of salt as fellowship was nearly universal, and Plautus, a Roman playwright, wrote “Men must eat a peck of salt together before the claims of friendship are fulfilled.”

Literally this would take nearly nine months, suggesting the need to prove friendship. In striking contrast, among both Jews and Arabs far less salt needed to be shared before

the obligations to the code of honor respecting salt were accepted. According to this code no one would eat the food of the person whom he sought in any wise to injure. So strongly engrained was this custom that McCarthy, a 19th century traveler in the holy land, reports that Arabs would snatch bread and salt from the tent of a feared fellow in order to obligate him to cease his hostility and render his protection.

This custom, of being faithful to those with whom one ate, was known as the “covenant of salt” or covenant of faithfulness (R4907). To succeed in having an enemy eat at one’s table or partake of one’s food seasoned with salt was equivalent to a pledge of lasting friendship and that he would never do his companion injury. Hence the gravity of our Lord’s words respecting Judas, “He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me,” marking an appalling violation of the “covenant of salt.” This was the most reprehensible act of betrayal.

This also is the allusion in Abijah’s reproach of Jeroboam and the rebellious ten-tribe kingdom (2 Chronicles 13:5): “Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?” Here the Lord himself was the faithful party in the sharing of the salt with David’s posterity. Hence, the preservative qualities of salt make it a fitting symbol of an enduring compact.

SALT’S ANTISEPTIC PROPERTIES

Salt is a painful but readily available antiseptic. The curative properties of salt were already recognized in Old Testament times and Elisha alludes to this curative aspect of salt in his miracle of the healing of the waters (2 Kings 2:20-22).

SALT ON THE SACRIFICE — A SYMBOL OF PEACE AND PRESERVATION

The symbolism of salt in the words of our Lord is that the influence of the true Christian upon the world is both a healing, purifying influence, and a preserving influence. The Christian should always work for the preservation of that which is good from the adverse elements of putrefaction and decay (R2099). Because salt serves as a promise of peace with God (Numbers 18:19), it was essential to offer salt along with the grain-based, non-bloody meal offerings. “And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt” (Leviticus 2:13).

This offering of salt arguably goes back to patriarchal times, for this custom is preserved not only among the Jews but is shared by the Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, and peoples of India. The preeminent Jewish commentator Rashi, with some hyperbole, suggests that the offering of salt goes back even prior to the fall. “The alliance [between God and man] was contracted with salt from the beginning of the six days of creation when he [the Lord] provided for the water below to be offered in the form of salt [on sacrifices]” (Latham, *op. cit.*, p. 39 citing Munk, E., *Le Commentaire de Rachi sur le Pentateuque*).

Rashi offers a keen insight as he suggests that the offering of salt is a practical way in which a sacrifice offers both fire and water. The preeminence of applying our Lord’s words on salt to sacrifice is supported by Mark 9:49-50, “For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”

How very much like the element of peace in the Christian heart that may endure the flames of trial unscathed and then is available to share its life-giving properties of peace in the sympathizing tear. Let every Christian sacrifice include the salt of peace.

UNSAVORY SALT TRODDEN UNDERFOOT — SALT AS A CURSE

Yet, as our Lord notes, once a batch of salt acquires an unsavory flavor it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot (Matthew 5:13). This salt would certainly be inappropriate to offer with sacrifices even though it still would retain a considerable fraction of salt. Even today, at equestrian and livestock facilities, it is standard practice for salt to be mixed with the soil on the riding floor. Apparently the value of unsavory salt for this service on unpaved roadways was already well established in our Saviors’s time.

