

NECMA 19th October 2003

Matthew 24:33-34, 35-39

“God sends us away, to get our act together”

It is my prayer that the Lord God of Hosts be our vision, and my vision, not just now, but always.

In our chat channel we had what several of us saw as a serious security problem, and I took swift drastic action as a result. My role is what in a corporation might be the “Chief Operations Officer”, responsible to the Board for day-to-day running.

While the CEO - shall we say - and I don't often disagree, after some fairly heated correspondence on our operations email list, there seemed to be not just a deadlock, but bad feeling.

For a very short while I had the “natural man's” expected feelings along the lines of...

à *“that was really dumb that they didn't agree with me”...*

à *“they don't understand, and after all I have to be right, because I did all the leg-work...”*

à *“if they don't want me, they'll just have to get along without me...” and so on, and so forth.*

Yes, a typical “Poor Me” attitude. Have you ever been a “Poor Me”?

I said it lasted a VERY short while. In the morning, I realised that I had been hasty - not in taking the action, which is what I would have been expected to do, and which I would do again.

Not because of the excellent technical reasons which were fully supported in advice received from highly experienced network administrators. Nor for every other reason I could muster, either.

Can YOU see why I was wrong?

I was out of order by insisting that I was right...

Because it nearly destroyed the two-way relationship of affection and respect with Lydia, the “CEO”, and Colin my mate, both of whom I love dearly and hold in the highest regard.

And would have badly hurt the online community as well.

You see, I could easily have walked away - But I didn't.

I repented of being stiff-necked, and pharisaical...

Did you realise that pharisees were actually ALWAYS absolutely right according to their rules?

Really they were, technically speaking.

But they were right with their heads, not their hearts. This is where “circumcision of the heart” as taught by Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles comes in.

Fortunately I was open to, and acted on, God's quiet voice which - while I did not actually hear it out loud, may well have said to me...

“Richard, I'm SO SAD that you haven't learned this basic lesson...

despite your having taught it to others for years...

Wake up my Son, please learn from it this time, and apply it in YOUR life”.

It is important NOT to hold any prestige for actually being the “head op”. Being the “head op” is NOT my identity - in channel - or as a Christian. One's identity must NEVER be in what we do.

My identity is simply a sinner among other sinners, saved by the blood of the Lamb, and praise His Holy Name!

And I recognise that if I am to meaningfully participate in presenting the gospel to every nation and tribe under the sun, it can be ONLY if I am relational - to them, and that includes you, my brothers and sisters, as well as to God.

Some of us seem to be slow learners in this - and perhaps other - areas.

I feel strongly that the Lord wanted me to share this anecdote because it demonstrates that within each of us lies the ability to REACT unrelationally when God would rather we ACT in harmony and love.

We started this series a few weeks before Pentecost with identifying false teachings, or heresy, and situations that can lead to us being short-changed as Christians.

Then we looked at the body of believers needing to be truly one with one another and God - like on the Day of Pentecost, in part using the entire 17th chapter of John.

After that we looked at what actually causes the disharmony all around us, which we discovered was SIN.

In 1970 I transferred from Perth in Western Australia to Whyalla in the north of South Australia, within the company I was working for.

I joined the local scouts so that I could learn how to be an effective youth leader; I became an “Assistant Scoutmaster”, and because of my expertise with boats, it was with the Sea Scouts.

I spent nearly 3 years qualifying under the original scout leader training scheme, finishing by running on my own a regular scout troop which had an unhappy history of poor leaders with doubtful behavior...

and I took over a dozen unruly demoralised lads who met in a tin shed with broken panels, and matching hearts, boys who were unacceptable to the rest of the Whyalla Scout District.

I took them camping, canoeing, hiking into the scrub, taught them to cook, and more than anything else was consistent in discipline and behavioral requirements, which is what turned the boys around.

At the last meeting together, I discovered to my utter amazement that the 30-odd they had now grown to had prepared a farewell feast inside the shed, having burgled one of the still broken panels at the back to get in and set it up!

You may ask *“What has this to do with today’s sermon?”*

I use it to show that the way things work best is in God's way, it is consistency, not changing; and being tough but yet fair. *"O Thou who changest not, abide with me"*.

