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HAUNTED BY JACKALS

Anubis is generally called the jackal-headed god of the Egyptians. Although he doesn't figure in much of Egyptian mythology, he has one very important role. He was eventually considered the god of the underworld. His primary function was to oversee the embalming of corpses and to escort the dead to the underworld, where they could continue to exist in a state resembling their life. His head is generally depicted as a jackal with black fur, black being the color of resurrection or the afterlife. Anubis also presided over the "weighing of the heart" ceremony. The heart of the deceased would be weighed on a balance scale against a feather, representing *maat*—truth, order, and justice. If their deeds were good in this life, the scale would balance and they would be allowed to enter the realm of the dead. If the heart was heavy with wrongdoing, it would be gobbled up by the crocodile/hippopotamus god, Ammit, and the person would cease to exist. This was considered by the Egyptians to be the ultimate punishment because then one could never be resurrected. Thus the jackal was held in high regard by the Egyptians.

The golden jackal (now scientifically classified as the golden wolf) is closely related to some modern canids, most notably the coyote and then the wolf. They live a solitary, monogamous life, chasing all other jackals except the very young from their territory. Like the coyote, they may live close to humans, sometimes even making dens in abandoned dwellings. Unlike the true jackals of southern Africa, the golden jackal will not usually attack larger animals or people. Their solitary life and willingness to live close to people may be the basis for making Anubis wear a jackal's head.

The Bible mentions jackals about fourteen times. In the King James Version, the word is generally translated dragon, reflecting the late Middle Ages natural history of the English. Most modern translations, including the New King James Version, translate it jackal. The description of the animal in question more accurately fits the golden jackal.

Sometimes the Bible depicts jackals as living in dry deserts. "I turned Esau's inheritance into a desert for jackals." (Mal 1:3)

The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived. (Isa 35:7)

Several references associate jackals with owls. Perhaps this relates to the solitary habits of both animals. Job says he has become "a brother to jackals and a companion to owls." (Job 30:29) Isaiah says Edom will "become a haunt for jackals and a home for owls." (Isa 34:13) He also says that jackals and owls will thank God for providing water in the wilderness. (Isa 43:20)

Their most common use in the Bible is to depict the utter destruction of cities and nations. Palaces and homes will become dwellings for jackals, following their habit of taking over ruined dwellings.

Isaiah and Malachi predicted that Edom would be a haunt of jackals. (Isa 34:13; Mal 1:3) But Isaiah also said that of Babylon. "Hyenas will howl in its fortresses, and jackals will make dens in its luxurious palaces." (Isa 13:22) Jeremiah predicted Jerusalem and other towns of Judah would become a ruin, "haunted by jackals." (Jer 9:11; 10:22; Lam 5:18) He says something similar about the Galilean city of Hazor, which was about ten times the size of Jerusalem. (Jer 49:33) Ezekiel compared false prophets to "jackals digging in the ruins." (Ezek 13:4)

In the American Southwest it would not be far wrong to substitute coyotes for jackals. Either way, this is another animal that God used in a prophetic way. We can learn from history; we can learn from jackals.

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THE ELECTRONIC ASSEMBLY

Recently, a megachurch in Denver made the decision to sell their building and go to an all-virtual format. They promised that their community social outreach—clothing and food services—would continue. They did not address how this would effect the social health of the church itself. After the pandemic of 2020-2021, a number of congregations are following their example. After this story hit the news, a Christian radio station asked what their listeners thought about this. The reactions were mixed, with some liking it and others saying they had to have the in-person interaction of a physical assembly.

Several issues come to mind when discussing virtual assemblies. These include participation, fellowship, and the Lord's Supper.

Participation

How much participation is involved in electronic church? That, of course, depends on the individual. The

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temptation is great to do other things while listening to the television or computer, and then your concentration is no longer on worshipping God. Others don't even need the electronics, because they worship by themselves constantly. The assembly of the church, however, is designed by God to include corporate participation; many scriptures use the phrase "among you" in reference to the church. For many who participate in online church, there is no "among you," because they never identify with a particular congregation, or don't know who else is in that congregation.

While you can sing along with a televised congregation, sometimes people don't do so because they can hear themselves separately. Of course, what is important is the worship and not how you sound, but some people don't like singing along with an electronic congregation. There is another aspect of this that will be looked at later.

Some TV churches only broadcast the sermon, and then you miss out on the other aspects of group worship. In other broadcasts, prayers may be hindered because when the one leading the prayer mentions specific persons, many of the listeners may not even know who the person is or how they are related to the congregation. Since they tune in individually, there is no participation with others, to know who they are or what their needs are.

Many larger churches, even those that meet physically, have a problem with members knowing more than a core group. There may be many such groups, and even some overlap in membership of those groups. Online worship exacerbates the problem. If one can participate in the worship without knowing who else is included, then one need never get to know other participants. It takes a strong will to find out who else is even considered a member of the congregation, and an even stronger will to reach out to get to know those people. Online congregations are often not even congregations; they are a collection of individuals with a common interest but no desire to associate with those of the same interest.

There is another concern with the trend toward virtual worship services. Research shows that the increase in electronic viewing has also accompanied an almost 80% reduction in contributions. Although people can still mail in checks (yes, those still exist) or set up electronic transfers of funds on a recurring basis, over a third of people going virtual fail to give to the church at all. A lack of group involvement results in a reduced interest in supporting the group financially. In spite of promises to continue outreach (social or evangelical), the reduction in income will necessarily result in a reduction of outreach services.

