



Come now, and let us reason
together, saith the Lord.

—Isaiah 1:18



Christian Science Sentinel
Bible Lens

Unreality

**September 28–
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from the Responsive Reading

Isaiah 45:9

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

Clay is a recurring metaphor for human beings in Scripture. Isaiah 64:8 declares, “O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.” Jeremiah records God’s words “Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 18:6). And Paul reprises the image in his letter to the Roman Christians: “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?” (Romans 9:20, 21).

A potsherd is a piece of broken pottery. In biblical times, pottery was used for such household items as dishes, cooking pots, jars, pitchers, lamps, buttons, and toys. Some broken objects were repaired; others were repurposed as surfaces for writing messages, implements for scraping animal skins, or braziers for carrying fire. Many, however, were simply thrown away. To this writer, one who argues with God is as ineffective as a useless shard of pottery.

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from Section 3

9 | Proverbs 29:7

The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it.

Considereth is interpreted here as active concern for the rights and needs of the poor. A scholar suggests: “These astonishing sayings contradict the notion that wealth is equivalent to righteousness. In them the poor are raised to the highest dignity. They and the rich are regarded as equals, but the poor alone are identified with God.”

10 | Nehemiah 2:1, 2

It came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. The king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart.

Artaxerxes was a name assumed by several Persian monarchs. This king ruled during the period after King Cyrus freed the Israelites from Babylonian captivity. Many Jews returned to their homeland at that time, but some, including Nehemiah, remained behind under Persian rule.

Although a foreigner, Nehemiah held the responsible position of cupbearer to Artaxerxes. This meant he was a highly trusted aide who ensured that the king’s drink was not poisoned and who guarded the royal living quarters. The Hebrew term for *cup-*

An exploration of Bible citations from the *Christian Science Quarterly*® Bible Lessons

“...a lesson on which the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends.” —Mary Baker Eddy

bearer (mašqē) is rendered *butler* in the account of Joseph in Egypt (see Genesis 40).

10 | Nehemiah 2:2–4

Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request?

Four months (from Chisleu to Nisan) had elapsed between Nehemiah's learning of his city's condition and his request of the king. This period was likely the time of Nehemiah's fasting and prayer (see 1:4). He would probably have known that it was Artaxerxes who ordered cessation of Jerusalem's building after being warned that it had been a rebellious city (see Ezra 4:9–24). Asking the king to overturn his command called for great spiritual resolve.

Though the decrees of Persian rulers were considered irreversible, Artaxerxes had included an escape clause in his mandate—“until another commandment shall be given from me.” So the rebuilding effort wouldn't be an impossibility.

10 | Nehemiah 2:19, 20

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn. . . . Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Enemy factions virtually surrounded Jerusalem at this time. Ammon, Tobiah's nation, was a pagan kingdom to the east of Judea comprised in part of descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot. Ashdod was a Philistine city west of Judea that became a major Assyrian stronghold. Samaria, antagonistic to Israel and represented by Sanballat, was to the north. Geshem's Arabians have been identified as tribes located south of Judea.

To be a citizen of Jerusalem was deemed a great privilege by many, and only those belonging to the tribes of Israel could live there. Nehemiah specifically denies his opponents any civil, legal, or religious rights in the city.

from Section 4

14 | Mark 2:17

They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Christ Jesus is applying to his ministry a well-known proverb—that those who are well have no need of doctors. Most of his listeners expected the righteous to be rewarded and sinners punished. However, one source explains: “Jesus redefined the coming of God's rule as the time of salvation, when people are freed from the power of Satan. They are healed, and their sins are forgiven.”

Resources quoted in this issue

Cit. 9: O'Connor, Kathleen M. *The Wisdom Literature*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988.

Cit. 14: Keck, Leander E., et al., eds. *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Vol. 8, *General and New Testament Articles, Matthew, Mark*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996–2001.

"The awful unreality"

By Helen Wood Bauman

From the May 9, 1970, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*

The association of two words not generally related is sometimes startling to say the least. And so it is with the words "awful unreality" used a number of times by Mary Baker Eddy in explaining her scientific uncovering of the nature of evil. In *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* she speaks of the omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience of Spirit, and she says, "These eternal verities reveal primeval existence as the radiant reality of God's creation, in which all that He has made is pronounced by His wisdom good." Then she explains, "Thus it was that I beheld, as never before, the awful unreality called evil" (p. 110).

In uncovering the nature of evil, Christian Science makes it possible for people to get rid of it, both as a spurious activity of their own present human selfhood and as an external force that might claim to influence and even harm them.

Mrs. Eddy's explanation of evil as unreal—an imposition, an illusion, a supposition, having no Principle and no actual law—is deeply scientific. And her method of dealing with evil in this light has been proved effective in countless instances when through that method healings of sin and sickness have taken place. Nothing is more convincing than proof.

Christ Jesus defined the devil, or evil, as "a murderer" and "a liar" and declared that "there is no truth in him" (John 8:44).

One has only to look around the world and consider its wars, murders, thefts, violent acts, and adulteries to see that, in perspective, evil has not been considered unreal. The omission of the Master's teaching that the devil is a liar and evil a lie has been the great sin of popular theology, because, if evil is understood as unreal and conse-

quently powerless, it can never develop into awful, destructive action.

The unreality of evil must be established in our thought, regardless of what we need to learn about its goings-on. If we try to destroy evil by believing that we are up against some monster, we will be agreeing with its self-estimate, and we will get nowhere in overcoming it. But to meet it head on as an unreality, however "awful" it may claim to be, robs it of power to act or fulfill its deadly purposes.

The student of Christian Science needs to learn to adjust his thinking to the fact that evil is unreal even when it seems awful. The awfulness of sin does not make it real, and no one should be terrified by its awfulness.

No stand we can take toward evil is more important than that it is unreal. If we are confronted with some form of error, either as sin or as sickness, we should make up our minds about it quickly. Is it real or is it unreal? Our decision will determine our experience.

Mortal mind's realm, the realm of the physical senses, is an illusion, its wickedness a sham. Evil cannot forever persist before the Christly realization of the three great verities of being revealed by Christian Science and lived in daily action: omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience. Where is there room for an "awful unreality" since God is All and governs all?

To read the entire article, which has been shortened to fit this page, go to jsh.christianscience.com/the-awful-unreality.