

In this passage we meet God's Guardian Angel for His people. People love to speculate about guardian angels. 70% of Americans believe in angels, and half of these believe they have their own personal guardian angel. Many of these claim they have "contact" with their guardian angels, and follow them as their "Spirit Guides." Some people hang an image of their guardian angel on their front door to protect their home. "Angel Spirituality" is high today – a spiritual life which is focused on and devoted to angels.

But today we want to learn from God's word that this kind of Angel Spirituality is idolatry. People are placing their trust for safety and security in mere creatures created by God. If you want to be really, truly, and eternally secure, you need more than an angel. You need Someone far more powerful and loving than angels are. You need God's Special Guardian Angel, the One we meet in Exodus 23.

To understand this Guardian Angel, we want to ask 4 questions of this passage:

1. Who is He?
2. What does He do?
3. How must we respond to Him?
4. What blessing comes to those who believe in Him?

**Behold I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.** I want to show you that this angel is no ordinary angel. This Angel is Jesus Christ, the true Angel Guide God has sent to us. How do we know this?

- The LORD says: **Beware of Him and obey His voice...for my Name is in Him.** (verse 21) Of no other angel does God say this. *My Name is in this Angel whom I will send.* Do you remember what this Name is? It is the Name that God revealed to Moses when He met Moses in the burning at the foot of Mt. Sinai. When Moses asked God, "What is Your Name?" He said: **I AM WHO I AM.** (see Exodus 3) This means that He is the eternal, never-changing, completely self-sufficient Saviour of His people. This is the Name that is in this Angel!
- The LORD also says: **Do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions, for My name is in Him.** (verse 21) This Angel has the power to forgive and not to forgive sins committed against the LORD's Name. No man or created angel is able to do this. This power belongs to God alone. **To the LORD our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.** (Daniel 9:9)
- The LORD speaks of His close unity with this special Angel whom He calls **My Angel** (verse 23). He says in verse 22: **But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak...** Jesus later said when He came down to earth in human form: I and the father are one... (John 10:30). **Whatever I speak, just as the Father has told me, so I speak.** (John 12:50b)
- And there's one more text I would like you to consider, Malachi 3:1 – **and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger [Angel] of the covenant in whom you delight.** (cf. Isaiah 63.9)

The Angel whom the LORD sent to travel with Israel through the harsh wilderness on the way to the Promised Land can be none other than one who is at the same time the LORD Himself, and yet one sent by the LORD. This is the Son of God. This Guardian Angel is Jesus Christ. Before He came down to earth in the fullness of time as a man, He took on the form of an Angel. This is the Angel who travelled with the Israelites in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This is a reminder that Jesus, the Son of God, did not have His beginning when He was conceived in the Virgin Mary's womb. He was already with God in the beginning, at the time of creation, before anything was yet created!

## 2. What does God's True Guardian Angel do?

**Behold I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.** (23:20). Again, in verse 23 the LORD says to Moses: **For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.**

Here is the task of the Angel whom the LORD sends to His people; here is a promise of what he will do.

- First, the Angel will **keep you in the way**. The word **keep** means to guard, watch, and protect. Jesus was sent already to Israel in the Old Covenant to go with God's pilgrim people through the hard and harsh wilderness. He supplied them with manna from heaven. He was the Rock that fed them water. (see I Corinthians 10:3-4) He gave them sandals and clothing that did not wear out. He was the one who took pity on them and rescued them when they sinned, and were punished, and cried out to God for deliverance. He was represented in the Bronze snake that was put on a pole to bring healing to the sick whom God punished with a plague. (see John 3:15).
- Second, this Guardian Angel **will bring you into the place which I have prepared**. Jesus would travel with them and guarantee their safe arrival in the Promised Land, their inheritance from God. In spite of their sinful stubbornness and repeated rebellion, Jesus would make sure that this little household of Jacob, this weak church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) would make it to their promised destination.

What comfort this message was for God's people! The same LORD who saved them from slavery and death in Egypt, would not leave them as orphans. He would not let them travel alone. He would carry them all the way to the end of their journey. They would not be alone in the tough spots. When enemies surrounded them to destroy them, the Commander of the Army of God would fight for them. When they grew tired and discouraged, the One who never grows tired or weary would be with them. When they sinned and came under judgment, the One whose compassions fail not would hear their cries and rescue them.

