

THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



Evangelists of hope for Africa . . .

The Creator's Special Project

Ardron Hinton

Humans are such amazing things,
With eyes for beholding beauty,
With minds that soar on eagle's wings,
And ears to hear of his duty.

Bloom of flower and note of song
Can touch the human heart,
And it can view the sunset hour
As a heavenly work of art.

The human mind can know
A God of justice, love, and grace,
And offer worship to this God
With others of the fallen race.
Humans ponder the unseen past,
Reach out to the future with hope,
Aim for a promised heavenly world,
And with present sorrows cope.

Humans can think an abstract thought
And study or weigh a fact.
Valid points of truth are sought,
Guiding how one should act.
From complex math to philosophy,
We can know a higher plane
Than the physical world that we can see
And seek nobler spiritual gain.

Amazing handiwork of God!
This being of flesh and spirit,
Who through the saving work of God
Can think of the judgment and not fear it.

Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom!

Matthew 9:15

Who is the bride?

“...Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:23-27).



The Contract and Its Agreements

- **How many brides does Christ have? Is He a polygamist?** *Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:4-6*
- **How did she become His bride?** *Acts 20:28; Romans 7:4; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 12:13*
- **What vows were included in the wedding ceremony?** *Ephesians 3:9-15; 2 Corinthians 3:18; James 1-5; 1 John 5:1-5; Revelation 2:10*
- **Whose name does she wear?** *Romans 16:16; Acts 4:12*
- **By what name are the children called?** *Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16*

**We encourage you to investigate
the church of Christ in your community.**

The conversion of the Ethiopian man:

... The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."
So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, **preached Jesus to him**. Now as they went down the road [in the desert!], they came to **some water**. And the eunuch said, "**See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?**" [Isn't it obvious that when Philip "preached Jesus" to him, he explained the necessity of being buried with Christ in baptism for the forgiveness of his sins? Otherwise, why this question?]

Then Philip said, "if you believe with all your heart, you may."

And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch



saw him no more; and **he went on his way rejoicing**.

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Typesetting: Gay Nichols
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TELUGU EDITION:

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THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU
(ROMANS 16:16).



The Passing of the Baton

Byron Nichols

Vast numbers of folks all over the globe have become captivated by the thrills and spills of sporting events, and by the accompanying jubilation of victory or the almost unbearable agony of defeat.

Races of most any kind are particularly popular sporting events. Whether it is a race involving humans, animals, or vehicles, there is lots of excitement surrounding the competition as the contestants jockey back and forth throughout the course of the race, with the greatest excitement usually being at the last part when one of the competitors manages to finish ahead of the others.

The New Testament at times describes the spiritual adventure of the individual Christian as a race. It seems that the apostle Paul, more commonly than the other inspired writers, may have employed the similarities of living the life of a devoted disciple of Christ and those of an athlete competing in a race. For example, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24, *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”* He wrote in the same fashion in Philippians 2:16, *“... holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”*

There are many things that could be said about how the successful Christian will have duplicated several kinds of activities and efforts that are common to the winning runner in an athletic race. This is both true and important, but it focuses strictly on the running of the individual Christian race. Is it possible to expand or broaden the comparison of the athletic race and the individual Christian to make application to Christianity in a wider sense? I believe that we can do that without any injustice to the Scriptures, as long as we don't get careless in doing so.

A majority of races involve individuals competing against one another. There are other races, however, that are team races, such as relay races. An example of a relay race is the 4X100 meter race. This is a team race in which the first runner runs 100 meters, carrying a baton in his/her hand, which is then handed to a teammate who then runs the second 100 meters and passes the baton to the third team member, who then runs the third 100 meters and passes the baton to the fourth member of the team, who runs the final 100 meters. This kind of race requires more than just speed — teamwork is just as essential if the team is to be victorious.

A study of the Scriptures reveals that in spite of the fact that we race *individually*, we do not race in *isolation* from everyone else. Our race is to be witnessed by others, and if our race is victorious, we will have a favorable impact on others, even while we are running for ourselves.

