



Psalms 78:2-4

I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old... We will not conceal them.

Parables Bookshelf - Series 1.4.3

This issue of PARABLES BOOKSHELF contains chapters 5-7 of *The Mark of the Beast*.

The disciple's cross is indispensable to the Christian. There can be no victorious life apart from the cross.

Many Christians today speak of the cross, but the only cross they know is the one Christ bore. They have little considered that Christ was a pattern for all men to follow. As Christ had a cross to bear, so too do all those who would be His disciples.

Mark 8:34-35

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him

deny himself, and take up *his cross*, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it."

Have you ever considered that there is a cross with your name on it? The flesh of man recoils at the thought of the cross, but in truth, the cross is not intended to be an instrument of destruction, but rather one of life.

The Christian life is full of paradoxes. We must die to live. We must be humbled to be exalted. We must live selflessly to receive an imperishable inheritance.

The cross is an instru-

ment of death, but it leads to resurrection life. There can never be a resurrection until there is first a death. Those who resist the work of the cross in their life are rejecting the resurrection life that God desires to bestow upon them.

The apostle Paul testified that it is well worth it to suffer for a moment in order to receive an inheritance that will last for eternity. He described all his suffering as "momentary, light afflictions." This is his description of the cross. It is the yoke all Christians must bear, and Christ said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Food for Thought

"If the first mark of a true and living church is love, the second is suffering. The one is naturally consequent on the other. A willingness to suffer proves the genuineness of love."

John Stott

"To love as Christ loves is to let our love be a practical thing and not a sentimental thing."

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford

Scripture Memory

I Corinthians 13:2

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Parables Newsletter

- Series 1.4.3
- *The Mark of the Beast*
- Chapters 5-7

The Mark of the Beast

The Overcomers

The book of Revelation contains many stark contrasts. There is much that is dark and tragic, yet there is also great light and victory. While one group of men are judged by God for receiving the mark of the beast, another group is rewarded for achieving victory over the beast, his image and the number of his name. The book of Revelation speaks of saints who are overcome by the beast, as well as those who are overcomers, being marked in their foreheads with the names of the Father and the Son.

I would imagine that all who read this book do aspire to be numbered among the overcomers. Great promises are spoken to the overcomers. These promises do not belong to all those who name the name of Christ. Many saints have fallen short of these things, and great numbers in this hour are in peril of forfeiting things that are impossible to value. To the overcomers is promised the following:

Another group is rewarded for achieving victory over the beast...

promises are spoken to the overcomers. These promises do not belong to all those who name the name of Christ. Many saints have fallen short of these things, and great

Revelation 2:7

To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

Revelation 2:11

He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death [which is the lake of fire].

Revelation 2:17

To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

Revelation 2:26-28

He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the na-

tions; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 3:5

He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.

Revelation 3:12-13

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Revelation 3:21-22

He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Revelation 21:1-7

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost." He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and

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he will be My son.

A great deception has fallen upon the church, for a vast number of saints have received the lie that all that is required to inherit all of the things listed as the inheritance of the overcomers is that they maintain their confession of Yahshua the Messiah. Yet the Scriptures reveal that believing in Christ, and confessing Christ as Savior and Lord, is not sufficient to receive these promises. One must also be conformed to Christ, being sealed in their foreheads with the names of the Father and the Son. One must triumph over the beast, his image and the number of his name. The professing Christian must manifest the fruit of a transformed life by turning from sin and exhibiting righteousness.

Yahshua was very plain in revealing the fact that it was not enough to merely be a confessor of Christ, or to even offer up many good works to God. There is only one thing that satisfies the righteous requirements of God, and that is to know His will and do it.

Matthew 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'”

These words of Christ reveal that mere confession falls far short of God's will for the saints. Even doing good and miraculous works falls short, for one can still be self-directed in doing such things. Only this one will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, he who does the will of the Father. And what is His will? That mankind should bear His image and His likeness, subduing and ruling over the beasts. This was God's first command to man, and His will in this matter has not changed. The saint must come to a perfect resignation to the will of God in every area of his life. He must lose his soul life that he might gain the divine life.

There is much symbolic language used in Revelation that speaks of the overcomers. Most prophecy teachers have focused only upon the physical, or carnal, sense of the words, and they have stopped short of looking at the spiritual understanding that is most important. Following is one such passage that relates to the overcomers in Christ.

Revelation 12:11

And they overcame [the devil] by of the blood of the Lamb and by of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.

Many prophecy teachers today understand this verse to be one more evidence that a great martyrdom will take place in the last days, and that many Christians will be killed for their faith. Yet not all overcomers die as martyrs. The apostle John who penned these words did not die as a martyr, but he will surely be found among the overcomers. There is something more than a natural death being spoken of here, and Yahshua revealed to His disciples what it is.

*Not all overcomers
die as martyrs.*

Matthew 10:38-39

“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”

Losing one's life is clearly linked here to taking up the cross. Taking up the cross is not speaking of outsiders killing the saints, but rather it speaks of the saints putting to death their own flesh with all of its carnal desires. Not all believers have, or will, face persecution from without to the extent that they are killed for their testimony, yet ALL saints are called to take up the cross and put the flesh to death.