The True God, the God of the Covenant, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is one who saves His people from beginning to end. He is the Alpha and the Omega of our salvation, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. Scripture says...

- in Isaiah 44:6 – **Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the First, and I am the Last; besides me there is no God.**
- and in Revelation 22:13 Jesus says – **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.**

This Angel is clearly a prophesy of the later, fuller work of Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament. Jesus came to earth as a man to die for His people and rescue them from slavery to sin and Satan. But after doing that great work which saved us, He did not stop His work. What were the last words He spoke before returning to heaven? **Surely, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.** (Matthew 28:20) Not just for individual Christians, but for His whole Church, Jesus Christ is the True and Perfect Guardian Angel who will see us through the whole way to the inheritance He has prepared for us. He said: **This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all he has given Me I should lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day! And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise Him up at the last day.** (John 6:39-40)

The Bible compares believers today to Israel. Like Israel who went before us, the people of God in the New Covenant are pilgrims on their way to the heavenly city God has prepared for them. (see Hebrews 11:8-16). And we are not alone! Our Saviour has not left us as orphans, but has sent His Spirit to go with us and dwell in us, to guard us the whole way and bring us to glory.

### 3. How must we respond to Him?

In this passage about His Guardian Angel, the LORD also lays a serious obligation and demand on His people. He tells them how they must respond to His Angel. The LORD promises that His Angel will keep them and bring them to the Promised Land, but this promise, like all God's promises, is for everyone who listens and believes in His Son!

The LORD gives many commands to His people here about how they should respond to His Angel, but there is one command that stands at the centre, and all the others circle around it: **Beware of Him and obey His voice.** (21) The word for **obey** means to hear, to listen to. We could translate verse 21 this way: **Pay careful attention to Him and listen to His voice.** The next verse reminds us of that command: **But if you indeed obey** (or: listen carefully to) **His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.** (22)

How does the LORD want Israel to respond to His Guardian Angel? *Listen to Him!* It is a command to open their minds and hearts to whatever He says. It is a command to trust Him, and follow Him. It is really God calling Israel to faith – to believe in His Son whom He sent to them in the form of an Angel or Messenger. Later, when Moses talked to Israel about they did not obey this command but rebelled against His presence in the wilderness, He described it as a faith issue: **Yet you did not believe the LORD your God who went in the way before you...to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.** (Deuteronomy 1:32-33) They did not believe in (put their faith in) His Angel whom He sent to lead the way.

Yes, the LORD has many commands here for Israel, how they should respond to His Angel:

- **Beware of Him...Do not provoke Him.** (verse 21)
- **You shall not bow down to their gods** [the gods of the Canaanite nations], **nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.** (verse 24)
- **So you shall serve the LORD your God.** (verse 25)
- **You shall make no covenant with them** [the Canaanite nations], **nor with their gods.** (verse 32)

But it all comes down to this one thing: *Instead of following false gods and pagan ideas, I want you to believe in My Angel alone. Listen to His voice! Everything depends on that.*

If you do not listen to Him, **He will not pardon your transgressions.** (verse 21). If you turn away from the LORD Jesus, there is no forgiveness, and then there is no promise of life for you, for you have cut yourself off from your Saviour who is your Life. If you do listen to My Angel, **then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.** (verse 22) Everyone who listens to My Son is on My side. I will help you, protect you, and save you to the end.

This call to faith in Jesus is fulfilled in the New Testament. Faith in God's Son, Jesus, stands at the very centre of everything God requires of us today too: as God's covenant people, we stand in Israel's shoes. One time when Jesus was up on a mountain with His disciples, God the Father gave this command about His Son: **This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!** (Luke 9:35) Everything hangs on this command:

- **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** (John 3:16)
- **The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. Whoever believes in the Son has everlasting life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.** (John 3:35-36 ESV)
- **And having been perfected, [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.** (Hebrews 5:9)

So that is the question for us today: as we travel through the wilderness toward the Promised Land as God's covenant children, and go through discouragement, disappointment, failure, sorrow, and many other troubles, will you trust in the Son God has sent to keep you and bring you to the inheritance He has prepared? We know the sad history of Israel: many did not believe in God's Guardian Angel, but turned away from Him in their trials and troubles, and perished in the wilderness. But everyone who believed in Him found in Him everything they needed to go from strength to strength until they obtained the Promised Land. What about you? The wilderness of the Christian life is not easy. When you face fatigue 疲劳 or disappointment, what will you do: turn away from Jesus your Saviour and Protector and die in your sin and weakness? Or turn to Him and find in Him everything you need?

