

Nehushtan

By Kent Heaton

"Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan" (2Kings 18:1-4).

Centuries had passed since the tragic day the people spoke against God and against Moses. The people had grown weary and discouraged because things did not seem to be going the way they thought it should. They were dissatisfied with the providential care of God; they wanted better things; they wanted what they wanted; their hearts were filled with anger against God. To punish the people the Lord "sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). When the people repented and asked for deliverance God instructed Moses to make a "bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived" (Num. 21:9).

By the time of Hezekiah the symbol of their deliverance from rebellion became once again a symbol of rebellion as the people burned incense to Nehushtan ("a piece of brass"). We find the brazen serpent had become an object of idolatry. How could something that represented the power of God and His mercy become the object of idolatry? The nature of man is not surprised by these actions of seeking physical satisfaction in worship with even those things that reflect the glory of God. The Lord forbade the use of images for worship because truth came from only one God (Psalm 115:3-8; Isa. 46:5-11; Deut. 4:11-16).

Isaiah defined the nature of God when he writes: "I will not give My glory to another" (Isa. 48:11). Yet the people of God had turned the power of God into their own idol and object of worship. Hezekiah exercised great courage to destroy the ancient artifact rich with history and truth. But it was destroyed because the servants of God had turned the purity of God's word into their own selfish design. The message of the brazen serpent was made to fit the dogmas of man's own wisdom and desire of the day.

The Bible is an ancient book that represents the power and mercy of God. Through its holy pages man is able to see his own rebellion and the only answer to death – Jesus Christ. Yet today man now worships the Bible as a book designed for his own needs. The Bible is worshiped as a book that is defined by one's own interpretation and will. Why are there so many churches and faiths today? One man looks at the Bible one way and another man looks at the Bible his way and a third man looks at the Bible his way and on it goes. I wonder if there is any way for all men to understand the Bible? Could it be the Bible has become Nehushtan? Paul said we can read it and understand it (Eph. 3:1-5). Peter said the Lord has given us everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2Peter 1:3). If God is not the problem, who is?

"Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:10-11) "...That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom. 12:2)

I Have to Practice

Internationally acclaimed violinist Midori believes that focused, diligent practice is the key to performance. While playing a rigorous schedule of 90 concerts a year, she still practices an average of 5 or 6 hours a day. Jane Ammeson, in NWA World Traveler magazine, quoted Midori as saying: "I have to practice for my job and I practice every day. It's not really the hours, but the quality of the work that needs to be done. I see with students, that they play and they call it practice, but they are not listening and not watching. If you have your textbook open, it doesn't mean that you are studying."

That same principle applies to our walk of faith. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15). Diligence implies constant, earnest effort, and is the opposite of a careless, inattentive approach. It is not just having your Bible open. It embraces every aspect of our relationship with God. Just as a musician strives for excellence, we should want to serve God with confidence, seek His approval, and skillfully share His Word with others.

Entertainment at Church By Mike Thomas

When Jesus was on earth, He felt it necessary to rebuke the Jews who were misusing the Lord's Temple. It was intended to be a place of worship and sacrifice, but by the time of Christ many were using it as a place of business and corruption. Jesus' response was simple. He pulled out a whip, overturned their money tables, and drove them out with the charge, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" (John 2:16).

The Jewish Temple has long since been removed from God's will. The closest representation of it today is the Lord's church (1Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:21). Christians are to be priests who offer spiritual sacrifices in worship (1Peter 2:5). Unfortunately, like the Jews, many are using the church for things Jesus never intended: entertainment, business, politics, and corruption. Churches not only engage in entertainment and social programs, they depend on them to survive. Thus, the continual circus-like atmosphere in many outreach programs centered on carnivals, concerts, and candy. If we think Jesus would be silent to this if He were on earth today, we are of all men most foolish. That whip of His would be used so much it'd be worn down to a shoestring!

My good friends, where is our faith? The power to save man from sin is the gospel (Rom. 1:16). The work of the church is spiritual (Eph. 4:11-16). When Christians tried to make the church a place for social meals, Paul rebuked them saying, "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1Cor. 11:22, 34). There's nothing wrong with social meals and activities; it's just not the purpose of the church to provide them. The Lord's work is much too important to reduce it down to food and entertainment.

When we stand before God in judgment, to give account for our life (2Cor. 5:10), what will have mattered most from our time on earth: entertainment or salvation from sin? Then that's the kind of work the church should be doing. Anything less than that will be overturned by Jesus

A Moments Wisdom

- If you have time to text, you have time to pray.
- A man has only as much knowledge as he puts to work.
- Children are innocent, which is why they love justice; adults have sinned, and that is why they love mercy.
- If it is to be, it is up to me.
- It is better to try to work your way into a better way of feeling, than to wait until you feel your way into a better way of working.
- We find the courage to stand when we kneel before God.