Galatians 5:24

Now those who belong to Christ Yahshua have cruci-

The Mark of the Beast

fied the flesh with its passions and desires.

Is it not clear that when the Spirit reveals to John an image of a great harlot riding upon a beast, that this harlot has not crucified the flesh? This is why John

Some would not know this death to the soulish nature of man until they saw Him coming in His kingdom.

wrote that the beast would eventually turn on her and consume her with fire and eat her flesh. The death that all overcomers must die is not physical martyrdom, but a daily dying to the desires of the

flesh and to the willfulness of man's soul. Yahshua brings further insight to this matter with the following words:

Matthew 16:24-28

Then Yahshua said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

I would like to point out a great deceit that has occurred in this hour, for I have never heard a single preacher or prophecy teacher share what I will share here. There has been much wrangling over what the last sentence here means. What did Christ intend when He said, "there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom"? I have heard many theories, and all of them have spoken of this as being a positive statement that some would not experience a natural death before they saw Christ revealed in glory. Some have suggested that this was fulfilled when Christ was transfigured upon the mount in the presence of Peter and James and John.

Let me suggest to you another interpretation that is in keeping with the context of the passage. Yahshua had just declared that all who seek to save their natural, fleshly and soulish lives would lose them, and only those who died to their natural life by taking up the cross would know true life, the divine life of God. He then says that some of those to whom He is speaking will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. What death has He been talking about? Has He been speaking of the physical death of men's bodies? No! He has been speaking of the death that is defined as taking up the cross. Yahshua was declaring that among those He spoke to, some would not know this death to the soulish nature of man until they saw Him coming in His kingdom.

These are not positive words He is speaking. They are words of great sorrow and calamity. Christ was declaring that many men would wait too long to experience the death that they were called to embrace. A death to the natural life of Adam. Some would not taste of this death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. This is why we read of such a grievous response from mankind when the sign of Christ's coming occurs.

Matthew 24:30-31

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Do you know who will be mourning the most? It will be those who have been confessors of Christ, but who have avoided the working of the cross in their lives. These will have avoided tasting of death to their fallen nature until it is too late. They will not be counted among the elect, the overcomers, and they will have their names blotted out of the Lamb's book of life. The Lamb's book of life has recorded in it the names of all those who have embraced the working of the cross, who have allowed God to bring them to a conformity to Christ in this life, that they might not have to experience the purging of the Lake of Fire.

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Saints, listen to the words of Scripture:

Psalms 69:28

May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous.

Revelation 3:4-5

But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Revelation 20:15

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 2:10-11

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.

All those who are called as children of God have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. Yet of those who are called, few are chosen. Many will have their names blotted out of the book of life because they have refused to take up the disciple's cross and crucify their flesh with its affections and desires. They have retained control over their lives and have lived according to their own direction and initiative. They have sought the things that will perish instead of that which is eternal.

All Christians are invited to present their bodies as a living sacrifice upon the altar of God now in this age that their flesh might be consumed and that they might come forth as gold that has been tried in the fire. Yet a vast number of saints have protected their flesh and have lived to fulfill the desire of their souls. They have loved their lives and they will lose them.

Only those who have hated their lives will keep them.

Can you see the plain language that Christ is employing? He is not speaking about a physical death to the body, but rather a subduing and ruling over all that is of the flesh and of the beast nature. Some saints will wait too long to subdue and rule over that which God commanded them. When they see Christ appearing it will be too late. Some will not taste of death until Christ appears, and the death they will then taste will be the second death which is reserved for all those who have avoided the working of the cross.

[For a fuller explanation of the purpose of the Lake of Fire, and the understanding that many saints will share a place with the unbelievers there, see the book "God's Plan of the Ages". The Lake of fire is not for eternity as the church teaches today, for this "second death" must come to an end, for the last enemy to be destroyed is death. The lake of Fire shall pass away when its purpose is fulfilled.]

Let us return now to that which is written of the overcomers. John records that "they loved not their lives even to death." Is it not plain now that he is not speaking of physical martyrdom, but of the working of the cross in their lives? The overcomers are overcomers because they have attained the victory over their own bodies and the beast nature that resides in the flesh. That John is using symbolic language to speak of spiritual matters is further revealed as we look at another Scripture relating to the overcomers.

Only those who have hated their lives will keep them.

Revelation 20:4

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Yahshua and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and

The Mark of the Beast

on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

The word beheaded here comes from a Greek word that occurs nowhere else in Scripture. It denotes having one's head cut off with an axe, which was a common enough type of capital punishment in Roman days. We read in the gospels where Herod beheaded John the Baptist in this way. But this was not

A man must die to his own will, initiative and desires that are found in his head...

the only method employed to martyr the saints. Many of the early saints in Roman times were crucified. Some were stoned to death. Many were taken to the forums

and given to wild beasts such as lions. Others were burned to death as "Roman Candles," and there were many other such ways in which the saints have suffered death at the hands of their persecutors.

We have to conclude that the Holy Spirit is not seeking to convey with these words that only those who are physically beheaded are numbered among the overcomers and will be given the honor of reigning with Christ during the Millennial period of the Kingdom of God. Rather, the words used to describe this beheading are filled with symbolism and are intended to be understood figuratively.

