



MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 5, Issue 3

Web Site: <http://minuteswithmessiah.tripod.com>

January 2004

WHY DID HE MOVE?

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulon and Naphthali; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying The land of Zebulon, and the land of Naphthali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. (Matt 4:12-16)

Why did Jesus move to Capernaum? Yes, he moved to that city in order to fulfill a prophecy about Messiah. But why does the scripture specify that Jesus moved when “he had heard that John was cast into prison?” What was the relationship between John’s imprisonment and Jesus’ decision to move to Capernaum?

The most obvious reason for Jesus to have moved at this time was safety. A mentally and politically unstable king had just thrown a prophet of God into prison for the simple reason that the prophet had dared to question his marriage. When a king becomes a tyrant, it is safest to live as far from the king as possible. Jesus had been spending time in the Jerusalem area, and had specifically been singled out by this imprisoned prophet as the Messiah, the king of the Jews. Now, if it is good to be as far away from the tyrant as possible, it is doubly so if the tyrant thinks you want his throne. Thus it was certainly expedient that Jesus leave the area around Jerusalem. Since it was known that his home town was Nazareth it was also good to move to a bigger city, where one might easily be overlooked. This is the reason suggested by Harvey Cox (Common Prayers, p. 168)

That, though, would seem to prove that safety was not one of the considerations. Immediately after Jesus moved to Capernaum, the scripture says, “from that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt 4:17) If you are in hiding from the king, you don’t stand on a street corner and call attention to yourself. The best drivers on the road, the best citizens in town, these are what you tend to become when on the lam. Jesus did not act like a man who was hiding. Especially, it would be unwise to be preaching the exact

same message as the poor preacher Herod had thrown in jail. Of all the things to call attention to yourself, this would be the worst.

So if Jesus was not concerned for his safety, why did he move to Capernaum? Perhaps the most compelling reason is found in Matthew 4:17, quoted above. He did it to begin preaching. When Matthew tells of the move, he quotes from Isaiah 9:1-2. Every Torah scholar will say that when someone quotes a passage, they are quoting the context. Just a few verses after the passage Matthew quotes is a passage that is clearly about the Messiah. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the might God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” Matthew was saying that it was time for Jesus to reveal himself as the Coming One, the Messiah of God.

What does that have to do with John being imprisoned? Could Jesus not have begun preaching before then? Apparently not. We know that Jesus did baptize while John was still free (Jn 3:26). Apparently he was doing some preaching at that time, as well. But it was not until John was imprisoned that he began his mission in earnest. As long as John was free to do the work for which he was born, Jesus was not free to do his work. Until the decrease of the forerunner of whom Malachi prophesied (Mal 4:5-6), the Messiah was to bide his time. Only after John prepared the way and ended his mission could Jesus begin his. Jesus knew when his “time” had come. When it came, he moved to the big city. When it came, he went to where he could fulfill the prophecies about him. Jesus moved to Capernaum.

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JUDE'S THREES

It is a common literary device to use groups of three. Think of such quotations as “wine, women, and song,” “a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou,” or “Winken, Blinken, and Nod.” Dickens used three ghosts in A Christmas Carol. Even in the Bible there are trios: the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), or “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” When I was writing annual evaluations in the Navy I often tried to mention three characteristics, like “dedicated, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic.” Preachers are taught to keep their sermons to three main points. (Some don’t pay attention to that, though.) One person seems to take the threesome to extremes. Judas, more commonly called Jude, structured his letter almost entirely on groups of three, with a couple of pairs and foursomes for variety.

Let us take a quick look at this book. This will, obviously, not be a complete commentary. Jude has much to say to us, though, and he says it in triplicate.

His first trios come in his introduction. He addresses his letter to those that are “sanctified by God the

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Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” Any of those three things would be nice. Sanctification alone would be sufficient, but God has also preserved us and called us. On top of those blessings, Jude wishes that mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to his readers. Paul often opened his letters with grace and peace, including the Greek greeting (*charis*) and the Jewish (*shalom*). Jude’s greeting is perhaps less cultural, but maybe more reflective of the God whom we serve. His greeting also continues. He wishes these blessings multiplied.