As we near the completion of our race, should we not have been making preparation all along to “pass the baton” on to our family members, so that they too will continue running the race, always keeping the finish line in mind? As we live among many different families, we see many differences in the spirituality of those families. In some, the faith and perseverance is obvious from one generation to the next, but other families don’t always exhibit that continuing consecration to the Lord. Why is that? Surely at least part of the answer is because “the baton” has not been passed along in some families, while other family groups have been conscious of the ongoing necessity of every member running the race so that all will one day share the very same exhilarating victory.

We see the same things happen in congregations that we see in families. Some congregations are much more dedicated to the continual success of all of the members as they run the race, and the elderships make provision for the right kind of spiritual nourishment and exercise so that each Christian is better equipped for competing against the devil with skill and determination. This results in “the baton” being continually passed along from generation to generation, resulting in those congregations becoming stronger all along.

Just imagine what this would mean for the Lord’s church, as a whole, if all of our families and all of our congregations would understand that our race is more than just for ourselves, individually, but it is also for ALL of God’s children. The only way for the judgment day scene to be what it can and should be is for every one of us to earnestly run the race ourselves, and to determine that we will also “pass the baton” on to others.

May God bless us all with the wonderful crown of victory!



Apostasy: Its Cause and Cure

Jerry Bates



Apostasy has always been a serious problem in the Lord's church, and I suppose that it always will be a problem. Much time is spent discussing what causes it and the solutions. I do not presume to provide the final answer to that dilemma, but let me offer one consideration which I believe is often overlooked.

In pondering this question, let us consider the nation of Israel as an example. In Hebrews, chapters three and four, the writer uses the nation of Israel as a warning to the Lord's church not to revert to their former lifestyle. Christians are plainly referred to in this section, because they are called "holy brethren," and "partakers of the heavenly calling" in 3:1, and again called "brethren" in 3:12. These Christians were tempted to leave Christ and go back to keeping the Mosaic Law as their way of serving God. However, by so doing they would lose the reward they were seeking. Thus, they were urged to remember what happened to the nation of Israel.

God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage without them fighting a single battle. They had seen that, but it did not cause them to *trust* God more. In actuality the result was the opposite. They hardened their hearts, and

when confronted by the walled cities of Canaan, they wanted to return to Egypt. In spite of all the great things they had seen God do, they thought He was inadequate for the challenge of Canaan. Israel suffered because of unbelief. It wasn't that they did not *believe* in the existence of God. Rather, they did not *trust* Him, and that led them to heed human voices of despair rather than listen to the voice of God. Thus, God condemned an entire generation of people to die in wilderness wanderings and never enter that land of Canaan to which they had looked for centuries.

Why was Israel unable to enter Canaan? Hebrews 3:19 said they could not enter because of *unbelief*, although 4:6 pronounces they did not enter because of *disobedience*. Unbelief or lack of trust in God is the root cause of disobedience. Israel believed mentally in God. His evidence was all around them in the cloud by day and the fire at night. But that mental assent did not translate into trust or obedience.

Israel lacked confidence in God's ability to fulfill His promises. They saw great signs of God's power, yet never developed an ability to walk by faith, not sight. They continually yearned to return to Egypt. We have a hard time understanding why they would desire slavery. After all, we cannot even imagine wanting to return to such hardship. Hebrews 3:13 mentions the deceitfulness of

sin. Sin caused Israel to forget the hardships of Egypt and to remember only the good things, the meat and vegetables to eat, and probably a permanent house in which to dwell rather than a tent.

How does this relate to our temptation to leave God and return to a life of sin? I believe that many of us never really make a commitment to serve God — especially if you, like me, were “raised in the church”. Your parents, and possibly grandparents, were Christians, and you were taught the will of God from birth. Going to church services and being baptized into Christ was just something you did as a member of your family.

However, at some point, each one of us must make a heartfelt commitment to God. The majority of the people of Israel never made that commitment. They were *born* Israelites, and believing in God was something everyone did as a member of their nation and society. However, that mental assent never made it into their hearts, because when faced with the obstacles of the walled fortresses of Canaan, they listened to human wisdom rather than the promises of God.