Today we look at how God disciplines His people because of their sin.

He "sends them away" or allows others to do so, by lifting His protecting hand from them.

Later, He restores them to their inheritance - importantly, when He is ready, not before.

We ought to continually remember that the God who we worship is the same God, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow". UNCHANGEABLE. The God of the Old Testament is indeed the God of the New Testament.

He has NEVER needed a "Plan B"; there can be NO change in His viewpoint or behaviour. It must have been set in concrete from the beginning. The first words of Genesis are, *"In the beginning, God"*.

He is a Holy God, and we have never been able to stand in His presence with spiritual dirt on our hands - or as Isaiah said to the seraph, with dirty lips which he needed to cleanse with a white-hot coal.

God will ALWAYS continue to deal with His people in the same sort of way NOW, and in the future, as he has ALWAYS done in the past, throughout all time.

He sends His people into spiritual or physical exile - sometimes both - to learn from their mistakes, or as a punishment, or both, during which time he does NOT have them on the "protected species" list. Like Scouts, He expects us to "learn by doing".

While still His chosen people, he does NOT deal with them in a special way... you might say "God is not a respecter of persons". That applies just as much to His church today, as with the Old Testament times.

Spelling it out, the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" - who created the Israelite nation which was descended from Noah's son Shem through Abraham, is the very same God who welcomed Jesus to sit at His right hand in Heaven, upon His completion of the atonement He made for all mankind.

An atonement by which salvation was FROM THEN ON made available for ALL people “Both Jew and Greek”, also described in the Bible as “The circumcision” and “The uncircumcision”

We need remember that physical circumcision of the male was instituted hundreds of years before the Law era, in the Abrahamic covenant, and like all Old Testament things, it was a type or shadow of the future... circumcision of the heart as the prophets told us.

The “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” was the God of the Garden of Eden, who looked on Satan’s tempting of Eve and Adam with absolute loathing, yet He deeply loved the two mortals He had created.

The history of God’s repeated “sending away” in scripture is quite fascinating. However, please remember these are not my own ideas, but just what God’s word says. “Sending away” is not a Biblical word, like “Trinity” - but both are Biblical concepts.

1. Starting in Genesis God removed them from Eden, placing security guards at the gate, to prevent their return. They were now totally on their own.

Restoration to Eden has not taken place. Nor do I believe it ever will - I see the Garden of Eden as a STARTING point... if one reads the epistle to the Hebrews - *“let us, therefore, go on unto (towards) perfection (maturity)”*, it shows Eden was where our “journey” began - like at the start of the fall we saw on Ron’s chart last week.

2. Before Eden, God had dismissed Lucifer and one third of His own angelic creation, for their disobedience and pride. While strictly speaking angels were not “God’s people”, He dealt with them in exactly the same way, according to His unchangeable practice.

3. Next we have Noah and the Ark.

This time God did not disperse the evil disobedient people, like He had done with Adam and Eve.

This time He drowned them in their own unbelief, saving his choice of a few righteous folks - by sending THEM away with the leader of His choice, to safety. Noah was that leader.

The flood is a type or shadow of God saving a remnant out of man's future tribulation, at which time, everyone left within the worldly system will have to choose between being executed for their faith in Christ, or to save their earthly lives and thereby lose their eternal lives.

The Old Testament is full of such types or shadows. Remember, that sending away was accompanied by God calling a spiritual leader in Noah.

4. Number four was at the time of Nimrod in Mesopotamia, the scene of the Tower of Babel.

God sent away ALL the people - who at that point still had one language and one culture - again for disciplinary reasons. They are STILL dispersed with different languages and different cultures, and God has NOT yet chosen to restore them.

Man with his cleverness has learned many foreign languages, and we have computer programs which will roughly translate from one into another. But God has NOT restored the people to one tongue yet. Not even our Pentecostal brethren! (joke)

There was no prophet like Noah raised up then to exhort the people to obedience, and there isn't one in this age either, to encourage them to return to one language, although there was a failed attempt between the two world wars to teach Esperanto as an international language.