Evil People

After a brief explanation that he had to change the purpose of his letter, Jude begins with warnings about people who would lead the church astray. Most of the remainder of the letter, 15 of the 25 verses, describes these people. It is important to note that he is

not talking about people attacking the church from outside, but those who would destroy it from within. While we will always have people who are unbelievers persecuting the church, the greatest damage will come from those who claim to be Christians. People may take attacks from without with a grain of salt, but when our own members act hurtfully that is noticed. That gives people an opportunity to say, “If that is what it means to be a Christian, I want none of it.” The division of Christianity into the various denominations, for instance, may have been Satan’s greatest victory.

Jude describes these evil people in several ways. “*Ungodly men, turning* the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and *denying* the only Lord God.” (v. 4) (Italics mine to emphasize the trinity of accusations.) They are “*murmurers, complainers, walking* after their own lusts, and their mouth *speaketh* great swelling words.” (v. 16) These men were prophesied to be mockers, walking after their own desires (a pair, v. 18); they are those “*who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.*” (v.19) In verse eight he says they “*defile* the flesh, *despise* dominion, and *speak evil* of dignities.” One quickly gets the idea that these people care more about themselves than they do about God. They use their liberty in Christ to satisfy their own desires, both sexual and political. Not only do they show no respect to other members of the church, they disrespect the governing powers. These are people who use the church as a dating service. They use the members of the church only for the business networking available. These people would include those preachers and members who speak ill of the President (or any leader), even if only not according them the respect of using their proper titles.

The people who would bring down the church are compare to notorious men in biblical history. The three he mentions are Cain, Balaam, and Korah (v. 11). Cain committed murder simply because he was embarrassed. Balaam was willing to curse God’s people, and lead them into sexual errors, just to satisfy his greed. Korah showed contempt for authority, setting himself up as equal to God’s prophet. Few sins are considered by men as serious as these: murder, greed, and rebellion. Yet these are the very sins that were creeping into the church, requiring Jude’s warning letter.

In verses 12-13 we find two triplets and a pair to describe the false teachers in the church. They are called “spots” in your love feasts. Literally, the word means that they were rocks or reefs that lay just under the surface of the water. Every sailor knows that the dangerous reefs are not the ones you can see, but the ones that are below the

surface. Everything looks calm in the church, but these people “make shipwreck of the faith.” (1 Tim 1:19) They are waterless (and therefore unprofitable) clouds, driven by every wind. Paul says they become victims “by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” (Eph 4:14) The third of the triplet contains one of its own (or maybe a foursome). They are trees “whose fruit *withereth*, without fruit, *twice dead*, *plucked up* by the roots.” Not only are they barren of fruit, and thus dead, but they suffer a second death. That second death, in this case, is being plucked up. Not only are they already dry, but they will have no root to hope for sustenance.

Next is a couplet. They are raging waves and wandering stars. Those of us who have spent some time on the ocean know about waves “foaming out their own shame.” Normal waves are unremarkable. Stormy waves, on the other hand, stand out from all others because they are topped with foam. You can see them, even in the dark of night. The wandering stars, planets or comets, travel through the darkness. They have no light of their own, like true stars, but reflect whatever light is available. These people have no foundation, but ultimately show their true colors.

God’s Wrath

The author of the letter not only describes evil men, he also describes what will happen to them. God will not be mocked. Those who oppose him set themselves up for punishment.

Just as Jude compared the evil men to historical figures from the Torah, he compares their punishments to historical groups. First he compares them to the people who listened to the spies during the exodus or those who complained about the lack of food. He reminds his readers “how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.” (v. 5) This recalls to his listeners that the mere act of murmuring and complaining is anathema to God. He then compares them to the angels that chose to leave heaven. (v. 6) This is one of the few verses that give us a hint of how Satan and his angels came to oppose God. Whatever their reason for leaving, we do know their end. God has reserved them “in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Finally, he compares their sexual misdeeds to Sodom and Gomorrah, and reminds them of the fire that destroyed them (v. 7). God’s punishments are sure and eternal.

