

The Consequences of Failing to Know God

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the severe consequences of failing to know God, affecting both Israel and the church, and calls for repentance and a true knowledge of God.

Scripture: Isaiah 28:14

Topics: "Knowing God", "Spiritual Deception"

Description

Art Katz addresses the tragic assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, emphasizing the dire consequences of a nation that fails to know and trust God. He reflects on how the justification of violence in the name of God reveals a deep spiritual crisis within Israel, which has rejected the Messiah and the covenant offered through Him. Katz warns that the church may also be deceived in its understanding of God, drawing parallels between Israel's plight and the church's own failures to discern God's true nature. He calls for a sobering examination of both Israel and the church, urging repentance and a return to a genuine relationship with God to avoid impending judgment. The sermon concludes with a reminder that true knowledge of God is essential for both Israel and the church to navigate their respective futures.

Transcript

I am, as I am sure you are, heavy-hearted over the recent assassination of Israel's head of state, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. As tragic enough as it is itself, it seems to foreshadow something of a most solemn kind for Israel's troubled future. That is, in the justification found for it, "in God," by an assassin who is in himself not some aberrant and deviant "extremist," but representative religiously and intellectually of the best in the Land. What makes it worse is that his act reflected the sentiment, if not the admiration and endorsement, of many in the nation perilously divided from within.

I say that, not to castigate the nation in its time of sorrow, but to underline how pathetic are the alternatives when the God of one's fathers is not known, nor trusted, nor sought as its defense (see Psalms 130:7-8; 131:3). In the absence of such trust, one is required, for expediency sake, to act violently and, ironically, even on God's behalf! Such are the tragic consequences of the continuing rejection of the Messiah-Deliverer for which Jesus Himself wept foreseeing the melancholy end toward which the nation is now inescapably and irretrievably moving.

In the rejection of the new and everlasting Covenant offered in the Messiah's blood, the Oslo Accord with Arafat was remarkably suggestive of Israel's final covenant with Anti-Christ. The rejection of God's offer makes inevitable the shameful necessity of the other. For all the many references to "God" as justifying

the Zionist state's possession of the Land, when has God in fact been sought in the terrible predicament and frightening insecurity that that possession has wrought?

Rabin's atheistic contempt for God and the Bible, despite all the good things that could be humanly said for him, was well known. His possible personal order for the assassination in Malta of Islamic Jihad chief, Fathi Shakaki (The Jerusalem Post, November 18, 1995, p.22), may have more to do with his own assassination than man can know - "Whatsoever a man sows, that too shall he reap." Even if it were not so in this instance, in how many others has it been so, or will it be so, given the mentality of a secular/atheistic nation pressed by the expediency and extremity of need?

Rabin's murder marks for the nation, I fear, a threshold of moral irretrievability that can never again be regained. An Israeli poet is quoted as saying, "I went to bed in one place and I woke up in a different country." And a taxi driver: "We all have to search our own souls...Who are we? Why are we here? What have we become?" (ibid., p.8). Rabin's proud Sabra-like refusal to wear a bulletproof vest despite many threats to his life and the entreaties of security personnel speaks for itself.

The nation's inability to protect him from point-blank murder is symbolic of its own growing defenselessness despite its confidence, now seriously eroding, in the formerly impeccable "elite" defense forces. The editorial of Jerusalem Post's November 8 edition rightly notes, "It does not take great political acumen to realize that murder condoned is murder multiplied, that political assassinations lead to lawlessness, and that lawless societies are doomed." We have reason, I fear, not only to mourn, but also to tremble.

Is not the prophetic exhortation of Isaiah 28:14-15 especially apt now? Therefore, hear the word of the Lord, O scoffers, who rule this people who are in Jerusalem. Because you have said, "We made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with [self] deception."

The alternative stated in vv. 16-17 is a "tested stone laid in Zion - a costly cornerstone for the foundation firmly placed"! "He who believes in it will not be disturbed ("make haste in sudden panic," Amplified Version). Bible commentator, F.C. Jennings (Studies in Isaiah, p.334, Loizeaux Bros., 1935) writes:

"...it would be clear that this scourge is some threatened danger, against which the proud men who rule the Jews believe that their covenant gives them security, and it follows that this "covenant" is in direct antithesis to the "stone"... Some treaty then has been made by the governors of Jerusalem with the human representative [of death and hell] of these normally terrifying and irresistible foes."

Written in 1935, before World War II and the advent of the present state of Israel, Jennings adds:

"The prophecy therefore must find its definite fulfillment in the future, when there shall be a Jewish State so organized that it can make an alliance or covenant; and whilst such a condition may be seen as approaching, it certainly has not yet fully developed (p.335)... [and] That which was the confidence becomes the source of the infliction...the confidence becomes the penalty [for] no doubt, in the day to come, the mass of Jews who have returned to their land in unbelief...will make some provision against a literal threatening danger...but God sends them a scourge of another character from which there is no possible escape (p.338)."

"Then hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the secret place. And your covenant with death shall be canceled ["annulled", Amplified Version], and your pact with Sheol shall not stand" (Isaiah 28:17b-18a).

To what degree is the condition of the church a corollary of that of Israel? Israel's coming disaster is proportionate to its false hope, "For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves [from ourselves as to our true condition without God] with deception" (v.15). The "overflowing scourge" must in the time appointed wash away the lie in a flood of God's judgment; the lie that an intractable enemy bent upon Israel's destruction could ever be placated by a negotiated "peace" in the seduction of a Middle Eastern Israeli-Arab prosperity.

A lie is employing "God" as legitimizing the possession of the Land without any real regard to Him in its conduct or purpose as a nation. Such fraudulence makes for deception, and deception makes for disaster, as we shall soon enough, I believe, have occasion to witness. My question is to what degree are we, as the church, equally deceived in our own misconception and misuse of God? The fact that we can so much affirm Israel in her error makes me suspicious about the possibility of our own.

