

A Wife going aside

In this message, we will be continuing our discussion on 'Two kinds of women', under the topic: "A WIFE GOING ASIDE". This phrase - 'a wife going aside' is found in Numbers 5:12-21. Accordingly, we will be reading three or four verses from Numbers 5, taking them as our starting text:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, if any man's WIFE GO ASIDE, and commit a trespass against him.

And a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of husband and be kept close, and she be defiled, and there be no witness against her, neither she be taken with the manner:

And the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled: or if the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled:

Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest" (Numbers 5:11-15a)

Now, this is a provision in the Old Testament concerning the institution of marriage. It relates to the sanctity of the matrimonial bed. A woman (and the man also) takes certain vows as she enters into wedlock with her spouse. Essentially, it is a religious rite prescribed by the Lord through the instrumentality of Moses, used in ascertaining the fidelity or otherwise of a woman.

It is used when for some reason the husband of the woman is in doubt of her faithfulness. It is interesting to note that this religious rite

was used in Israel for over 2,500 years. The entire passage is interesting and it would be profitable for the reader to go through it once or twice. That will be sufficient to familiarise yourself with all the provisions. In another connection, we will be able to take an exposition of all verses beginning from the 11th verse of Numbers 5. But for our present purpose, one or two things would be observed from a consideration of this passage.

In verse 29 of Numbers 5, we are told explicitly that this religious rite as described in the upper verses constitutes the law of jealousy. When a wife goes aside to another other than her husband, there is a divine witness attesting to this. The woman's belly swells and her thighs shrink. What an unsightly figure she becomes! There is much to be seen in the judgements of the unfaithful woman.

They have a strong bearing to what results in the judgement of an unfaithful ecclesia.

Let us look at this briefly. Three things happened to the guilty woman. Her belly swells, her thighs shrink and she becomes a curse among her people. The woman that is not guilty is given a special capacity to conceive seed and bring forth children.

It is important to note that this religious rite is administered on a woman only when the spirit of jealousy comes upon the husband, whether or not the wife is defiled. The true state of affairs comes out at the completion of the ceremony. It is even more curious to observe that in the case of an unfaithful wife, if the spirit of jealousy does not come upon the husband, he is accounted as sharing in the guilt of the wife. But if he is sensitive enough to feel uncomfortable about the wife, he is approved even when the religious rite does not confirm her guilty. In this case, God would bless both man and wife. This looks a little bit queer, but we know and understand that all scriptures point to the Lord Jesus Christ. And this passage faithfully used by husbands year after year, for 2,500 years actually points to Christ and the Church. For we know that the relationship between Christ and the church is set forth in the scriptures under the figure of marriage. And whatever we find here has a prophetic undertone.

Now, we will link up what we have been reading so far to the provisions in the book of Revelation. Our burden is to have an introductory consideration of the harlot woman of Revelation 17. It can be demonstrated that the book of Numbers has a special relation

to the book of Revelation. And, of course, many persons are quite familiar with this situation. For example, the books of Joshua and Ephesians enjoy the same relationship. Joshua 1:3 says, ".withersoever the soles of your feet shall tread upon, that have I given unto you for an inheritance.". That is the counterpart of Ephesians 1:3, ".Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.". There is thus a human responsibility involved in the enjoyment of these spiritual blessings as may be inferred from a consideration of Joshua 1:3.

Coming back to the main stream of our meditation, we are saying the book of Numbers has a special relationship with the book of Revelation. We are shown here that the Lord Jesus Christ takes special interest in those congregation that profess to have a relationship with Him. He will test them for faithfulness now and again. He will do so, whether these assemblies are faithful or not. Note this carefully.

You will recall that in a previous meditation, we examined the faithful wife. We looked at Revelation 12 as detailing a later development among the faithful class of believers. Revelation 17 does the same but showing the future state of unfaithful assemblies.

What is interesting is that the persons who find themselves in either one or the other of these two classes were once in the same assemblies. As the tares are separated from the wheat, in the process of time, the tares are left in denominational bundles. The wheat class is assisted to come into the priviledges and glories of the sign-woman of Revelation 12.

Now, our emphasis in the main is on 'a wife going aside'. In what respect is this woman going aside? Or putting it more correctly, what things constitute the going aside of the woman? This composite figurative woman is said to be in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We answer (the above questions), by drawing our attention to the things we observed the penultimate chapter. In considering Revelation 12, we said that woman came to the exalted position as the

seven great promises were being gradually fulfilled towards her.
So
then, we see the several elements in the glory of the sign-woman of
Revelation 12 as contained in the seven great promises of
Revelation
2 and 3.

