

Commentary — From the Margins

What Did You Expect to See?

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Christ Jesus' comments about John the Baptist (Matt 11:7-9).

Much of what Americans do is work to meet the expectations of their neighbors, the proverbial keeping up with the Jones. A person does not expect to see food-bearing plants growing in front yards of homes in suburbia. The person expects mowed grass, and he or she gets mowed grass. And this meeting of expectations is quietly reassuring to neighbors: the person is "okay" for he or she does not differ from what is expected.

Jesus of Nazareth did not meet the expectations of John the Baptist (Matt 11:3); nor did John meet the expectations of the scribes and Pharisees who journeyed out of Jerusalem to see this prophet of God; hence, Jesus' questions. Who did they come out to the wilderness to see? Who today do those who journey to the tip of Michigan's Thumb come to see? Certainly not someone in soft clothing and a new Mercedes, not someone uttering soothing words and banal platitudes, not someone who meets the world's expectations of how Americans live—no, in the spiritual wilderness of the Thumb, this ministry walks with far larger footprints worldwide than it has local appearance.

Recently, a pastor from Kenya came to visit, a pastor with an orphanage to support and budding congregations needing young pastors. Exactly what his expectations in coming here were was never stated, but after three days he left with knowledge and no moneys (there were none to give him). He left after experiencing what it means to be *in* the world but not *of* the world ... we had company the previous week, but someone we have known since summer 2004, someone financially able to spend nights in a local motel. We still had much to do to get settled into the new place before we could host our friend; we certainly were in no shape to host company when an unexpected e-mail message came from Kenya saying that the pastor would be arriving in the United States Friday and that he wanted to come for a visit the following Monday.

We have recently moved, and we are not yet settled in the place to which we moved ... the property was purchased with known problems: water, plumbing, electricity, others. Thus, when our visitor from Kenya arrived the weather was hot (we do not have air conditioning); we do not have a second bedroom, or a second bed; we did not have hot water (another hot water heater was not installed until after our guest left) and the pump from the water well was malfunctioning. In addition, the bathroom sink and tub

drains were clogged with decades of debris and had not yet been cleared so even the simple act of washing one's hands was difficult. Hence, our guest endured cold water showers, sleeping on the living room floor, and an eighty mile ride from and to Saginaw in a sixteen year old Dodge Dakota pickup that does not have air conditioning. And though our guest was most gracious, we did not meet his expectations—and it is here where expectations undermine credibility that a test of the disciple's faith will occur.

With the temporary exceptions of Kings David and Solomon, go into Scripture and show where a person doing a work for God had great wealth. It is difficult although the former Worldwide Church of God (WCG) used to argue that Jesus had great wealth, the evidence of which was that when crucified His garment was not torn apart but had lots cast for it; plus, it was argued that Jesus must have had a house in Jerusalem where 120 persons could meet together in an upper room (Acts 1:15). Scripture, unfortunately, does not support the former WCG's arguments.

Luke was a very careful historian. He names those first disciples who were staying in an upper room in Jerusalem: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James (Acts 1:13). With one accord they were devoting themselves to prayer, "together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (v. 14). Luke does not say that the women were in the upper room, and it is not likely that they were when all were devoting themselves to prayer. So 120 persons are not named, nor said to be in this upper room. But it was within this period of ten days between when the glorified Jesus ascended to be seen no more until He receives the kingdom of this world and before the first disciples were visibly empowered by the Holy Spirit when Peter stood up among the brothers (which Luke records are 120 persons) and said it was time to replace Judas Iscariot (vv. 15-26). Luke, however, does not give the location of where the 120 were when Peter stood up to speak although it can reasonably be said that they were in Jerusalem or on the Mount of Olives, for Jesus had commanded them "not to depart from Jerusalem" (v. 4). And evidence for Jesus owning the house with the upper room is lacking, especially considering that He "borrowed" the use of a house in Jerusalem to eat His last Passover days earlier (Matt 26:17-18).