If we never make a commitment to God from the heart, we will do the same when faced with the obstacles of life. Christianity brings its share of temptations and afflictions, and sin offers us pleasure, if only for a short time. We need to have the wisdom

and courage to look beyond the temporary and gaze at the end result of a life of faith. We must be like Moses who *“chose to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”* (Hebrews 11:25).

The people of Israel never learned to completely trust God, and thus were unable to believe God either could or would lead them to victory in Canaan. Satan is constantly trying, likewise, to destroy our confidence in God and His promises. Many do not believe that we *need* God’s help or that He *will* help, thus we try to do everything on our own. Many doubt that God actually means what He says, thus we do what God forbids or we fail to do what He requires. We are constantly tempted to put our trust in people or things rather than in God. A lack of confidence in Him will likewise cause us to disobey His will.

Christians should also be constantly encouraging one another. The Hebrews were told to encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3:13). Notice the writer said to encourage one another “today”. This adds a sense of urgency and emphasizes the vital nature of exhortation. Furthermore, we are to encourage “one another” daily. Christianity is a “one another” religion. God never intended for His followers to be lone rangers but to associate with one another, and thus exhort one another on a regular basis, even daily.

It is easy to become discouraged while following God. Virtually all of the great servants in the Old Testament had their times of discouragement. When the church in Jerusalem heard about people in Antioch being converted to Christ, they immediately sent Barnabas to them, and one purpose in going was to “encourage” them (Acts 11:19-23). We are told that one purpose of our assemblies is to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24). Today, we have largely turned this around. **We encourage to assemble rather than assembling to encourage.**

We have seen that two ways to keep from apostatizing from God is to make a firm commitment to serve God, and then accompany that with a strong dose of constant encouragement from our fellow Christians. The Israelites failed in both respects, and thus they failed to remain true to God. May we never follow their example. †

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11).



Christ in the Old Testament

Louis Rushmore

Precursor as to whether Christ can be found in the Old Testament, either by way of prophecy or physically active on earth, is the question as to the nature and eternality of Christ. Respecting the latter, which says much about the former, Jesus Christ affirmed of Himself His pre-existence to the Incarnation when He uttered, *“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am”* (John 8:58; cf. Exodus 3:14 KJV). Add to that our Lord’s statement, *“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”* (John 17:5). Christ existed before “the beginning” (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16; 1 Peter 1:18-20) and was coequal with God the Father (John 1:1-3,14,18) and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2). There are three, eternal, coequal Divine Persons (Matthew 28:19) Who possess the quality and essence of being God or the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9). Since Christ is a Member of the Godhead and has existed eternally, it should be of no surprise were we to discover Christ in the Old Testament through prophecy, some activities on earth prior to His Incarnation or both.

Everywhere one looks with discernment in the Old Testament, he sees the eternality of Him best known to us as Jesus Christ. Just one specimen is the Old Testament passage the first century Jews (Matthew 2:4-6; John 7:42) and Christians today without the least hesitation invoke as prophetic as to in what city the Savior was to be born. *“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2).

In a marvelous prophecy concerning the coming Messiah, the prophet Micah described Him as being the one “whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2) With this statement in mind, it must be understood that the Lord’s conception and birth into the world was not the beginning of His existence. Rather, this phrase identifies Him as already existing: He is “from everlasting.” He is eternal and has no beginning or end. (Daugherty 8)

Furthermore, respecting Old Testament prophecies and New Testament fulfillments concerning Jesus Christ, J.J. Turner and Edward P. Myers make the observation that “many passages in the Old Testament that refer to Jehovah are found to be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus in the New Testament. Thus, the Holy Spirit (as He inspired men to write) gives His testimony to the fact that Jesus is Deity by asserting His pre-existence in that Jesus is the



Jehovah of the Old Testament” (78). Likewise, Roy H. Lanier, Sr. concurs that “we must conclude that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament” (166). For an example, compare Isaiah 40:3, “The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God” (ASV) and Matthew 3:1-3, “And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was

spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (ASV).

