



FEED MY SHEEP

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Who Is Responsible for our Blindness?

Blindness and lameness was the theme of the previous FMS. It is one of the major motifs of the Scriptures and so we shall explore it further in this issue. Thus far, we have looked at the blind and the lame from the physical laws of the Old Testament. We have shown how this theme is applied to us personally and spiritually in the New Testament. We then saw how the laws of the priesthood—concerning blind, lame and other blemished priests—applies to us today. Let us now consider the blind and the lame from the *national* spiritual perspective. We're referring to the nation of Israel in the OT and Christianized Israel in the NT. Do you think it was just a coincidence that the two most immediate forefathers of the nation of Israel; namely, Isaac and Jacob, were blind and lame?!

Genesis 27:1 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, ...

Genesis 32:31 And as he [Jacob] passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

These handicaps of the individual patriarchs foreshadowed and prophesied of the national spiritual handicaps of the nation of Israel. Israel would be blind and Israel would be lame. Israel would not see and yet Israel was to be witnesses for God. What a paradox! Blind eyewitnesses! (An oxymoron, to be sure.) A blind eyewitness is useless to everyone—except God. He actually takes the blind eyewitness and He causes them to fulfill their role as witnesses despite their handicap. Only God can do that. This has played out in history in several ways.

First of all, we point to the fact that even as the nations of the Christian West have carried the gospel to their own peoples for the first 1500 years after Christ, and then to all the other peoples of the globe for the past 500 years; during all this time, they have been blind to the fact of their own identity as the descendants of Jacob, as the Israel people of the Bible.

Similarly, Israel halted. Israel was lame. The history of the OT is clear that Israel as a people always had great difficulty in “walking the walk” as God’s people. That’s why God scattered ten of the twelve tribes seven centuries before Christ—the tribes who never returned to the old land. That’s why God placed the other two tribes in Babylonian captivity for 70 years.

In like manner, even after Christ had come, and over the course of centuries, those dispersed tribes of Israel who had lost their name and their awareness of who they were—but who by then had become known corporately as “Christendom,”—then these people of Europe who were Israelites, *still* could not—as a whole—walk the walk of Christianity. They were, and we still are lame. But it was all in the Plan of God, wasn’t it? How do we know? Well, let’s look at a platter full of Scriptures to establish the facts. Let’s start with...

Isaiah 41:8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

Fact #1: Israel is God’s chosen servant people.

Question: Would it be fair to say that before a servant can carry out his master's will, that he has to be able to *hear*? In other words, being a *deaf* servant makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to be a *good* servant, right? Next Scripture:

Malachi 2:7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts.

Fact #2: Israel is God's messenger. In this verse it says the *priests*..., but we will show herein that it applied to all Israel as well. Israel is God's messenger.

If you were going to be a messenger in those days, one thing was certain. You could not be lame. You had to be able to walk or run from here to there to carry the message. Therefore, being a *lame* messenger makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to be a *good* messenger. Scripture #3.

Isaiah 43:10 Ye are my witnesses, saith YHWH, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

Fact #3: Israel is God's witnesses.

Question: We spoke of it a minute ago: if you are going to be a good witness, you have to be able to see! In other words, being a *blind* witness makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to be a *good* witness, right?

Summarizing then, God chose Israel to be his servants, his messengers and his witnesses. But they could be in serious trouble if somehow they were to actually suffer these handicaps. Let's see what happened. Speaking to Israel, God proclaims through the prophet...

Zephaniah 3:19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

So Israel, the messenger who needs to be able to walk, is lame.

Isaiah 42:18 Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye

blind, that ye may see.

19 Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? [Here is where it is referring to corporate Israel as God's messenger, not just to the Levitical priests.] **...who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as YHWH's servant?**

Not only is Israel lame, but Israel is also deaf and blind.

20 Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not.

21 Yahweh is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.

Whoa! Did you hear that? Israel is a lame messenger, a blind witness and a deaf servant and God is well pleased? What gives? The explanation of this conundrum is found in...

Isaiah 44:18 They have not known nor understood: for he [God] hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand.

That reminds us of what God through Moses told the people of Israel at the end of the 40 years wandering in the wilderness?

Deuteronomy 29:4 Yet YHWH hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.

What a loud and clear trumpeting of the sovereignty of God! What this is saying in both of these verses is that it is *God* who blinds the eyes. It is *God* who makes us deaf; it is *God* who makes us lame... all for *His* good pleasure and for his righteousness' sake.

Incidentally, when I looked up Isaiah 44:18, I happened to glance at the New International Version. I caught a lot of flak from some quarters back in the mid-90s when I presented a 20-part lecture series concerning the various Bible versions. [Still available in either tape or CD version.] After all these years, there is virtually nothing I would change in that series now. I am not and have never been a "King James only" person (as I was accused of being). But I do believe that of the widely-used English translations, the KJV is the best, for the reasons we gave in that series. (And many more reasons that I have learned since then.)

Now concerning the New International Version, I want you to understand this. There is very subtle change in the translation of Isaiah 44:18 which makes an absolutely 180 degree difference in one's theology. See if you can catch it as we give the very same verse from Isaiah as above. Compare the two versions and you probably will notice it.

