

Tidal Defenses

By John Plunkett – November 19, 2011

One day, back in the summer, I was sitting down at our local beach and saying my prayers, when a young family came onto the beach – a Mom, a Dad, and a young boy. They were all “loaded to the gunwales” with their beach paraphernalia – folding chairs, toy boats, buckets, shovels, and other sand toys.

They made their base on a little isthmus of sand jutting out from a larger pebble beach. This looked like an idyllic spot for a sunny summer’s morning. Perhaps they thought that they could spend the whole day there. But this was not to be, because the tide was coming in!

Very slowly, inch by inch, minute by minute, their little isthmus of sand was transformed into a little island of sand. Then, once it had become an island, the island itself began to shrink as the tide made headway.

Eventually, the family found it necessary to abandon their little, sandy haven, and to find another spot further up the beach.

Some time ago, I gave a sermon entitled “Islands and Offenses.” In it I pictured our local islands of the British Columbia coast as representing the various scattered “branches” of God’s church at this time in our history. Also, in that sermon I pictured the surrounding ocean water as symbolizing the non-Christian world out there, Satan’s world, surrounding our Church of God islands.

Today, I would like to use the same symbolism – the sea representing the world, and the aforementioned tiny sandy island, where the family where, representing any one of the many branches of God’s church. The purpose of this sermon is for us to learn some spiritual lessons from sand, and also to encourage you to defend your tiny Church of God island by building on the rock the foundation and the corner stone, that is Jesus Christ.

Let us look first at sand, as it was important to Abraham. In many scriptures, in both the Old and the New Testament, God repeatedly promised that the people of physical Israel would be as many as the grains of sand on the sea shore.

This first scripture is actually a repetition of God’s initial promises to Abraham, or Abram as he was back then.

Genesis 22:17 "Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

Ten chapters later, and still in the book of Genesis, we read the same promise. It is the same promise, but it has now been handed down to Jacob.

Genesis 32:12 "For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

Did God fulfill this promise? Well yes He did, at least partially. Here we come to Solomon's time, and this is what we see:

I Kings 4:20 Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude...

Centuries after this, the author of Hebrews, we think that it might have been Paul, repeated this partial fulfillment.

Hebrews 11:12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

You know brethren, as well as I do, that sadly just as Solomon lost much of his God given wisdom, due to his excessive fraternizing with the heathen women and their ways, so did Israel as a whole commit spiritual adultery. We need to learn from their bad examples.

Isaiah 48:17-19 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go. Oh, that you had heeded my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants also would have been like the sand, and the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; his name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me."

As a punishment for their idolatry and their other sins, God actually deferred the complete fulfillment of His promises, in fact He even pruned Israel's population back.

We can read about this in what we can think of as a bad news good news prophecy.

Isaiah 10:11, 19 As I have done to Samaria (representative of the Northern House of Israel) and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem (represented as the Southern House of Judah) and her idols?" Then the rest of the trees of his forest... *{i.e. many people... a different analogy than that of sand of the sea shore}*... will be so few in number that a child may write them.

Now, in verse 20, we read of a transition time going from the bad news to the good news, because of the future repentance of the people of Israel and Judah.

Isaiah 10:20-22 And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (There is the repentance part of it.) The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the

Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

So over and over again he gives that term remnant.

At the time of their invasion and captivity by Assyria, Israel's numbers were apparently reduced to a mere remnant. Evidently the Assyrians left a tiny remnant of the Northern House of Israel in their homeland and likewise in the House of Judah later on.

What is a remnant? According to the dictionary it is a "tiny remainder, a relic, a leftover, a residue, a trace, or a vestige." It is true, as we know, that Israel's numbers did later increase in their post-captivity homes (throughout Western Europe, the British Commonwealth countries, and the United States). This happened as God's deferred promises to Abraham unfolded.

Let us look at today, the present and the future. I do not know whether you know it, but recent statistics prove that the modern are again going into another period of negative population growth. Why? For what reason? Our nations are bringing it upon themselves because of continuing idolatry, selfishness and heathenism in our lands. And direct disobedience to God's repeated command. One of God's very first commands to human beings (Genesis 1:28) is the command to be fruitful and multiply. You would think that would be something that human beings would like to do. Is that important? You bet it is. God has that command, "Be fruitful and multiply" repeated fourteen times in the scriptures. To disobey it is a great sin, and this great sin *will* come back to haunt the people of modern Israel.

God forewarns this through the prophet Hosea. When our peoples eventually come to realize the grave and dangerous error they have made in this regard, it will be too late for them, because God says that He will (at least temporarily) prevent their fruitfulness from returning, and they will once again be reduced to a mere remnant of their former numbers, and hence, a remnant of their strength and power.