One does not have to merely muse as to whether Christ can be found in the Old Testament, since Jesus Christ Himself forcefully avowed that the Old Testament declared Him before His birth and subsequent earthly ministry. Following the resurrection, Jesus specifically instructed some of His disciples about this very

thing. *“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:25-27 KJV). The primary, divine theme of all the prophets, our Lord averred, was about the Christ; the Old Testament is replete with references to Jesus Christ. *“You can find Christ in every part of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27). What a delight it is to meet Christ in the Old Testament Law, the types, the Psalms, and the writings of the prophets”* (Wiersbe).

Of course, long before His death, burial and resurrection, at the commencement of His ministry, Jesus declared His divine Role as the anointed One, and He did this by applying an Old Testament prophecy to Himself. Entering the synagogue in Nazareth, our Lord volunteered to read Scripture, whereupon He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah to what is now 61:1,2, *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings...”* *“And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”* (Luke 4:21). Clearly, Jesus claimed to be the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior at the onset of His earthly ministry. One commentator remarked, *“In all the Word of God there*

is not a page that does not testify of Him” (G.F. Pentecost qtd. in Exell). It is generally acknowledged that there exist approximately 333 specific prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah that are completely and minutely fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the Old Testament being filled with prophetic Scripture references to Jesus Christ, the work of the Second Person of the Godhead — Christ — is evident on earth in the Old Testament. For instance, the Angel sent ahead of the wandering Israelites (Exodus 23:20) is commonly understood to be a reference to the One we know best as Jesus Christ. *“We view the ‘angel’ as the pro-incarnate Logos - Christ in the Old Testament. Israel’s guide was the Son of God - the same Divine Person who is now conducting ‘many sons unto glory,’ and who is become ‘the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him’ (Heb 2:10; 5:9)”* (Spence and Exell). This same Angel or reference to Christ appears in Exodus 19:14, and the Angel speaking from the burning bush (Exodus 3:2) is a reference as well to Christ (Fields 516); the context of Exodus 3:2-8 identifies the Angel speaking from the burning bush as Deity. The inspired penman Luke recorded the inspired words of Stephen, which confirm that Christ was the Angel at the bush and Who gave the commandments to wandering Israel.

“This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us” (Acts 7:38). In addition, the apostle Paul with no less inspiration declared that Jesus Christ participated directly with wandering Israel.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

Other Old Testament passages refer to the “Angel of” [“Jehovah” ASV] [“the LORD” KJV] where the reference pertains to the Second Person of the Godhead – Christ. “The first mention of this special angel is found in Genesis 15. The appearance occurs in the context of a crisis in the life of Hagar” (Ball 48). It was the Divine Person we know best as Christ who appeared to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-13). The “Angel of Jehovah” stayed Abraham’s hand as Abraham was about to slay Isaac (Genesis

22:11-18 ASV) and further identified Himself as Jehovah who promised blessings upon Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 22:16).

The Second Person of the Godhead is far more active in the Old Testament than many people imagine He was. It is my deep conviction that He often came to earth on missions for the First Person. These He did as the Angel of the Lord, Angel of Jehovah, My Angel or Angel of His presence. Too many just assume that the basic meaning of angel is that of a created being such as Michael or Gabriel. However, the basic meaning of angel is that of messenger or agent. The Second Person often came to earth as Messenger or Agent for the First Person. (Taylor 25-26)

This Angel of the Lord is portrayed in the book of Joshua, in the book of Judges and in the lives of David, Elijah and other great worthies of the Old Testament. Zechariah... The Angel of the Lord figures prominently therein. (Taylor 27)

Besides this, Jehovah appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18:1) along with two angelic companions (Genesis 18:2) and declared that He would

give Abraham and Sarah a son (Genesis 18:13-14). Later in the chapter, the two angelic companions to Jehovah went to Sodom to rescue Lot's family and to destroy the cities overcome in homosexuality; Jehovah, though, remained behind, and Abraham attempted to negotiate with Jehovah the safety of any innocents in the cities (Genesis 18:20-33). Throughout the Old Testament, though, the word "Jehovah" sometimes refers to the Father in heaven, frequently, it refers to the Second Person of the Godhead before His Incarnation.

