

“Troubler Of Israel”

There are two truths which are confirmed by a multitude of scriptures in God’s holy word. The first truth is that God’s children have always been hated by the religious world. Those who have claimed to be the most religious have always been the greatest enemies to true righteousness, and to the people of God. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” Acts 14:22 says, “*... through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*” Many times the Lord and His apostles suffered by the hands of the Jews, the most religious group in Palestine.

The second truth concerns the altar. The altar has historically been a place of worship to God. In many hundreds of scriptures, the altar is used to exalt God. Even before the Old Law, man would build an altar in an attempt to present pleasing worship to God. However, upon these altars, man has always developed the ability to present worship that is not in accordance with the laws of God, but instead has its development in the mind of man.

I would like for us to consider a well-known story in the Old Testament which will demonstrate the above two truths. The story is found in 1 Kings 16-18 and is concerns the actions of Ahab, Jezebel, Elijah and the prophets of Baal. After examining this incident, I want to take you on a journey into the present where these two great truths are still trustworthy.

The Past -- Ahab And The Prophets Of Baal

All the prophets of God and the apostles have been condemned for telling religious people the truth. God taught the people to have only one God, yet Ahab and his people had turned from God. He and his wife Jezebel had turned Baal worship into the state religion (1 Kings 16:31-32). On account of Ahab’s great sin Elijah declared to him that there should be no dew nor rain only according to his word (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17). The earth became dry, all the water was gone and Ahab started out over the land to find water. During these years of drought there was no lack of religion or religious preachers, for Ahab’s wife was supporting from her own table 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah (1 Kings 18:19). At the end of three and one-half years’ drought brought on by the wickedness of Ahab and these preachers, Ahab came face to face with Elijah, and instead of confessing his sins and coming to God he said to Elijah, “*Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*” (1 Kings 18:17).

This accusation is generally repeated by all religious people against the chil-

dren of God. The same charge was made against Paul and Silas when the religious people said, *"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also"* (Acts 17:6). Elijah, knowing that no man who stands on the Lord's side is afraid of discussion, suggested that all the prophets of Baal build an altar, and place on it a sacrifice, and he would repair the altar of the Lord and also offer a sacrifice. If Baal came down and accepted their sacrifice he would be their god. If the God of Israel accepted the sacrifice then He be their God. The offer was so fair the people did not reject it. The debate was held with 450 preachers on one side and one preacher and God on the other side. The people saw that God accepted Elijah's offering, and that all the false prophets were put to death; yet such miraculous demonstrations did not cause them to turn from their sins. Elijah's life was threatened by Jezebel, and he had to flee and hide to protect himself. We notice in all ages there have been two altars of worship -- one erected by man, the other by God. Man has the privilege of choosing between the two. Elijah asked the people, *"How long halt ye between two opinions?"* (1 Kings 18:21). Was Elijah the true "troubler of Israel?"

The Present -- Religious Liberalism

In Galatians 6:16, Paul referred to the church as a spiritual Israel. In the church today, are there any troublers of Israel? Let's examine a very typical altar of man upon which he would offer worship to God.

Saved by "faith only" vs. the gospel plan of salvation

So many in the world today want us to believe that we can accept Jesus and be saved. It is not uncommon for people to relate to you their experience of when they were saved. Tracts handed out by denominational churches frequently tell the believer to utter a carefully worded prayer and open their eyes to salvation in Christ. The denominational churches have departed from God's altar where He taught, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16), have erected a human altar and claim that we are saved by faith only. James says, *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"* (James 2:24). Sectarians tell you they do not believe that for such teaching will cause trouble in Israel.

"Once saved, always saved" vs. a just God

It surely would hold comfort in the hearts of many people today to know that they will never lose their salvation as long as they obey the most basic of commands. Many hold that the believer, as long as he is truly united with Christ, will be eternally secure in God. They say that nothing will ever sepa-

rate them from the eternal and unchangeable love of God. This is certainly true on God's end of the bargain (Romans 8:35-39). But the Bible clearly states in many passages that we can be in danger of losing our soul if we fall from God (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 12:15; James 5:19-20; 2 Peter 2:14-15, 20-21; 2 John 9-11). Man is a free moral agent who can choose to believe or to reject, and so long as he lives in the flesh man can change his spiritual condition and eternal destiny (Ezekiel 18:20-24).

"Many faiths and many churches" vs. one faith and one body

There is an ever-widening feeling among the religious community of indulgence concerning every different religious faith and group. The common argument is that we are all just serving the Lord in whatever form we choose (one of my neighbors is very much in favor of this). Let's not hassle about specifics, let's just get on with glorifying God. I am all for glorifying and obeying God, but I am equally for following the pattern which God has declared (Hebrews 8:5). That divine principle is echoed all through the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Matthew 7:21-23; John 4:24; Colossians 3:17; Revelation 22:18-19). Jude 3 instructs Christians to "*contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" We must also uphold God's teaching about the body of Christ. Jesus said, "*I will build My church*" (Matthew 16:18) and that church is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). Let's not disrespect the headship of Christ by believing that we can stick any old body onto the supreme head of the church. Paul states that there is but "*one body*" (Ephesians 4:4).

The "social gospel" vs. the saving gospel

The prominent ideas concerning the work of the gospel today revolve around man's material needs. Concerns for the social aspect of man are eclipsing the true biblical pattern of the work of the church. It is not uncommon to find churches with family life centers, gymnasiums, kitchens, and to see churches performing works which range from counseling to wrapping Christmas presents. Now, all of these functions and places are necessary in everyday life, but the question is, what is the church's function among all these secular influences? John 18:36 states that the Lord's kingdom is spiritual in nature rather than worldly. This divine creation also has a divine mission. This thought is also substantiated by the statement of Christ in John 6:26-27: "*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*" The work of the Lord's church is to evangelize (Acts 13:1-3; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians

1:2-8); to edify (Hebrews 10:24-25; 2 Timothy 2:2); and to care for its own saints (Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 8:12-14; 9:12). If we go beyond these goals which are laid out in the New Testament, we have failed to be true to God.

On the side of man's altar are not only the majority of the outside world, but the religious world also stands there and claims that all who oppose their unscriptural teaching are troubling Israel. But you will remember Elijah, Micahiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Paul, Peter and all of God's teachers who condemned sectarianism and denominationalism were accused of troubling Israel. That man or woman who is trying to please the religious world is not pleasing God. It is safer to stand alone as Elijah did at Carmel with the Lord on your side than the 450 prophets of Baal and their bloody grave on the other side. Which side will you be found with at the last day? Let us not fear the majority. If we have God and His authority on our side, we have nothing to fear.

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