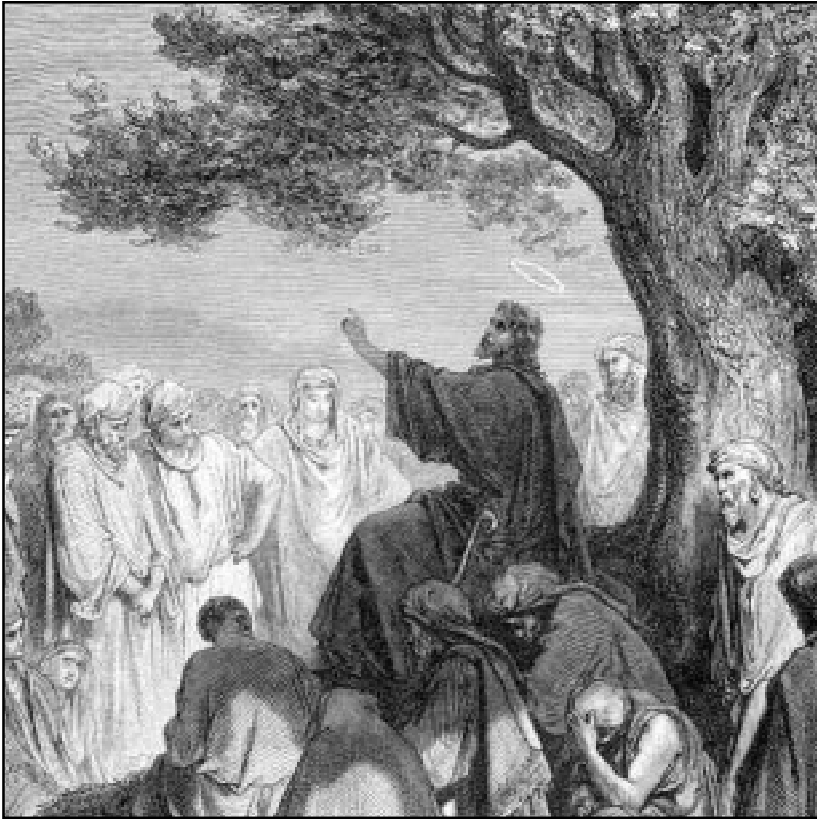
Aside from this utilitarian use of unsavory salt, the curse of salt could be pronounced against individuals (Jeremiah 17:5-6). “Thus saith the LORD; cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.”

Giving over of a district to salt was a curse. Here Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-26) served as the type of divine punishment and of the eternal barrenness and cursing: “And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law ... and the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah” (Deuteronomy 29:21-23).

Following this guidance, victorious Abimelech “beat down the city [of Shechem], and sowed it with salt” (Judges 9:45). The cursing of a district to be turned to salt is also obliquely employed in Zephaniah 2:9, that promises “Moab shall be as Sodom.” We also find this referred to in Ezekiel 47:11 where the salt marshes appear to be a type of the second death. This custom was also shared by other people, one of the noteworthy examples being the sowing of Carthage with salt after the Roman victory in the Punic wars.

SALT SOURCES

For all its importance to life, only under rare geophysical circumstances does pure halite or common table salt (Sodium Chloride, NaCl) occur in nature (Benison, K.C., *Sedi-*



Christ Preaching in Galilee

mentology, 48(1) p.165-188, 2001). Naturally occurring salt deposits originating from dried saline springs yield an impure salt of marginal value. As we read in Barne's Notes on the New Testament: "In eastern countries the salt used was impure, mingled with vegetable and earthly substances; so that it might lose the whole of its saltness, and a considerable quantity of earthy matter remains. This was good for nothing except that it was used, as it is said, to place in paths, or walks, as we use gravel. This kind of salt is common still in that country. It is found in the earth in veins or layers, and when exposed to the sun, and rain, loses its saltness entirely. Maundrell says, 'I broke a piece of it, of which that part that was exposed to the rain, sun, and air, though it had the sparks and particles of salt, yet it had perfectly lost its savor. The inner part, which was connected to the rock, retained its savor, as I found by proof.' "

These observations about the sad state of salt quality encountered by Maundrell must reflect on the impoverished state of the Holy Land at the time of the visit. These salt-rich outcrops would normally be considered the raw material for salt production in more prosperous places. The Barnes explanation sounds like salt with no saltness, and this is entirely correct.