For a fuller treatment with numerous inspections of corresponding passages, see brother Lanier's excellent book *The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries*. Still beyond these references to the Second Person of the Godhead in Scripture, numerous appellations or names are applied to the Christ in the Word of God (Derk) so that a Bible student could spend a very long time reexamining the Bible with an enhanced perspective of Christ in both testaments. Yes, Jesus Christ is in the Old Testament, both in hundreds of prophecies as well as in discernible activities. †

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**Everywhere one looks
with discernment in
the Old Testament, he
sees the eternity of
Him best known to us
as Jesus Christ.**

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The Lion and the Lamb

Hugo McCord

From the island of Patmos the apostle John *“in the Spirit”* ascended into heaven, and saw in God’s right hand a scroll *“sealed tightly with seven seals”* (Revelation 1:9; 4:1-2; 5:1). When no one *“could open the scroll,”* John *“wept much”* (Revelation 5:3-4). One of the 24 elders said to him, *“Do not weep. Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the descendant of David, has conquered! He can break the seals and open the scroll”* (Revelation 5:5).



However, the one who took the scroll from God’s hand was not a Lion, but a Lamb (Revelation 5:6-10). What is the explanation?

All 66 Bible books are interlocked. The history of the Lion and Lamb pattern begins in Genesis. About 1706 B.C., the patriarch Jacob prophesied about one of his sons: *“Judah will stoop and crouch as a lion, and as a lion,*

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who will arouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until the Peacemaker comes, and him the peoples will obey” (Genesis 49:9,10).

Apparently because the lion is the king of the jungle, God planned that a descendant of Judah would be given a king’s scepter of “*all authority in heaven and on the earth,*” and, as a lawgiver, the King would issue “*the law of the Spirit of life,*” the words of which will “*judge*” all people “*in the last day*” (cf. Matthew 28:18; Romans 8:2; John 12:48).

Isaiah added to Jacob’s prophecy that the coming lion-like King would be a direct descendant of King David: “*And a throne will be established in lovingkindness, and one will sit thereon in truth, in the tent of David, judging, and seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness*” (16:5). “*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and on his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this*” (9:7).

Other prophets spoke of the coming monarch as a second “*David*” (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:24; Hosea 3:5). But we are shocked to read that Jacob’s prophecy of a lion-like king among his descendants (Genesis 49:9-10) would be: “*like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep is silent before his shearers, so he will not open his mouth*” (Isaiah 53:7).

How could a king sitting “*upon the throne of David*” (Isaiah 9:7) be “*like a lamb*”? Or be called a “*servant of rulers*” (Isaiah 49:7)? Seven times Isaiah called him a “*servant*” (42:1; 49:5, 6, 7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). As a lion and a lamb are opposites, so are a king and a servant.

Indeed, Jesus, “*the son of David*” (Matthew 1:1; 9:27), was a servant: “*The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve*” (Matthew 20:28). Everywhere, He “*went about doing good*” (Acts 10:38). When “*Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with fever,*” Jesus “*went to her, took her hand, and raised her up. The fever left her*” (Mark 1:30-31). On another occasion, “*Jesus took a towel and wrapped it around himself. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to dry them with the towel*” (John 13:4,5).

Jesus’ purpose in coming to the earth was to be “*the offering for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). He volunteered his life as a “*ransom*” (Matthew 20:28). A ransom for the release from the guilt of sin is impossible by “*perishable things, as silver and gold*” (1 Peter 1:18). Ours was a debt we could not pay. When John the immerser “*saw Jesus coming*” he exclaimed, “*Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29).

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The blood of the Lamb has *“purchased for God men of every tribe and language and people and nation”* (Revelation 5:9). The Lord adds to the church day by day every saved sinner (Acts 2:47, KJV; Acts 5:11), and so it can be said that *“he bought”* the church *“with his own blood”* (Acts 20:28). Baptism puts a sinner *“into Christ”* (Galatians 3:27), and *“in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”* (Ephesians 1:7).