Perhaps it failed because it was never in God's holy will to restore a single world language. I suspect God will prefer to wait until the "New Jerusalem", and all those who "go in and out" will have to speak the same language - the language of heaven.

5. Ur of the Chaldees, and God's appointed leader Abraham.

Here we have another type of Noah's situation - God calls Abram as he was then known - to be His leader, to take his family out of a corrupt environment, a type or shadow this time of Moses, yet to come.

Like with Noah, God separates His chosen people from being "of the world" while still being "in the world", and sends His messenger to take them.

6. Joseph of the many-coloured dream coat fame is next. God deals with Joseph's brothers' treachery and hard hearts through the famine that drove their entire family penniless into Egypt.

Joseph is God's man here, promoted by the Egyptian king from a bottom grade slave, to the topmost court official.

God restores his people - Joseph's family's integrity by inviting them all to Egypt to share in Joseph's good fortune, so that they don't suffer in the famine. This creates another sending away - they abandoned their land of promise - and of course Joseph dies, and so does the benevolent Pharaoh who allowed Joseph to invite them... Here we have sending-away number 6. And when Joseph dies there is no spiritual leader - yet.

7. Enter Moses, a later hard-hearted Pharaoh, and the Exodus, saga number seven.

The exodus climaxes with God's writing the ten commandments on stone while He talks with Moses in the cleft in the rock near the top of Mount Sinai.

However, disobedience again, and we see the so-called "god" made from the golden ear-rings and other ornaments, which is now worshipped by the Israelites. Wherever a golden calf is mentioned in scripture, it represents a false God or idolatry. In other words, the same apostasy and heresy we looked at here some months ago.

God strikes down thousands where they stood, and lets all the rest of that generation die out as they wander aimlessly for forty years in the wilderness. He then calls a new leader from amongst the new people.

Joshua, the son of Nun, obediently re-enters the Promised Land as God's prophet and commander-in-chief. We are still in the same saga, number 7, and God's people are finally back in the land He gave them. But no, they aren't satisfied!

Moving on, later, in 1 Samuel 8 we read...

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we WILL have a king over us, that we also may be like ALL the nations, and that OUR king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." And Samuel heard all the words of the people,

and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. So the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed their voice, and make them a king."

Does that remind us of an attitude a thousand years or so later when they shouted at the Roman governor *"We have a law, and by that law he must die"* ?

That is how they got King Saul. God grants them kings at their demand - and ought we be surprised that the first one they pick is a dud?

Saul's reign is a disaster; when God is ready, He sends someone to replace their bad choice who will encourage them back to Him, calling David, the shepherd boy. Then follows a period of spiritual growth, and son Solomon follows his dad as king.

8. The next time they were "sent away" was after Solomon's death. His two oldest sons, Jeroboam and Rehoboam were not relational, which is what God's plan has always been about. When Solomon dies in about 922BC the Kingdom was divided into two - Judah being left in the south, under Rehoboam the lawful king, and in the north, Jeroboam, the unlawful pretender to the throne, who chose the name "Israel" to be different - they wanted to be independent.

Jeroboam immediately sets up altars to golden calf idols at opposite ends of his kingdom in "High Places"; we may remember Elijah did battle with the priests of Baal on Mt. Hermon - which was one of them.

This is the eighth time God sends His people away - just the northern kingdom, this time, who totally turned their backs on Him. They reject a string of prophets sent, God finally losing patience and allows Assyria to invade, capture, and take them into captivity in 721BC. They were butchered by the infamous cruelty of the Assyrians.

This is a type or shadow of modern times when people hear the gospel but choose to "do their own thing". The eternal consequences are the same.

9. 154 years later, the two remaining tribes centred on Jerusalem are carted off through ungodly disobedience, to Babylon in 567 BC; remember though, God doesn't EVER forget them, because THEY have NOT completely rejected Him. He raises prophets in their midst while they are in captivity, in sending-away number nine.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a nightmare, which God's prophet in exile - Daniel - interpreted. King Cyrus the Great of Persia fulfilled Daniel's interpretation by defeating Nebuchadnezzar in 539BC. The Jewish people in Babylon then became HIS property - HIS slaves.

