
A Cup of Trembling

By David Wilkerson

March 10, 2008 "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?... Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which has drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; *thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling*, and wrung them out....

"Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, *I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling*, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again" (Isaiah 51:9, 17, 22, my italics).

In this powerful prophecy, Isaiah tells us God has put into the hands of all nations a "cup of trembling." This cup is of the Lord's doing, and it is filled with the wine of fear, hopelessness and perplexity.

Isaiah was writing to a people who were in captivity in Babylon. He intended his message specifically for those righteous ones who continued to seek the Lord in the midst of that wicked society. It was a word for a holy remnant who had not given in to the materialism and sensuality surrounding them.

Isaiah wrote much about the last days, and I believe with many Bible scholars that his message here applies to the church today. Indeed, it has meaning for all who seek the Lord and love his righteousness in a wicked time. In short, the same cup of trembling that God put into the hands of Babylon, Assyria and the surrounding nations is a cup he has put into the hands of the nations today.

Isaiah says there are four great fears mixed into this intoxicating cup of trembling. Isaiah delivered his message in the midst of troubled, chaotic times, when all nations drank from the cup of iniquity. God's people were plagued with fears during that time, fears that we find mirrored in our own day:

1. *There was the daily personal fear of losing everything because of the chaotic world conditions.*

The Lord said to his remnant in Babylon, "(Thou) hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy" (Isaiah 51:13). God was telling his people, in effect, "You think your bread is going to run out, that you're going to fall into a pit of poverty. You have fixed your eyes on your oppressor rather than on your Provider."

The fact is, some of these same people were children when they saw their parents lose their homes in Israel. They had had all their goods and possessions taken away by the invading Babylonians. Now there were threats that the Persians were about to invade Babylon and bring it down. And that made God's people feel powerless again. They had to stand by and watch as an international crisis caused the society around them to tremble.

Fear had laid hold of these Israelites' hearts and it gripped them continually. Their days were filled with an ever-growing fear of collapse, that what they had built up during their time of captivity would soon be taken away. Can you imagine the scene? Here were God's special, favored people, praying and seeking his face, yet all the while they drank from a cup of trembling fear. They wondered, "How are we going to survive? How will we provide for our families?" It was purely a fear for survival.

2. *They also feared losing their children to the Babylonian spirit.*

“Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets” (51:20). Worry had spread among godly Israelite parents over their children. This fear became so overwhelming that it caused a kind of drunkenness among the most faithful ones. In short, they had watched their children grow less and less sensitive to God in the midst of wicked Babylonian society. The young people were becoming hardened as they gave themselves over to sensuality, materialism, lusts of the flesh. Finally, the Lord sent a “fainting” among these youth as a rebuke for their apostasy.

3. *They feared the awful calamities and terror taking place in the nations surrounding them.*

“These two things are come unto thee; who shall be sorry for thee? Desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword [terrorism]” (51:19). Isaiah doesn’t provide a list of the chaotic crises facing God’s people at the time. But he does say these events added to their cup of trembling. The crises on the international scene only added to their anxieties over their personal crises.

4. *There was no leader to guide them out of the chaos.*

“There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons she hath brought up” (51:18). There was no king, no prince, no political leader who could bring hope to the people. Nobody possessed the answers that were so desperately needed. Instead, false prophets abounded, telling lies and prophesying prosperity while building up their own personal fortunes. There wasn’t a true voice in the land to bring them any peace or hope.

God’s people sent up a cry to him, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord” (Isaiah 51:9). “Awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old” (Isaiah 51:9). Make no mistake: this was an accusatory cry. It implied that God had been sleeping, unconcerned about his people. They were saying to him, in effect, “Lord, why don’t you act? Where is your promised power? Take action on our behalf, the way you did for your people at the Red Sea. Do for us now what you did in ancient times.”

Think about what God’s people were saying here. They shouted accusingly to the One who never slumbers nor sleeps, whose arm was always outstretched on their behalf, “God, wake up!” *Think about this.* These same Israelites had preached often about a mighty God of past miracles. Yet they had little faith in his willingness to work wonders for them now, in their present crisis.

Tell me, is the church today any different? We also preach great sermons about the Lord’s power in ages gone by: a God who brought water out of a rock, who provided bread from heaven, who raised the dead. But like his people in Babylon, we have little faith in the Lord’s willingness to work wonders in our present hour of need. We sing praise choruses about how mighty he is, we preach sermons on how he answers prayer. Yet, all the while, we worry about where our next paycheck is coming from; we fret over our children; we obsess about how we’ll pay our mortgage. We, too, drink from a cup of trembling, filled with thoughts of unbelief.

