

of lackadaisical comfort and non-confrontational spiritual slumber that is decimating the power to save the lost in our world today.

Filled with many troubles and full of many concerns of the world, daily routines are followed that omit even a casual glance at the Scriptures. Bible stories are relegated to something for children during a once weekly Sunday School Class. So called “enlightened” adults are bored with anything that suggests they need to have more understanding of God’s word. Preaching is tender at best — delicate and cautious in substance, lest those who hear, have their self esteem damaged. Woe to the person who would suggest that sin requires repentance and a need to return to God or face eternity in hell.

God had great expectations of those we have just read about in the days of old. We saw that Moses and Jonah fought, before accepting and carrying through with the expectations God had of them. Jonah simply didn’t *want* to do what God was asking him to do and Moses just didn’t believe he was capable of carrying out his assignment. Hosea had the faith and confidence to just do as God asked — even though it wasn’t easy for him. And then there was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego — well — they really weren’t exactly sure *what* was going to happen to them but they knew that whatever it was, they were *going* to serve the one true God and not bow down to any other gods. But in the end, they *all* eventually did whatever God expected of them.

What does God expect of *us*? Does he expect more or less of *us* than He did of those we’ve read about? Are the challenges He places before *us* more difficult than those He placed before Moses, Hosea, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and others? Just what *does* God expect of us? We *all* can enjoy God’s favor. But is His favor something we do no more with than consume, making no effort to expand our service to Him? Might we bask so in His favor that we no longer feel any need to answer His call for whatever great expectations He may have for us?

On page three, we listed a number of things that indicate that our nation is drifting farther and farther from God. Are we among those who are just bowing down to the god of tolerance while God expects far more of us? Has His Word already asked us to take a stand — but we’re just giving Him excuses like Moses tried to do? Have we just ran the other way like Jonah did? Or are we willing to take the chance like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego — even though we’re not *real* sure what will happen to us? Could we be one of the instruments God expects to use to accomplish His work — but He’s waiting for us to answer His call? No one can answer those questions for us. We each have to answer them for ourselves.

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# DILIGENCE

*“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11*

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## God of Great Expectations

Following almighty God requires confidence and faith. We see this demonstrated as we read in the Scriptures about numerous individuals who were asked to undertake feats thought to be beyond their capability — yet they were able to accomplish those feats with God’s help.

What great expectation does God have for you or me that will cause us to have to trust our faith? Since we don’t have direct conversations with God, as did many of those whom we read about in the Scriptures, it may be more difficult for us to relate to the expectations God has for our lives — but they *are* there.

As we consider some of the lives of those individuals mentioned in the Bible, we will find one trait that was common to all of them as they followed God’s instructions. Even though some of them fought God before moving forward, each of them eventually carried through with God’s expectation of them and did so with great success.

Let’s first look at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the book of Daniel.

*“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:17-18 NIV)*

Although Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had tremendous faith, they also allowed for the *possibility* that they *could* be destroyed — that it might not be God’s will that they escape. Reading the rest of that chapter reveals of course, that they emerged from the fiery furnace completely unharmed. The fact remains however that even though they allowed for the possibility of their destruction, they moved forward with complete confidence of a reward with God — whether it would be through salvation from the blazing furnace or an eternal reward because of refusing to worship a false god.

The second Biblical individual we’ll discuss is Hosea, the prophet.

*“The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri ... When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.’ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.” (Hosea 1:1-3 NIV)*

*continued on page 2*

Just imagine what you would do if God spoke to you and told you to marry an adulteress in order to provide a lesson to the church. That's what happened to Hosea. God told him to take Gomer for his wife. She eventually bore three children and each child was given a name by God that was descriptive of God's people having strayed from Him in favor of Baal. As time passed, the marriage disintegrated and Gomer was sold into slavery. As the story continued, Hosea eventually bought Gomer back and took her as his wife again. All of this was to illustrate that even though Israel was an adulterous nation, God would once again welcome his people back. Think about this story of Hosea in context of today's church. Can you imagine how members of the local congregation would react today? Yet God asked all of this of Hosea in order to provide the message that Hosea needed to give to the people of God so they might be more inclined to return to Him. It was never about Hosea being a faithful servant. It was all about those who had strayed and fallen victim to the temptations of Baal. What huge expectations God had of Hosea — yet Hosea faithfully executed everything that God asked him to do.

