

SUMMER 2007

Although I would never want to be God (why would the created ever desire to be worshipped?), I do have an unrelenting appetite to know intimately the God who created all things. What a great journey this pursuit has been! I have learned that believers have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) but that we are the created (Genesis 1:27)—God alone is Creator (Colossians 1:16). We now see through a glass dimly and know in part (1 Corinthians 13:12), meaning that we don't know what He knows about all things (Deuteronomy 29:29). If we did, we would be God—and we certainly don't want any part of that. Can you imagine attempting to be God for a day? Can you even begin to comprehend all the plates you would have to keep spinning, none of which could be ignored long enough for even a brief walk in the park? Maybe at Disneyworld one could pretend to live as such, but that is make-believe, and make-believe is an infinite distance from reality. God is God, and no one (or no thing) can take His place. However, if God is dead, someone must take His place. But who could possibly fill His shoes? I have never met nor heard of anyone or anything capable of pulling it off. He has always been God and will always be God (Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 1:18). There are no substitutes.

I start this letter as such because of a verse that forever transformed my perspective of the awesomeness of God. The verse is Isaiah 40:12: “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance, And the hills in a pair of scales?” (NASB) Just in case you need to hear it today, maybe due to difficult circumstances, or maybe just to reassure yourself of God's “bigness,” the God of the universe is so omnipotent, all powerful, and supreme that He is capable of holding the oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams in the palm of His hand—all at the same time. Can we even begin to imagine that? Consider this as well. A “span” is the distance between the extended thumb and the little finger, approximately nine inches. If God “marked off the heavens by the span,” this means that God measured the universe, in all of its vastness, with the breadth of His hand. He also “calculated the dust of the earth by measure,” indicating that He possessed a container capable of holding all the dust of the ground at one time. He also, “weighed the mountains in a balance, and the hills in a pair of scales,” meaning that He had in His possession weighing devices large enough to hold all the mountains simultaneously. The same applies to the hills. This means that He possibly picked up all the mountains, weighed them, then picked up all the hills, and weighed them. How could man ever compete with such a display of strength and omnipotence? But God is all of the above and more. He is also love (1 John 4:8), and proved it by coming to earth in the form of His Son to die for the sin of man. He is also gracious and compassionate (2 Chronicles 30:9), forgiving (Psalm 86:5), slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth (Exodus 34:6). The fact that He is truth (John 14:6) means that He is always right, never having to apologize for any decision, regardless of how politically incorrect it may be.

I say all of the above to say this: I have had countless opportunities to observe what occurs in lives when truth is accepted versus when it is not. I have been in numerous teaching and counseling sessions where parties in disagreement “part ways” solely because one, or both, have chosen to define for themselves what truth “should” be rather than accepting the truth for what it really is—God's standard that protects mankind and reveals His Person. As a result, I have watched individuals make choices that will never work, not in a million years, and for a lifetime reap consequences that are irreversible. This scenario is presently occurring within the body of Christ at an alarming rate. I, then, would like to pose a question. Is this exchange of God's truth for self determined truth the root problem, or is it a surface problem disguising itself as the main cause? It, for sure, is a surface problem—a shoot from the root cause! The root problem is a

desire to sit in God's seat, acting as God, and determining for ones self what is the right and the wrong of life. This would be fine so long as man possessed the tools to assume such a position. Because no individual (or thing) has held, simultaneously, all the waters in the palm of their hand, we can assume that God alone is the God of all. Only when man (or something else) performs such a feat, and at the same time possesses all of God's infallible attributes, will someone (or some "thing") besides the Creator qualify for the throne. Therefore, to live life to the fullest, we must allow the God who is seated on the throne of the universe to have His rightful place on the throne of our individual lives. If not, life is all about "me," about having "my" needs met above the needs of others. That is a life of make-believe suited only for environments that are unrealistic and out of touch with reality. Solomon, a man who did everything imaginable and lived to tell about it, called it "futility and striving after wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

Therefore, what is truth to you? Is it man generated or God generated? If you answer incorrectly your flunk more than a course in a university classroom. You flunk life in its totality, and that would be the worst offense of all. Because I love you I ask you to think about it! (Thoughts From the Hill dovetails into what is addressed here.) Family News

Kim, Benjamin, and I are doing well and preparing for the fall. We have already started Benjamin's sixth year of school (he is eleven). I will teach math and Kim will pretty much teach everything else. Kim continues to wear many hats around here, but does so with a great attitude—for which Benjamin and I are more than thankful. Along with his school work, Benjamin will be working this fall for a local farmer, Keith Harris. Farming remains his passion as far as a vocation is concerned, so we will see what God has in store in the years ahead.

