



Editor's Note

Did you know that Elders ShopNotes is translated into Spanish and made available online, as well as being sent to various countries in South America? It's called *Apuntes Para Ancianos*, and can be found at <http://apuntes-para-ancianos.org>.

I am deeply thankful for those capable servants who take time to translate and check for the verbal clarity and doctrinal accuracy of each issue.

You can help by remembering this effort in prayer, and by sharing the above link with any Spanish speaking friends you

may have. There may be missionaries serving in Spanish speaking lands who do not know of this resource. We're planning to mail sample copies to many of them this summer. And who knows? Perhaps a day will come when Elders ShopNotes can be translated into some other languages to assist missionaries in training local elders! With God all things are possible.

Blessings in the Lord,
Jack Spender

Leadership Principles

Dealing with False Accusations by Warren Henderson

Years ago, a faithful brother and longstanding church elder, shared with me some helpful advice: "When you start meeting with the elders – you get a target on your back; when you are recognized as an elder – you get a target on your front." This beloved brother was kindly informing me, a newly recognized elder, of the harsh reality of being a faithful shepherd. Dear believer, the devil will oppose every true work of God. If you are laboring for the Lord in your calling, you will be criticized and accused of wrongdoing. It is part of the faith-building exercise which God permits to develop His people – so expect it! There is a quality of patience that cannot be incorporated into our faith without experiencing God's deliverance through such painful trials (Jas. 1:2-4).

In Jewish history, perhaps no greater attempt to hinder God's work through false accusations occurred than after the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple and later Jerusalem (Ezra 4:4-24). Ezra specifically mentions two letters drafted during the reigns of Darius and Artaxerxes to falsely accuse the Jews of wrongdoing. Examination of these letters reveals much about how the tactic of false accusation was effectively employed and also what the proper response of God's people should be to it.

False Accusations to Darius

Although the Jews had laid the foundation of the temple, persistent opposition slowed its construction to a halt (Ezra 5). Fifteen years later God moved two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to confront the sins of His people – the work on the temple

resumed and advanced expediently. The local governor Tattenai drafted a letter to Darius, the Persian Emperor, to accuse the Jews of engaging in an unlawful building program, charging that political unrest would result if their temple were completed. Tattenai was implying that the Jews had fabricated their story and he hoped that Darius would side with him and halt the temple's construction (Ezra 6).

If the Jews had continued working from the onset, the temple would have been finished and no accusations would have been raised against them. But, since they had stopped building, and begun again, it seemed like the Jews were acting without a Persian decree. The lesson to learn from this is to keep busy in the Lord's work; we enhance the enemy's opportunities to tempt us to sin and tarnish our testimony when we become complacent in the things of God.

Throughout the entire ordeal the Jews told the truth when asked specific questions, did not waste time defending themselves, and were unresponsive to bullying tactics to stop doing what they knew God had commanded them to do. In faith, they trusted the Lord to defend their cause and He did. King Darius validated King Cyrus' earlier decree for the Jews to rebuild their temple and that the project was to be funded by the empire. With the aid of the local government the work on the temple was completed swiftly and all to the glory of God.

False Accusations to Artaxerxes

About sixty years later, chancellor Rehum wrote King Artaxerxes a letter on behalf of a large contingency of various peoples throughout the region who were ada-

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Biblical Foundations Studies in Acts—Part 4

by Jack Spender

This is the fourth of an ongoing series in the book of Acts in which we are noting insights about good leadership, especially the main focus, church elders. Having passed the earliest or "primitive" stage of development in the early church, we looked briefly last issue at the second section of the outline which covers chapters 8 - 12. A number of important (and interesting) people appear briefly in this section, which leads up to the great central section of the book - the missionary journeys of Paul and his companions beginning in chapter 13.

The Founding of the Church in Antioch

There is one matter in this second section that we must not pass by, the record of God's work in Syrian Antioch. Here we find the first mention of church elders in the Acts, as Luke chronicles the planting of the first church on Gentile soil.

We learn that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Finally, it is from this young church, not from Jerusalem, that the first missionaries were sent out. The paragraph is brief, and the tone historical rather than official, but there are nevertheless, some precious truths to be noted about how godly leaders work together toward a common goal.

Antioch in Syria was about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, a large and prosperous seaport city being at one point, the third largest city in the Roman Empire. Many Jews made their home there, some having fled north after the persecution in Jerusalem following the death of Stephen.

The account of the work in Antioch begins in Acts 11:19. Space does not allow an in-depth study of this section, but we can note a few insights in an annotated list of verses.

19, 20/ Jewish believers scattering from Jerusalem shared the good news of the Lord with other Jews, which is understandable. But some spoke to the Greeks, and to their credit, kept the focus on "the Lord Jesus" instead of getting sidetracked by traditions and cultural issues. Accordingly, we read that "the hand of the Lord was

with them." We ought to ponder this statement carefully in our day! It is as if the Lord would say: "See how I bless these few who have not forgotten my command that they go as witnesses "unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8). The greater question for Christian servants today is not, "What do we think needs to be done?" but, "Where is the Lord working?"