In an earlier chapter we read of the overcomers being sealed in their foreheads with the names of the Father and the Son. This typifies one who has taken Christ as their Head, and they have no head of their own. These overcomers have the mind of Christ, and they live no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. In I Corinthians Paul employs symbolism of one's head being related to authority and submission. He writes:

I Corinthians 11:3

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

If a man has Christ as his Head, then this indicates

that a man has no head of his own. He must figuratively cut off his head in order to take Christ as his Head. A man must die to his own will, initiative and desires that are found in his head, and he must take Christ's head as his own. Man must live for the will of Christ, not only calling Him Lord, but living as if He is Lord. He must take Christ's desires for his own, buffeting his body and keeping it in subjection when he should find desires arising which are contrary to the desire of Christ.

No man can take Christ as Head and keep his own head at the same time. God does not desire two-headed monsters. So all those who are overcomers must lose their own heads. This is the spiritual understanding of John's words in Revelation. He is not indicating that the guillotine will be brought back into fashion in the last days, which is an idea many prophecy teachers are promoting. He is saying that the overcomers will be beheaded by receiving Christ as their Head in place of their own head. They will be perfectly resigned to the will of God in their lives, not pursuing their own agenda and goals, but living to do the will of God.

Many foolish things are being taught as truth in this day. Satan is pouring forth a flood of deception to sweep the saints away. The hugely popular books in the "Left Behind" series are promoting many erroneous interpretations of the words of Daniel and John. Tragically, they are encouraging many saints to focus upon a battle that will come from outside of their bodies, when the true battle lies within.

The overcomers will not attain victory by forming some political opposition group to withstand an evil world ruler, nor by employing carnal means to resist his domination. Such speculations are worse than folly, they are damnable lies and deceit, for they lead the saints away from the mind of God, and they inoculate them against the truth.

The overcomers in Christ will attain victory through embracing the cross of Christ. The blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and loving not their fleshly and soulful lives will bring the victory.

May many have ears to hear what the Spirit is speaking!

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Enemies of the Cross

One of the most misunderstood phrases in the Bible is that found in the title of this chapter. The phrase “enemies of the cross” rolls off the lips of pastors and Bible teachers often enough in these days, but it is almost universally misapplied. If you have been long in the traditional Christian religious system of this day, when you hear the phrase “enemies of the cross” you most likely will envision evil despots who rule their nations with an iron hand and who persecute those who name the name of Christ. You may envision liberal organizations such as the ACLU who have been instrumental in attacking public expressions of Christ, removing prayer from schools, and other such actions that are viewed as antagonistic toward Christianity.

Once more we see that the church has set its vision outward toward an external enemy, and we observe preachers lambasting these villains outside the doors of the church while urging the saints to take action and to stand against them. The truth of the matter, however, is that those whom the Scriptures describe as enemies of the cross are much closer to home than the church has wanted to admit. They fill the pews of churches every Sunday and Wednesday, and they confess Jesus Christ, Yahshua the Messiah, as Lord. The apostle Paul had confessing Christians in mind when he spoke the words “enemies of the cross.”

Philippians 3:17-19

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Paul is writing to saints in this epistle to the Philipian church. He is declaring to them that he has set an example before them of how the saints in Christ should conduct themselves. His life of sacrifice and obedience is a pattern for others to follow. Yet, he also declares that there are *many* of those who have

been called of God who are manifesting a different pattern. When Paul considered the carnality of these saints, the reproach they brought upon the name of Christ, and the judgment they would meet with, he was brought to tears.

Paul did not envision some outside entity that was antagonistic toward Christianity when he spoke of enemies of the cross. He defined an enemy of the cross as anyone who was focused upon earthly things and who lived to satisfy their fleshly appetites. In the book of Galatians Paul wrote of the purpose of the disciple’s cross.

Galatians 5:24

Now those who belong to Christ Yahshua have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The cross is an instrument of destruction to the flesh. It is a place where we choose to lay aside our desires and passions and choose instead to live for the pleasure of God. We can understand then that an enemy of the cross is anyone who avoids the working of the cross in their life. It is all those who seek to protect the flesh, and who serve their natural appetites. These enemies of the cross are found everywhere in the church, and it was this fact that led Paul to weep.

The cross is an instrument of destruction to the flesh.

Paul stated that he had often warned the church about those whose god is their belly. We can find these warnings in numerous places. One of the most carnal of churches was found in the city of Corinth. These saints were bringing a reproach upon Christ, even taking one another to court and suing one another over worldly possessions and earthly matters. These saints were vastly different from those found in Jerusalem in the early years who claimed no ownership of anything, but freely shared what they had with others. Instead they were warring with one another over possessions and material things. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers the following

The Mark of the Beast

words of correction:

I Corinthians 6:7-10

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

The church has given themselves so far over to the beast nature in this day that many see no error in appointing homosexuals to positions of church leadership. Paul declared that homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God, so there is only one place

Paul reveals that a covetous man is actually an idolater.

that homosexual ministers can lead those who follow them, and that is away from the kingdom of God. But Christians should not congratulate themselves if they have turned away from the sins

they consider more grievous in this list, for Paul states that those who practice any of the things listed will not inherit the kingdom of God.

