

I Will . . .

Joe Slater

Our God makes neither vain promises nor empty threats. When He says He will do something, rest assured He will do it. Twenty-three times in Hosea chapter two, the Lord told His people of the northern kingdom (Israel) what He was going to do. The first nine pertain to His chastening of the apostate nation, while the last fourteen deal with His plan to restore His beloved people.

Scripture teaches us that *“whom the Lord loves, He chastens”* (Hebrews 12:6). And Israel desperately needed chastening! Consider what God said He would do in this regard:

“I will . . .” not have mercy (v. 4); hedge up your way with thorns (v. 6); take away grain & wine (v. 9); take back wool & linen (v. 9); uncover her lewdness (v. 10); cause all her mirth to cease (v. 11); destroy her vines & fig trees, make them a forest (thicket, v. 12); and punish her (v. 13).

How awful! Was this to be the end? By no means! The very next sentence begins an even lengthier list of things God would do to bring His precious people back to Him:

“I will . . .” allure her (v. 14); bring her into the wilderness (as when He brought their ancestors out of Egypt, v. 14); speak comfort to her (v. 14); take from her mouth the names of the Baals (v. 17); make a covenant with them (v. 18); shatter the bow & sword, make the people lie down safely (v. 18); betroth you to Me (vv. 19 & 20); answer (vv. 20, 21); sow her (v. 23); have mercy on her (v. 23); say to those who were not My people, *“You are My people!”* (v. 23).

How thankful we should be that God does not easily give up on His people! Even in severe discipline, His goal is redemption. He gives us every incentive to repent and return to Him. That was true 750 years before Christ, and remains true today!

Old Habits Are Hard To Break

Thomas Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration of Independence has numerous cross-outs and smudges. Recently, librarians took the document out of its oxygen-free vault in Washington for the first time in 15 years for high tech imaging to determine one particular smudge that was more aggressively wiped out than others. With the use of a high resolution digital camera the wiped out word "subjects" was found underneath the word "citizens."

Officials at the Library of Congress believe this was a Freudian Slip by one of the Founding Fathers. Even while declaring independence from England, he had not escaped the effects of the long years of living under the Monarchy. Others speculate that he adopted it from a draft of Virginia's constitution which uses the words "fellow subjects."

I remember the late Jack Beach, an elder of the church, who told me that when he was in the Navy he smoked and drank a lot of liquor. He said the hardest thing for him to give up when he became a Christian wasn't the booze or the tobacco, but the "cussing."

Old habits are hard to break, and sinful habits are even harder. The Christian realizes when he's made a mistake due to the bad habits developed during his pre-Christian years. He must wipe it out and replace it with something wholesome and good. Jefferson knew that Americans were not subjects, but it slipped in nevertheless. We are citizens, freed from the oppression of a monarch. He discovered his error and corrected it.

Let's make a better effort to sanctify Jesus as Lord in our hearts to overcome the flesh, so that our sins will be blotted out (Acts 3:19). Replace a bad habit with a good one!

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)

GOD WITH US

Do you have the kind of friend that can just be there for you when you're in need? They don't have to really do anything or say anything. They are just there with you.

I've learned as a minister that some of the most meaningful things I do — more so than sermons preached, classes taught, or other words spoken or written — is to just be there with people in a hard time. Believe me, that's what people remember.

One of the major additions to Israel at Sinai was the tabernacle. Yes, it was a place of worship they didn't have before. Marvelous objects were contained in it (think Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat), and wondrous events transpired within its confines (the annual offering of the blood of atonement in the Holy of Holies). This is not to mention all the other furnishings, sacrifices, and offerings taking place on a very regular basis.

But there was something more at work here: *“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them”* (Exodus 25:8 & 29:45, also Numbers 5:11). God's intent was to be among His people, to be with them. They lived in tents, so His tent would also be right there, with them.

When God threatened, after the golden calf incident, to remove His presence from among the people, they went into mourning upon hearing *“this disastrous word”* (Exodus 33:4, ESV). It meant that much.

And so, when John sees the *“holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,”* he hears the pronouncement: *“Behold, the tabernacle (literally “dwelling place”) of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”* (Revelation 21:2, 3).

The Old Testament tabernacle wasn't just a tent, a worship place, or a housing for God's Mercy Seat. It was a foretaste of heaven's very essence: God with us!

--David Deffenbaugh (Oklahoma City, OK) via Old Paths