21/ What better evidence could there be of the Lord's hand at work than this statement: "a great number believed, and turned to the Lord." Suddenly, in a large pagan city of the empire, there was a circle of newly-

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born ones, owning allegiance, not to Caesar, but to Jesus. Can we even guess what their meetings together must have been like? Without a written New Testament, (the Old Testament Scriptures say nothing about the church), it would be interesting to know. We can guess that they studied the Old Testament, gathered for prayer, enjoyed sweet fellowship, and the breaking of bread, having been taught at least these basics by those who had fled there.

But even knowing so little there was life, that wonderful gift of the Spirit of God, without which all form and ceremony is dull and dry! These latter have their place of course, but by themselves they will never bring joy to thirsty souls. Let those who lead in the assembly ask how evident life is, the living water that is flowing out in blessing from full hearts.

22/ Inevitably, news of all this reached the church in Jerusalem, which, as a living thing, has "ears" to hear spiritual truth. An investigation was in order, and thankfully, it was the large-hearted "son of encouragement" named Barnabas who was chosen to go north.

23f./ Three things are said about

Barnabas the man, and three things describe his actions. As to his character, he was a good man, a Spirit-filled man and a man of faith. Ideal ingredients for the work of edifying (building up) new believers.

Note his actions. He rejoiced upon seeing God's grace at work, he used his spiritual gift and exhorted the young believers to hold tightly to the Lord, and then he went looking for help so that the work might continue to grow. How we need men like Barnabas in the churches today! We can only imagine how many things were far from perfect in Antioch, yet Barnabas rejoiced in the positive things and built on that. It is chilling to think of what might have become of the young assembly had Barnabas begun to criticize every vestige of paganism, Emperor worship, display of the flesh, etc. All these, of course, have their counterparts today in any new work.

Not only did Barnabas refrain from a critical spirit, he humbly recognized his own limitations and went to seek a gifted teacher with whom he could co-labor. Spiritual maturity eventually begins to display its fruits; note carefully the closing 4 verses of the chapter.

The Fruits of Righteousness

Evidently the church in Antioch was becoming well established after a year of work on the part of Saul and Barnabas. We note that it was a gifted church, that there was opportunity for the Holy Spirit to lead in its ministry, and it was a practical church. That practical side surfaced in response to a prophetic word from a brother named Agabus.

Those who have responsibility in the Lord's work ought to take note of an interesting point here. With great men like Saul (who became Paul) and Barnabas in the assembly, who was Agabus, and why should anyone hear him? Could not any needed word from the Lord come through those already well known? Yet the Lord is sovereign in choosing servants, and we do well to be sensitive about that, and not quench their ministry.

Further, it is refreshing that we do

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Studies in Acts—part 4 (continued from page 2)

NOT read: "There will be a famine; let us remember our brethren in prayer." Rather, we have prayer that leads to action: the first of three great components in New Testament grace giving. We read that the giving was by "every man according to his own ability." Thus the church determined to send practical help to the saints in Jerusalem. [For the other two elements of grace giving, see I Cor. 16:2 and II Cor. 9:7]. One infallible proof of new life

is love for the brethren being worked out in tangible ways.

Conclusion

All of this provides the background for the opening verses of chapter 13 where we find gifted men of God serving the Lord and fasting, doubtless waiting for the Lord to reveal what part they might have in the spread of the gospel throughout the empire.

It would not be very long - as history records - before Jerusalem would

be destroyed, but the spread of the gospel into all the world would not be endangered. The young work in a Gentile city off to the north would become the new focus of missionary effort. God Who knows the future, makes provision for things essential while things temporal pass away. Thankfully, it is no less true in our own day.



Dealing with False Accusations (continued from page 1)

manly opposed to the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem. This letter was successful in causing King Artaxerxes to halt the reconstruction efforts until further notice. Why were the accusations of Tattenai defeated, but Rehum's effort successful? In short, Rehum incorporated a different strategy into his assault, which Tattenai did not use. Rehum resorted to half-truths, exaggerations, and an appeal to the king's pride. Rehum's letter was also signed by many in the region to seemingly substantiate the accusation.

In most confrontations the guilty party is usually the individual who defends himself or herself by gathering others (often friends and family through emotional ploys) to raise accusations of wrongdoing. Neutral, seasoned brethren are not sought to resolve such matters to ensure one's self-focused agenda is preserved and accountability for sin is avoided. This was Rehum's effective strategy to overcome the Jews. On the other hand, the individual who leaves the matter with the Lord to judge is usually the innocent party. This was certainly the case with the Lord Jesus Christ, who was accused of wrongdoing by an emotionally charged crowd, yet He was completely innocent of the charges against Him, enduring the offense patiently. Peter exhorts us to follow His example (1 Pet. 2:20-23).

