

Summer 2008

An interesting thing occurred recently. For some reason, very early one morning, I opened my journal and scanned over the major events of the last thirty years of ministry here on the hill. As I read, I realized more than ever that this place exists solely because God desires that it exist. There is no way that such a wide variety of events could have been orchestrated so precisely had the Creator not been at the helm. God has used an incredibly diverse group of faithful, loving, and very generous saints to bring this whole thing together, confirming that the explanation as to how and why we are here rests in His heart alone. We have lived a miracle, and the interesting thing is that the miracle continues today. We want to thank each of you for allowing Jesus' life within you to flow our way. How very humbling to know that you would love, support, encourage, and pray for us as you do, especially considering that we are far from doing everything right. You truly are faithful friends.

As many of you know, I have not only been teaching the book of Isaiah for the past five semesters, but writing a commentary on the book as well. My plan is to finish teaching Isaiah this semester and publish the commentary later in the year. There is no way to begin to articulate what the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah have done in me. I know of no other book that could have encouraged me more, especially considering the state of the world today. Isaiah is truly a masterpiece, written by a man with impeccable character, a man who greatly loved those to whom he prophesied but, at the same time, consistently risked friendships for the sake of the truth. He never blinked, even while being falsely accused by those who should have washed his feet for walking the road less traveled.

A most interesting thing has transpired as a result of my time in Isaiah. I sense that I have come to know, to some degree at least, Isaiah himself. Here is a man who, at the beginning of his ministry, was told that few would believe his message (Isaiah 6:6-13). Yet he consistently spoke truth to a nation who, due to sin, was incapable of accepting God's remedies for the nation's woes. It is hard to imagine what might have been had Judah not only believed, but interpreted literally, as well as in context, Isaiah's message of hope! By the way, how are Isaiah's words to be interpreted today? Should they be interpreted literally and in context, or are they to be perceived as an allegory possessing a "deeper meaning," the "deeper meaning" (whatever that may be) taking precedence over the content of the literal text? (Note: Many times this "deeper meaning" is determined by whoever has taken the latest guess at what the allegory "might" be communicating?) Jesus interpreted Isaiah's words literally and in context, not allegorically, so how can we justify differing with the Savior (read Luke 4:16-21 as just one example)? By viewing Isaiah through the lens of Jesus' method of interpretation, the past three years have been one of the most encouraging, as well as fascinating, adventures of my life. I have been amazed at the quantity of light that Isaiah sheds upon the other Old Testament books, and because so much of what is addressed in the New Testament finds its roots in the Old, my understanding of Matthew through Revelation has been significantly enhanced as well. For instance, I had not realized previously the degree to which Paul's words of Romans 9-11 were influenced by chapters such as Isaiah 42 and 49. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Romans 9-11, that hugely famous, yet highly debated section of Paul's letter to the Romans, is impossible to "rightly divide" without the assistance of Isaiah's masterpiece. No doubt, Paul's epistles were greatly impacted by Isaiah's words.

Several years ago I wrote a course on the first eight chapters of the book of Romans (Romans 1-8). From its inception, several have inquired as to when similar materials relating to Romans 9-16, the second half of the book, might be written. It is interesting that, although I have always

enjoyed researching the topics addressed there, it has been my recent study of Isaiah that has motivated me to write a course on this more than volatile segment of God's word. I look forward to the challenge, even though some, maybe many, will disagree with where I stand on the more controversial issues. My plan is to take the spring semester that begins in January 2009, and first address what all the Scriptures (Genesis through Revelation) teach concerning predestination, election, foreknowledge, the believer's chosenness, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, etc. All of these topics (and more) will be covered in as much depth as possible and made available to the general public as each is completed. A good working knowledge of these subjects should prepare us well for Romans 9-16.

This edition of Thoughts From the Hill (located on the last two pages of this newsletter) lists a few "thoughts" taken from Isaiah's incredible book. Hopefully they will encourage you in your walk with Jesus. All of the subjects addressed there are covered in much greater depth in our forthcoming commentary. Ministry News

What takes place here on the hill these days would be much different were it not for Rick and Donna Underhill's assistance, for their administrative skills are serving this ministry very well. Like many of you, they desire to train men and women (of all ages and backgrounds) in the truth. After all, this was their calling in Newburgh, Indiana before moving here. They are approximately one month away from having the ministry grounds better organized (you should see all that they have done), so this fall and winter should give them ample time to transition into the training ministry that they so greatly enjoy. With this in mind, consider the following.

When we browse through our mailing list, we are amazed at how many of you have either attended our weekly Tuesday night Bible study, visited for weekend retreats, studied some of the materials distributed by this ministry, or found out about the hill through word of mouth. Most of you we have met personally, so we are very thankful for the memories from the time spent with you. To have been blessed to know, love, and appreciate such a large base of passionate believers is truly phenomenal. Some of you we see on a regular basis, but we also desire to fellowship with those of you we have not seen for some time or have not yet had opportunity to meet.