As Jesus and His first disciples traveled throughout the small geographical region that forms Galilee and Judea, Judas Iscariot kept the money bag in which were the funds necessary to pay for food and lodging ... my guest from Kenya, again a minister seeking to supply the needs of his ministry and the orphanage he operates, was (and will be for another three and a half weeks) traveling around the eastern half of the United States on faith. A trucker willing to support his ministry brought him from Dayton, Ohio, to Saginaw, Michigan (actually, to Bay City, a few miles from Saginaw). When he left here, he took a bus to Canton, Ohio: \$68 and 28 hours (two layovers of more than six hours each). The expense was not great, but the layovers made the trip unreasonably long considering the length of time it would take to drive to Canton from here. His stay here cost him nothing. He was/is traveling as disciples did in the 1st-Century CE (3 John 6-8). So take what he is doing and apply it backwards to where distances are measured in the tens of miles and travel was by foot.

My guest ate whatever he was served; Jesus and the first disciples ate what was set before them by their hosts, and Scripture confirms that those first disciples were at

times hungry on the Sabbath. Plus, Scripture mostly addresses only the beginning and the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. For theological reasons, Scripture is nearly silent about what happened during the middle years of Jesus' ministry. So we don't know the source of the moneys in the moneybag. Possibly these moneys initially came from the Magi who brought gifts to the infant Jesus that were appropriate for a potential heir to the Parthian throne, a conjecture that has some limited historical support. Regardless, the money bag was not so heavy that it placed a physical burden on Judas Iscariot. There were not many kilos of gold and silver in the bag, and gold's purchasing power remains surprisingly constant over time: the amount of gold that it takes to purchase a bag of groceries has not appreciably changed. Thus, the moneys in the bag needed to be regularly replenished, or very few purchases were made. And it was probably the case that few purchases were made ... my guest does not make many purchases as he travels about. His reason for visiting the United States is not to improve our economy.

If Jesus did not need a great amount of wealth to do His ministry, and if disciples are to do an even greater work during the Tribulations, then endtime disciples will also not need large amounts of money to do this greater work. And if these disciples will not need mega-millions to do a work for God, then these endtime disciples will not be flush with money. They will be hard pressed to meet their financial responsibilities, for one of their needs is to trust God to supply those things that they must have.

If endtime disciples are hard pressed to meet their financial responsibilities, they will also disappoint those who judge them by how many things they possess. They will not meet the expectations of the physically-minded.

In typology, the geographical territory of Judea represents the mental topography of God's rest (Ps 95:10-11), with this mental topography expressed in both the weekly Sabbath rest and in the Millennium reign of Christ Jesus (Heb 3:16-4:11). Therefore, the size of the physical nation of Israel becomes a reflection of that nation's spiritual health, as evidenced by the house of Israel putting away the Baals and the Ashtaroah and serving only the Lord during the days of Samuel, with the hand of the Lord against the Philistines all the days of Samuel, thereby restoring to Israel the cities the Philistines had taken from Ekron to Gath (1 Sam 7:4, 13-14). As the house of Israel returned to God, the geographical territory of Israel was restored to the nation. An actual hard correspondence exists: the number of square miles controlled by Israel served as the visible revelation of Israel's invisible relationship with God.

Because the northern house of Israel [Samaria] never forsook the idolatry of Jeroboam (2 Kings 17:21-23), but added additional idolatries to that by which Jeroboam condemned Israel (*vv.* 7-18), the house of Israel was taken captive by Assyria, and relocated "in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (*v.* 6). These geographical lands represent the mental landscape of *death*. Thus, Samaria lost its inherited lands, lost its identity as Israel, and was never allowed to return to the Promised Land—it never recovered its knowledge of God. These are the lost ten tribes of Israel, "lost" to *death* because of the idolatry of Jeroboam.

