

Zahakiel: Let's begin. Pastor, please offer an opening prayer.

Pastor Chick: Dear Heavenly Father. May Your Spirit refresh us this hour as we come before Your Throne for a special blessing. Thank You for answering us with Your Presence. in Yahshua's holy name, Amen.

Zahakiel: Happy Sabbath to everyone. Tonight's study is called "With a Rod of Iron," and I intend it to be the first of two parts. As I mentioned last week, I've become interested in the U.S. presidential elections. While I hesitate to draw any specifics from it to address in our sacred time here with Yahweh, I certainly feel that the topic makes it clear we as Yah's people have a lot to pray about for the future.

As Adventists know, the United States is a key element of last day events, and the signs of the times show perhaps most clearly in that country. After all, it is the place from which the Mark of The Beast has originated, and from which the time of trouble spreads around the world.

In thinking about the matter this past week, the concept of "government" presented itself to me, and I spent some time looking up some verses about the way that human beings are ruled, both by Yahweh, and by our fellow men. One verse that stood out, and which provided the name of today's study, is this one: "And out of [Yahshua's] mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron, and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (Rev. 19:15)

The Bible makes it clear that the final form of government, and therefore the one that Yah Himself has ordained, is a theocratic monarchy. Simply, the ultimate authority is one that wields both religious and civil power, setting rules of behavior that pertain to worship as well as social interactions among the citizens themselves. This was the way of many ancient societies, but let me state this very clearly – such a form of government would not work today, and while there are certainly people who think that a religion-based government is best for this generation, this should not be the goal of the Christian message. History has shown us that whenever civil and religious powers are combined, the result is tyranny. Yahshua certainly taught us that His Kingdom is not of "this" world, and that there is a difference between "Caesar's" things and God's. (John 18:36, Mat 22:21) When such a separation is ignored, the individual or group given this combined power invariably misuses it. Sometimes the initial motives are good – after all, who would not make the rules of his country more acceptable to those who believe strongly in his own religious principles? Unfortunately, this arrangement soon collapses into making the rules tolerable only by those who subscribe to a specific belief. The priest-king then mandates a state-supported religion, and all others are persecuted.

"But," some might ask, "isn't that what Christ does when He returns?" The Bible says this directly – Yahshua returns to "smite the nations," and He will rule them with "iron,"

“fierceness” and “wrath.” This certainly sounds like the final stages of the paradigm I am describing, with those not conforming to the iron rule of ultimate religious authority being destroyed. In fact, we read of Christ’s return to assume the role of Priest and King: “[...] the Lord Yahshua shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not Yahweh, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Yahshua the Messiah, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.” (2 Th. 1:7-9)

For non-Christians, this doesn’t sound like good news at all...certainly not a “Gospel” in which they can rejoice. Some Christians, on the other hand, may look at that and say, “I wish we could have that now,” at least, the aftermath of that return. What they do not understand, however, is that this only works in exactly the way the Bible describes, and in no other way. If it was best that we had such a form of government today, we would have it.

The Father is not powerless to act, simply because He has restrained Himself to let matters play out in a certain way thus far. When Yahshua returns, then it will be the time for wrath, judgment, and the iron rule. At such a time, all men will have already been judged for everlasting life, or everlasting death. (Rev 22:11-15) Those who are sanctified will rejoice in such a government, for they will all be perfected, and suitable for this perfect society. Those who are ultimately lost are such as would never be content in any government whatsoever; and Yahweh in His kindness simply destroys the sin, the discontent, the dis-ease, the unrest, that has tragically become a core part of their spirits. This is the destruction of the second death, and if it was understood the way the Bible describes it – as everlasting death, not eternal, conscious, fiery torture, (Mal 4:3) then it would be easier to understand as a mercy, albeit a stern one.

Should we try to implement such a government now, we would necessarily put flawed human beings in charge of determining what the “right” religion is, what the “proper” commandments of that religion ought to be, and how to correct or penalize heretics, those who could not or would not conform to those commandments. This is not Gospel, this is not “good news,” for anyone. Yahshua does implement a perfect governmental system, but only in the Father’s perfect timing, and only after exercising infinite pity to save the lost. No other person, or group of people, is capable of doing anything like this while maintaining the principles of justice.