Hosea 9:11-13 As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird—No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception! Though they bring up their children, Yet I will bereave them to the last man. Yes, woe to them when I depart from them! Just as I saw Ephraim like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place, So Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer."

I wonder, brethren, is that a reference to abortion.

Hosea 9:14-17 Give them, O LORD—What will You give? Give them a miscarrying womb And dry breasts! "All their wickedness is in Gilgal, For there I hated them. Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more. All their princes are rebellious. Ephraim is stricken, Their root is dried up; They shall bear no fruit. Yes, were they to bear children, I would kill the darlings of their

womb." My God will cast them away, Because they did not obey Him; And they shall be wanderers among the nations.

That is a pretty strong warning, brethren, to our people.

When modern Israel does come to wake up, and realize the seriousness of this grave and dangerous error it will be too late. Because God says that He will, at least temporarily, prevent their fruitfulness from return an that they will once again be reduced to a mere remnant of their former numbers, and hence to a remnant of their former strength and power.

This prophecy seems to be starting to come to pass right now in our day.

What about *spiritual* Israel – the Israel of God, what about the Church of God? Could these prophecies also apply to us, brethren? Yes, they could. The Apostle Paul quoted some of these verses in Isaiah.

Romans 9:27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved.

It appears that a mere remnant of *physical* Israel would be initially called into God's true church and called to salvation (plus some Gentiles, of course, who would be grafted into Israel, we read about that in Romans 10).

And this is true. It has already come to pass. We just have to look around us to be aware of the tiny percentage of our modern physical Israelite brethren who have been called into spiritual Israel, the Church of God, and therefore called to spiritual salvation.

But even within *spiritual* Israel – even within God's true church, is it that a mere remnant will be brought to full term? Remember that Jesus Christ said, "Many are called but few are chosen." Brethren, this is a frightening possibility. Even the 144,000 that we read about in the book of Revelation is a drop in the bucket. Again, let us look around us and consider the great falling away that has already taken place since Mr. Armstrong's death.

But that is the bad news! Now, here is the good news for the future:

Jeremiah 33:22 As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.

Is this referring only to modern physical Israel, when God's physical blessings will be richly poured out on them as has been happening since the 19th century? Brethren, I believe that is refers to spiritual Israel as well.

Hosea 1:10-11 "Yet, the Israelites will become as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore. No one will be able to measure them or count them. Wherever they were told, 'You are not my people,' they will be told, 'You are the children of the living God.' The people of Judah and Israel will be gathered together. They will appoint one leader for themselves, and they will grow in the land. The day of Jezreel will be a great day.

These scriptures were shortly prior to the imminent captivities of Israel (Hosea) and Judah (Jeremiah). This means, of course, that these prophecies look beyond those captivities. First of all to the blooming of Israel's' populations in our recent centuries now. And secondly, to the restoration of physical Israel in the World Tomorrow. Also, I believe that these scriptures refer to spiritual Israel, God's church.

With all of this in mind let us go back to the beach. Let us go back to that little sandy island on our local beach. Let us imagine the ocean tide relentlessly moving in to bury it in sea-water.

And remember our spiritual anti-type for today's sermon, let us imagine Satan's world relentlessly moving in, trying to bury God's children, and to inundate us in Satan's flood and to deluge us with his evil counterfeit spirit:

Revelation 12:15-16 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

The word 'earth' here is from the Greek word 'ge.'

Please remember that water so often symbolizes spirit in the scriptures. God will open the earth's mouth in order to swallow up the deadly flood of polluted spiritual water that Satan will spew out against us. I am not exactly sure how God will do this, maybe He will use sand, maybe He will use spiritual sand to dispose of the spiritual flood water. I say that because of the use of the word 'ge' is mentioned here. This is the same word as the sandy earth that is mentioned in Luke 6:49. It is the same word used there where Jesus warns us not to build on that sandy earth.

But is there anything we can do to defend our tiny church islands from his incoming tide?

Let us think back about the tiny physical sandy island on our local beach. This may sound silly, but there were two preventative measures that this family could have done in order to protect their little island of sand. These are theoretical measures that they could have taken, neither of them would be easy or practical; but please bear with me as I follow through with my analogy:

1. They could build a sea-wall around their island. Of course, the sea water could seep underneath the walls, so that would have to be dug very deep, and the whole island would have to be completely under-girded with a very strong, waterproof foundation. That is quite an engineering project. Obviously, again, impractical.
2. The second thing that they could have done is to have built up the height of their island by bringing in more sand. Again, this would not be practical and they would have needed heavy equipment and big trucks to do that.

How might these solutions apply spiritually? Let us look at our second "solution first." If sand is symbolic of people can we add more human sand to our Church of God islands? In other words can we add more church members in order to win the battle against Satan and Satan's spiritual water?