The cup of trembling that God has put in our hands today holds the same fears as it did for his people in Babylon. Consider the similarities between our own fears and those of the Israelites in Babylon. I see us being overwhelmed by the same four fears that plagued Israel:

1. *There is a daily fear of losing everything.*

The United States is experiencing the worst housing crisis since the Great Depression. Home values

have dropped a greater percentage than at any time on record. One-and-a-half million people are at risk of losing their homes.

Our largest, most trusted banking institutions are having to be bailed out by Arab and Chinese money. China recently put \$650 billion into our banking system to save it, and also had to bail out one of our nation's largest insurers.

The sinking economy has become the number one concern, even greater than the Iraq war or the threat of terrorism. The stock market is on a roller coaster ride, with warnings on all sides about a deep recession to come. Even as Congress votes to send checks to every American household, in order to stimulate the economy, people are wary about spending it.

2. *There is a mounting fear over the loss of our children.*

College campuses are drowning in alcohol, with a growing epidemic of binge drinking. Even in wealthy suburban high schools, it is hard to find students who don't smoke pot or drink heavily; many have already developed severe addictions. Crystal meth, the new cheap-and-easy drug, is sweeping cities and small towns, with an entire generation falling into its hellish grip. One former addict, whose drug use drove him to the brink of suicide, told me the effects of crystal meth were like taking 1,000 snorts of cocaine.

As the number of school shootings have mounted in recent years, parents are gripped with fear as they send their children to college and high schools, even private ones. In the wake of the shootings at an Illinois university, a wealthy father hired a surveillance helicopter to hover over the college where his daughter is enrolled. The campus was experiencing unrest, and he wanted his daughter to be rescued in case shootings broke out there.

I am a father and grandfather whose heart grieves over the generation of young people who have been taken captive and held hostage by the devil. Like other parents, I am tempted to be overwhelmed by fear over all these things. But if I allow fear to grip my heart, I will end up drinking the dregs.

3. *There is trembling over the desolation, famine and terrorism taking place all over the world.*

Reports say that 50,000 people are starving to death in the Congo. Ethnic cleansing in Sudan has displaced over 300,000 men, women and children. Kenya is being terrorized by brutal violence, with multitudes being slaughtered in cities and villages. Chad is enduring a civil war. Nigeria is falling into societal chaos. The Middle East continues to boil in a cauldron of terror and fear.

May God break our hearts over these tragedies and unrest. Our ministry is in touch daily with contacts in Kenya, who report that churches and tribal leaders are calling for unity amid the chaos.

4. *The whole world today is looking for a savior, a leader who will appear with solutions to these mounting problems.*

The European Union is making plans to install a "super president" who will have unprecedented powers and raise up a military force. Meanwhile, the world awaits the appearance of an Answer Man. One politician after another appears making incredible promises, boasting he will put everything in order. Hopes rise with each new face that comes on the scene. But every leader who emerges will end

up having no clue. Each end-all solution will be exposed as smoke and mirrors. This string of disappointments will set the stage for the Antichrist.

Isaiah tells us that not even the “sons of the church” can offer leadership. Think about it: in every presidential race, politicians boast they are sons of the church. Consider the presidential candidates who have run in the current campaign: one candidate was a Mormon, another a Baptist minister, another Church of Christ. All of them talk about Jesus and carry Bibles, and one carried a copy of *The Purpose Driven Life*. Yet Scripture tells us, “There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up” (Isaiah 51:18).

No one can agree on what to do about the worsening economy, the war and the health care crisis. The mounting problems are completely beyond them. The truth is, there is only one Answer Man in this universe: our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He alone can take us by the hand and lead us to peace, hope and victory.

What is God’s answer to this cry for him to act? What does God promise to do about our cup of trembling? Isaiah tells us, “Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine” (Isaiah 51:21). Here is a call for us to take notice, from “thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people” (51:22). The Lord is saying, in essence, “I have a word for all who love righteousness, who have been seeking me, yet who have been intoxicated by drinking in fear.”

“Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again” (51:22). God declares, “I have made provision for you never again to have to drink from the cup of trembling. Only the ungodly will drink from my cup of fury. But I have provided for you to drink from my fountain of life.”

Beloved, the Lord never intended for his people to live in panic or trembling fear. Even in the Old Testament, the Lord had a people who trusted in his promises and were unmoved by the chaos all around them. We see this in the life of the prophet Habakkuk, a man given a vision of “the end” (Habakkuk 2:3).

Habakkuk saw a people in the last days who would wear themselves out pursuing greed and covetousness. According to his vision, a dreadful spirit of violence would prevail in that time (see 1:9). Habakkuk said of it all: “The cup of the Lord’s right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory” (2:16).

We know that a prophet always speaks to his own generation first. Yet, according to Habakkuk himself, this prophetic word is also meant for our generation. He tells us, “The vision is yet for an appointed time, *but at the end it shall speak, and not lie*” (2:3, my italics). Habakkuk was seeing a cup of trembling: “When I heard, my belly trembled...I trembled in myself” (3:16).