A Christian may not give themselves over to homosexuality, and they may even abstain from fornication and adultery, they may not be a drunkard or a thief, but there are some things listed here that appear much more acceptable to the church today. The church does not place the same weight upon covetousness as it does on being a homosexual, an adulterer or a thief, but Paul lumps all of these things in the same list of those transgressions that will keep the saints from inheriting the kingdom of God. Another sin mentioned in this list is idolatry. Many saints think that idolatry is only something that ignorant pagans engage in. Paul reveals that this is not so.

Ephesians 5:5-6

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person **or covetous man, who is an idolater**, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Paul reveals that a covetous man is actually an idolater. Covetousness is not seen as a great evil in the church today. In many cases covetousness is even presented as a virtue. There is an entire host of prosperity preachers today that are leading the church into covetousness, and some even depict the saint who is content with the things they have as being wicked and lacking in faith. Many pastors have encouraged their flock to take pictures of the things their soul desires and place them on their refrigerators, or in other places they frequently look, so that they might keep a vision of these things in their minds and be diligent to give themselves to the pursuit of that which they crave. This is a diabolical evil, and many are being turned away from the kingdom of God by preachers who are proclaiming the things that men's ears want to hear.

How does a believer in Christ know whether he is acting covetously, and whether he is content with God's will and provision for him? It is very easy to deceive oneself in this matter. We may claim that all we have come as a gift from God, and that He desires us to have an abundance of material things and to be satisfied with many earthly possessions. But how did we come to acquire the things we have? Did we submit every purchase to God in prayer? Have we surrendered to Him our spending habits?

I have found that financial debt is one indicator of a covetous heart. The apostle Paul admonished the saints with the following words:

Romans 13:8

Keep out of debt and owe no man anything, except to love one another...

(Amplified Bible)

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Those who have heard my own testimony know that I once struggled greatly with covetousness and I had much debt. The person who desires many things will manifest a willingness to place himself in bondage to acquire the things today that his soul longs for. It was only through much pain that I was delivered from the covetousness that I was formerly given over to. I do not have nearly as many possessions today as I once had, but I am free of all debt.

Many people in the church today view their Christian faith as a means to acquire worldly goods. Paul warned Timothy of such men, and described them with the words that they “suppose godliness is a means to gain.” To answer the question of whether we are free from covetousness, or not, we should carefully consider the words of Paul to his son in the faith.

I Timothy 6:6-11

Godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things...

Do we have the mindset of seeking the things above, rather than things on this earth? Do we live as if we understand that none of the possessions of this world will follow us when we depart this life? Are we content with food and covering, or have we pursued and accumulated much of the world's goods? It might be illuminating to walk around your home some time and make a note of everything you possess that is not related to food and covering. Note all things that are related to entertainment, to creature comforts, to fulfilling some desire of your soul. What things fill the rooms of your home, your closets, your garage, your attic? Have you had to purchase a larger home just to contain all the “stuff” you have been acquiring? Are you like millions of Americans that have had to rent storage buildings just to have room

to put the things that will no longer fit inside their homes?

In reading the biographies of men who have devoted themselves to God and who have been greatly used of Him, I have noted that they rarely had many of the world's goods. Last year I read several books on the life of George Mueller, the minister who lived in the 1800's in England and who built orphanages to house thousands of children. He also supported a large number of missionaries and funded various day schools and paid for millions of tracts and Bibles to be printed and distributed. At the end of his life a vast sum of money had passed through his hands, yet he died owning no houses or lands, he lived in a room in one of the orphan houses he had built, and his furnishings were described as Spartan. At his death he had no personal savings, and all his money consisted of a few pounds that were in his pocket.

Do we have the mindset of seeking the things above, rather than things on this earth?

When we are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and when our focus is upon satisfying Yahweh's pleasure and performing His will, then we are not as prone to the attractions of this life. We will live our lives as servants to God and to others, rather than spending all of our time serving our own selves. Can it be said of us, even remotely, that we have been content with having food and covering? Are we fleeing from a love of money, or are we engaged in an endless pursuit of more of it? Do we deny ourselves the things we want, choosing instead to have only what God desires for us?

Our answers could determine whether we are enemies of the cross, or disciples who have embraced the cross of Christ. Would you describe your own accumulation of the things of this world, and the way in which you spend your money, as manifesting the cross and crucifying your flesh, or is there no discernible difference between your life and that of your lost neighbors who make no pretense of following Christ and being conformed to the image of God?

The Mark of the Beast

There is a reason I am spending so much time in this book in relating our accumulation of the goods of this world with the beast nature. What we spend our money on reveals where our heart is. The beast nature is earthly and it desires many things of this earth, while the divine nature is heavenly and seeks those things that are above. The beast nature is satisfied with earthly possessions, while the divine nature seeks righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The divine nature finds its satisfaction in doing the will of the Father.

The beast nature is earthly and it desires many things of this earth...

The one whose focus is set upon things above will use the things of this world sparingly. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth warning them against being attracted to all the material things that were around them in abundance.