Well, yes, we can shuffle members around from one church group to another. And this kind of shuffling is going on right now! The membership of God's church is in a state of flux as many brethren become unhappy with the group they are in and move to others.

But, of course, the healthiest kind of growth is when *God* provides the increase:

I Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Colossians 2:19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

That is the best kind of increase.

Again, God is the only One who can add people to one of His church group without taking them away from others. Here is what Jesus said:

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Does God want to see an increase in the number of members of His Church? Of course He does:

Acts 5:14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

This is at the very beginning of the Church. We see that the *numeric* increase of brethren is God's responsibility; not ours, although He has given us a part in it.

In Old Testament Israel, not only were Abraham's descendants supposed to be as many as the sand of the sea shore numerically, but God wanted that kind of increase in other ways as well.

Look what King Solomon was given:

I Kings 4:29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore.

What about Jesus Christ? Did He have any increase? Yes, He did.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.

What about the Apostle Paul? Did he increase as well? Yes, he did.

Acts 9:22 But Saul increased all the more in strength...

This was immediately after Saul's astonishing conversion to the Apostle Paul. You can see that God was very much involved in this.

I Thessalonians 4:10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;

What kind of increase is Paul more interested in? He saw the need for an increase in the fruits of God's Holy Spirit:

II Corinthians 9:10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

Colossians 1:10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

God's word does talk about increase in numbers in the Church, but God is more interested in spiritual increase.

Even before they had received the Holy Spirit the disciples saw the need for an increase in at least one of the fruits of the Spirit:

Luke 17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Paul saw that same need and its benefits to the whole church. An increase in faith is of course a very valuable commodity.

II Corinthians 10:15 not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,

And finally, Paul recognized the need for an increase in the most important of the fruits of the Spirit:

1 Thessalonians 3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

What the Apostle Paul is saying there is an increase in love not just to one another in their own little group, but to all. What are the boundaries to that all? Obviously to the brethren in God's Church and by extension to the people out there in the world who eventually are going to be God's people as well.

The other solution to protect our little island is that of a strong sea wall plus the undergirding of a solid, waterproof foundation. Spiritually, do such things exist? Yes, they do!

Back in May, Trish and I were blessed to be able to visit Italy, where we had the opportunity to visit some of the lovely old walled hill-towns in the provinces of Tuscany, Umbria and Lazio. But those picturesque hill towns were not just built for the future enjoyment of 20th and 21st Century tourists! They were built on hills and with strong walls to keep their enemies at bay!

Likewise in ancient Israel, we will read a couple of scripture here just to see how important our Israelite forebears deemed physical walls and foundations for their towns and cities, and how dangerous they considered it to be if they lacked of them:

Jeremiah 50:15 Shout against her all around; she has given her hand, her foundations have fallen, her walls are thrown down; for it is the vengeance of the LORD...

So the downfall of a wall back in those days was an absolutely terrifying prospect.

Ezekiel 13:14 So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

When the Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity, what was one of their first priorities?

Ezra 4:12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.

That is one of the first things that they put their hand to when they came back out of captivity.

One of God's priorities in the World Tomorrow will be to restore the ultimate in walls and foundations to spiritual Israel:

Revelation 21:14, 19 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.... ..The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones...

In many respects, the foundation is even more important than the wall:

Luke 6:48 "He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.

Again you see how this ties directly with Revelation 12, and the inundation of Satan's evil flood upon God's Church.

Luke 6:49 "But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth (Greek word 'ge') without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

So what is our ultimate foundation, or rather Who is our ultimate Foundation?

I Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ... ..

Are we left out of His foundation then? Can we build on Jesus' foundation? Yes, we can, but we must build with the very highest quality materials:

Corinthians 3:12-14 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

If we build on there with wood, hay or straw what will happen in the fire? It is going to burn up to ashes. If we build with gold, silver, and precious stones, then when the heat comes on them (spiritually of course) they will survive the fire.

This brings us back to where we started – to Abraham:

Hebrews 11:8, 10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Abraham knew that the Builder and Maker of our protective wall is God the Father, and that the foundation is Jesus Christ.

The tide of Satan's flood is coming in against God's people, increasingly and relentlessly.

It never stops day or night.

Not one of us wants to be like that foolish man in Luke 6:46, who "heard and did nothing."

We do not want to be "like *that* man who built a house on the earth without a foundation...

Brethren, we need to be warned by these scriptures, "against *that house* the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

So let us all be doing whatever we can do.

No. We cannot add more human "sand" to the spiritual "islands" of our little church groups. This, as we have seen, is primarily God's job. Nevertheless, let us get involved in any and all types of positive increase, as we are able, and as God provides opportunities.

And let us get involved in building our defenses against Satan's tide, building spiritual gold, silver and precious stones upon the Rock-solid Foundation and Corner-stone that is Jesus Christ!

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