Taking a cue from this, it can be demonstrated that the infamy or
shameful estate of the woman of Revelation 17 has its constituting
elements in the things condemned by the Lord Jesus Christ in the
letters to the churches.

Let us attempt to look more closely at these letters, focussing our
attention on what is condemned. In the very first letter, at the
4th
verse, we see Jesus saying to the woman, or the church in Ephesus:

".Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast
left
thy first love."

So, the first mark of unfaithfulness in the wife going aside is
that
she left her first love. We are not told that the woman lost her
first love, but she left it. That is, there was loss of focus.
She
allowed herself to be distracted by other things that seemed to
captivate her heart. This typical church is seen in busy
activities.

So much is commended in her zeal for outward service. But she has
come to be doing these things routinely. Christian service is
motivated by love. Heart affections are of great value in the
sight
of God. Probably, we should read the preceding two verses to help
our understanding:

".I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou
canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which
say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

And hast borne, and hast patience and for my name's sake hast
laboured, and hast not fainted." (Revelation 2:2-3)

Such were the credentials of this church in Ephesus. But she has
deviated from the source-spring of all true service unto God. True
devotion unto Christ, the place of personal devotion, was

abandoned.

The use of those instruments of devotion that the word of God reveals was not given special attention. They were busy involving themselves in some service but they did not know that the first important consideration in our walk with God is that we should have vital fellowship with Him.

In Mark 3:12-15, we find Jesus selecting the twelve Apostles. The Lord's first objective for these men is that they might be with Him.

Even in the natural setting, a woman can be so hardworking in the home, and yet be lacking in the things that pertain to true companionship with the husband. Devotions to Christ rate higher than outward service. Salvation is first and foremost designed to meet the needs of God. He desires our fellowship and dwells in our worship. This then is the first duty of love. When the church is not properly focussed upon Christ, it may result in placing too little premium on ministering to the Father's pleasure in worship and fellowship. So this woman goes aside first in not being focussed on her husband. Something has distracted her. Some other things have taken her attention from the love of her husband.

Next, we go to the letter to the church in Pergamos. There we find two elements that we might use to discuss the issue of the wife going aside:

".But I have a few things against thee because thou hast there them that hold the doctrines of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." (Revelation 2:24)

Now, Balaam is a figure we are all familiar with. He taught or serves the Lord in the aspect of teaching or prophesying. But he does this for filthy gain. Both Peter and Jude addressed this matter in their epistles. That is, he laboured only where there is cash to pay for his services. And, we were told that even though he had

awareness that God would not have him curse the children of Israel, because of lust for money, he taught Balak to cast a stumbling block

on the path of the children of Israel. Applying this to our present

meditation, we can say that this woman is found going aside in the matter of being distracted toward covetousness. In Colossians 3:5, covetousness is taken as idolatry. And we are told in Revelation 2 that Balaam taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel. It was to cause them to eat food sacrificed to idols and commit fornication. Idolatry is one area where the wife goes aside from the husband. Her heart is drawn away from the Lord because of covetousness. From experience, we know that when a believer is properly focussed upon Christ, he is sensitive to things

cropping up in his life that are evil. There is a work of the indwelling Spirit of Christ in this regard. Before things get out of

the way, the Spirit of God witnesses it to the believer who has become acquainted with the voice of God.

When devotion is entered into under a sense of duty, and we do not wait long to come into real fellowship with the Lord, it is sure that

the inward counsel of the Lord will not be discerned. When things are done from a merely religious viewpoint, then there can be no increase of Christ's consciousness, no increase of Christ's life within. And we know that, once our heart is turned towards God, we begin to enjoy those ministrations from the Spirit of God. So, in this element, the wife goes aside in the matter of covetousness, drawn to materialism, because of some perceived gains that she might

get from it. This brings us to the next situation.

The third issue is committing fornication. The reference is to worldliness manifesting itself in unholy ties. We know that James says that, ".ye adulterers and adulteresses know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God.?" (James 4:4). And the sixth verse says that, ".don't you know that the Spirit within you lusteth unto envy.?" This reminds us of what we find in Numbers 5

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".And if the spirit of jealousy comes upon the husband.". Now, there

can be devotions towards things, towards persons which ought to be exclusively reserved for Christ. Even in the natural, if a woman's heart is unusually drawn to another man, it provokes jealousy. If

we

go to the letter written to the church in Thyatira, there again we find this same thing under the figure of Jezebel. We are told that,

the church (in Thyatira) was lured into committing fornication and eating food sacrificed unto idols by the whorish activities of that woman Jezebel.