I Corinthians 7:29-31

But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on... those who buy, [should be] as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

The days are truly short, and the Lord is soon to return to recompense every man and woman according to their work. What will Christ say of us? Will He commend us for devoting such a large part of our lives to pleasing self and acquiring things which will perish? Will He be able to identify where we embraced the cross in the area of our desires, so that we could seek His will and desires?

Another reason that I am giving much emphasis to this matter is that the book of Revelation reveals that a majority of the church will fall short of the will of God in these things. We have read of the church in the last days being depicted as a harlot riding upon a beast. This harlot is described with words that indicate that she is materially focused when she should instead have a pure devotion to Christ in her heart. We read of this harlot:

Revelation 17:4

The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality...

Revelation 18:7

To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning."

Some of the outstanding things that mark this harlot are her sensuous living, her emphasis on self, and her great attention to the way she is adorned with the wealth of the world. She spares no effort or expense for self, choosing to lavish herself with everything she desires, and she abhors the suffering of the cross. She desires to avoid all mourning, all suffering, all pain, seeking to spend her days in comfort and ease.

James saw the danger of the church entering into harlotry with the world in his day, and he spoke strongly to admonish the saints.

James 4:3-4

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

All it takes to qualify as an enemy of the cross is to be devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, comfort, or ease. Many are the saints who will be caught up in a pursuit of worldly things when Christ returns.

Luke 17:26-30

And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they

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were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

There was much debauchery in Sodom, even as Paul listed the sins of homosexuality, stealing, adultery and fornication among the things that would keep men and women from the kingdom of heaven. Yet Luke quotes the Lord as saying that Sodom was focused upon eating and drinking and buying and selling and planting and building. Are these things evil? Doesn't man need to eat? Is it wrong for man to live in a house or to plant crops to eat? No, but many people have the attitude of the man of which Christ spoke in His parable:

Luke 12:16-21

And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The saints may reason that they do not have barns, nor have they built themselves bigger ones. The goods of the current age may not be placed in barns, but they are placed in homes. How many saints have purchased a larger home because they surveyed all their goods and decided they needed more room to store it all? The prophet Ezekiel further describes the transgression of Sodom with these words:

Ezekiel 16:49-50

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it.

It is very easy to fall into a pattern of selfish living when we are surrounded by a self-focused society. The excesses of the world around us are everywhere. People are glutting themselves while turning a blind eye to those in need around them. This should not be true of the saint of God, for the child of God should have their eyes turned upon the Savior and a pursuit of Him alone. "The things of earth" should "grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

There is a cross for all saints to bear in the matter of spending, in their acquisitions and consumption. Our life will either be a manifestation of the beast nature that is focused upon acquisitions and consumption, or it will be an expression of the divine nature that is giving and where things of this earth do not have a hold.

Many saints will be caught up in a pursuit of worldly things when Christ returns.

Consider for a moment what Paul's words to the saints in Corinth actually mean. He said, "those who buy, [should be] as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it."

Let us use a house as an example, for we see houses specifically named in the book of Acts as one of those things that the saints did not claim ownership of, but which they were in some cases selling to give the proceeds to the needs of the church, and in other cases opening up their homes for the benefit of the church and the needs of the saints. What would it mean to buy a home, but to live as though we do not possess it?

One clear meaning is given in the book of Acts where we are told that no one claimed that anything they

The Mark of the Beast

possessed was their own. Such an idea is really foreign to the saints today. We may think, "I bought this house and it is mine. It is for my personal use and that of my family. Others do not have the same right to this house as I do." Does such an attitude measure up to the example of the early saints and the example of Christ and the apostles? Does it reflect a mind that is set upon the will of God above all things?

Suppose God wants to send you and your family to another place to minister. Would you be free to go, or are you tied down to your possessions? Would

In our coveting things of this world that we are trading away true spiritual riches.

you reason, "I cannot go for I have a nice home and a good job and a comfortable life where I am at?" If your thinking reflects such ideas then you are not living as though

you possessed nothing. Neither are you living purely for the will of God. Your attitude reflects that you are living partly for God and partly for self, and when these two interests collide you will have to choose which one you will serve. This is why Christ said:

Luke 16:11-13

"Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

The phrase, "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?" were words that the Spirit used to get my attention and call me to repentance. I understood from these words that if I could not act faithfully with that which the KJV Scriptures call "unrighteous mammon," then how could God entrust to me true spiritual riches. If I would not obey Him by giving up coveting, and independent spending, and by fleeing from the bondage of financial debt, then how could God entrust me with any great anointing, or open to me the mysteries of His word?

The principle found in Scripture is that those who are faithful in small things will be given greater things.

Have you ever complained that the Scriptures were not as open and revelatory to you as they are to some other people? Have you ever wondered why some people seem to have a greater anointing to minister the life of Christ to others than yourself? The reason could well be that you have not proven yourself faithful with small things in order that God might entrust greater things to you. It may be that you have not embraced the cross in the area of your money management and spending habits and in your acquisition of things of this world, and because you have not been faithful in things that are "unrighteous" God cannot entrust to you those things that are holy.