Our summer leadership camps for youth (ages 13-18) have taught us much concerning the spiritual climate in America. The youth that visited this past summer were from a wide variety of backgrounds and geographical locations, yet their overall hunger for the Lord was nothing short of miraculous. As a result, the small percentage of kids who came for the wrong reasons experienced peer pressure from the good side throughout the week. It was quite a sight to behold. They all, without complaint, sat through four to five hours of Bible study each day and, amazingly, could have taken more. It was a leadership camp for kids who truly love Jesus, so just imagine the environment that was generated by the One who is their life.

And guess what those kids taught us about themselves? Their need to know that other youth are standing firm and enjoying the journey, that they are part of a well trained, well equipped army rather than a small band of ill-equipped militia afraid to go to war, is absolutely crucial to their spiritual wellbeing. There is no way to express the degree to which they fed off of each other's passion for Christ. They were like kids in a candy store with a sack full of quarters once they realized the type of youth they were hanging with. Obviously, there are some parents out there doing a lot of things right. They truly are to be commended.

No doubt, all godly moms and dads wonder if they are properly equipping their children for what

lies ahead. Kim and I are no exception. Benjamin is now twelve, meaning that we have six years remaining before he leaves for college (if he chooses to go that route.) We realize now, more than at any other time, that he will need to be a Daniel if he is to survive the trappings of this present age. We are teaching him everything we know about Jesus, life in general, and how to be a man in a society that is fast forgetting that masculinity is cool. Benjamin, due to living here on the hill, has the advantage of rubbing elbows with many passionate believers, several of whom are peers. Consequently, he knows that he is anything but a Lone Ranger in his pursuit of the truth. But we want more of that to take place, not only for the good of our own family, but for the good of the overall body of Christ. What we are talking about is bringing believers together on a more frequent basis who have traded the smokescreen of activity and performance for the awesome adventure of the pursuit of Jesus' life.

Ravi Zacharias said it well when asked what prevented him from growing complacent in his pursuit of the Almighty. His answer was clear when he stated that complacency only captures those whose world has become too small. Has your world become too small? Do you sense that you need some fresh air along with a good dose of "life" from a larger base of passionate believers? The kids at camp needed it, so why couldn't adults benefit from the same? We can take what we have learned from the youth, along with what we have gleaned from our annual ministry-sponsored retreats, ask the Lord to tweak it, and trust Him to do the same with believers of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of spiritual maturity. In our next newsletter we will supply more details, so please pray with us as to how you might become involved. In the mean time, walk on, in "His" strength, of course. You truly are not alone!

Some Events to Consider Attending on the Hill

August 19-November 25, 2008 Tuesday night Bible study here on the hill (7:00 pm). The book of Isaiah. **October 17-19, 2008** Annual Fall Retreat for couples and singles **January 16-18, 2009** Annual winter youth retreat **April 30-May 3, 2009** Annual men's retreat for fathers, their sons, and single men of all ages. **July 5-11, 2009** Annual summer camp for youth (ages 13-18)

THOUGHTS FROM THE HILL

The commentary I am writing on Isaiah deals more comprehensively with the subjects addressed here, but I thought you might enjoy the cream off the top. The following is based upon a literal interpretation of Isaiah's words in the context in which they are stated.

Isaiah 1:18—Isaiah proves that it is acceptable to reason together with the Lord, meaning that it is okay to think through, with God's truth as our standard, what we believe.

Isaiah 3:1-26—At some point in the future, the Jewish community will be led, not by men, for the men will have gone passive, but by self centered and deceitful women along with their insubordinate children. Chaos will result.

Isaiah 6:6—God is Holy, Holy, Holy! Why the Seraphim made this statement is extremely interesting but too lengthy to discuss here.

Isaiah 11:11—This verse addresses the worldwide regathering of spiritually regenerated Israel (all Jews alive on the earth at the end of the Tribulation). Notice it will be a second worldwide

regathering, the first being a worldwide regathering in unbelief (which began in 1948 and continues today)—discussed in such passages as Ezekiel 20:33-38, Ezekiel 22:17-22, and Zephaniah 2:1-2. The worldwide regathering in belief, however, will occur so the Jews might enter into the blessings associated with the Messianic Kingdom. Note: The regathering of the Jews from Babylon in 536 BC was not a worldwide regathering. Therefore, it was not the first worldwide regathering in unbelief. Knowing this certainly puts a different slant on the events of the Middle East.

Isaiah 13:1-22—Ancient Babylon, located in modern-day Iraq, will be rebuilt at some point but destroyed toward the end of the Tribulation.

Isaiah 28:11—The sound of the Assyrian language (tongue) in the southern kingdom of Judah was a sign of Jewish unbelief in Isaiah's day (the Assyrians were bitter enemies of the Jews). The Assyrians would never have entered the land had the Jews but walked in faith. In the same manner, tongues, during the church age, are a sign of Jewish unbelief, for the church came into existence as a result of the Jews rejecting Jesus at His First Coming (Acts 2:1-13). Had they accepted Him there would have been no need for the present church age. Therefore, just as Judah's disobedience in Isaiah's day resulted in a foreign tongue being heard in the land, the disobedience of the Jews at Jesus' First Coming resulted in tongues being heard in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Isaiah 36-37—It took 185,000 Assyrian troops threatening the security of Jerusalem for the Jews to finally seek Isaiah's counsel. Therefore, we are to remain faithful in this present age, awaiting the day when a desperate need forces our nation to seek the truth.