As most of you know, my dad went to be with Jesus in January. Words are incapable of expressing the degree to which I, along with my family, miss him. Mother is doing pretty well, just trying to make the adjustments (I can't imagine the emotions involved in suddenly losing your spouse of sixty two years). She is a trooper, and we try to support her in every way we can. Dad, the greatest man I have ever known, was, and is, my hero. He will always be my hero. I learned so much from him about life in general and adversity in particular. I will forever be indebted to him for his example as a man and his counsel as a father. What character he displayed before me for the first sixty years of my life. He was first wave Utah Beach at Normandy in WWII, helped liberate Paris, and was wounded at the beginning stages of the Battle of the Bulge. Many of us have heard his "war stories," but today they mean more to me than ever. He lost the sight in his right eye due to German shrapnel, but never once complained about it. He attended Murray State University after the war and majored in agriculture, eventually teaching at my high school. He was never famous, never had an abundance of financial resources, never had political prowess, but always did what was right regardless of the fallout. In my opinion, that is what heroes are made of. My faith allows me to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I will see him again. Can't imagine living, even for one second, without the hope of that fact. Thank you Jesus, and thank you dad, for all the memories!!

Ministry News

The summer has been very hot and very dry, but a variety of groups (of all ages) have visited on a consistent basis. We had a wonderful summer camp this summer (youth ages 13-18), probably our best ever. We had great youth and great counselors as well. It made for a wonderful time, and we thank God for what He did that week in the lives of all who participated.

We have some special news to pass along to you. Rick and Donna Underhill and their son Adam (who will be attending Murray State University as a freshman this fall) are now living on the hill. They have one other son, Kyle, who is presently attending the University of Southern Indiana. Kim and I met the Underhills several years ago in their hometown, Newburgh, Indiana. They started visiting the ministry and decided they would like to be more involved. The log home directly in front of our meeting area (where Kim and I used to live) is their place of residence. They are here for a variety of reasons, the main of which is to invest their lives into the lives of others. They will also be responsible for overseeing the administrative responsibilities associated with the daily operations of the ministry. They are a tremendous asset and a welcomed breath of freshness. Please pray for them as they adjust to a new "job," a new area of the country, and many more things that go with the territory of "ministry."

Some Events to Consider Attending on the Hill

August 21, 2007 Tuesday night Bible study begins at 7:00 p.m. The book of Isaiah continued. Childcare available. **August 31-September 1, 2007** Two-day school. Topic: Romans 1-8 **October 19-21, 2007** Annual fall retreat for men and women, both single and married. **April 11-13, 2008** Annual men's retreat for fathers, their sons, and single men of all ages. **July 6-12, 2008** Summer Camp for ages 13-18. If you are interested, and have not joined us previously, you need to sign up as soon as possible since we were almost full last summer.

Speaking Engagements Off the Hill in the Short Term

September 14-16, 2007 Windy Gap North Carolina You can check out the remainder of our itinerary on our website at www.lifeonthehill.org.

A Word of Thanks

It is amazing what things cost today. Consequently, it goes without saying that this ministry appreciates your support more today than at any time in the past. We sense a tremendous responsibility in the area of stewardship as we receive the resources that God directs our way. We have never sensed a greater need for what God is doing on this hill, yet we understand well that it is your faithful support that allows us to continue. Our prayer is that God multiplies, not only your material resources as a result of your generosity and thoughtfulness, but your spiritual insight and understanding as well. Much thanks to all!

THOUGHTS FROM THE HILL

I have been teaching the book of Isaiah for the past two semesters and will continue to do so in the fall. More than half of the following was generated through my research relating to this wonderful book. I hope it serves to encourage you in your journey with Jesus.

Is. 29:13 Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote...."