Reminiscent of the present revival "blessing" emphasis in the church, Isaiah 28 begins with the woe addressed to "the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty...Of those who are overcome [margin, "smitten"] with wine." Perhaps all the more because it is "a fading flower" it may be disposed to "swallow"...as soon as it is in his hand the first ripe fig prior to the summer (v. 4). Without doing the text undo injury or slight, I would ask if this is not a picture of the church's grasping for blessing before the [millennial] time because we are a "fading flower" in danger of being swallowed up by what we have swallowed?

Like Israel, instead of ruthlessly examining our root condition, we set ourselves up for a fall in "making falsehood our refuge." Are we grasping greedily at a "fig" of so-called "revival" or "blessing" (that swallows the swallower) when it is the whole unreal constitution of ourselves as church, its life, its premises and practices, that needs to be examined? Our haste in celebrating clairvoyant trivia as the gift of prophecy, worse, as the prophetic office itself, of construing flamboyance as anointing, and the "gift of gab" as preaching, religious manipulation as "the moving of the Spirit", amplified noise as worship, shallow, boisterous camaraderie as "fellowship", makes me suspicious whether our foundation is really upon "the costly cornerstone," laid in Zion.

Have the decades of Charismatic pomp, the adulation of personalities, the rejection of the Cross in the rejection of suffering, the calculated use of hype, the idolizing of prosperity and "faith" as manipulation, taken its toll? Are we in a position even to assess what is real when the whole substance of our unreality has become for us normative and definitive? On what basis do we evaluate and accept as "blessing" what may be dubious or counterfeit when our "priests" reel with wine and stagger from drink...they reel while having visions, they totter when rendering judgment (Isaiah 28:7)?

Jennings, long before our generation, translates "reel" and "stagger" as stupefied by excess, and "confused by wine" as spiritual torpor and "they totter when rendering judgment" as lying prostrate in their shame! Is this not too frighteningly an apt description of what we have too indiscriminately celebrated as God? Little wonder that verse 9 asks, "To whom would he teach knowledge? And to whom would he interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast?"

Little wonder that a generation, too long malnourished in the word and poorly enough birthed with congenital defect into our contemporary Christianity, in the end "stumble backward, [are] broken, snared, and taken captive" (v. 13)! The appropriateness of these words today for both Israel and the church is sobering if not chilling. As for the world itself, what can be hoped for there? It is predicated upon lies and hurtles even now to its doom drunkenly, in frenzied fortune-making and vacuous politicizing, while the dark clouds of its coming judgment gather.

The subterranean rumblings beneath the earth saturated in the blood of violence, sound the imminent judgment and doom of nations. In the meanwhile, it holds its breath for the coming out of the newest designer fashions, multiplies its millionaires and baron-kings of sport whose millions are made in seconds, drinks up the moral vomit of "talk-shows", numbs its mind with "entertainment," is suckered into any fad or scam that can titillate its sated soul in hope of novelty against the engulfing boredom of self.

For this and more will "the Lord rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be stirred up to do His task, His strange task, and to work His work, His extraordinary [alien] work...For I have heard from the Lord God of hosts, of decisive destruction [irrevocably determined a finishing stroke - Jennings] on all the earth" (Isaiah 28:21-22). The Amplified Bible reads, "a degree of destruction have I heard from the Lord of hosts, upon the whole land [i.e. Israel] - and the whole earth."

Paraphrasing Oswald Chambers devotional statement (My Utmost for His Highest) for November 29, the day of this writing: The [Charismatic/Evangelical] movements of today have none of the rugged reality of the New Testament about them; there is nothing about them that needs the death of Jesus Christ; all that is required is a pious atmosphere, and [nominal] prayer and devotion. This type of experience is not supernatural nor miraculous; it did not cost the passion of God, it is not dyed in the blood of the Lamb, nor stamped with the hallmark of the Holy Ghost; it has not that mark on it which makes men say, as they look with awe and wonder - "That is the work of God Almighty."

In conclusion then, is not every failure, whether that of present Israel or the church, the failure to know and discern God rightly? "The key to all," Jennings writes, "lies in the King revealed, and as He is thus revealed, so is everything in His Kingdom exposed in its true colors" (p.385). In the last analysis, can we grant that every error is in proportion to the lack of that true relational knowledge of Him? We simply do not know as we ought to know, even as we think all the more that we do know!

A key here might lie in the phrase "and as He is thus revealed." That is, revealed as King; seen, that is, in the fullness of the theocratic context which we have not as the church historically nor presently considered, because this necessarily requires a seeing also of Israel's millennial destiny as the theocratic center of that world rule. Is it not for that reason that Paul in Romans implores the church not to be ignorant of this mystery - "lest we become wise in our own conceits" (Romans 11:25)? Is it not equally our "conceit" that assures us that something "must be of God" because of ostensible "blessing"? Is that not as much a possible presumption as that of Zionist Israel's assurance that her ultimate security and peace is certain because anything else would be unthinkable? Could it be said that the church is in its own questionable condition due to its inadequate knowledge of God as God?

To become wise, then, in one's own conceit is to lose not only the knowledge of God about Israel, but the knowledge of God about God - seeing that nothing more reveals Him as God than the mystery of Israel's restoration by His mercy and through His power after millennia of apostasy. That He "would not have us to be ignorant of this mystery" implies that our historic and present ignorance has been willful and therefore

to be remedied only through repentance. So may we be "able to teach, [be] patient when wronged, [and] with gentleness instruct those that oppose themselves; if God perhaps will give them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth [about God - about everything!] that they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him at his will" (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

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