NIV Isaiah 44:18 They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.

Do you see that very critical difference? This is a pivotal, fundamental and essential point in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Who is it that blinds the eyes. One would never know from the NIV. The NIV translators rendered it in the passive voice and most readers would draw the conclusion that "well, *we* with our own free will must be totally responsible for our own blindness." Whereas the KJV shows clearly that God causes us to be blind.

The truth is that while we have *some* responsibility (as explained on page 4), God is *ultimately* responsible. Why? So that He receives all the glory, as He should.¹

This is just a typical example of scores and scores of places where the NIV, in my opinion, perverts the truth of God's word. The KJV is far from perfect, but it is immediately in a class of its own simply because nearly all modern English versions—and that includes the Ferrar Fenton version, I am sorry to say—they all use a different set of Greek manuscripts as the underlying text of the translation of the NT.

Now to further elaborate on God's sovereignty as it relates to our blindness and lameness, I want us to go back to Isaiah 41. One of the common sayings among Christians, especially in times of trial and testing, is the idea that God is holding our hand. For example, at funerals, one of the things we say in trying to give comfort to the bereaved is that God will see you through this; God will hold your hand. Consider the following passage—a bit long, but necessary in order for us to understand the succeeding point.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteous-

ness.

11 Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.

12 Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, *even* them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.

13 For I YHWH thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, *and* ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith YHWH, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

15 Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat *them* small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

16 Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in YHWH, *and* shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.

17 *When* the poor and needy seek water, and *there is none*, *and* their tongue faileth for thirst, I YHWH will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

18 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, *and* the pine, and the box tree together:

20 That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of YHWH hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

That last verse is a summary of all that God is doing from verses 15 through 19. He wants everyone to know that He, Yahweh, is doing these things. Yet He is holding Israel's hand in verses 10 and 13, and He is empowering Israel to carry out His will in the earth: to thresh the mountains (nations), make the small nations (hills) as chaff, to scatter them, etc. But there is something in this passage which struck me as

very powerful and yet very touching.

To demonstrate this, picture myself in front of you and I have my six-year-old grandchild with me. In this illustration, I will act as God and the child will represent a typical Joe or Jane Christian believer. You see, when we try to comfort others with the words that “God is holding your hand,” that *is* a Biblical truth. But I think we tend to get the impression that *this* is the way God holds our hand: as though God just takes our hand in His and He strokes it, like a mother would do with an ill child, to give comfort.

Or if not that, then we might visualize that you’re walking through trials, and God is right there next to you, holding your hand as you walk through the fires of testing. It’s like running through a gauntlet with Jesus running next to us. (Picture me and the child: we are walking side by side and my *right* hand is holding Joe/Jane Christian’s *left* hand. Or I could be on the other side and my *left* hand is holding Joe/Jane Christian’s *right* hand.)

But look again at verse 10.

I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

God is using the right hand. Now look at verse 13, where He takes our hand.

For I YHWH thy God will hold thy right hand

In other words, God holds Israel’s right hand with His right hand. One way to do that is as when two men shake hands; they are facing each other. But that is a very awkward method to try to give someone a *helping* hand.

Here is the way I think that God takes our right hand by his right hand. Visualize: I am now behind a six-year-old child with the my right hand grasping his right hand, my palm to the back of his hand, so that I am in complete control of what his hand does. Being God and all, I give Joe/Jane’s hand the strength to do what I want done. Therefore, as in the sticky issue of free will, we are doing it, yet God is doing it all.

To carry this a step further, as I use a five-year-old child to represent the Christian believer, then I, God, can have her put her feet on top of mine (her feet

and mine pointed in the same direction) and whenever I walk, I am carrying her along. And if she is blind, I am the eyes; if she is deaf; I am the ears. If she is lame, I am the legs and feet. God is sovereign and we will do *all* that the Father has planned for us.

Another illustration: It is like when you as a father are teaching your 5-year-old to ride a bicycle. You put training wheels on it and then because he is scared, you help him to get up on it and tell him where to put his feet. You tell him to start pedaling, and you might even take your hands and push down alternately on his feet to help him get the pedaling started. You take his hands and place them on the handlebar.

As the bicycle begins to move, you are holding him securely with your hands around his ribs or under his arms, “upholding him with the power of your might,” so to speak. Yes, the child is now riding the bike, but without the Father, it could not be done. And yes, some day, he will be entrusted to ride on his own. That corresponds to when we have been translated into incorruptibility and immortality.

These illustrations were meant to demonstrate visually for you how God doesn’t just hold our hand; he *guides* our hand; he *empowers* our hand; whatever we accomplish, it is due to the power of God. It is also a visual demonstration of the very same principle as Paul was inspired to write it in the NT:

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will¹ and to do of his good pleasure.

And so, to the extent that Israel is blind and lame, it was God who *has* done it; it is God who *is* doing it—for His good pleasure, for His purposes. So what should we say to that, my dear Christian brothers and sisters? ... How about “Amen!” (So be it, Father!)

ENDNOTE

1. For an extensive and detailed study of the concepts of free will and God’s sovereignty, obtain our 10-part series *The Sovereignty of God*. Audiotope album A-102, \$33 ppd. or CD album A-102, \$40 ppd.

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