

The Hill (B.A.S.I.C. Training)

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My sixteen-year-old son is teaching me much about life. Earlier this year, we watched the box office hit, *The Avengers*. Did you see it? I came to the very clear conclusion that if kids in America can follow the complexity of the storyline of that movie, then surely they, and we, can understand God's letter written to man. I have also concluded that Hollywood's best attempt at stimulating man's imaginings can't begin to match the wonder of God. After all, He has the ability to know and predict the future without causing it! Have you ever contemplated such a thought? Yes, God predicts the consequence of man's recklessness prior to its coming to pass. As a result, you (having been given "*the mind of Christ*"—1Corinthians 2:16) are capable of seeing through the smokescreen of error that the unredeemed classify as truth. In fact, a letter authored by the sovereign Ruler of the universe makes the events of our day (although horrendous at times) a source of constant affirmation. How so? He, in His Word, gives advanced notice of things to come. Thus, due to God's love for us, He has revealed what to expect when truth is set aside. The events we witness day after day, therefore, are what God foreknew would transpire as man's choices increasingly migrate toward evil. Unquestionably, God's revelation of His pre-knowledge of these events validates His omniscience and legitimizes His right to rule. It also proves that He is truth—never wrong in His foreknowledge of what eventually comes to pass. He will win in the end, even with man free to choose as man pleases. After all, He has declared Himself the Victor over the arrogance and recklessness of the insubordinate. What encouragement!

No nation can experience freedom when sin abounds. Jesus said it best: "*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32). Truth sets people free. Sin, however, enslaves: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin*" (John 8:34). Thus, we should expect the world's enslavement (and woes) to increase exponentially as it exchanges God's truth for a lie and worships that which cannot impart life. To be light in the midst of such darkness is adventure at its best!

Ministry News

As most of you realize, Rick and Donna Underhill have been a tremendous asset to this ministry. They have efficiently managed everything that has taken place here on The Hill for the past five years. They promised us two years when they came, so to have had them three additional years has been a blessing. A few months ago, Rick and Donna sensed a calling back to their hometown, Newburgh, Indiana. They will be leaving in January, 2013. We will miss them more than words can express but trust that this move is God's best for their lives. We have learned a great deal from them, and pray that the ministry that God establishes in their home will be a blessing to many. What wonderful hearts they possess.

Kim and Benjamin are doing well. We continue to homeschool Benjamin, and he is really enjoying playing football for The West Kentucky Warriors (a local homeschool football team).

As was reported in our last newsletter, I have been teaching on Murray State University's campus for the past two semesters. Because the students in attendance are very bright and inquisitive, their answer to one particular question was especially intriguing. My question was, "How do Christians on campus normally determine what they believe regarding Jesus Christ?" A paraphrase of their answer follows: "They, in most cases, evaluate who has the largest platform within the body of Christ and buy hook, line, and sinker the theology that person (or system) declares. They lack the passion to examine God's Word for themselves, so they allow man to mold their theology rather than the Scriptures."

I believe that many writings of men have served God well. The true litmus test for anything authored separate from the Bible, however, is: Are the writings based on the full counsel of God's Word, or are they based on a few verses out of context coupled with the "logic" of man. The latter will never suffice—that is, if we desire to properly view the God of the universe. Yet, the youth of America are buying in to this error. They aren't alone. Many adults have bought in to the same inaccuracy! Let me explain.

We submitted the manuscript of *God's Heart: As it Relates to Foreknowledge/Predestination* (the first of four books of the *God's Heart* series) to a major Christian publishing company. Unsurprisingly, it was the fact that Scripture alone was used to support our position that caught their attention! In the meantime, one of the editors who first read the manuscript has become our ally, seeking different venues that might publish the work. In fact, he recently contacted me and said that the subjects of foreknowledge and predestination are among the hot topics of our day. He also mentioned that an extremely large denomination is presently groping over what to do with these highly debated theological issues. If you should be interested in studying our views on these subjects, we are presently self-publishing *God's Heart: As it Relates to Foreknowledge/Predestination*. We trust that it is a tool used of God for His good.