Cyrus decreed the following year that the Jerusalem temple had to be rebuilt. That was 29 years after they were taken captive. God called Zerubabel as His man to oversee it and escort the people back.

Note, only some settlers went back... most of the people refused, preferring to intermarry with unbelievers and set up businesses and do their own thing. This might well be a factor in God's people not being restored at this time.

80 years on, God prompted Babylon's Persian administration of the latest king, Artaxerxes I, to release Ezra the priest in 458 BC, with SOME MORE settlers, to follow up on rebuilding the temple.

13 years later in 445 BC, Artaxerxes sends Nehemiah the administrator to find out why it had all gone quiet. He found the usual situation, dissention and apathy among God's people.

Eventually, of course, God raises up John the Baptist, to herald the arrival of the promised Messiah. Did they listen?

Now about their repatriation. We need to understand they were NOT being restored to sovereign rule. It was NOT a "State" of Israel; those relocated to Palestine were part of the 5th Persian 'Satrap' or administrative district. They were Persian slaves who had limited freedom, and occupied land their masters graciously allowed them to, and from which they could be dispossessed very quickly.

The Jews as a nation have not "owned" any land since the Lower Kingdom was enslaved in 567BC - until a political decision was made by the brand-new United Nations in November 1947. 2,500 years later.

After Persia followed many subsequent "masters" or "owners" of the Holy Land and its inhabitants. In 40BC the Parthians took over, Herod the Great being made king a few years later by the Romans. Herod started another temple rebuild in 20BC which prompts the following thought...

Many have speculated that the Holy of Holies in Herod's Temple was actually totally empty. They say it was minus its furniture, the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of stone and Aaron's rod which budded, because there is no mention of its return from Babylon - or indeed its being taken to Babylon.

There are two opposing - yet agreeing - views why...

Firstly that when the Babylonians arrived, they would have stolen and melted down the gold and silver they found, and taken it away.

Secondly that the temple treasures were actually buried deep under the city of Jerusalem just BEFORE the Babylonian conquest, and are still there now.

So the Holy of Holies would have been completely empty in Jesus' era - in either case - unless they made sham furniture unauthorised by God.

If the Most Holy Place was actually empty during Jesus's time, it would suggest that the High Priest would have been performing a sham "Day of Atonement" ceremony every year when he entered to sprinkle the sacrificial blood over a non-existent mercy seat - the floor perhaps.

Perhaps that was an extremely good reason that God would tear the veil at the moment Christ died, to expose the sham of the empty "Holy of Holies", and that the real sacrifice towards which the temple worship had pointed since Moses' time - having now been made - there was no further need for the temple.

But, after the curtain or veil was torn, the priesthood stitched it up.

How do we know that? Because they continued using the temple for another thirty-eight years until General Titus Flavius Vespasian was sent by his dad Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasian to solve the Judean problem once and for all, by bulldozing the site.

You know, Hitler wasn't the first to try to solve the "Jewish problem". The Romans partly succeeded, with God's permission. Hitler tried without God's permission, and failed.

You may disagree with that - and what follows - which is fine, but at least let us walk through it together, step by step, using our scriptural exegesis, and continuing that way... realising I am NOT anti-Semitic...

Remember the Jews were not free, and they were not a nation, they were still the property of others - and actually still are now, being the property of the United Nations who re-established them in Palestine in May of 1948.

In Roman times their ruler was a vassal king - who was not even Jewish. In modern times it is the UN secretary-general - who is not even Jewish. Now, just as in past history, they thumb their noses at their oversight authority.

10. Number ten, the final or “Great Diaspora” - the dispersion of all Jews among the other nations, came about because the Romans lost patience with the Zealots’ ongoing terrorist activities.

Remember Barabbas who the people demanded Pilate set free instead of Jesus? He was one of them. An unidentified one - perhaps even he - was publicly executed at Vespasian’s and Titus’s victory parade in Rome in 71AD.

The Great Dispersion started in 70AD when the Temple in Jerusalem was totally destroyed, with ongoing purges at intervals through to around 135AD after which there were no Jews left living there when the Jewish pseudo-Messiah called Bar-Cocheba was defeated.