"Judah also did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God [*YHWH* their *Elohim*], but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced" (2 Kings 17:19).

The pinnacle of Israel's purity before God was during the reign of King David, a man after God's own heart, and was specifically at the end of David's reign when the king as

poet reveals that he understands that *Yah* is the visible (to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel) God of Israel, the *Theos* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 22:32). David reveals that he knows *Yah* is the “natural” or physical representation of the invisible *YHWH*, *Theos* & *Theon* together as one as if married (cf. Ps 146:1; 148:1, 149:1; John 1:1-2; Gen 1:27; 2:24; John 17:20-23). It was the *Logos* or *Theos* who came as His Son, His only (John 3:16), in the form of the man Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:14), and who would be *born again* or born a second time as the Son of *Theon* when the Holy Spirit [*Pneuma 'Agion*] descended as a dove, lit and remained on Him (Matt 3:16-17). So Jesus was the only Son of *Theos*, and the firstborn Son of *Theon*. And this is knowledge of God that would not return to Israel until the time of the end.

So at the end of David's reign when Israel's geographical borders were the largest they would be—God gave peace to Solomon so he did not make war to expand Israel's borders—Israel's knowledge of God as represented by its king's knowledge was also at its maximum expansion. Israel's knowledge of God would not again be that of King David's for three millennia, or until the 21st-Century CE. Thus, the material wealth that came to David and came to Solomon came as a result of Israel's geographical expansion—and in moving from physical to spiritual, the gold and silver that was no longer counted as valuable during Solomon's reign forms the visible representation, or shadow and copy of the heavenly wealth of millennial disciples who have use of the “[key of David](#)” and the knowledge of God that the king possessed.

Therefore, the splendor of Solomon is the visible, physical precursor of the invisible, spiritual splendor possessed by those endtime disciples who keep the commandments and have the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12:17) and who will not meet physical expectations in this world ... the writer of Hebrews said, concerning the faithful of God,

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword.

They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (11:36-38)

Elsewhere the Apostle Paul wrote,

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Tim 6:6-10)

If the righteous of God, of whom the world was not worthy, went about in skin garments and dwelt in caves, and if disciples should be content with food and clothing and should not seek after money or the riches of this world, then disciples of Christ Jesus will not often appear among the prosperous of this world. They will not be named among the *rich and famous*; they will, however, possess a wealth of faith and godliness, love and steadfastness, righteousness and gentleness (2 Tim 6:11). They will, in this world, possess the invisible attributes of God and not the visible trappings of kings and

priests. Yes, priests! For the prophets and priests of the religions of this world, regardless of whether they identify themselves as Christian pastors or Islamic mullahs, will not and indeed cannot teach their followers to keep the commandments of God—and they cannot resist the trappings of wealth. They are as children in a candy store when they are offered the authority to rule and the robes of respectability that money can buy.

Why would a Kenyan pastor come to the tip of Michigan's Thumb to sleep on the floor and take cold showers? If his intent was to take home full coffers, he came to the wrong place. But if his intent was to return with knowledge that has little worth in this world but is priceless in the heavenly realm, then he came to the right place; for the knowledge that theological *Greeks* reject as *legalism* is to those disciples who have truly been born of Spirit the evidence that the tip of the thumb has touched the ear and the heel of Israel.

Those who judge by appearances have minds set on the flesh (Rom 8:6). They remain hostile to God (*v.* 7) for they remain consigned to disobedience as bondservants of the prince of this world. And many of them will sing praises to a Jesus they do not know as they attempt to enter God's rest on the following day, when the promise of entering into God's rest no longer stands (Heb 3:16-4:11). They would not journey a block to sleep on the floor or to take a cold shower, for they lust after the things of this world. They judge with their eyes, and the desires of their eyes. They are filled with pride for their possessions. And they are not of God the Father (1 John 2:15-17), but wholly belong to the prince of this world.

Those who judge by appearances fill pews in the spiritual synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16, 28-29).

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