Since our last newsletter, the new Romans 1-8 introductory course titled, *The Foundational Truths of Romans 1-8*, has been published. Taking into account the recent theological shifts within Christendom, it replaces the original Romans 1-8 study—being more comprehensive in nature. I will continue teaching *Advancing in Romans 1-8* on Tuesday nights beginning in the fall—a more in-depth version of *The Foundational Truths of Romans 1-8*. You can follow online if you like, but it is heavy duty theology that needs the backdrop of the introductory study for proper understanding. This will be followed by a verse-by-verse trek through Romans 9-11, one of the more controversial sections of God's Word. The original Hebrews course has also been revised—and will be published this fall. It addresses the above mentioned theological shifts of our day and contains a great deal more material than its predecessor.

Our retreat and camp schedules remain an encouragement, for God continues to open doors with believers from a variety of locations. In fact, our annual youth camp was filled with young men and women from 10 different states. Since the annual men's retreat this past spring was one of the best ever, we believe that our annual fall retreat on October 19-21 (for couples and singles) will continue the trend. We hope to see many of you there. As a result of the revised Romans and Hebrews courses, along with the new *God's Heart* series, we are being encouraged to host intense weekends of study that cover such topics as Calvinism, Reformed Theology, Arminianism, predestination, election, the believer's chosenness, foreknowledge, sovereignty, free will, depravity, and other related topics. (For those unfamiliar with this ministry, we do not adhere to Calvinism, Reformed Theology, or Arminianism.) It should be stimulating. If you are interested, feel free to join in with the college students who will be attending January 4-6, 2013. They would very much enjoy having you here.

Your prayers and support constantly encourage us. Because of you, the miracle on The Hill continues even after more than three decades. Thank you for being the conduit through which God works to make the dream a reality. We love you.

Thoughts from the Hill

The following was taken from *The Gospels from a Jewish Perspective* study distributed by this ministry. These same resources were recently taught at our youth camp (ages 13 to 18), and the campers' interest prompted me to pass this along. Every quote (from the Talmud, Josephus, and the Jewish Encyclopedia) was generated by Jews who rejected Jesus' Messiahship. Yet, their words validate that He was (and is) Messiah. Have fun as you progress, remembering that Jesus died in 30 AD—forty years before King Herod's temple (in Jerusalem) was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

The Middle Lamp of the Menorah was Mysteriously Extinguished

This event was associated with the Menorah, or golden lampstand (golden candlestick), which was located on the south side of the holy place within the temple. It had seven branches, each branch holding a lamp. The middle lamp of the seven lamps was called the Ner Elohim, the Lamp of God, the western lamp, or the Shamash (the Servant Lamp). According to the Talmud, the three lamps on either side of the Servant Lamp faced the Servant Lamp. The golden lampstand produced light for the holy place, the holy place having housed the following pieces of furniture: the golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and the golden altar of incense (Exodus 40:22-27). In the following quote from the Talmud, the middle lamp is called the western lamp. Note that it was "specially prized."

[The seven lamps] shall give light in front of the candlestick; this teaches that they were made to face the western lamp and the western lamp faced the Shechinah; and R. Johanan said: This shows that the middle one is specially prized.

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, the miracle of the middle lamp (the Ner Elohim) was mysteriously extinguished forty years before the destruction of the temple (in 30 AD in other words). Note from the following that the Ner Elohim was used to light the other six lamps on the lampstand.

The ... "Ner Elohim" (I Sam. iii. 3), was left burning all day and was refilled in the evening. It served to light all the lamps. The Ner Elohim contained no more oil than the other lamps, a half-log measure (1 log contains the liquid of six eggs), sufficient to last during the longest winter night (Men. 89a); yet by a miracle that lamp regularly burned till the following evening (*ib.* 86b). This miracle, however, ceased after the death of Simeon the Righteous, who was high priest forty years before the destruction of the Temple (Yoma 39b).

The Talmud has the following to say about the middle lamp of the golden lampstand, which in this quote is called "the westernmost light":

During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot ['For the Lord'] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine. (Yoma 39b)

These quotes from Jewish sources (Jewish sources that viewed Christ as anything but Messiah) teach that the middle light of the golden lampstand refused to burn the forty years before the destruction of the temple (from 30 AD to 70 AD). It seems plausible that this phenomenon resulted from Jesus' death in 30 AD, Who, on more than one occasion, stated that He is "*the light of the world*" (John 8:12; 9:5 etc.). Therefore, it is not coincidental that He is seen as standing in the "*middle*" of the "*seven golden lampstands*" in Revelation 1:9-16, His "*eyes...like a flame of fire*" (v.14), "*and His face...like the sun shining in its strength*" (v.16). It appears that John saw Jesus as the middle lamp, the Servant Lamp. He later states that Jesus will be the "*lamp*" in New Jerusalem, the "*lamp*" that will hold the glory which illumines the city (Revelation 21:23). This adds a great deal of flavor to Simeon's words—that Jesus was (and is) "*a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of...Israel*" (Luke 2:25-32). Wow!