The one engaged in social politics and soliciting the aid of others through sympathy is usually the one at the root of the problem. Satan enjoys using such to sow division among the brethren instead of making for peace and allowing the Lord to judge the matter. God hates "a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:19). Conversely, those

who are wrongly treated but wait patiently and quietly upon the Lord receive a blessing from Him: "*He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered*" (Prov. 28:25).

Proper Response to False Accusations

Those who struggle with envy and pride are usually the first in line to speak their mind and the last to change it when the truth is known. Just expect such irritations in the Lord's work, and keep serving the One who knows all about false accusations. Time will prove out the truth, and our exhibited humility during such times will speak as loudly as any evidence of the truth could. It is not our defense which is needful at such times, but rather our surrender to God in the situation. Also, remember to thank the Lord for those who loved you enough to contact you and hear the whole matter out before foolishly receiving gossip or a one-sided story as fact (Prov. 18:13; 1 Cor. 13:5).

If you are faithfully serving the Lord, expect to be criticized. Evaluate criticism for potential constructive benefits, especially when it comes from those who love you unquestionably, and then cast the rest aside and forget about it. If you are prompted to critique someone else, know that if it pains you to do so, then you have the right attitude, but if you have even a hint of pleasure in the matter, then it would be best to keep still. Why? Because our flesh naturally opposes the things of God (Gal. 5:17), and "*the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*" (Jas. 1:20). A spiritual person wants to edify others, not hurt them for the sake of personal

vindication or self-justification.

This is especially true for church elders. Elders must protect each other, and not engage in slander or criticism of fellow-laborers, especially those they oversee. Realizing that the devil hates the Lord Jesus, and that such a governing body represents His authority on earth, warrants careful protection of it. Believers are not to even listen to an accusation about a church elder unless there is irrefutable evidence available (1 Tim. 5:19). To do so just permits the devil to mess with our minds and we do not need his help when it comes to thinking negatively about others.

When living for Christ becomes arduous, let us remember that it is God who controls the worth of our service and not our accusers! When accusations come, attend to your character and allow God to protect your reputation as He deems best: "*The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me*" (Ps. 18:20). Ability usually rises to prominence, but without good character all will be lost. These are school days and God must bring us to the end of ourselves before we can be fully profitable to Him. Perhaps A. W. Tozer expresses this point best: "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply." This means that our great God is able to use false accusations to bless and honor those who trust in Him.



“**H**ide me under the shadow of thy wings”, implores the Psalmist. (Psalm 17:8) As leaders’ wives, we are surrounded with challenges that often find us in the sweetness of God’s embrace, seeking comfort beneath the shadow of His wings. We are well aware of external pressures and targeted attacks meant to discourage and damage our homes. What is our response, however, when the difficulties we face are internal?

As wives and mothers, as “keepers of our homes,” we desire the righteousness and blessing of God to abound within. Our hearts long to experience the “riches of His glory” in our families and in our homes. There are many factors that bear on these aspirations and one component is our husband. What if the man we love, whose leadership we value in so many ways, fails to see an area where his actions, or lack thereof, are preventing godly desires from actualization? At times like this, our natural response may be confrontation, criticism, or control. We want to convince our man of a better way! We yearn for him to grow, and we wonder how best to support God’s transforming work in his life? Is it possible that the same secret place we retreat to when the outside presses in, is also the remedy when the pressure is internal? As we find ourself eclipsed in God, might we also find one of God’s greatest tools for re-

shaping our husband?

God beckons His people in the book of Isaiah, “Come, *my daughter*, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself for a little moment...” (Isaiah 26:20) The very qualities that necessary for hiding: silence, stillness, and shroud, are the exact qualities God can use to get our mate’s attention. How can methods that draw no regard entice change? Herein we see the beauty and mastery of our God.

True concealment allows any other movement, or disruption of quiet, to garner immediate attention. Take a step back, release, retreat, and permit God to command that attention. Christ further encourages us, “But thou, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to the Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly!” (Matthew 6:6) God will respond to your discretion with His intervention. And, what you accomplish in private, He will accomplish in public. He declares, “So the Lord must wait for you to come to Him so He can show you His love and compassion. For the Lord is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for His help”. (Isaiah 30:18) As God undertakes needed conviction, action, and transformation in your spouse, your dependency on Him becomes a precious ointment for the

soul. The sweet intimacy of sharing secrets with The Most High is unparalleled. In the quiet, God will tenderly reveal Himself to you, and so you emerge transformed as well. As you abide in the secret place, your private aspirations and hopes, communicated with your Father alone, begin to materialize. Prayers and tears, once vapors ascending to heaven, become realities.

Be advised that the “work” of being hidden can be a timely process, and is not for the faint of heart. Being still and silent are one of the most challenging labors a wife can encounter. At times, it will be excruciating. But, God is there. We can plead that in His power, our Heavenly Father would do the exact opposite of what He requires of us. In that quiet, we cry out to Him and beg that His voice is heard. His movement is seen. His presence is known. “Keep not thou silence, O God, Hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.” (Psalm 83:1).



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Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.

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