Here was a godly, praying prophet who for a season was so overwhelmed by awful events that even he trembled. But the Spirit came upon Habakkuk, causing him to prophesy: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places” (3:17–19).

God removed the cup of trembling from his servant Habakkuk. And he will do likewise with all his faithful ones today.

The Lord promised to remove the cup of trembling out of the hands of his people, but with a condition. God's remnant had been faithful to seek him. But the Lord was looking for something from them now that went beyond merely seeking him. Remember, their cry was, "Lord, awake! Rouse yourself!" How did God respond to this cry?

He came back with this word: "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury" (Isaiah 51:17). In other words: "No, you wake up, Israel. It is you who sleeps, who has become drunk on fear." "I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand... Thou art my people.... [Yet] thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out" (51:17).

I hear from so many believers who have drunk the dregs of the cup of despair. They have faced so many traumas and endured so many crises they are now exhausted. They are so weighed down that they think one more worry, one more fear, will crush them beyond hope. They have come to a breaking point, the very end of themselves.

What does God say to such a fearful people who tremble with anxiety? What is his prescription for those whose hearts are failing with fear, whose eyes are fixed on the calamitous things coming upon them? He gives them this word: "Awake! Stand up!" (see 51:17). Here is the condition that God puts on us so that he may remove the cup of trembling from our lips: "Get up! Take a stand!"

Beloved, with everything that is coming — with evil men growing more vile and wicked, with economic crises continuing to mount — God's people need more than uplifting messages. They need more than sermons that pump up a short-lived faith. A man wrote to me, "Your recent messages seem repetitious. They are one message after another trying to encourage despairing believers. It sounds like few know how to lay hold of a faith that doesn't have to be constantly pumped up. Do they not know their Bible?"

This was God's very concern about Israel. What was the Lord's answer to their accusation? He told them, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man which shall be made as grass" (Isaiah 51:12). In other words: "I have put my words in your mouth. I have covered you with my hand. I have pledged that you are my people. But still you won't be persuaded that I will be faithful to perform the Word I have spoken to you. You still fear men who will fade like the grass."

Paul preached, "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3). All believers are given a portion or degree of faith. And that portion must be built up into an unshakable, unwavering faith. How does this happen? As faith grows, it is strengthened in one way only: by hearing and trusting in God's Word.

The Lord would never ask us to do what is impossible. And it is possible for us to stir and rouse ourselves, so that we ask, "Why am I so fearful? Why am I on this roller coaster of up-and-down despair? Why does the future cause panic in my soul?"

Here is why that has happened: it is because we have not fully committed our lives, our families, our health, our jobs, our homes into God's faithful hands. We have not made the leap of faith that

determines, “My Lord is true and faithful. Though I have failed countless times, he has never failed me. Come what may, I will cast my life and future into his care.”

How are we able to do this? By embracing this word he has given us: “Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again” (Isaiah 51:22). He is saying, in essence, “I am not asleep. I am the same God who opened the Red Sea, who raises the dead, and who has made provision for you. My people are not meant to live in bondage to fear.”

The cup of trembling is removed when we take a stand, waking up to our need to accept God’s Word. As we take this stand of faith, we will face sudden jolts of fear. But we are to stand up to those fears — to lay hold of God’s promises and be fully persuaded he is able to keep what we have committed to him. Then we will drink no more of the wine of despair.

The fact is, the darker the days become, the more God’s people must live by such faith. Otherwise, we make God out to be a liar whenever we panic and fear. A teenage girl demonstrated such faith powerfully, as reported in a recent story in *Newsweek*. A plane flying from Newark to Paris flew into heavy turbulence, and the passengers became panic-stricken and began screaming. Amidst it all, the sixteen-year-old girl sat buckled in her seat, quietly reading her Bible. Later she was asked why she wasn’t afraid when everyone around her was trembling in fear. She replied, “My Bible promised me God would take care of me. So I just prayed and trusted.”

Right now, the world is heading into great turbulence. There will be events and chaos that naturally bring panic and fear. But God has said to us, “My Word is in you. You are covered under the shadow of my hand. And YOU ARE MY CHILD.” It is time for us to fasten our seatbelt, open our Bible and talk to our Father through it all. He has said we are not going down: “I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved” (Acts 2:25).

I urge you, make this powerful word from Isaiah your own:

“Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:26–31).

Copyright/Reproduction Limitations: This data file/publication is the sole property of World Challenge, Inc. It may be printed in its entirety for the reader's personal use or to pass on to family and friends. It may not be altered or edited in any way and all reproductions of this data file/publication must contain this copyright notice. This material is not to be posted or transmitted publicly/electronically on any Web site, Web page or FTP site other than: worldchallenge.org, davidwilkerson.org or tsculpitseries.org

© 2008 World Challenge, Inc., PO Box 260, Lindale, Texas 75771