That seems to go just the same way the letter to the church in Pergamos goes, but there is a difference. The difference is this. In the case of Balaam, we go to the New Testament to know what the Lord is pointing out, while in the case of Thyatira, under the figure of Jezebel, we go back to the Old Testament to see what the Spirit of the Lord is witnessing against. Here it is unholy ties and mixed worship. God wants to emphasize. Some servants of God, unusually blessed by the Lord's presence, get carried away. They turn themselves to demi-gods, and make the people of God to worship them.

Remember that Jesus said through the prophet Isaiah that He would not

share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). So, in the matter of whom she reverences and worships, the wife could go aside. And, even

in the natural, when a woman tends to give so much reverence to another, while at the same time she neglects to do her duties unto her husband, it is a mark of gross infidelity.

We will take the next thoughts and then bring this meditation to an end. The letter to the church in Sardis points to something that the

Lord condemns. Let us read the first two verses to illustrate what in this passage answer to the wife going aside.

".And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before

God." (Revelation 3:1-2)

So, dead formalism is another indication that the wife is going aside. And again, we know that in a natural marriage, either

viewed
from the man's or the wife's perspective, it is the same. A man
may
give his wife all that she seems to need of physical things but
starve her of love and companionship. The woman will certainly
know
that something is wrong, because the husband's affections are
stayed
from her.

In the same way, the church in Sardis was given too much labour
but just little or nothing of real firepower. So, here it says,
".you have a name that you are living but you are actually dead."
The church services of many assemblies are cold and formal. It is
sometimes so superficial that it will be safe to call it mere
drama.

Things are said and done with no real meaning. Nothing goes deep,
yet there is so much noise and funfair. Even in the natural, such
things can be found in the home. A very careful observation may
easily detect the superficial in a relationship. The woman seems
to
be about her duties, taking care of the children, doing this and
that, but somewhere along the line, something is wrong. We are
bound
to crystallise the manifest presence of God in our church meetings.

This is achieved through recourse to prayers and worship. Once our
personal altars, our one-to-God fellowship suffers a loss, the
effect
is seen, not only in our character, but also in our services.

Last, in the letter to the church in Laodecia, we can find yet
another element of the wife going aside. In the 15th to 17th
verses
of Revelation 3, we read the following words:

".I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would
thou
wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I
will
spew thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have
need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and

miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; ."

Here is a reference to the fact that a wife can go aside in matters that pertain to false values. This church is quite conscious of her wealth and she thinks she no longer stand in need of any supply from Christ. She said, ".I am rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing.". Many get pompous and vain when they come to wealth. We know that whatever we see in the natural has its spiritual counterpart. The situation of the church in Laodecia is common place today.

Recall that we are told in Numbers 5 that the guilty woman will have a swollen stomach. That is, the excesses of such a church will be so evident even to the unbelieving public. Her sins and evil ways would become so obvious that all may see it. Many assemblies today are so out of place that even the unsaved know they have run out of acceptance with God. It says, the stomach will get swollen, and the thighs will shrink, and the woman will be a curse among her people.

Now, what we have simply done is to assist us to know that whatever the Lord will do in our day it is foreshadowed in some Old Testament scriptures. Just like the Hebrew may be constrained by the spirit of jealousy to drag his wife to the priest so the-greater-than-man, our heavenly Bridegroom, will do with the churches. Any assembly of people professing to be serving Christ will not miss divine attention.

Just like the Hebrew man, moved by jealousy caused the wife to be inspected, so Jesus Christ is carrying out a divine inspection of all assemblies that go by His name. We all need to take out time to carry out self-examination now and again. There is a call to repentance that the Lord is sounding to all that have ear to hear Him. It is particularly disturbing that many assemblies pay no

attention whatsoever to their condition. There is a need to go periodically before the Lord not only as individuals but also corporately. We would find the seven letters of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 very useful. In the mirror of these letters God's people are always made able to see their true state.

May the Lord burden His people further to give full attention to this important matter of habitually judging themselves in the light of the scriptures. May the Lord richly bless you, AMEN.

We will stop here again for now. When next the Lord by His mercies brings us your way, we will be considering these 'two kinds of women' under another topic: "THE LADY OF THE KINGS." We indeed covet your earnest prayers as we pray that 'YOU' stay blessed in Him who alone is the Bridegroom of His church.