The Legend of Azazel

The Day of Atonement was the only day throughout the year that Jewish believers could know that all their sins, even those sins "*committed in ignorance*," were atoned for (covered)—Hebrews 9:6-7. You can read about this special day in Leviticus 16:1-34, and as you do so, note two things. First, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies with blood, first for himself, and later for the sins of the people (vv.1-19). Second, a goat (a scapegoat) that bore the sins of the people was loosed in the wilderness (vv.20-22). The legend of Azazel has to do with this scapegoat. The Talmud records the following:

If you assume it was R. Johanan b. Zaccai [who made the rule], was there in the days of R. Johanan Zaccai a thread of scarlet [which turned white]? Has it not been taught: 'R. Johanan Zaccai lived altogether a hundred and twenty years. For forty years he was in business, forty years he studied, and forty years he taught,' and it has further been taught: 'For forty years before the destruction of the Temple the thread of scarlet never turned white but it remained red.' (Rosh HaShana 31b)
During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot ['For the Lord'] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white. (Yoma 39b)

The following is from the Jewish Encyclopedia relating to the same legend:

Day of Atonement— A man was selected, preferably a priest, to take the goat to the precipice in the wilderness; and he was accompanied part of the way by the most eminent men of Jerusalem. Ten booths had been constructed at intervals along the road leading from Jerusalem to the steep mountain. At each one of these the man leading the goat was formally offered food and drink, which he, however, refused. When he reached the tenth booth those who accompanied him proceeded no farther, but watched the ceremony from a distance. When he came to the precipice he divided the scarlet thread into two parts, one of which he tied to the rock and the other to the goat's horns, and then pushed the goat down (Yoma vi. 1-8). The cliff was so high and rugged that before the goat had traversed half the distance to the plain below, its limbs were utterly shattered. Men were stationed at intervals along the way, and as soon as the goat was thrown down the precipice, they signaled to one another by means of kerchiefs or flags, until the information reached the high priest, whereat he proceeded with the other parts of the ritual.

The scarlet thread was a symbolical reference to Isa. i. 18; and the Talmud tells us (*ib. 39a*) that during the forty years that Simon the Just was high priest, the thread actually turned white as soon as the goat was thrown over the precipice: a sign that the sins of the people were forgiven. In later times the change to white was not invariable: a proof of the people's moral and spiritual deterioration, that was gradually on the increase, until forty years before the destruction of the Second Temple, when the change of color was no longer observed (*l.c. 39b*).

Interestingly, the legend of the scarlet thread turning white (the legend of Azazel) signified that God had atoned for the sin of Israel for that year. That it failed to turn white after Jesus' death (if indeed it did) indicated that God was no longer dealing with sin through means of the animals offered under the Mosaic Law, but had already dealt with all sin for all time through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:12). Of course, an unredeemed Jew would draw a different conclusion as to why the thread failed to turn white. I thought you might enjoy this intriguing input!

Events

We hope to see you at one (or more) of our upcoming events: **August 21, 2012**— Tuesday night Bible Study begins (*Advancing In Romans 1-8* at 7:00 pm weekly); **August 23, 2011**—Study titled *God's Heart as it Relates to Sovereignty/Free Will* begins at Murray State University (8:30 to 10:00 pm weekly at the Curris Center); **August 31-September 1, 2012**—Discipleship Retreat; **October 19-21, 2012**—Fall Retreat for couples and singles; **January 4-6, 2013**—College Retreat, plus anyone interested in the above mentioned topics; **January 18-20, 2013**—Youth Retreat (ages 13-18); **April 25-28, 2013**—Men's Retreat; **July 7-13, 2013**—Youth Camp (ages 13-18); **August 9-10, 2013**—Romans Retreat