Still another individual of whom God expected much was Jonah. Jonah not only didn't want to honor God's request that he go to Nineveh, but he actually ran from God in defiance. As we know, God was very persistent (Jonah 1:3 through 2:10) and with the help of the belly of a whale, persuaded Jonah to do as he was asked.

*"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city — a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.' The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth"* (Jonah 3:1-4 NIV)

But Jonah was not at all pleased when God spared them because of their repentance. He said, "I know the kind of God you are, and sure enough you did exactly what I expected. When the city repented, you changed your mind," and, he said, "I'm angry." God went on then to teach Jonah another lesson — this time using a vine (Jon. 4:5-10).

And then there was Moses — Moses, a reluctant servant, tried to convince God that he wasn't capable of leading. He offered three different excuses to God as to why he couldn't do the job God was asking him to do. He first said "*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*" (Ex 3:11 NIV). Then he said: "*What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'*" (Ex. 4:1 NIV). And in a final effort to escape God's expectations of him, Moses said: "*O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.*" (Ex. 4:10 NIV). But God didn't accept any of his excuses and so Moses went forward and did as God asked him to do. God's people and His

plan — not Moses — was the focus of God's instructions. Moses was only an instrument used to accomplish God's work.

As we recall these numerous instances involving God's people, there seems to be a common thread. In each of the situations we have discussed, there were people of God who had begun to stray and God found it necessary to call upon some specific individual he could use to bring them back in line.

Now, let's consider for a moment the world we live in today. There is much good as well as much with which to be concerned. We are free to worship as we choose. The choices are numerous. The importance placed on the Bible is diminishing in many quarters and completely dismissed as out of date in others. Many view Christianity as simply one way (of many) to Heaven. Ignorance of Scriptures is portrayed as being humble while Biblical understanding is referred to as arrogance — a kind of "what makes *you* think *you* understand what the Bible says?" attitude. *All* points of view are treated as *equally* true — there is no right and no wrong. It's all nothing more than a matter of differing opinions. There is great comfort in our land comparatively speaking. Church attendance is down in many congregations and efforts to draw people to churches include almost any method conceivable by the human mind. Feelings and self esteem are very important today — often even more important than saving a soul. Much good is done by many people both in and out of the church. Mission work is a common practice and a part of many University programs. There is a great deal of effort being made toward unity — unity with denominations holding beliefs not according to the Scriptures. This unity by necessity means that core beliefs must be set aside. Government is increasingly involved in the removal of Christianity as a core belief of this nation in favor of Godlessness. Life is being valued less as abortionists boldly march forward demanding that women must have the right to choose even in late term situations. Divorce is still prevalent. Living together outside of marriage is commonplace and is now considered to be a "normal" part of one's life. On and on the list could go concerning the way of life in this great country today.

Many of those things listed above would indicate that our country is drifting further and further from God. Many of our churches are bowing to the demands of tolerance. Will we be asked to take a stand, or has God already done so?

God's Word was delivered once for all (Jude 1:3) and it includes numerous instructions for us on many fronts. Unlike those individuals we mentioned earlier, God is not likely to tap us on the shoulder and give us specific orders. He won't likely have us spend three days in the belly of a whale — or — have us tossed into the blazing fires of a furnace or go through what he asked Hosea to do in order to teach His people a lesson. No — the marching orders *we* have were given to *all* who have chosen to be his disciples. But as sure as His people fell into sinful behavior in times past, His people of today are falling under a spell