Remember, the LORD's Name is in Him – in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Great I AM WHO I AM. He is always more than enough for you. He gives and gives and never grows emptier, who works and works and never grows weary, who loves and loves and never runs out, who comes down to help His people in all their distress. All of God's endless resources are in Jesus. **In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily!** (Colossians 2:9) Don't *complain* that He has made the way too hard for you; rather *trust* that He has committed Himself to be with you and guard you all the way to the end. We often make too much of our troubles, and not enough of His mercies!

The LORD Jesus who bought you with His precious blood in His death on the cross, will never forsake those for whom He died. He who sealed you with His blood, will keep you in His power, and bring you to His Paradise. If you believe in Him – if you listen to His voice – you may be certain of this promise. He is the Alpha and the Omega of your salvation. Proverbs 4:25 says: **Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.** Don't let the world and its idols or problems distract you from your true Guardian Angel!

#### 4. What blessing comes to those who believe in Him?

We don't have time in this sermon to unpack all the blessings God has promised those who trust His Guardian Angel. But we will simply list these promises found in this passage, and say a few things about them. Here are His promises:

- **I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.** (verse 22)
- **My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites... and I will cut them off** (verse 23)
- **He will bless your bread and your water** (verse 25a)
- **I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.** (verse 25b-26)
- **I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make your enemies turn their backs to you.**
- **And I will send hornets 大黄蜂 before you which shall drive out [the nations] from before you.** (verse 28)
- **I will not drive them out from before you in one year...little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and you inherit the land.** (verses 29-30)
- **I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.** (verse 31)

These promises are for the people of Israel in the Old Testament, earthly promises for an earthly inheritance in the land of Canaan. But now that Christ has come as a man, has died for our sins, risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, these promises have not been taken away from us. In fact, they have become better than ever before! **He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.** (Hebrews 9:15) He is no longer our Guardian Angel, He is our own flesh and blood. No longer does He lead us to an earthly country in the Middle East. Now He leads His people through the wilderness of this life to the heavenly country, the new Jerusalem. He leads us to the New heavens and new earth where there will be no more cancer, no more weariness, no more pain or sorrow, no more death, no more sin, no more unfruitful days. Only glory and blessing and strength and health and joy – because God will be all in all!

This calls for faith and patience. In faith we trust that the victory belongs to God in Christ. He will send **hornets** before us. This means that He will go before us to scare and clear away our enemies. We must fight the good fight of faith, but the strength and victory belong to our Saviour and Guardian, Jesus Christ, the one who goes before us. He will open a door through every struggle and opposition until He brings us to our glorious destiny! **And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** (Philippians 1:6)

In patience we trust that though even progress seems very slow at times, even though God will not bring us our victory all at once, yet **little by little** He will lead us forward until one day the battle is over and the victory is won! Our salvation and holiness – which has already been completely bought for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus – are being given to us little by little. The church and kingdom of God are advancing little by little. That God may be glorified as His saints depend on Him and trust in Him for daily mercies, looking to Him for every good thing. Let us keep following Him even when the kingdom appears so small, and the glory looks so far away!

Jesus told His disciples that He was to heaven to prepare a place for them. **And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.** (John 14:3) When will He come again? Yes, at the end of this world, on the day of judgment, He will come to take His people to their inheritance. But He has also come in His Holy Spirit and through His Holy Spirit, the “Guardian Angel” of the New Covenant, Jesus is taking us to Himself.

Psalm 78:1-8 (Matthew 25:1-13) Take Extra Oil With You: *Biblical Family Planning* November 27, 2011

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Poor planning has led Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, and Germany to the brink 边缘 of bankruptcy. Many other nations are just a step behind. They don't have a vision for the future. They aren't thinking longterm. They aren't thinking about the future generations. They are wasting their time, energy and resources on themselves.

That's true of economies. It's also true of families and churches. Where there is no planning, the people go bankrupt; they fall away from God. Families and churches become unfaithful because they aren't planning for the future. To put it another way, they are not living by faith. They're short-sighted, living for the here and now, living for *this world*.

