

THOUGHTS

BY DOUGLAS W. SCHROEDER
SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY

WHILE THE WORLD WORRIES

S Evidently, as millions fret about viruses and terrorists, the bold and faithful toured Israel. I just returned from what was easily the most carefree, tourist-friendly conditions for pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The tour buses were fewer, and the packed in crowds waiting to enter churches were non-existent. In places where I have had to wait in the previous six tours for up to 3 hours to see a holy site, now we walked up to it literally. Because of the saved time we were able to see an average of one extra remarkable site per day. This will likely not happen again.

P Do not let that dissuade you from a pilgrimage to Israel. Any amount of waiting on site to see where our Lord rode a boat on the Sea of Galilee, preached in Capernaum, made wine at a wedding in Cana, healed a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, or rose from the dead perhaps at what is now called the Garden Tomb is worth it. I wish I had 30+ people with me on this trip. They would have been treated to something extra special, a convenience that is not typical while touring the Holy Land.

HEZEKIAH AND THE TUNNEL HE BUILT

E An extra event for the tour group was working our way through the newer City of David archaeological interpretation center culminating in a walk through the 1,600-foot-long water shaft known as Hezekiah's Tunnel. This king of Judah, who ruled from 715-686 B.C. and who mostly pleased the Lord, had the hidden water tunnel built because of the still long way off, but advancing Assyrian army. Its purpose was to allow the residents of Jerusalem to obtain drinking water from inside the city while disguising the Gihon Spring, the source of the water, from the Assyrians. It is a remarkable feat of ancient engineering, and also a testament to King Hezekiah's trust in the Lord that Jerusalem would be saved from the Assyrian war machinery. Pilgrims to Jerusalem walk through this tunnel which still carries water at a depth of about 1 foot into the ancient city.

E Seeing that place once again had me pay special attention as this morning the audio segment from the Bible I was hearing came from that very chapter, II Chronicles 32, which records the plan and execution of the water shaft. That did not save the city; the Angel of Death (presumably) saved Jerusalem by annihilating a large swath of Assyria's best soldiers (32:20-23). The lesson of the story is clear; people can stave off disaster partially or temporarily, but the Lord delivers permanently. God saved the Jews relentlessly in the Old Testament because He had promised to the patriarchs that He would bless the earth through them, which was the allusion to the divine plan to send the word's Messiah, Jesus. God had to keep the Jewish enterprise going until Christ came. The myriad of Miracles recorded in the Old Testament point toward the plan of redemption in Christ, and the swath of them that follow Christ's own miracles point ahead to His return. Miracles of the Bible are always to be seen in that larger context, and Christians are never to presume God will give them a miracle disassociated with

2022

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their role in the Kingdom of Christ and for His service. When God grants you a miracle, you had best prepare yourself to use it well for His service!

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Hezekiah received such a miracle, a 17-year extension to his life! But as often happens, when a big gift comes, we may be thankful enough in the near term, but arrogant and unappreciative in the long term. Hezekiah became arrogant afterward and brought on more trouble for Jerusalem. You can read the account in 2 Kings 20:12-21, which details how the king showed off the riches of the kingdom to envoys from Babylon. The Babylonians would not forget it, and they came back in 586 to lay siege to Jerusalem and carry off its wealth. They succeeded. The careful student of the Word learns many important truths about God, society, and personal behavior from such accounts. God's wisdom is a gift given in proportion to the person who humbles themselves to study and reflect on His word.

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Many Christians consider books of the Bible like I and II Chronicles to be boring, and not very worthwhile. That is because they are ignorant and perhaps even bordering on foolish. There is a strong temptation in Western culture to disdain the Word of God. Rather than work at becoming a student of the Word, we want quick, easy tidbits that are more like fast food than solid teaching. Shallow Christians thrill to popular preaching's humorous anecdotes and cutesy illustrations, but don't have time to mine the Word. It results in a fluff faith that doesn't really perform well in times of duress and testing. You may not appreciate my diagnosis. However, my calling is not to make you feel happy, but to improve your spiritual health. When there is apathy and indifference, and too often even an arrogant resistance, to maturing in faith, you have a spiritual condition that should be addressed. It's best you address it rather than continue in your spiritual anemia.

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LENDING A HELPING HAND

My souvenir on this trip was a "Yad", a Torah pointer. The word means hand, and the device is a pointer with a hand with the first finger extended to point at the text of the Torah (the books of Moses in the bible; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Jewish readers of the Torah do not touch it with their fingers, as that would diminish the written scroll of the word of God. Rather, they use a device to point to the text. It is another way that religious Jews (today, about 25% of the population of Israel) try to respect the Law (word) of God. It's a nice gesture to respect the document as God-breathed, but internalizing God's Word through the Sermon on the Mount gets us much closer to the Lord's intent for our behavior (see Matthew chapters 5-7. Visit my office to see this peculiar religious object.

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Blessings,
Douglas W. Schroeder