The Lord's Supper

Bridging the gap between participation and fellowship is the attitude toward the Lord's Supper. If you believe that participation in the Lord's Supper is important weekly, you miss out on the important remembrance of Christ through the bread and fruit of the vine. You could bless your own and partake at the same time as an electronic congregation but it isn't the same. You don't need the electronic congregation in that case in order to take the bread and cup. You could do that at any time. There is no participation with the congregation, so there is no need to limit what amounts to personal worship to the same time as others are worshipping together.

Paul had much to say to the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper. His discourse takes up the entire eleventh

chapter of 1 Corinthians. Much of what he says goes against the idea of electronic worship.

You can't "shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Cor 11:26) It is called a communion (1 Cor 10:16), but if you observe it by yourself, with whom are you communing and to whom are you showing.

"Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another." (1 Cor 11:33) One apparent problem with the congregation in Corinth was that they turned the Lord's Supper into a common meal. "In eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken." (1 Cor 11:21) Paul expected joint physical participation in the Lord's Supper. This is something that electronic congregations cannot do. They may participate jointly in time, but not with "one another."

Fellowship

There are specific scriptures about the differences between electronic and physical congregations. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25) The reference to "assembling together" specifically refers to doing so in a particular place. The reason this writer gives for assembling together (which you can't do electronically) is to encourage one another in love and good works. It is the togetherness of family. If you are not physically present with a congregation you are not encouraging others by your presence, or by your words. While it is possible that some smaller congregations may hold their worship through a group chat, like Zoom, most stream it one way. If you are watching on TV, YouTube, or Facebook, there is little or no opportunity to encourage one another.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Colossians 3:16) You can't teach and admonish with your singing if you are the only one who can hear it. It may be personal worship, but it is not congregational teaching. Singing in the church is a group effort, in the physical presence of others.

"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." (1 Thessalonians 5:11) You can't "comfort yourselves together" if you aren't together. There is little comfort from someone with whom you barely or never associate. The polite "I'm sorry for your loss" from the police or a doctor often comes across as a *pro forma* statement with little comfort.

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." (1 Thessalonians 5:12) How can you know those who labor among you if there is no "among

you," because there is no gathering together? How can an elder shepherd his flock if he doesn't even know who is in that flock, because they are all in their own homes? Elders are appointed over congregations, but in online "services" there is no congregation, because nobody is congregating.

There may be reasons that a person would have to stay away from the physical assembly of the saints. Often these are physical reasons, such as illness. Sometimes it is because of work schedules. In the time of pandemic, it is sometimes fear of crowds and catching a disease that can kill you. In the first century, though, there was also the possibility of death. Many Christians died because they chose to assemble together. In those cases, the threat of death often carried with it the idea that they would have to

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renounce Christ. There is not that consideration with the pandemic. Online streaming of worship to those who cannot otherwise assemble is better than nothing. The temptation, though, is to make excuses for why you cannot assemble together. Electronic worship enables some to create reasons they choose not to assemble. It makes them feel like they are doing the right thing while ignoring the command to assemble.

Television and internet evangelism have their place, but it is generally in trying to teach others. Its advantage is in evangelism, not worship. There are many people who would never darken the door of a church building, would never set foot in an assembly of the church. Some of those people might listen to a sermon on the television, even as background noise for other activities. The seed may be planted, whether they want it or not. Some seek out electronic worship to do their research into potential congregations or churches. By listening to online sermons they can determine whether a congregation or fellowship is following the Bible or mere doctrines of men. In that sense, electronic worship has value.

Electronic worship can never replace a congregation gathering together and showing love for one another. It can never replace knowing those who share your faith, and helping them when they need your help. It can never replace the innate human need for the company of others at important moments in their lives. These are things God wants, and he commands assembling together for our good and so we can experience these things.

CONTEXT IS KEY

For those in the *a capella* churches (Church of Christ, Eastern Orthodox, and some Baptists) there have always been certain scriptures to support singing without instrumental accompaniment. It used to be that most people in the Churches of Christ could recite the list from memory. It was always strange, though, that only one passage from the Old Testament made the list. It still makes its way to the lists of some of the most vociferous opponents of instrumental music in the assembly. That is really strange, because if someone is known as a “book, chapter, and verse” Christian, they should know better than to use that verse as a proof text.

The verse is found in Amos 6. Verse 5 pronounces a woe to those “That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David.” That is from the King James Version, which for many years was the favorite translation. It is truly a more accurate translation than most modern versions.

On the surface it does appear to be a condemnation of instrumental music. The problem is that it is taken out of context.

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the

viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. (Amos 6:1-6)

Even a casual reading of this context shows how ridiculous it is to use this as a proof text for *a capella* singing. It is clearly not even talking about the Temple worship. Note such phrases as “lie upon beds of ivory” and “cause the seat of violence to come near.” Those have no relation to congregational worship.

Amos is condemning uncaring idleness in the face of God’s judgement. Israel is in peril, and these people ignore the danger. They rely on their riches rather than God.

Beyond that context, it is clear that he is not making a blanket condemnation of the use of instruments of music. When he pronounces a woe on inventing instruments of music like David, he is condemning their wasting leisure time, not the instruments themselves. When Hezekiah made an offering it was accompanied by “instruments ordained by King David.” (2 Chron 29:27) Several other passages in 2 Chronicles mention Temple worship accompanied by David’s instruments. David was not condemned for inventing instruments because he made them for the Temple. These people are condemned because they made them for their excesses.

There is a difference between the music authorized for the Temple and that used in the synagogue, and subsequently in the church. It is wrong to use passages about the Temple worship to justify using musical instruments in the assembly today. It is just as wrong to take this passage seriously out of context to oppose those instruments.

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