While the Lamb was on the earth, He was not a king (John 6:15). But after He had given *“his life as a ransom”* (Matthew 20:28), then He *“conquered him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”* (Hebrews 2:14), and so He *“led captivity captive”* (Ephesians 4:8), and *“stripped rulers and authorities, boldly exposing them in his triumph”* (Colossians 2:15). He had entered *“the house of the strong man”* and had bound him (Matthew 12:29). In so doing, He *“indeed abolished death, and has brought to light life and immortality through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10).

On His return to heaven, having been raised from the dead to be *“set”* on David’s throne (Acts 2:30), He became the *“King of kings and Lord of lords”* (Revelation 17:14) on Pentecost Day, May 28, A.D. 30 (Acts 2:1-47). He *“must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death”* (1 Corinthians 15:25,26). *“Then is the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God”* (1 Corinthians 15:24). Thanks be *“to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15:57).

How did Jesus become a lion, a conquering king? Only by first being a submissive lamb. *“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered, and after he was made complete, he became the cause of eternal salvation to all who are obeying him”* (Hebrews 5:8,9). His path to the crown was preceded by his path to the cross. The way to the top began down below. Like *“a lamb”*, He *“humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross”* (Isaiah 53:7; Philippians 2:8). He won by losing. He gained by giving up.

When the 24 elders and four living creatures in heaven saw the Lamb who was able to open the scroll, they combined their voices in a new song of praise to him: *“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were murdered, and with your blood you purchased for God men of every tribe and language and people and nation, and you made them to be a kingdom and priests for our God, and they reign on the earth”* (Revelation 5:9,10). †

Hugo McCord was a preacher of the Gospel until his death.

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Jesus in the Old Testament?

Betty Burton Choate



Of course we read of “God” throughout the Bible. The Hebrew word for God in the singular form is “El”; in the plural form it is “Elohim”, but used with singular verbs. Some would say that “Elohim” is the so-called “royal we”, and is therefore not necessarily plural. In the well-known Deuteronomy 6:4 passage, *“Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one [Echad]!”* the “one” is a “united one” rather than one entity. The same word is used in Genesis 2:24, speaking of the oneness of a husband and his wife. The plural, Elohim, is used upwards of 3,000 times in the Old Testament, while the singular form is used only about 500 times. This indicates to us that, most often, when we read “God” in English, the “Godhead” is actually our subject, rather than exclusively “God, the Father”.

But can we identify Jesus, Himself, as an active participant in the events of the Old Testament? Let’s do some investigating:

The Angel of the LORD

Who was “The Angel of the LORD”? Was he simply a messenger of God, a created being, perhaps as we often picture “angels”, with wings? This

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One is mentioned 57 times, in such passages as Exodus 3, where “the Angel of the LORD” appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush. But in subsequent verses in that text He is called “the LORD”, and in verse 14 He identified Himself as “I AM”. In John 8:58,59, when Jesus applied those words to Himself, the Jews took up stones to kill Him for blasphemy.

Exodus 33:11 informs us that God spoke directly to Moses. In verse 2, He said that He would send “My Angel” with the Israelites. First Corinthians 10:4 identifies Christ as the One who was in the pillar of fire and the cloud, leading the Israelites through the wilderness. In Exodus 23:20,21, God described more fully the power of this “Angel”: “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for **My name is in Him.**” The statement that this Angel carried within Himself the name of God, and that it was in His power to pardon — or not to pardon — transgressions, shows that He was not a created Being.

The Commander of the LORD's Army

In Joshua 5:13-15 we read a remarkable story:

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”

14 So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”

15 Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.

It is obvious that “the Commander of the LORD's army” was one of the Godhead, since the worship of created angels has never been permitted by God. The command concerning the removal of Joshua's shoes was the same as was spoken to Moses at the site of the burning bush, and Jesus identified that representative of the Godhead as Himself.

The Word of the LORD

In 1 Peter 1:10,11, we read, “*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them*

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was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

This passage tells us that at least some of the prophecies of the Old Testament were imparted to the prophets *by Christ*. Can we find evidence of particular instances in which He was the spokesman?

John 1:1 informs us, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Verse 14 explains further: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* So we have no doubt that the One who was born in the flesh as Jesus Christ was, from the beginning, identified as “the Word”. Can we find Him in the Old Testament, or was He waiting in the wings until it was His turn to “go on stage”?