Verse 15 is, to my thinking, one of the great literary passages of the Bible. “To *execute judgment* upon all, and to *convince* [a couplet] all that are *ungodly* among them of all their *ungodly* deeds which they have *ungodly* committed, and of all their hard speeches which *ungodly* sinners have spoken against him.” In addition to the

opening couplet, no greater description of these men can be found than Jude’s quartet of “ungodly’s.” God’s judgement has a purpose. It is to convince (or convict) ungodly men of their ungodly works. Until such time as they are convicted, evildoers may convince themselves that they are not really doing wrong, or that they will avoid punishment. God will forcefully convince them otherwise.

Our Obligation

Because of the potential for punishment, our loving God lays an obligation on those who would rather see the salvation of those who have tried to lead them astray. God would rather they did not perish.

Before we can look to the salvation of others, Jude says we must look to ourselves. We must build ourselves up, pray, and keep in God’s love (vv. 20-21). Without these necessary things, we fall prey to the twin dangers of being led astray by those we would save or becoming self-righteous by comparing ourselves to them.

Once we have armed ourselves, then we may approach sinners in one of three approaches. On some we

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have mercy, because they “are in doubt.” They don’t fully know the truth. Approach two is “snatching” those who are falling into the fire of sin. On the third group, the most serious, we have mercy, but fearing even for our own souls. In all cases there is some hatred. This is the scripture most often paraphrased, “love the sinner, hate the sin.” In order to love the sinner, we must hate “even the garment spotted by the flesh.”

Jude closes with a triune description of God. Our God is able to keep us from falling, to present us faultless, and brings joy. After this he blesses God with a four-part benediction. “To the only wise God our Saviour, be *glory* and *majesty*, *dominion* and *power*.” This blessing is for the triple time of past, present, and forever. This is our God. In biblical numerology he is a three and a four, or a complete seven. There is and can be no greater. Those who would lead the church astray need to know this about God. They need to know that they can not win, because God is God.

HEAR, REALLY HEAR

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deut 6:4-5)

This is the basic statement of faith of all Jews, recited by the faithful at least three times a day. While most people concentrate on the statement of “one God,” it is also interesting to look just at the first word.

Before one can believe in the one God, it is important to hear about him. But hearing is more than just hearing. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; He that heareth, let him hear.” (Ezek 3:27) One kind of hearing is just receiving sound with the ear; the other involves receiving sound with the heart.

Rabbi Label Lam (Dvar Torah, V’aeschanan, on www.torah.org, 8/6/03) tells how he helps his children to get their arms around the word. He breaks down the three letters of the Hebrew word, *sh’ma*, that begins the passage. The word starts with “sh.” To hear we have to be quiet, to be open to receiving the word. The next part of the word is “mm,” or “hmm.” Rabbi Lam equates this with understanding. The final sound is “ah,” which he equates with acceptance, as in “ah! That’s right.” Thus, hearing involves readiness, processing, and acting.

While not disagreeing with the process presented by Rabbi Lam, I would like to look at hearing a little more basically. Again, it is based on the letters of the Hebrew word for “hear.”

We begin with the “sh” sound. This represents the entire process of taking in the information. As previously stated, one must be quiet in order to hear. If you are talking, or even thinking about what you are going to say, you are not listening. In order to hear God, one must be ready to listen to God. The problem

with a lot of people is that they are so busy with things—work, hobbies, distractions—that they are not ready to hear that which is important. “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” (Hab 2:20) The process also involves taking in the information. One may be silent, contemplating his own navel, and hear nothing around him. We must not only be ready to hear, but actually do it.

Once the words are received, one must filter them. This is the “hmmm” process, called thinking. Some people let what they hear go in one ear and out the other. God’s word is too important for this to happen. On the other hand, God generally does not expect blind obedience, or mere going through the motions without an act of intellect. Samuel, Jeremiah, and Malachi chided Israel for performing acts of obedience without the heart. Even in the passage with which we started, God says we must love with the heart and the head. Abraham and Moses have been known to question God. So should we, sometimes.

The final sound of *sh’ma* is the “ah,” or the “aha!” This is the understanding. How often do people say that they have read the Bible many times, but only noticed something in it recently? They have heard and received the word. They have even thought about it. But only after some event in their life do they finally understand it. The Bible is full of such “aha!” passages. God saves the understanding of them for later in your life, or just after much careful study. “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” (Ps 119:18)

Hearing is important; hearing God especially so. Whatever the process, God wants us to hear him. He wants more than just taking in his word. He wants us to work on it. That is part of the hearing, too.

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