In this generation, while mercy yet lingers for the sinner, Yahweh allows freedom of religion of all kinds. He does not (directly) punish those who dissent from His will, except through cause and effect, and – here is a novel idea for some – we are to be “like Him” in all things.

Of course, the Christian has the goal of teaching and promoting the true principles of Heavenly society. After all, the return of Yahshua is a soon-appearing inevitability; nothing can stop it. In light of this, we want as many of our fellow human beings to join us in everlasting life. We say, "Repent and be saved." We say, "Turn to Yahshua, and live." We say, "Let the Law of God be written on your heart, and it will change you into a person who would love, and eagerly anticipate, the Perfect Kingdom to come."

That is, really, what evangelism is. It's not just to have them "join a religion," that is, to convince them that a set of beliefs and practices are "correct." It is to let them recognize what religion IS: a way to connect humanity with the truth of the past, present and future, to recognize that if they are going to get the best out of this world, and to survive in the world to come, they need the Savior.

Adriel: Amen

Zahakiel: They need to accept, and be transformed by, His love. When that transformation has taken place, then the beliefs can be sincerely held, and then the practices make sense and have actual value. Anything else would be merely cold formalism.

So what do we do until then? What form of government is "best" until Christ's return? In order to determine that, we need to identify those qualities of governance that people need in order to be content. This is what we will do for the remainder of this meeting, and then next week we will see how various proposed and implemented systems measure up.

There are many factors that contribute to a successful society, but three of the main ones are:

1) Freedom of religion and speech.

This one is obvious, but it is worth highlighting. The Scriptures say, with advice, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." (Gal 5:13) We are "called unto," or intended for, freedom, and Paul is not speaking here of the world to come, because he tells Christians of his day – and our day – the responsibility that comes with that freedom. This liberty is not only for the Bible-believing Christian, for Paul is not concerned there (or really, anywhere else) with what the heathen are doing. Yahweh does not restrict others from doing as they please. He simply says that there is a consequence to all things, and He instructs His people to proclaim both mercy and judgment, protesting appropriately what they know will harm others, those things that would restrict happiness and holiness. Paul, again, asks, "Why is

my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" (1 Cor. 10:29) That argument must go both ways.

With regard to protests, as "Protest-ants" there will be some things that the Christian will strongly oppose in a society based on today's corrupt and anti-Biblical principles. It is the responsibility of such to give voice to those principles, and to let it be known that Yahweh is not pleased with all beliefs and practices merely because He does not immediately punish them. The Scriptures give us clear knowledge of the kind of country and kingdom that the Father and Son bless, and those from which They turn away. The critical thing for those who are teaching the right principles is to remember that force is not a tool in the holy arsenal when it comes to dealing with such matters. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through Yahweh to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:4, 5)

As Adventists, we should know the Spirit of Prophecy quote, that "force is the last resort of every false religion;" and the Bible tells us the same thing plainly enough – it is "every thought" that must be brought into captivity to the principles of holiness. It is not the actions that the Father seeks to compel, it is the heart He seeks to inhabit. (Gal. 4:6)

Adriel: Amen

2) Property.

This is an interesting factor for a successful society, and might seem to be of lesser importance than such a "high" principle as liberty; however, it is actually quite necessary. The Scriptures have a number of safeguards in place to prevent an individual, or a family, from losing property, including the concept of the "Jubilee." We read, "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family." (Lev 25:10)

As a bit of a (relevant) side-issue, some who oppose the Bible try to undermine its moral message by pointing to various teachings, and attempting to equate them with atrocities found in human history. A common one that I have heard is, "The Bible promotes slavery."

First of all, merely discussing a matter is not the same as promoting it. As with many things associated with ancient Israel, the Almighty permitted a certain degree of latitude, but even there He placed bounds beyond which He said, "You shall not go." The ideal marriage is one husband for one wife, (Mat 19:4-6) and yet polygamy was permitted.