There's one sense in which our culture is obsessed with family planning – reducing the number of children. But that's often more like *anti-family* planning. What's even worse is that true, *biblical* family planning – *raising children who are confident in God for generations to come* – is all but gone from our culture! Even in the church this is true. Approximately 75% of the next generation in North American churches are leaving. The main reason is that they are not being raised to hope in God.

We live in the kind of age Psalm 78 is addressing – a godless generation whose hearts are not loyal to God. From Psalm 78:1-8 let us hear what God says to us about *a Biblical vision for family planning*.

#### **Take Extra Oil: A Biblical Vision for Family Planning**

1. an educational vision
2. a God-centered vision
3. a multi-generational vision

Asaph is speaking to the rising generation in Israel about a renewed vision of planning for the future of Israel, the covenant people. Israel has been through a time of rebellion and unfaithfulness. Psalm 78 tells us this long, sad story of Israel's unfaithful response to their faithful God. In spite of all He did for them, they did not believe in Him, and they did not talk about Him to their children. That was the key problem. That is the reason given for Israel's forgetting the LORD and falling away from Him: the fathers did not tell the children about the Lord. The parents did not educate the next generation in the LORD's ways.

Psalm 78 is written to fight that problem. The main theme is this: *If we tell our children about the LORD, then they will put their trust in God*; and **not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.** (verse 8) This psalm is a recipe for spiritual renewal and reformation in the church.

It not promise that each and every child will respond favourably to our Christian instruction, but it does mean that with this biblical vision for raising children in the covenant community, families and churches will be strong in the LORD. Of course, each generation must commit in faith to this vision for family planning!

The key is education. By that, I mean the key is that we practice what the psalmist speaks of at the beginning of the psalm: **Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark** (hidden) **sayings of old.** The parables, the dark and hidden sayings are the mysterious, wonderful things God has done which are beyond our understanding! After introducing his desire to teach us in verses 1-8, Asaph goes on to tell us about

God and His covenant in verses 9-72. Asaph is a model of what each generation must do: we must open our mouths to declare the wonders of God to our children.

He continues in verses 3-4: **I will utter dark sayings... which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength, and His wonderful works that he has done.** Here the LORD tells us our educational task in two ways, in a negative way and in a positive way.

- Here's the negative: **We will not hide them from their children.** He is calling believers to make a commitment not to hide the teachings about God and His works of salvation from the children of the covenant. To hide means to cover over. *We will not cover over our faith. We will not be silent about God. We will not keep quiet about the Word.* Sometimes as parents we are too afraid or too busy to educate our children to know the LORD. But Asaph, a wise and godly teacher in Israel, is putting words in our mouths and calling us to make them our own words: *We will not hide them...!*
- Here's the positive: **We will tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,** that is, the great things He has done for which He is so worthy of praise. Again, Asaph is putting words of commitment in our mouths and calling us to make them our own. We will tell them of God and His works. That means spending time and energy on talking about God and His ways to our children. Our temptation is to be busy with so many things that the instruction time gets cut short, and sometimes doesn't even exist! That's why Moses added the word *diligently* when he commanded:
  - **And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.** (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)
  - **Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.** (Deuteronomy 4:9)

This educational task must be our undying commitment to and priority with our children – with our own children as parents, but as parents and singles with *all the members of the next generation*. Asaph speaks of a commitment to the whole rising generation in the church! As a man of God Asaph had in his heart all the children of the congregation of Israel, not just his own children. For this reason the education of our children is not just a family matter, it is also a church matter. *Our care must be for posterity in general, and not only for our own posterity; and for the generation to come hereafter, the children that shall be born, as well as for the generation that is next rising up.* (Matthew Henry)

As Christ's church, therefore, this is our commitment to God's covenant children: to instruct them and discipline them – education involves both – in the true God, and in the true teaching of salvation, and in faithfully living for Him. a) Through the preaching and teaching ministry of the leaders of the Church, b) through parental instruction, and c) with the assistance of other godly brothers and sisters in Christ who can also be their teachers, let us never, ever lose sight of that commitment to educate our children so that their lives are shaped in truth. [I grew up in a church environment which did not take this task seriously. The church wanted to follow the trends instead of being faithful. It wanted to be cool, not Christ-centred. They did this hoping to keep their children, but, instead, they lost most of their children! Only the true knowledge of God's works through Jesus Christ will keep the next generation!]