Lately I have been re-reading the Scriptures, on a quest that is proving to be very exciting and enlightening! Did you know that, many, many times in the Old Testament, we are told that *“the word of the LORD came to”* so-and-so? I had always read that statement with the subconscious thought that it was simply saying that **God** spoke to the various ones. But one day I mentally capitalized “Word” and — behold! — an entirely new message jumped out at me! Were all of these passages actually specifying that “the Word” was the One of the Godhead who was bringing the message to the prophet? Analyzing a little more closely, I was amazed to see how often the statements read like this: *“The Word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God [or, often, ‘the Lord of Hosts’]....”* Doesn’t that closely parallel what we might say: “The Emissary of the King came to me, saying, ‘Thus says the King...’?”

So far, in my re-reading, it does no violation at all to the text to think that ‘the Word’ — the One who was to become the Christ — spoke to the various prophets, acting as Mediator between humanity and ‘the Lord of Hosts’. The more I study, the more fully I am convinced that, not only was it *“... by Him [that] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him”* (Colossians 1:16), but in the great plan of the ages, developed before the foundation of the world was laid, the Word was the designated Member of the Godhead who would serve as the bridge [Mediator] between the Father and those who would become His children! †

Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, founding Editor of The Voice of Truth International. She lives in Winona, Mississippi, USA.

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The Greatness of God

Maxie B. Boren

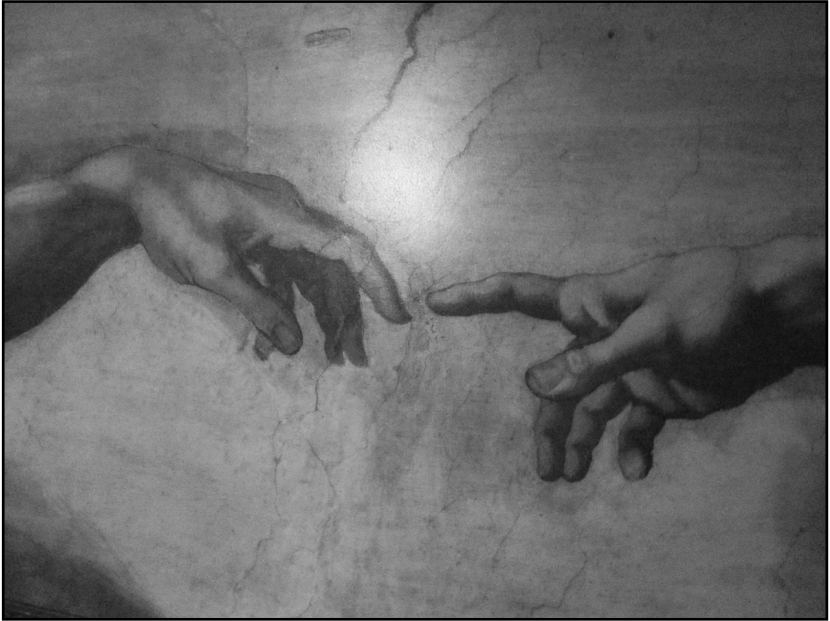
It is beyond anyone's capabilities to adequately verbalize how great God is! After all, God spoke heaven and earth into existence! "*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). "*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth*" (Psalm 33:6). "*Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast*" (verses 8,9). David declared in praise to God, "*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God*" (Psalm 90:2)! The apostle Paul spoke of the "*living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is*" (Acts 14:15).

Try your very best to plumb the depths of God's creative genius and power. Reflect on the myriad forms of life and contemplate One so wise and powerful as not only to "think up" all the creatures we know to exist, but also to design them with infinite wisdom, and then to

actually bring them into existence. It is mind-boggling! And consider further the vastness of the cosmos – it is staggering in its magnitude! God has placed us in a universe so immense that distances are measured in thousands upon thousands of "light years" (remember that light travels at 186,000 miles per second!). So when frail humanity reflects upon the enormity of it all, and considers the omniscience and omnipotence of the Creator, no wonder there is failure to magnify Him fully.