Isaiah 40:2—The Jewish nation is the only nation that receives double for all her sins. This is because she is the first-born of the Father (Exodus 4:22), the first-born receiving a double portion of everything. It only takes a brief look at the nation's history to confirm that this is true. No nation has suffered like the Jews, and this suffering will continue until the end of the Tribulation—when every Jew alive on the earth will accept Jesus as Messiah. It is then that Israel, being the first-born of the Father, will receive a double blessing during the Millennium.

Isaiah 42:1— Jesus was the Father's chosen one (also validated in 1Peter 2:4). But what was He chosen for? He most definitely, being sinless, was chosen to fill the office of Messiah. (He wasn't selected from a group of candidates, for He alone was qualified for the office.) This confirms that the word chosen need not point to the idea that God selects certain persons for salvation prior to birth (Jesus was "chosen" but, for sure, didn't need to be saved), but rather points to the "vocation" to which a believer is called by the Father (John 6:70; 13:14-18; 15:16, 27, etc.). Even Ephesians 1:4 teaches that believers are not chosen until they are placed into Christ, an event that transpires after they have chosen to accept Christ through faith. Once believers are placed into Christ (2Corinthians 5:17), they receive eternal life (with no beginning and no end), and are therefore seen as having been in Christ since before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). And what are believers chosen for? They are chosen, once they are placed into Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13), to serve in a vocation that allows the chosen one of Isaiah 42:1, who lives in them (Galatians 2:20), to express His divine character through them while they rest (Hebrews 4:9). Wow!

Isaiah 45:1— It is amazing that Isaiah spoke of Cyrus, the leader of the Persian Empire, approximately one hundred years before Cyrus was born (Isaiah 44:24-28 and Isaiah 45:1-7). It is

amazing as well that Isaiah prophesied so accurately concerning the fall of Babylon, which was overthrown by the Persians in Daniel 5 some one hundred and fifty years later! Again we see the exactness of the prophet's words. Note: Isaiah's prophecies relating to Cyrus are so accurate that those who reject the inspiration of the Scriptures view verses such as Isaiah 45:1 as having been recorded after the fact. Nonsense!

Isaiah 48:16—This is a verse that proves unequivocally that we serve a triune God; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Trinity is not a New Testament “invention” but rather an Old Testament “fact.”

Isaiah 55:1— Every Jew who thirsts is invited to come to the Lord, even those who have no money to purchase the spiritual nourishment He freely offers. The fact that no cost is involved confirms that it is obtained solely by grace through faith (John 6:27-29). Notice that a choice is involved on the part of those who desire to partake of this free spiritual nourishment, meaning that to accept this offer is not a work on the believer's part. It is the death (and subsequent resurrection) of the Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 that allows God to make such a gracious offer.

Isaiah 55:9—This verse teaches that Jehovah's ways and thoughts are higher than those of man. Does this mean that all His ways and thoughts are beyond man's ability to comprehend? No doubt, there are secret things that only God can know (Deuteronomy 29:29). But does not the same verse confirm that He reveals much to the redeemed concerning Himself? With this in mind, consider the following.

There are schools of thought today that teach doctrines inundated with contradiction. When asked to explain the remedy to their contradictory ideology, they many times plead “mystery”—in other words, teach that it is permissible to overlook contradiction when the preservation of their belief system is at stake. In fact, those who reject their teachings are viewed as having yet to learn that God Himself is a mystery—totally incapable of being understood by the mind of man. Beware of such schools, for verses such as Psalm 103:7, John 14:21, 16:14, Philippians 3:10, and 1John 2:13-14 teach just the opposite. The post-modern era, which deems absolutes as nonexistent, is fertile ground for contradictory dogma to have its way, ultimately taking away its adherent's ability to reason through what they believe.

Isaiah 66:1-5—The Tribulation temple, the next temple to be built by the Jews, will not be sanctioned by God. King Solomon's temple, as well as the temple built by Zerubbabel (which came to be known as Herod's temple), both met with God's approval. We can conclude this because His glory entered Solomon's temple (2Chronicles 5:11-14), and Zerubbabel's temple was built through the encouragement of Jehovah's prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. There is no doubt that Jehovah will approve the Millennial temple. After all, He is its builder (Ezekiel 37:26-28), and His glory enters it as well (Ezekiel 43:1-5). Why then will the unbelieving Jews desire to build the Tribulation temple? For the purpose of reestablishing the sacrificial system observed under the Mosaic Law, a system that is totally obsolete and incapable of bringing the worshipper into a right standing with God (read Hebrews 10:1-18).

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