

Good and Bad Shepherds

‘The [Phillips 66] Oil people were meeting in the Mountain Room of the Sheraton, and Baptist pastors had an annual meeting in the Riverside Room of the same hotel. Since watermelons were in season, the chef thought it was a good idea to serve watermelon slices to both groups. The round red of a watermelon slice seemed to be so appropriate, since [Phillips 66] signs [also have a big red area]. Appropriately, the chef added a little brandy to the [Phillips 66] slices. Inappropriately, the [Phillips 66] slices were taken to the Riverside Room instead of to the Mountain Room. The mixup was discovered too late. The chef held his head in horror. He asked, “What did the Baptist ministers say?” A waiter replied, “They didn’t say anything as far as I heard, but I saw some of the [pastors] putting the seeds in their pocket”.’

Well, seems like some of those Baptists, in violation of their vows as Baptists, were imbibing on the sly, and weren’t about to pass up the opportunity to obtain some naturally-alcoholic watermelons! To deem those Baptist pastors with watermelon seeds in the pockets as hypocritical would be accurate. But if that was their only sin, their parishioners might be considered fortunate. For I knew an Anglican (Episcopalian in America), bishop in Japan who too freely imbibed. This Japanese bishop would sometimes

arrive for a service visibly tipsy and, shall we say, quite aromatic. In this, he was unequivocally a disgrace to God and the church.

Again, if that was his only failing, he was still better than the wholly apostate pastors, priests, prophets and leaders of God's people in Jeremiah's day. Apparently their behavior was vile beyond belief. God sees all. Nothing is ever hidden from Him. But these "shepherds" of the people conducted their carryings-on in private rooms of the Temple itself! Just like the Catholic priest in the news last year who was caught in the very act of unspeakable immorality on the very altar table in his church with a dominatrix! And this is to say nothing of the all-too-numerous instances of sexual abuse that priests and pastors have inflicted on both adults and children, of which they are supposed to be shepherds.

Pastors in particular and church leaders in general live with targets on their backs and fronts—targets put there by satan and his minions. Bringing down any church leader is especially appealing to the enemy of our souls because they influence many. In our still relatively-free society, when a church leader falls morally, the "fallout" often brings down many others with them. Many of their followers and parishioners may stumble in their faith, some even walking away from God completely. And satan laughs.

But if our enemy can't bring down great numbers of pastors through the temptations of vile immorality, he has a whole toolbox of other methods he can resort to. Really better than a tabloid-worthy sex scandal involving a nationally-known church leader,

are his insidious, subtle whisperings that ever so gradually draw both leaders and church members into ever-increasing sin and error. If we just look at the state of America's religious landscape, we see whole denominations that now bear little or no resemblance to true churches of Christ. Their doctrines have become so perverted that their only remaining Christian aspect is that they still call themselves Christian. Recent statistics reveal that while a majority of Americans still claim to be Christian, 43% of them believe that Christ Jesus sinned while on earth! Over 60% believe there are mistakes in the Holy Bible and that not all of it is God's Word! Heaven forbid that any of you might fall into any of those statistics. Here in our lesson from Jeremiah, we read that God blames the pastors, the priests, the prophets, the leaders, for that appalling state of affairs back then, and the same for our own day.

In Jeremiah's time, the sins of God's people were piling up higher and higher and faster and faster. In fact, they had passed the point of no return. In the visions and prophecies of coming destruction that Jeremiah was given, he could not help but weep. It records him crying so often that he's been nicknamed "the weeping prophet". But if he was grieved over the people's gross sin and apostasy, imagine how God felt. God had repeatedly bent over backwards, giving them chance after chance to come to their senses and return to His loving embrace. But they weren't willing. They went through the motions of worshipping Him, but their hearts were far from Him. They spoke good-sounding words, but

that's all they were—meaningless words. Recall Christ Jesus Himself weeping over Jerusalem, as recorded in Luke 19:41: “He saw the city and wept over it” (NASB). Here was the ultimate Shepherd of God, the Chief Shepherd, crying over the people, God's sheep in Jerusalem who had turned their backs on Him and consigned themselves to judgement. If only they had listened!

But in our own day, the proliferation of “bad shepherds” is no accident. Actually it's all going according to plan. For we are in the Last Days, the End Times. II Thessalonians 2:3-4 tells us: “For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God”. This “man of lawlessness” is named the antiChrist in the Book of Revelation. And the great “rebellion” is often translated the great “falling away”. In other words, these are people who were once believers, or at least claimed to be, but are now opposed to God and have turned instead to follow the antiChrist. They have “fallen away” from the faith. Many of us probably have a hard time imagining how anybody in their right mind will willingly follow the antiChrist when he comes. But you see everything we've been going through the last several years, and everything that's coming in the next several years, are all laying the groundwork for his appearing. For things will get so bad on the earth that the world will welcome a strong

globalist leader who promises to make things right and good again. Religiously, the majority of the world will have come to believe that all religions lead to God, that all worship the same god, but in different ways, that what we really need to do is to syncretize all the different faiths into one so that any who want to worship can do so with any and everyone else similarly inclined, and we can all live in peace and joy! But how can this happen? The world will need legions of “bad shepherds” to foster this mass apostasy. **[Here’s one.]** Then this antiChrist man will step onto the world’s stage after miraculously resurrecting after a clearly fatal wound, and after a while, proclaim himself the savior of the world, even God. Recall it says in II Thessalonians 2:4: “He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God”.

Note here that it mentions the “temple of God”. Which means there will be a new temple of God in Jerusalem. No temple now exists. The last one the Romans burned to the ground in the year 70. In Jerusalem today, all that remains of it is the western foundation retaining wall, known as the Western Wall, or the Wailing Wall. Where the temple had been now stand two Islamic mosques, the Dome of the Rock, and the Al Aqsa. But in the near future, Israel will build a new temple, in which to ostensibly worship God. But God will not be in it. Regardless of the intent of the builders, it will become the place of worship of the antiChrist.

There’s a glaring error here. For we should know, as Ephesians 2:20-21 teaches: “Together, **we** are His house, built on the

foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself. We are carefully joined together in Him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through Him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by His Spirit". There is no more need of a physical temple building. For we are the new temple of God; indeed, the Holy of Holies is right here, in our hearts. If we have given our lives to Lord Jesus and invited Him in, then, it assures us, His Holy Spirit lives in us!

But if that isn't enough, we are tended by good shepherds, led by a "new" Good, no, not "good", rather Best Shepherd. Of course, He cares for us perfectly, as in Psalm 23, and Jeremiah 23:5-6 describes: "For the time is coming", says the Lord, "when I will raise up a Righteous Descendant from King David's line. He will be a King Who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this will be His name: 'The Lord Is Our Righteousness'. In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety". That this future, perfect Best Shepherd King is not yet here is evident by the fact that when He comes, as Jeremiah 23:8 says, "As surely as the Lord lives, Who brought the people of Israel back to their own land from the land of the north and from all the countries to which He had exiled them'. Then they will live in their own land." The Jews have only recently come back into their land. In 1948 the land became theirs once again, after 2,000 years! So rejoice, for our Lord Jesus is coming back very soon!! We have nothing to fear at all.