The Spirit convicted me that this was the case in my own life some years back, and for this reason I invited Him to bring me to a place of death to those areas of my life where I was not submitting to Him. This led to a painful process of delivery where my flesh was laid upon a cross and my selfish desires and willful spending habits were crucified. At the same time that I began entering into faithfulness in the use of money and in my attitude toward worldly goods, the Spirit began giving me insight into spiritual things that had formerly been hidden.

Saints, we must consider that in our coveting things of this world that we are trading away true spiritual riches. I would rather be a poor and wise man than a rich and foolish man. I would prefer to have riches that are eternal and unfading than to amass a vast fortune in those things that are corruptible and passing away.

The cross is an amazing instrument. On the cross we die to the lower nature with its affections and desires, but we enter into heavenly realms and become partakers of awesome spiritual treasures. Those who embrace the working of the cross the most will gain the most. Those who avoid the suffering of the cross will suffer the greatest loss. Within the church there are many enemies of the cross, and this fact should bring us great grief and lead us to weep. The spiri-

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tual life of the church is at ebb tide because so few have embraced the disciple's cross. May God grant that many might have their eyes opened to discern the incalculable loss that lies before them.

There is a true story that recounts how some of the early settlers and traders of America purchased Manhattan Island from the Indians for some trinkets and beads. Manhattan now is one of the most highly valued pieces of real estate in the world and a news article a while back said that some Indians are suing to receive compensation for this disastrous trade.

There will be no opportunity to renegotiate with God when this life is over. The trade we made will stand. If we choose a few trinkets and baubles of this world over eternal spiritual treasures we will weep and wail and gnash our teeth in grief over our folly. As I look at the church of this hour I see a great heavenly poverty. The majority of Christians have chosen to pursue that which perishes, and like Esau whose natural appetite led him to trade his birthright for a pot of stew, so too are many saints trading away an immense and unfading inheritance in order to satisfy their appetite for earthly things. There is a warning in the words written of Esau:

Hebrews 12:17

For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

Esau did not find within himself the motivation to rule over his natural appetites and the desires of the flesh. His failure to embrace the cross and to put his flesh to death resulted in much loss that he later wept bitterly over. An appetite for things of this world is something that we are born with, and we can choose to either rule over and subdue these appetites in order to seek things above, or we can live to satisfy these earthly desires and trade away our birthright.

There is at this hour still room for repentance, but the hour is late and soon will be over. Seek God

while He may be found and turn away from the allure of things of this world. Hold all things loosely and have the attitude that you do not possess anything here. Do not spend your strength seeking things which are destined to perish, but seek the true riches which are in Christ. The pleasures of this life are fleeting, but those who seek pleasure in the presence of God will enjoy it forever.

If you have viewed the disciple's cross as an enemy to be avoided, then reconsider. The cross is the instrument upon which we slay the beast nature and release that which is divine. Satan despises the cross, but Christ embraced it. We will follow in the footsteps of one of them.

Kings and Beasts

In previous chapters we have looked at God's command to the man and woman to subdue and rule over the beasts. This command is given in the very first chapter of the Bible. We have also read in the very last book of the Bible that there will be a group of overcomers who will know victory over the beast, his image, and the number of his name.

Those who embrace the working of the cross the most will gain the most.

From start to finish the Bible is focused upon the plan of God for man to rule over the beast nature, and we see this message in types and shadows throughout the pages of Scripture. We should not be surprised then to find this same symbolism in the center of the Bible, in the book of Psalms.

Psalms 8:4-8

What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and

The Mark of the Beast

the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

David repeats in this Psalm the same three classifications of animals that are mentioned as being formed on the fifth and sixth days of creation. He speaks of the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish and creatures of the sea. David testifies that God made man to rule over these beasts.

God's report of David is that he was "a man after My own heart." People have taken this expression to mean various things. Some have understood it to

The very first command that God gave to mankind was to subdue and rule over the beasts...

mean that David pursued God and His will and pleasure, while others have taken it to mean that David's heart was like unto God's own. I believe there is truth in both understandings, and that

David both sought after God and His will, and he became conformed to God's image and likeness in many ways.

The very first command that God gave to mankind was to subdue and rule over the beasts, and one of the first things we learn of David is that he walked this out in a very literal manner.

I Samuel 17:34-36

But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear...."

Even while a youth David had begun to subdue and rule over the beasts, both within and without. What David performed in killing the lion and the bear was a symbol of his inward victory over the beast nature. I believe the lion represents pride. We call a group of lions a pride. Satan is depicted as a roaring lion and

we know that pride was his downfall. Paul, in writing to Timothy, speaks of Satan's error. In speaking of the qualifications of one who is fit to lead the church of Christ, he writes:

I Timothy 3:4-6

He must be one who manages his own household well..., and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.

Pride and conceit were the downfall of the man God chose David to replace. King Saul was little in his eyes before he was made king, but then pride took hold of his life and led to arrogance and disobedience before God. The prophet Samuel spoke to Saul of the change that occurred in him.

I Samuel 15:17

Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And Yahweh anointed you king over Israel..."