Private acts of vengeance were tolerated, and sanctuaries were even created to allow the guilty to escape a continuing cycle of violence. (Josh. 20:2, 3)

Similarly, slavery was allowed, and generally fell into three types: selling one's self into service to repay debts, (Lev. 25:39, 40) being a prisoner of war, (Deu. 20:10, 11) or – as a sub-type of this on rare occasions – being kidnapped as a wife. (Judges 21)

Again, none of these are represented as being "good" things; and certainly the slavery of the Bible has little beyond the name to do with the racially-based subjugation of entire groups of people as seen in the past couple of centuries. But even with what it does allow, the Bible places limits. Every 50 years, "ye shall return every man to his family," and this was for non-Hebrews. Fellow Israelites had a term of 7 years... which makes Laban's employment practices all the more unacceptable (but that is a subject for another night). If one becomes a slave 4 years from the Jubilee, then he is able to return to his home after that period of time, and is not held against his will on a permanent basis.

With so much opposition, and so little Godly reasoning, we must learn what the Bible says. I have never seen this verse used to refute the claims of the scoffers that the Bible "teaches slavery," yet it effectively does so. We also note, in line with our topic tonight, that the property of a family cannot be lost forever. If one generation falls into debt, so that it must sell or forfeit its land, the next will regain it. "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of Yahweh of Hosts hath spoken it." (Mic 4:4)

This idea, that property allows us to be self-reliant, is necessary for us to feel that we "belong" in a given society, and we see the Bible model this both in an earthly setting with Canaan, (Num. 34:29) and when it speaks of our Heavenly "inheritance." (1 Pet 1:4) Even as we consider ourselves to be "pilgrims" on the earth, the reason why we belong to Yahshua's Heavenly Kingdom is because He has gone to prepare a "place" for us there.

3) Purpose.

We must have liberty. We must have resources over which we are given responsibility. Finally, we must have a reason to exist in the society to which we are going. We read, from a passage we have seen in a recent study, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, 'Occupy till I come.'" (Luke 19:12, 13)

Again, "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we

were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Yahshua the Messiah, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." (2Th 3:8-12)

Here, the apostle is saying that even though the Gospel workers have the "power" or the right, to live off of their evangelical work, (1 Cor. 9:14) they nevertheless worked for their living among the congregation being addressed. They had heard that some of the Church members were idle...doing nothing productive with their time, and largely because of this they decided to set a good example, working while preaching, and giving authority to their instructions to "work" and live off their own efforts.

Even in Heaven and the renewed earth, we will have a clear purpose. In this perfect, endless society in which there is no sorrow, or pain, there will be work to accomplish. We read, of these days to come, "And there shall be no more curse, but the Throne of Yah and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him." (Rev 22:3) Though we shall be co-rulers, the fact that we will still be "servants" and "priests" indicates that we will be quite gainfully occupied in the Everlasting Kingdom. It will be glorious work, exalted, unlike anything that we could hope to describe or understand based on our present experience... but it will be toward a goal. We will have purpose.

Any earthly system, therefore, that wishes to be a good, productive, effective one, must have these qualities. A government that functions properly must allow its people freedom, must give them ownership over their resources, and must provide them with purpose directly, or by means of available opportunities.

Next week, we will look at what humanity has produced, how it relates to the Bible's teachings, and how well it meets these three requirements. In understanding this, it is my prayer that the people of Yah will have two responses. First, we will come to understand our responsibility to pray for our countries, our leaders, and the world. Second, we will come to appreciate, even more clearly, the perfect plan of Yahweh for His people, and to labor, perhaps more eagerly than before, for the foundation for His Kingdom being laid by our work in the Gospel. I will close here for tonight and ask if there are any comments and questions at this time. If there are none, then I will ask Bro. Luke to close our meeting with a prayer.

Lucan: Dear heavenly Father. We thank you for the perfect government of your kingdom, which will soon rule in the earth. We are blessed to cooperate in bringing it about, having that kingdom already ruling within our hearts. As we enter into the Sabbath hours, may our thoughts and conversation be in the kingdom of which we are citizens. In Yahshua's name we pray, amen.

8-12-2016 With a Rod of Iron

Zahakiel: Amen

daphna: Amen

Barb: Amen

Adriel: Amen

Elyna: Amen

Pastor Chick: Amen.