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The Promises of God

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I am often asked, “Why do you travel to Israel so much? Is there anything else to learn?” Undoubtedly, those questions come from someone who has never been there. The most striking thing to me as I travel across that beautiful country is how little I know. When I am there, an hour does not go by in which I do not learn something very valuable.

Back in March, I led my latest tour group over there. This was the earliest in the year that I have taken a group. For the most part, I enjoy traveling over there in the summer months. Yes, it is a bit warmer than other parts of the year. But, with the ample amounts of daylight and the fact that there is no chance of rain, it makes that time of year very desirable for traveling. With that said, the opportunity to lead a group in March was something that I could not turn down. And we were not disappointed. We were treated to many different unusual events, including snow falling while we were visiting the Mount of Olives!

By traveling this time of year, I was reminded of something involving the promises of God. In Deuteronomy 11, God speaks to the people (through Moses). He tells them that God will bless the land to which they are about to enter via “the early rains and latter rains”. This promise of God, which was made about 3,500 years ago, is still true today.

The early rains fall in October. And, from the period of October through March (when the latter rains fall), the land of Israel gets almost continual rain. Between the latter rains (in March) and the early rains (in October), the land gets no rain at all.

By traveling to Israel in the summer, I visit many places that have not received rain in at least three months. Therefore, most of the grass and shrubbery has turned brown. However, by traveling in March (at the end of the rainy season), I was able to see the land in full lush color.

At the Old Testament city of Beit-shan, the tel of the ancient city is usually brown and only enhances the heat which beats down on to the first-century Decapolis city of Scythopolis. However, after the rains of March, the tell was a beautiful green and only encouraged travelers to hike to the top for an unforgettable view.

While traveling across the Sea of Galilee, the awe-inspiring edifice of Mount Arbel towers over you on the western side of the lake. During July, this rocky crag is the home to small burrowing animals which seek relief from the never-ending sunlight. However, in March, the grass covered sides of the hill beckons all types of animals to feed on what it has to offer.

And finally, in the Valley of Elah, where David fought Goliath, the sounds of crackling underbrush as you walk through the valley in July is replaced by the lush, deep-green agriculture which will be soon ready for harvest.

Experiencing these locations at this time of year reminded me of the wonderful promise that God made to the children of Israel centuries ago. That promise to take care of the land through the early and latter rains still holds true today.

The Bible is full of promises. In the beginning, God created man and they were in complete fellowship with each other. However, very soon, man sinned and that relationship was tarnished. The rest of the Bible details God’s plan to reestablish that relationship with man. This plan involves dozens of promises of God.

In Genesis 6, God promised to bring a flood upon the earth. That promise came true.

In Genesis 9, God promised to never destroy the earth by water again. That promise came true.

In Genesis 12, God promised to bless all of the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham. That promise came true.

In Jeremiah 25, God promised that the people would be carried off into captivity because of their sin. That promise came true.

In Jeremiah 30, God promised that some people would return to the land. That promise came true.

In Matthew 1, God promised Joseph that Mary would bear a son and this son would save his people from their sins. That promise came true.

In Matthew 9, Jesus promised that he would be delivered into the hands of men, killed, and he would rise on the third day. That promise came true.

2 Peter 3:8-9 tells us that God is not slack concerning the promises that he makes. And history confirms what Peter is saying. It does not matter if the promise is about the punishment of the Israelites due to wickedness, the role of Jesus in the salvation of man, or of the rain that falls on the land. God promises always come true.

And walking around the land of Israel during March is a vivid reminder of this.

Living in the Danger Zone

by Tony Mauck

As our generally ungodly society progressively worsens, it should be no surprise' to see individuals who wear the name "Christian" also heading in this direction. Some have the attitude "how close can I get to sin without sinning? Just how much can I get away with? How little can I do and be pleasing to God?" Thus, being influenced by the world, they are living in the danger zone. The eternal welfare of their soul is jeopardized. May I suggest some areas where the influence of the world is great and a word of caution is needed.

(1) Evil companions. Paul forewarned in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good morals." The people Paul had in mind may not have been "absolute filth." Maybe his warning simply had to do with spending too much time with folks who have no redeeming spiritual qualities or Godward inclinations. Being distracted from our spiritual warfare allows Satan an opportunity to take advantage of us. He will use anything or anybody he can to accomplish his purposes. Letting others determine your behavior or do your thinking for you is quite perilous spiritually. If you're in need of some good companionship, and we all are, why not spend your time with brothers and sisters in the Lord?

(2) Media indulgence. The information we filter through our mind undoubtedly affects the way we think and behave. To continually fill our minds with the world's philosophy is quite harmful whether by television, radio, movies or magazines. Seeing or hearing that which is immoral filth has no redeeming value. Also, we must be careful not to take a lighthearted or tolerant attitude toward sin when we witness it.

(3) Immodesty. It's hard to feel comfortable when you "stick out like a sore thumb" in a crowd, but the Christian must, if the majority does evil. Regardless of the world's standard of dress, Christians must adorn themselves in a manner which reflects the proper attitude of heart. (1 Tim. 2:9,10.) The sacrifice of comfort and peer acceptance is a small price to pay in glorifying God. Beware of the dangers associated with immodest dress, evil influence, lust, sexual promiscuity, etc.

(4) "And things like these." (cf. Gal. 5:19-21.) Alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, narcotics, modern forms of dance. Being engaged in these practices cannot strengthen us spiritually. They will only weaken us. Any small participation in or even too much association with these practices hurls one into the danger zone spiritually.

Beware of living in the Danger Zone! "Abstain from every form of evil." (1 Thess. 5:22.)