ROMAN SALT MAKING NOT KOSHER

Generally salt making begins when salt-rich deposits, as described by Maundrell, are mined and mixed with fresh water to preferentially dissolve the salt. Naturally occurring waters from a salt spring may also be used. This brine solu-

tion is then taken into salt recovery where production methods remained unchanged from Roman times. In traditional "Open Pan" salt making, practiced until the early 19th century, large uncovered pans of brine solution produced from salt-rich deposits were boiled to produce salt. However, from the standpoint of a Jew abiding by the law there were problems with Roman salt. To initiate the controlled growth of salt crystals Romans added blood from oxen, calves, bucks or white-of-egg. Urine was also employed, presumably as a froth flotation agent to bring organic matter in the salt bath to the surface where it could be skimmed off. All of this would have made Roman salt currency and Roman salt-making abhorrent to Jews adhering to Kosher law.

EVAPORATIVE SALT PITS FOR KOSHER SALT

Completely dry salt will never lose its savor. So one object of salt making is to prevent the hygroscopic action of moisture from wetting the salt in the first place. Thankfully, Roman methods have been left behind and modern salt production technology operates by spraying of fine mist containing very pure

brine into a moderate vacuum to yield a 0.5% moisture salt — at least ten times drier and hence with a much longer shelf-life than was possible using pan evaporation. Gone are the blood, beer and urine.

But, it is possible for salt to slowly lose its savor if moisture is present and salt is left for years. Slow reactions will then take place with naturally occurring trace acid gases in the atmosphere, particularly with carbon dioxide. There is a spiritual lesson here. Salt, if unused and casually stored, slowly loses its savor.

However, to understand the principal lesson our Lord's allusion to salt's lost savor we must consider that both the Judean climate and Kosher law would favor the most ancient of salt production techniques. This is evaporative salt making, a method that produces the highest moisture salt. Irrespective of the ancientness of the technique, in the United States, on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, Utah, Morton Salt still maintains a commercially competitive evaporative salt making operation. Evaporative salt making, Roman and medieval salt-making techniques were reviewed by Georgius Agricola in a classic engineering text, as follows.

"... we ought to make as much salt as we can sell. The depth of salt-pits should be moderate, and the bottom should be level, so that all the water is evaporated from the salt by the heat of the sun. The salt-pits should be first encrusted with salt, so that they may not suck up the water. The method of pouring is not less old, but less common, since to pour well-water into salt-pits was done in Babylon, for which Pliny is the authority, and Cappadocia, where they used not only

well-water, but also spring-water. In all hot countries salt-water and lake-water are conducted, poured or carried into salt-pits, and, being dried by the heat of the sun, are converted into salt” (Agricola, G., *De re Metallica*, [On the Nature of Metals], Book XII, Salt, 1556).

The Galilee district is rich farming soil. However, because Jesus typically used illustrations at hand, we may conjecture that some expanse of flat acreage near the shores of the Sea of Galilee was devoted to evaporative salt ponds. Although there is very little flat acreage around the Sea of Galilee, nor is there direct evidence for salt pits, as are found in abundance around the Dead Sea, such production is possible. A flat area of 50 square meters (one half of a soccer field) could supply the annual needs of five thousand adults if the waters came from the lake. If the waters came from one of the salt springs in the area, the salt yield would rise dramatically. These ponds may have stood either within sight or possibly had stood near the route taken by the multitude as they gathered to hear the sermon. Under the normally sunny skies in Galilee, brines were slowly evaporated leaving behind the salt. For those who had witnessed it, this crystallizing salt would glisten with an almost blinding whiteness in the light of the Judean sun. If all went as hoped, this life giving salt so essential in the sacrifice would be fully formed, fully crystallized, and harvested for mankind’s benefits.

FRESH WATER PREFERRED FOR SALT MAKING

Seawater with 30,000 parts per million of dissolved materials, principally halite, may serve as a salt source, however, it is never a preferred source. Though the desirable halite is the chief component of seawater, other dissolved compounds including magnesium sulfate, bromine, and a little of nearly every naturally occurring element, are present as contaminants. Organic residues, algae, and occasional seasonal oddities such as massive jellyfish larvae releases also are present to contaminate the salt. All these impurities impart an undesirable taste. Sea salt starts with a poor savor that can never be refined.