It is in this sending-away number ten where opinion is divided. We ought consider the circumstances - which our unchangeable God allowed to happen; it was their punishment for disobedience. If He had chosen not to permit it, it would not have happened.

Has it actually ended yet?

One is led to believe so, and that it happened in May 1948, by those who teach that Israel is still actively God’s chosen people, notwithstanding God’s instructing the Apostles to preach “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek”.

I think to answer whether or not the Diaspora is now over, we need to ask two questions...

“Who did God call to be a spiritual leader to them, like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Ezra, or Nehemiah, to the 1948 state of Israel?” And when did He do so?

“Has God called anyone like Hosea, Jeremiah, Malachi or John the Baptist since? If so, who is it?” We should note that there has never been any such a claim by them.

And, of course, the current nation Israel is NOT under the New Covenant. They will remain totally under the Mosaic Covenant until they recognise and accept Jesus for who He was and is.

That cannot happen until God raises the two prophets He will call to lead them back to Him during the 3-1/2 years of the Great Tribulation. Regardless of what missionary work is done in the Holy Land. God has said so.

While I agree that it would be lovely to see the re-occupation of Palestine in the 20th and 21st centuries by a Jewish nation, I suggest it HAS to be done in HIS ways, not according to OUR “good ideas”.

Make no mistake. God WILL YET raise someone up. Perhaps even tomorrow. Scripture says He will before the Second Coming, and scripture does not lie. But has He YET?

During the Tribulation He will raise two prophets who will preach unharmed and immune from attack for three and a half years. They will eventually be murdered and left lying dead in the streets for three days under the eyes of the television cameras of the world - which now are in place - according to the first 11 verses of Revelation 11.

Their mission is solely to call the Jewish nation to repentance, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah whose visitation they missed two thousand years ago. Not to the Gentiles, all of whose ears

will have been stopped by then, because their time will have passed. We are NOW in the time of the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit will switch back to the Jews at the Tribulation, which is why WE have to witness to the nations NOW.

If “Eretz y’is-ra-el” truly is God’s people, restored in 1948 truly at God’s hand, would not one expect them to treat its people, and the

neighbouring peoples, in accord with the mandatory instructions God gave in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Do they farm the land according to God's inarguable instructions in the Pentateuch?

Do they do either of these?

We should consider... If God did NOT restore the Jews, then MAN has pre-empted God's action. That is arrogant presumption by mankind, and God does not tolerate presumption of Himself, His Will and His Ways.

If that has happened, then one would be unlikely to see ANY evidence of peace in that land, because the nation would be returning in disobedience to God's dispersion.

Do we see any evidence of peace there?

We cannot bend scripture to fit our own pet theories - or the theories of some other preacher for that matter. The history we have traced this morning is totally supported by scripture.

11. Now, there has to be yet one more sending-away.

It will start just before the Great Tribulation, on a date and time of which Jesus said He knew not, because only the Father does.

It will be like in Noah's day, when the wicked people actually stayed where they were, and were destroyed in their sin, unbelief, and disobedience. Do you remember Bill Cosby's monologues from the sixties?

He did Noah's conversations with the Lord. The key comment in them was God's paraphrase to his prophet... "How long - can YOU - tread water?"

God will take the few faithful remnant - including you and me if we are alive, God willing - and with our own leadership - into the wilderness, even though He has not told us where that might be.

Something that in defence circles is called “Need to know”, I guess. And we don’t need to know where - or when - but just praise Him for this provision, so we need not - and should not - fuss about it.

The final sending away will assuredly be - as God did in Noah’s time - His leaving the lukewarm saints - and they who refuse to believe - where they are, to become part of the apostate church that will speedily belong to the Anti-Christ as he quickly assumes control.

There is little doubt in many minds that we are near the end, for a multitude of reasons. If we ARE left behind at the start of the Great Tribulation, we shall have a very unpleasant, painful, and difficult experience... but that is a good subject for further study.

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,
oh may I then in Him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne.*

*On Christ the solid rock I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand!*

God bless you all.

15:09 18-10-03