Saul was once little in his own eyes, even hiding himself among the baggage when the men of Israel were seeking him to make him their first king. Yet Saul did not remain little in his own eyes. He became conceited, and in his pride he became stubborn and willful. He was no longer careful to do those things that God commanded him. He chose to do things his own way, rather than God's way.

We never read of Saul that he slew the lion or the bear, or ruled over the creatures. In fact, in the Bible's first mention of Saul we see him being led along by animals that are noted for their stubbornness. It would seem that this failure to rule over this stubborn animal was a prophetic testimony of what was to come in Saul's life.

I Samuel 9:3-4

Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to his son Saul, "Take now with you one of

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the servants, and arise, go search for the donkeys." He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they did not find them.

Repeatedly we read how these dumb animals, these stubborn donkeys, eluded Saul. Everywhere he looked he could not find them so that he could rein them in, subdue them and take them back to his father firmly in his control. This speaks of his inability to rule in the pride and stubbornness of his own flesh and present this area to God the Father as under his subjection. Saul never did find the donkeys, or rule over them.

I Samuel 9:19-20

Samuel answered Saul and said, "I am the seer... As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found."

Samuel reported to Saul that the donkeys had been found. What Saul failed to do, someone else accomplished. Even so, in the church there are many who are failing to find and rule over the beast nature within them, but God will have a remnant who will do so. There will be those like David who are victorious over the beasts. Both Saul's and David's lives are parables which reveal that God calls many men and women to share the honor of ruling and reigning with His Son Yahshua, but only those who rule over the beast nature will be chosen to continue in positions of honor in the kingdom. The kingdom of God will be taken away from those who fail to subdue and rule over the beasts and given to those who do so.

I Samuel 15:28

So Samuel said to [Saul], "Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you."

As we look at the event that precipitated these words

of Samuel to Saul, this matter of his failure to rule over the beast nature can be seen even more plainly. God had charged Saul with destroying the Amalekites, and God gave Saul explicit instructions in this matter.

I Samuel 15:3

Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ***ox and sheep, camel and donkey.***

It is interesting to once more note the mention of donkeys in this list. The animal that Saul had failed to subdue and rule over earlier, he is commanded to slay and to not spare. Saul was also commanded to destroy the other beasts of the Amalekites as well, their ox and sheep and camels. Yet Saul found an excuse to let the more attractive of the beasts live.

I Samuel 15:7-9

So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

In the church there are many who are failing to find and rule over the beast nature...

What tragedy is in these words, "but they were not willing to destroy them utterly." How many saints shrink back from the cross when God would command them to crucify the flesh entirely? Perhaps they hold onto some area of covetousness, or some secret sin, some lust, or pride. They say, "God, I will destroy that which is unattractive to me, but I will hold onto that which I value and cannot bear to put to death."

The Mark of the Beast

Saints, this is why those who are called of God must count the cost of discipleship. God is not satisfied with those who shrink back from allowing Him to do a thorough work of transformation in their lives. He is not willing that man should leave any area of the beast nature uncrucified. The saints are called to present themselves a living sacrifice that all their flesh might be consumed on the altar.

Observe now Saul's deceit, for it is found everywhere in the church today.

I Samuel 15:13-15

Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of Yahweh! I have carried out the command of Yahweh." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to Yahweh your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Many are the saints who pretend to have carried out the will of Yahweh. Yet these saints have chosen to forget much of God's will.

The saints are called to present themselves a living sacrifice...

They come to God and declare, "I have kept the faith by maintaining my confession of Christ," yet they have ignored God's many admonitions for the saints to be holy, even as

He is holy. They have somehow forgotten that Christ said that all who would follow Him must take up the cross daily, and deny the flesh, and live for God's pleasure rather than their own.

What was Saul's justification for disobeying the command of Yahweh? He declared that he and the people spared the attractive beasts so that they could be presented to Yahweh as a sacrifice. This act of disobedience was supposedly done for God. With such deceit does the church justify her continuance of riding upon the beast today.

The church says, "It is good to love money, for if I have much money I can give more to God." The church says, "It is good for me to have a glorious appearance, to promote myself and tell of my great education and many honors and awards, for then people will think me wise and listen to me when I tell them of Christ." The church says, "It is good that I am satiated with the goods of this world, for then the world will not find me so repulsive, but rather they will be attracted to my embrace and be brought to Christ." The church says, "I must give myself to much entertainment and pleasure, for these things will draw in the lost." The church says, "I must have the same type of music as the world, and the same clothing styles, and I must have as much of the flavor of the world as possible, for in this way I can draw in more people and bring them to God."

Yet God sees through the deceit. The church's decision to spare the beast nature was not arrived at for the sake of God, but for the sake of self. The church has not failed to embrace the cross and leave off her pursuit of the world and its pleasures out of concern for God, or the lost, but because she loves the world and the things of the world. It is a carnal church that would follow God with half measures, and it is such a church who will have the kingdom taken from her and given to one who is better than she.

Here now is a great distinction between the overcomers and those who will be rejected as members of a harlot church. The harlot, like Saul, makes excuses when confronted with their failure to do the will of God. Those who are overcomers will stumble at times, perhaps even badly as David did in his sin with the wife of Uriah. Yet when confronted with their transgressions, the overcomers will respond with quick repentance. When the prophet Samuel confronted King Saul he was met with excuses and justifications. In stark contrast, when the prophet Nathan confronted David we read:

II Sam 12:13

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Yahweh."