Fresh waters (225 parts per million of salt) tend to have lower concentrations of the disagreeable contaminants with respect to halite. They also are less biologically productive, resulting in fewer organic contaminants. For these reasons they are preferred to seawater. Agricola offers this practical observation about how salt’s savor is lost. “While the salt-water in the salt-pits is being heated by the sun, if they be flooded with great and frequent showers of rain, the evaporation is hindered. If this happens frequently, the salt acquires a disagreeable flavor, and in this case the salt-pits have to be filled with other sweet water.”

UNSAVORY ADDITIONS

What is happening? First, the rain itself brings in mild acid gases that react with the salt, leading to the conditions described by Maundrell. Second, the delayed drying provides more time for the elements of the world to enter the salt. These air-borne contaminants include fine sands, feldspars,

clays, muds, pollen, and organic debris, all imparting a disagreeable taste to the salt. This particulate matter also introduces chemicals that alter the halite salt chemically, either directly depositing or leading to the formation of gypsum, dolomite, calcite, glaubers’s salts and certain halite sulfates containing potassium, magnesium and calcium that are “typically found” associated with halite salts (Benison, *op. cit.*).

Yet, as disagreeable as all of these are, they are probably not sufficient reason for the salt to be cast away and trodden under foot. During his earlier visits to the holy land Maundrell had particularly noted that “the salt used was impure, mingled with vegetable and earthly substances.” As Benison notes in her discussion on salt formation, algae and other living organisms can actually make a home in this hypersaline environment and these are typically contaminants. It is these organisms that also cause the salt to lose its savor. Other researchers corroborate these observations and have focused on studying the “fingerprints” left by the high biological activity in salt beds. Ominously, they have even observed cyanobacteria that release neurotoxins growing in beds of salt.

Unsavory salt indeed!

PROPER SALT FORMING

What, then, was our Lord’s intended lesson in his teaching during the Sermon on the Mount? As the salt ponds were considered, was there already a threatening distant thunderhead? Could a distant roll of thunder be heard portending the raging tempest of that very evening (Mathew 8:24)? Would the salt in the evaporation ponds become wetted again and remain unformed? Would the salt lose its savor?

It is not only one of forming scriptural saltiness in our lives, but of forming it in a timely manner, uncontaminated by the elements of life. The salt forming process and the salt using process are distinctly unlike the forming of the pearl. Pearly growth requires great time, is special, precious, and treasured. Salt making and salt using must be a common or “communion” part of Christian lives in each and every day and each and every meal. Both the babes in Christ and the “seasoned” soldiers of the cross daily need to make salt, use salt, offer salt and most importantly be this salt.

This process takes place in the open before the world and always requires watching unto prayer. There always is a danger of being subsumed by the storms of life that can delay and contaminate the salt forming. As the storms of persecution burst upon us, rather than crying out in despair “Lord save us, we perish,” let us in quietness exhibit our faith and God’s peace in our hearts. Yet, when Christ says:

“YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH”

How significant is the comparison! These words also indicate a responsibility on the part of Christians toward the world in general (R4907). Though we are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world (John 17:16), our purpose, like our master’s, is for blessing the world and being a

preserving influence. “For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56).

Keeping Christ’s mission in focus and his words in our hearts: “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50).

—Richard Doctor

Parables of Jeremiah

(Continued from previous issue)

POTTER AND CLAY

The next parable of the earthen vessels, that of the potter and the clay, is in Jeremiah 18:1-10. Jeremiah is first directed to learn a lesson as he watched the potter at his wheel. Pottery making was a familiar industry throughout the Near East and one that Jeremiah had witnessed many times. What impressed Jeremiah the most was the absolute dominance of the potter over his clay. He also marveled at his creative skills. After watching the potter Jeremiah went on to indicate that the nation of Judah, notwithstanding its boastful strength, was as fragile as the clay. They were as subject to the will of God as was the clay to the potter’s will. In the parable, somewhere in the potter’s operation the vessel became marred, out of shape. When this happened the potter took the vessel and kneaded the clay once again, for it was still soft, not



The Prophet Jeremiah

having been fired. He took the clay, placed it onto the wheel and formed it anew. “Such a vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jeremiah 18:4).

Let’s complete this reading. “Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them” (Jeremiah 18:5-10).

Afterward, Jeremiah was instructed to warn the people that God was framing a disaster against them. “Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good” (Jeremiah 18:11).

