

'The purpose driven life' by Rick Warren—a critique based on Scripture

Introduction

All Christians have a God-given responsibility to emulate the Bereans who 'were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness and **'sought the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so'** (Acts 17v11). The checking of Paul's preaching against the Scriptures by these Berean Christians was nothing **personal** against the Apostle Paul, but a desire to be faithful to biblical truth. My purpose in checking Rick Warren's book **'the purpose driven life'** against scripture is the same. In fact all prophecies, sermons and books should also be tested against scripture (1 Thes 5v20-21).

At the beginning of the book, the reader is promised a life-transforming experience after 40 days. In addition, the reader is told that this is also God's normal way of revealing His purposes to His children, as declared on **page 9** of the book as follows:

'Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for His purposes, He took 40 days.'

The word **'whenever'** leaves no room for questioning Rick Warren's unbiblical concept. Thirty days will not do (nor will 30 years), only 40 days! To prove his point Rick Warren then proceeds to give us 8 notable examples: Noah, Moses, the spies, David, Elijah, Nineveh, Jesus and the disciples. He then concludes:

'The next 40 days will transform your life.'

Again this is an unequivocal promise. This subtly implies that if nothing happens after these 40 days, then it must be your fault! My critique will aim to show that Rick Warren's premise is incorrect due to faulty exposition of scripture. It is of course very palatable to Christians, who want God's dealings with His children reduced to a **formula** requiring the minimum amount of discipline possible. It is in fact yet another **fad** being forced on the Church. In addition, throughout the book, we are also encouraged to buy all kinds of other books and tools from the same author.

If only we would spend 40 days studying the Bible and continue studying it for the rest of our lives, we would truly be transformed as Jesus promises:

'If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples and you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.' John 8v31-32

Critique of Rick Warren's book

'Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain.' The Bible does not say this. This is Rick Warren's personal interpretation. However, it is obvious from the Bible that Noah's life had been transformed a long time before the 40 days of rain that occurred during the Flood. Firstly, Noah showed that he was a godly man **before** the Flood by exercising great faith in obeying God's command to build the ark for the saving of his family and all the animals. In addition, during the time when He was building the ark he preached the gospel to the unbelieving generation around him for probably 120

years (Hebrews 11v7; 2 Peter 2v5; Genesis 6v3). Noah had already known what his life's purpose was **before** the 40 days of rain during the Flood.

'Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai.' I'm sure he was! But what about all the amazing 'non-40 day' experiences prior to that, which are described in Hebrews 11v24-29. His life had been transformed long before Mount Sinai. He had met the Lord in the burning bush and then saw God do amazing signs (plagues etc) in Egypt before the deliverance of a whole nation from slavery, followed by the parting of the Red Sea etc. His life purpose (as Israel's deliverer and leader under God) had been known long before Mt. Sinai!

'The spies were transformed by 40 days in the Promised Land.' Well actually only 2 out of 12 spies came back transformed, and it is also obvious that those two, Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13-14), had experienced God in far more spectacular ways during the Exodus out of Egypt and the journeying in the wilderness. In fact Joshua had been Moses' assistant long before the spying episode (Exodus 24v13). So his life had been transformed by God very early on. Also later Joshua received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the commission to take over Moses' leadership position—surely an even more transforming experience than the time in the promised land. (Deuteronomy 31v14; 34v9).

'David was transformed by Goliath's 40 day challenge.' Long before the Goliath incident David knew his life purpose. He had experienced the Holy Spirit's anointing to be king long before the Goliath experience (1 Samuel 16v13). He had already experienced God's deliverance from the lion and the bear and thus he was ready for Goliath. He was also called '*a man after God's own heart*' (1 Samuel 13v14). In addition David was definitely not there during all 40 days of Goliath's challenge as he was tending his father's sheep (1 Samuel 17v28) and so it is more likely that he responded to Goliath's challenge the first time he heard it (1 Samuel 17v23).

'Elijah was transformed when God gave him 40 days of strength from a single meal.' But what about the transforming experience of the Mount Carmel Victory over the prophets of Baal. Also he had seen God provide his food miraculously for 3 and a half years through ravens and a poor widow, whose son he also raised from the dead! (1 Kings 17-18). No mention of 40 days in any of these experiences either.

'The entire city of Nineveh was transformed when God gave the people 40 days to change.' Actually the important thing was not the 40 days as such, but the message preached by Jonah in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the emphasis that Jesus brings out Himself in Matthew 12v41.

'Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness.' Actually Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit at His baptism **prior** to the 40 days of temptation by Satan. He was **tested** for 40 days in the wilderness.

'The disciples were transformed by 40 days with Jesus after His resurrection.' I'm sure they were, but what about the previous 3 years when they had walked with Him and what about the day of Pentecost when they were baptised with the Holy Spirit? Surely these were 'non-40 day' transforming experiences.

Therefore, Rick Warren's conclusion that '*whenever God wanted to prepare someone for His purposes He took 40 days*' is incorrect.

Conclusion

Forty days is not a 'magic number' or 'formula' to control God. One could also similarly argue that 30 years is the time God uses to prepare us for His purposes e.g. Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt at age 30 (Genesis 41v46); David became King at age 30 (2 Samuel 5v4); Jesus began His ministry at about age 30 (Luke 3v23). However, nowhere in scripture are we encouraged to think that 30 years is a 'magic number'. (Yes I do agree numbers in scripture may be symbolic—that is another subject). Let us not do the same with 40 days. Let God deal with us in His time!

In closing, let us be those who spend much time in God's Word under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit so that we might become 'complete, equipped for every good work' as Paul admonishes (2 Timothy 3v16-17).

However, there is a cost to becoming a Bible student—you will need to be prepared to set aside much time for the rest of your life, not just 40 days. Jesus said: '***Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God***' (Matthew 4v4).