There was much activity generated by tradition (man's opinion) in Isaiah's day, meaning that the residents of Judah expended much religious energy but possessed no spiritual life. Inadequate

leadership had brought about this dilemma, as is confirmed by the next verse, Isaiah 29:14—*And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.* Isaiah 29:10-12 states much the same. Because the leaders were unable to properly teach the Scriptures (due to an improper bias in regards to how the Scriptures should be interpreted), the people only gave lip service to the things of God. Jesus dealt with a similar issue in Matthew 15:1-9 and Mark 7:1-7. In fact, the rejection of Jesus's Messiahship resulted from the Pharisees living by the tradition and commandments of men rather than the infallible, and always dependable, word of God. Therefore, the same root problem that existed in Isaiah's day continued to prevail when the Messiah came to earth. It does not stop there, however. The Roman annihilation of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, along with the covenant that the Jews sign with the Antichrist that begins the Tribulation (and much of the suffering in between), results from one major malfunction within Jewish society—the elevation of man-generated laws over the God-generated word of truth, the Scriptures.

The man-generated “oral” laws which existed during Jesus's earthly ministry were finally written down and assembled around 200 AD. They are known today as the Mishnah. The following quote from the Mishnah confirms that adherence to manmade laws always leads to an improper view of the Scriptures.

“Greater Stringency applies to [the observance of] the words of the Scribes than to [the observance of] the words of the [written] Law” (The Mishnah; Danby; Oxford University Press; page 400). Do you see my point? The Mishnah states unequivocally that the laws generated by the Scribes (mere men) carry more authority than the Scriptures. No wonder the Jews in 30 AD rejected Jesus as Messiah, especially when Jesus's idea of a good time was breaking as many of the man-generated oral laws as possible.

A Jewish Rabbi named Rashi (1040-1105 AD) wrote much commentary on the Mishnah, most of which has been the bench mark for Jewish thought the past nine hundred years. The following quote from the Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Edition (1911) confirms my point. Keep in mind when you read this quote that the word “Talmud” makes reference to laws that were generated by Jewish leaders, laws which were not sanctioned by God. (Don't confuse the “Talmud” with the “Torah,” the “Torah” being another name for the first five books of the Old Testament. Therefore, they are anything but equivalent.) Note Rashi's realm of influence as described by the following quote.

It is no exaggeration to assert that the modern world owes its power to understand the Talmud to Rashi. In this field the "Commentator" is supreme. He practically edited the text of the Talmud besides explaining it, and the Talmud is never printed without Rashi's commentary on the margin.

Obviously, Rashi has greatly influenced the theology of the Jewish nation. But has he done the Jewish nation harm or good through his commentary? Let's jump into his mind for a moment and ask one simple question. Did he, or did he not, allow the traditions of men to influenced his thinking? Consider the following.

When taken literally, and not allegorically or figuratively, Isaiah 53 points to a suffering Savior who would die for the sin of man. Take time to read this chapter and it will become obvious that, when taken literally, no other conclusion can be drawn. If you were to read Rashi's commentary (which you can do by typing in “Isaiah 53 Rashi” online), you would see that he views Isaiah 53

from a totally different frame of reference. Note the following quote from Rashi relating to just one phrase of this chapter.

Isaiah 53:3a--Despised and rejected by men... Rashi's commentary states: "So is the custom of this prophet: he mentions all Israel as one man..." In order to hold to the traditions of men (so he could continue to reject Jesus's Messiahship), Rashi wrongfully allegorized the text by assuming the Jewish nation is the subject rather than the Messiah. This type of thinking will be the norm within the general Jewish populous until the Hebrew people realize their error at the end of the Tribulation, adhere to a literal view of the Scriptures, and accept Jesus as the suffering Savior of Isaiah 53. Therefore, if the Jewish nation is the firstborn of the Father (Exodus 4:22), and the firstborn receives double the inheritance, the Hebrew nation is the only nation that receives double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:2). This means that a major portion of Israel's sufferings over the years can be traced back to one core issue—improper teachers who placed greater value upon the words of men than the words of God. Had the Jewish leaders viewed the Scriptures properly they would have, without hesitation, accepted Christ as Messiah. But they opted out for the "tradition learned by rote" (Isaiah 29:13) that so handicapped the Jewish people even in Isaiah's day. This explains many of the events of recent history, yes, and even the evening news. How very interesting!

So, where are you and I in all of this? Can we detect error, or are we at the mercy of every teacher who crosses our path? Wouldn't it be a wonderful adventure to equip ourselves to where we could accept the truth but reject the error regardless of the messenger? Ephesians 6:10-20 addresses this issue, so think about it.

Love you in Jesus. Walk on!

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