The RSV uses the word “shaping” for “framing.” This word is from the same word as “potter,” meaning to “form” or to “shape.” Jeremiah appealed to them to turn from their unrighteous ways. However, he knew what their reply would be. “And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart” (verse 12). “It is no use,” or “it’s hopeless,” according to the NASB translation. They would continue with their own plans and follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts, for the warnings of Jeremiah fell on deaf ears.

The message contained in Jeremiah’s symbolic visit to the potter was clear. Destruction was coming if the people did not repent. This parable teaches the sovereignty of God, like the sovereignty of the potter’s right over the lump of clay.

In this lesson of the potter we should not forget that the principle of “a free moral agency” still applies. In all this, God does not interfere with the free will of those of the Jewish nation or of mankind. He uses his knowledge of mankind and their sinful tendencies to accomplish his purposes.

God could do what he wanted to with Israel. However, the teaching of the parable shows the forgiveness of the Creator and also his long patience. The potter might have thrown away the marred piece of clay, but instead he continued to work with it and mold it into a desirable shape. God could have made a permanent break with Israel the first time they violated his commandments, but instead he continued to bless them and chastise them and work with them through many centuries in order to make of them a people who will bring honor and glory to his name.

It should be kept in mind that at one time Babylon had not fallen from divine favor, despite the mixed character within and the great mass of doctrinal error she accumulated over

the centuries with her moral decadence. She manifested none of the spirit of Christ. But she was not rejected from favor until the appointed time. "Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad... We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies" (Jeremiah 51:7, 9).

In the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13, when the servants had discovered the tares among the wheat, they asked of the master, Matthew 13:27-29, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." We believe this event occurred during the period of the Reformation. But the Lord withheld the servants from doing anything to the system, Babylon, saying "let both grow together until the harvest" (verse 30).

BROKEN BOTTLE

Let us consider the third in this series of parables regarding the earthen vessels. Jeremiah 19:1-19 discusses the parable of the broken bottle. In the parable of the potter, there is the thought of construction. The marred clay, still soft, could be reshaped into a desirable form. In this parable, the evident theme is that of destruction.

Israel was so confirmed in sin and rebellion against the Lord that she seemed to be beyond any hope of recovery. Remolding was impossible, and being unfit for its designed use, there was no other course but to destroy it. What a solemn, striking symbol of Israel's inflexibility, which resulted in the breaking up of her nationality, polity and religious system!

The "ancients" who were called to witness the acted out parable were the elder statesmen of the people and the priests, representatives of the civil and ecclesiastical rulers. "Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests" (Jeremiah 19:1).

Now notice where they went for the divine denunciation, into the valley of Hinnom. "And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee" (verse 2). This was the very place where their fathers had practiced the most abominable form of idolatry. Tophet was the center of the sacrifices made to the idol Molech (2 Kings 23:10). This place of degradation was witness to the retribution and destruction of Judah which was to come shortly. Listen to Jeremiah's words that he received from the Lord to read to the people, from Jeremiah 19:3-6. "And say, Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel;

Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind: Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter."

Here is an important picture and lesson that Christendom failed to acknowledge. It is a lesson they have chosen to completely ignore. This is verse 5, "Which I commanded not, nor spoke it, neither came it into my mind." This Scripture teaches that the doctrine of everlasting torment is contrary to every element of God's character. "Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury" (Jeremiah 19:10, 11).

At the appointed time the Lord will regather the fragments of Israel and fashion them into a vessel of greater honor, according to the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:26, 27. "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

REMAINING PARABLES

There are four remaining parables, listed here but not examined in detail. The seventh parable was that of the **Two Baskets of Figs** (Jeremiah 24:1-10). The next, **The Cup of Fury** (Jeremiah 25:15-38). The ninth parable was **The Bonds and Yokes** (Jeremiah 27-28). Then last, the tenth, was the parable of the **Hidden Stones**, Jeremiah 48:8-13.

—John Trzyna, 1988

Financial Statement

1,522.61	Balance January 1, 2002
3,882.00	Donations
3.81	Interest
- 2,650.00	Expenses
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2,758.42	Balance December 31, 2002
567	Current Subscribers