This is true, biblical family planning. In many families this kind of planning is often completely forgotten, even in families that call themselves Christian. One of the saddest things is to witness a family that calls itself Christian but spends no time talking about, teaching, or telling the things of God. This is not Christian, and it will not raise children who are confident in God.

## **2. a God-centred vision**

That wise and godly teacher, Asaph, also understand the God-centred purpose of true education. What *is* the purpose of this education? Is it to give parents bragging rights so that we can proudly say (or think): *My child knows much more than yours!?* Is it to give churches a sense of pride that they have an excellent education program that is far better than almost every other church for miles around!?! God forbid that we should ever use education to become a proud and smug people – we have the true doctrine and we are the best! In Romans 2, Paul rebukes the Jews for being proud that they know the law of God, but then don't use their knowledge to bring glory to God. What happens then, says Paul, is that our knowledge blasphemes God.

What does Psalm 78 says about the purpose of education? (5) **For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children;** (6) **that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born...** (7) **that they might set their hope in God and would not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.**

There are 2 purpose statements here. Why should the fathers make the truths of God's Law (Word) known to their children?  
a) **so that the generation to come might know them...** Knowledge is the first purpose. But there is a further purpose:

- b) so **that they might set their hope** (trust) **in God**. The family planning vision runs like this: from education to knowledge and from knowledge to trust.

The real purpose of education is not to raise children with self-esteem, but to raise children who hope in God and put all their confidence in Him, not in themselves. The biblical vision for family planning is a God-centred vision, not a child-centred one. The focus is on God, not on the us or our children. God is the Great One to be esteemed, not our children. Only this vision can pass along true meaning to our children, when they see that God is the meaning of life in this universe. He is at the centre of everything.

This God-centred vision of teaching our children involves two things, says God's prophet, Asaph:

- a) It means that the content of our teaching must be God. **We must tell the generation to come the praises of the LORD, His strength, and the wonderful works that He has done** (verse 4). And verse 7 adds: **that they might not forget the works of God**. Education not about teaching morals and manners to our children. That produces empty religion which is all about man's works. No, education is about coming to know God. Not just any god, but the God of salvation who sent Jesus, His Son, into the world to save sinners.

Did you know that in this Psalm Asaph is really commanding us to tell the story of Jesus Christ? Let me explain how Asaph is a prophet who is talking about Jesus. The New Testament says so. Jesus came to fulfill Psalm 78 by what He taught and what He did. When Jesus told parables about the kingdom of God, the Bible says in Matthew 13:34-35: **All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, He said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."** (Matthew 13:34-35) Jesus came to reveal the "dark sayings" or hidden mysteries of God. He came to show the wonderful work of God's salvation. What is this work? It is how God would save sinners through a Saviour who would come and die for sinners on the cross. This is the ancient mystery which was hidden in the Old Testament and then revealed in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. The Israelites saw God's salvation only dimly, in sacrifices and prophecies.

Jesus came to show us God's salvation plainly in His death and in His resurrection. There the hidden works of God are exposed in full beauty: how He put our sin and punishment on Jesus, so that we might have our sins forgiven and receive eternal life. This is the story of God Asaph told in Old Testament language, which Jesus now tells us in New Testament language. This is the story we must tell from all of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. Tell them the story of Jesus, which starts already in Genesis 1. As Paul says in Colossians 3 – **May the Word of Christ dwell in you richly!**

- b) And it means that the aim of our teaching is faith in God: **that they might set their hope in God**. The word here for **hope** literally means **kidney**, something that lives very deep inside you. The idea is this: that they might develop a very deep, genuine and abiding confidence in God and in His saving work. This hope is a *deeply felt confidence in and expectation from God*. We are called to raise children in the desire that they come to a firm conviction and deep-rooted assurance in the God of the Bible, and that this God is My Saviour and will work all things for my good and be with me to the end. I commit my life to following Him alone and keeping His commandments because there is no other God besides Him, and I have no other refuge.

We know that God-centred education is the tool for this, but it is not the power that does this work of creating faith and hope in God in our children. The power belongs to the Holy Spirit of God. We must teach and discipline always in reliance on the Holy Spirit who alone can create and develop faith. As the apostle once said: **Our Gospel came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance**. (I Thessalonians 1:5) It requires the work of the Holy Spirit for our telling of God to translate into our children's trusting in God. We must pray for that! He uses our work, but it is His work. He must regenerate and open the heart to the Lord.