David not only confessed his sin, but he never transgressed in the same way again. Saul, however, be-

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came more willful and stubborn throughout the rest of his reign. His failure to repent sincerely and completely led to his being given over to greater error. Saul killed an entire city of priests out of jealousy, and he consulted a medium shortly before his death.

Today there is a group of saints who are embracing the cross and subduing and ruling over the beast nature, crucifying their flesh and buffeting their bodies. They are becoming more and more set apart unto God as the Spirit brings before them new enemies to conquer. When the Spirit shines the light upon their life and points out some area of sin, they respond with agreement, and they turn away from the sin and seek diligently to pursue a course of righteousness.

There is another group, a much larger group, that are avoiding the cross. The Spirit also shines the light on their life, but they make excuses and present justifications for their continued carnality and subservience to the flesh. These do not realize that the darkness in them is growing darker. They do not see the light being extinguished in their lives, and they are unaware of their peril of being excluded from the kingdom of God, of having their place in the kingdom given to another.

Saul and David are pictures of two types of Christians. God is calling all saints to subdue and rule over the beasts and to spare nothing. It is no wonder that Christ is called the Son of David, for what David began to do in ruling over the beasts, Christ completed. Yahshua subdued and ruled over all. May many sons and daughters come forth in His image.

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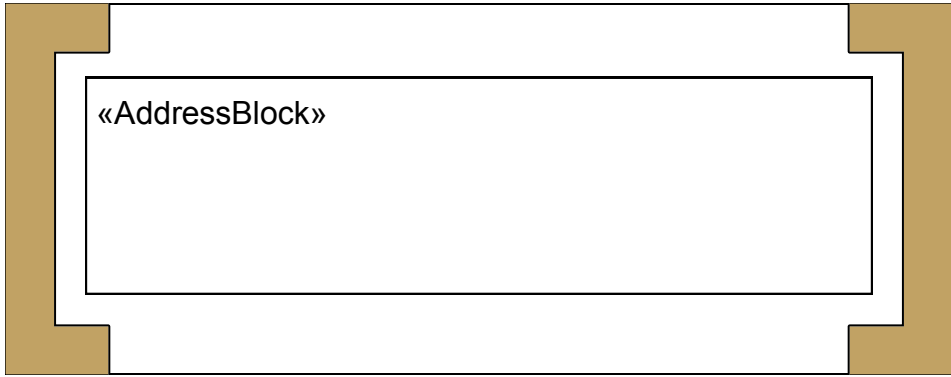
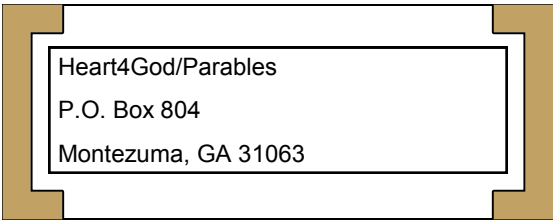
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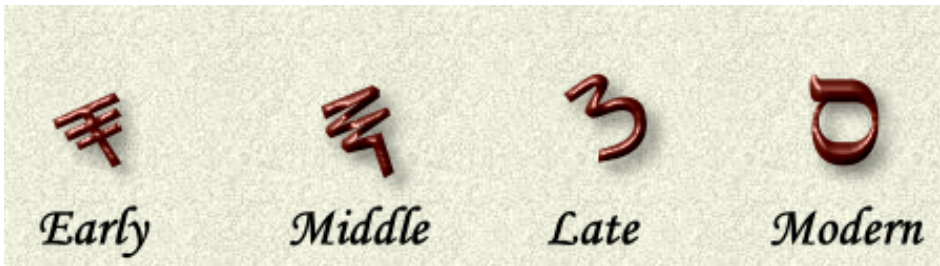
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PARABLES PRECEPT—The Hebrew Alphabet



(Image source: Ancient Hebrew Resource Center’s Website)

The Hebrew letter above is Samech. It is believed to be an image of a thistle, though there is some indication that an image of a fish may have been associated with this Hebrew letter.

Jeff Benner, in his book *Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible*, states that this is the most difficult letter to reconstruct, as there is very limited archaeologi-

cal and text evidence of this letter. The Arabic alphabet does not contain this letter, and the Greek letter that corresponds to it is Ksi.

Words using this Hebrew letter have two sounds, and Mr. Benner believes the letter may have been split into two different characters at some point, which are the letters Samech and the letter Sin, or Shin.

Samech - שׁ

Shin - שׁן

When this Hebrew letter passed into Greek and then into Latin, it became the letter X, which we know today.

Some possible associations with this letter, if it was intended to represent a thorn or thistle, are “a shield” as thorns were used to form a barrier, or a wall to enclose livestock at night. It may have also borne the meaning of “to grab hold or cling,” as a thorn grabs hold of clothing or hair.

The difficulty of discerning the origin of this letter reminds us that understanding ancient language is not a perfected science. There is guesswork involved.