

“To the Law and to the Testimony”

Intro: Sometimes you're in a public place minding your own business and suddenly you find yourself party to a conversation you didn't plan to enter. I was eating my lunch this week when two ladies sat in a booth near me at the restaurant. The lady doing most of the talking was aimed straight at me and her voice carried easily to the place where I was sitting. I entered her conversation unintentionally and to some degree disturbingly.

She spoke in a clearly British accent and quickly it became evident that she was discussing a “reading” she had just experienced. You've seen them, those neon signs on the side of the road at the front of a little white shack that says, “psychic reading or palms read”.

The lady had been quite impressed with the reader's ability to describe her past. She was, to use her British colloquialism, “spot on” about that. But she was exploring with her friend the cryptic prediction that there was a “relationship” in her future and that the person apparently was someone she already knew. So the two ladies were agonizing together over this newly discovered information from the palm reader. And in a sense I was agonizing too—over two human beings so desperate for information that they would resort to a “palm reader” to get some clarity about their lives.

The whole experience reminded me of a passage in the Scripture (Isaiah 8).

A People in Desperate Need of Answers

Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. When it was reported to the house of David, saying, “The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,” his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind. (Isaiah 7:1-2)

The people of the southern kingdom of Judah under their King Ahaz found themselves in a frightful political situation. The kingdoms of Syria and Israel to the north had agreed together to form an alliance against the Assyrians coming from the east. To further add to their power they wanted to overthrow the kingdom of Judah and set another king over it, so that the three kingdoms could unite in alliance against the Assyrians.

What may have seemed to be a politically expedient thing to do was in fact a very unfaithful thing to do. Ahaz and the people were weakening in their resolve to stand firm and trust in the Lord to fulfill His covenant promise to protect them. God sent messages by Isaiah to the king to urge him to trust in the words of God, even offering to perform signs to relieve his fears. But apparently Ahaz and the population in general did not believe the prophet. Instead they accused him of “conspiracy”, sympathizing with the enemy, and rejected the revelation of God; instead they wanted to hear what

“alternative sources” of information, including the spiritists and mediums among them, had to say. What can they tell us about the future?

In Isaiah 8 God responds to Ahaz’ and the peoples’ unbelief by solemnly predicting that because they had not trusted in the Lord but rather in their politics and false sources of information they would suffer the consequences. The Assyrians would come like a flood and all but destroy the kingdom.

Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks. Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. (Isaiah 8:6-8)

But in this setting God reserved a special message of encouragement to Isaiah and His disciples!

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. ...And when they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. (Isaiah 8:16,19-20)

This powerful exhortation reveals a number of important lessons.

God has always made available to His people a basis for faith in Him and instructions for their conduct!

The “testimony” refers to the evidence God had given to lead His people to trust in Him.

The “law” refers to the specific counsel or instruction given by God in the Law of Moses that was intended to guide man’s decisions and conduct.

Just as God had given his word to the people then, so He gives His word to us now. He has given us reasons to trust in His guidance.

Satan seeks to discredit the revelation of God and offer “alternative” sources of guidance.

Of course in the ancient world a common source of such misinformation were the false prophets that used occasions of crisis to pad their pocketbooks and elevate their position. But another source of misinformation was the occult arts accompanying the idolatry of the times. This “misinformation” came in the form of astrology, necromancy, and spiritism. In this case, the people wanted to consult mediums and spiritists for guidance in this important decision. These things still exist and are becoming more prominent in our society. They are being given increasing legitimacy by talk shows and magazines; and people like the lady I mentioned seek to find answers in them.

In times of uncertainty God's people must resist the temptation to seek answers outside the revelation of God.

God's instructions to Isaiah were that He and His disciples must "bind" and "seal" the testimony and law of God and to resort only to it for guidance or light in the face of uncertainty.

The reason for this is clear. Why asks someone who has no light to guide you through a dark place? What help can the dead give to those who are still living?

Instead they should look to the clear and light-giving truth He has revealed for answers to their questions.

Should not a people consult their God?

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

(James 1:5)

Pray to God that He will show you the answers you need and patiently trust in His providence.

Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Go directly to the Scriptures and look for the teaching on the issues that concern you. Observe those whose life indicates wisdom and seek from them counsel in applying God's word.

Conclusion: Of course, there are times in life when people don't know what to do. And the lady serves to illustrate a common problem among us human beings. Why do people rush to learn what they cannot know and ignore what is freely given to them? Why do they ignore the only real source of illumination in this life and resort what can offer them no real help?

Your future is not in your palm; it's in His palm! To the law and to the testimony that He has given!