### **3. A Biblical vision for family planning is also a multi-generational vision**

Remember that the LORD through Asaph is calling us to a 4-generation perspective – *a multi-generational outlook*. Here, verses 5-6, the LORD calls the 1) fathers to teach 2) their children so that 3) the generation to come would know the teachings, even the children yet to be born, that they in turn may arise and 4) declare them to their children. It reminds us of the prophet Joel who says to Israel about the works of God (in judging His people for their sin): **Tell your children about it; let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation**. (Joel 1:3)

Now, obviously, the LORD is not calling us to limit ourselves to only 4 generations. The point is this: as you teach your children, look far, far ahead into the future, much farther than you can see or imagine now. *As you teach your children, plan ahead for your great, great grandchildren who will be born in 22<sup>nd</sup> century*, Lord willing!

And that brings us to the issue of the oil in the parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins. The Church has often failed in her vision for family planning. We are like the 5 foolish virgins who took no extra oil with them as they waited for the Bridegroom to return. They were thinking short-term. The Bridegroom is coming any moment! And they are not ready for the long wait; they are not ready for a delay. Short-term thinking is really very selfish: *I'm just in it for me. As long as I get to heaven I'm not*

*concerned about anything else.* This has led to very careless, short-term thinking when it comes to training our children. The rapture's just around the corner so why bother thinking about great-great-grandchildren?!

But if we really want to prepare for the Lord's coming, we will take extra oil with us so that, in case the Bridegroom is delayed and takes longer than we think, we will have passed along the knowledge of God with enough clarity and soundness and diligence and seriousness to carry the next generation forward, and they the next, and the next, and the next, so that in the year 2130 and 2576 our descendants will be raising children who are confident in God! No, we can't guarantee the outcome, but we must be faithful in our task to desire and pursue this outcome that only God can bring!

*Take extra oil with you.* What does this mean in the context of raising the next generation?

- This means many things, of course, but it begins with throwing away all half-hearted, lukewarm Christianity. If we are half-hearted in our faith, we are setting the generation to come on a pathway that leads away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Half-hearted Christianity has no holding or staying power. As Paul says, the *form* of godliness may be there, but there is no power in it. Jesus will spit it out of His mouth. (see Revelation 3:16) We must repent of being lukewarm (which attacks us all) and become, with God's help, fully devoted to the Lord and His kingdom. The Lord says that the fear of the Lord holds great blessing for Israel's future: **Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!... May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!** (Psalm 128:1,6)
- Taking extra oil with you also means having that positive perspective on the future that is willing to look ahead several generations. Many Christians simply assume that everything is going to ruin with the coming generations. But we must stop thinking that the future of the world belongs to the godless, and that there's no hope for the future generations either of our own children and grandchildren. This is an extremely short-term and hopeless outlook. We must believe what God promised Abraham: that he (and those who have his faith) **will inherit the world!** (see Romans 4:13) A Psalm 78 perspective believes that there is hope for the coming generations, and for the Church in this world.
- For this reason, taking extra oil also means that we believe that we are not stuck in the sins of our forefathers, but that reformation and renewal are truly possible with God. By faith Asaph was looking to reverse the tide of an evil, rebellious generation. He was saying to them: *You don't have to do this just because your fathers did it that way!* God is the God of reversals. He can make children of Abraham out of stones. He can use little you and little me to turn the world upside down by the power of the Gospel, and turn the tide of a wicked and depraved generation! The Gospel is powerful – far more powerful than the godless, pagan culture that invades our land, our movie theatres, our government, and our news media. Taking extra oil means shining the powerful light of our lamps in this dark world until the Lord returns, and letting the Lord work powerfully through us. The Gospel is powerful light because it is nothing less than the death of Jesus Christ which destroys sin, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ that brings new life. That is the life-changing power that can turn the tide in your life, in your child's life, in your whole family history, and even in your nation!

Because of the Power of the Gospel of God's Christ, we not only must, but we can look far ahead in our family planning! This is the Word of God that saves households for generations to come. We must never put faith in our family planning vision, or in our parenting techniques, or in our church education program, for in the end, though God will be pleased to use these faithful works, it is His faithful work alone through Jesus Christ that will build the rising generations.