Fathoming to some extent His "*everlasting power and divinity*" (Romans 1:20), yet we fall short in our ability to enunciate the eternal attributes of Him who upholds "*all things by the word of His power*" (Hebrews 1:3). Quite honestly, it just can't be done. I feel so inept in my preaching to convey to others how truly great God really is! But I know He deserves our praise, and "*the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever and ever*" (Ephesians 3:21). †

Maxie B. Boren is a gospel preacher and elder for the Brown Trail Church of Christ and lives in Fort Worth, Texas, USA.



And God Created the World, How Long Ago?

Dave Everson

There has been a great deal of focus in the popular press about the discoveries of the Hubble Telescope. These discoveries are being interpreted in light of “old age for the universe” bias. Remember, most scientists today believe that life evolved from inanimate matter, and this process would take vast eons of time. So, each new discovery is interpreted in a way to support a long period of time. This does not rule out other possibilities as being the right answer; it simply gives one explanation. Well, this question of how old the earth is, is an important one, for if it is not billions of years old, then evolution could not have had time to occur. Let’s look at what we can know about how old the earth is.

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First, the Bible does not tell when the earth was created! But when the Bible gives information that relates to the passing of time, it is not wrong! It does this in the genealogies given in Genesis 5:1-2, Chronicles and the New Testament. By taking the ages given here, it is possible to get a time frame on how long ago the creation was. This number comes out in the 6,000 to 10,000 year range. This is a far cry from the 4.5 billion estimated by evolutionists. Is each of the genealogies exact in the names and dates given, no, but the problems that we know about are because of other lists that point them out. There may be some unfilled gaps in the chronology given in the Bible, but they do not give billions of years of time! What should the Christian believe?

❖ One, realize that knowing the exact time of creation has nothing to do with our salvation. Have faith that it happened in the way God said it did, that Jesus and the inspired writers believed it, and that obedience to God's commands is the most important thing we can do.

❖ Two, we can have questions and look at the evidences from the physical world around us, but we need to remember that when an explanation is given that disagrees with what God's Word says, we can know it is wrong, no matter how many scientists believe it. The Bible's answer is the right one, and that should end it.

❖ Three, realize that there are many evidences that indeed show the earth is not billions of years old. These evidences are not well known because the evolutionary scientists do not want them to weaken their case; so, they do not mention them.

❖ Four, even the historians have now dated with accuracy the events of the Bible back to the time of Abraham. This does not leave many generations back to Adam for the millions and millions of years to occur if we try to hold on to evolutionary dogma *and* the Bible. There have been many in the religious world, and indeed some in the churches of Christ, who have tried to accept the interpretations of the evolutionists and make them fit what the Bible says. This is sad and very dangerous, because it questions what God has said. We should take the Bible as fact *first* and then examine the evidences to see if and how they might fit into what happened. Let us strengthen our faith to believe "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). †

Dave Everson is an elder for the church of Christ in Belington, West Virginia, USA. He is a retired high school biology teacher, evidences seminar speaker and participant in annual discussions at Oxford (University) Round Table.

The Living Word for Dying Men

Bill Dillon

No thought is more significant than that men are dying creatures. David said in 1 Chronicles 29:15, *“our days on the earth are as a shadow; and there is none abiding.”* Job said that man *“cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not”* (Job 14:2). The best statement a man can make, at any time, regarding his stay on the earth is to say, *“there is but a step between me and death”* (1 Samuel 20:3). Can you say for sure that you will be alive next year? Next month? Next day/ hour/ minute? If you don’t know the future, isn’t it about time you became better acquainted with the God of the future? The Living God has given His Living Word to a dying humanity. Philippians 2:16 calls it the *“word of life”*. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is *“quick [living] and active and sharper than any two-edged sword”*.

This old world is one of ultimate winding down. The metal rusts; the wood rots; the flesh decays; but there is an incorruptible substance called the *“Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever”* (1 Peter 1:23). Wouldn’t it serve your best interest to exercise a greater awareness about the contents of that Word? First Peter 2:2 admonishes, *“desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may be able to grow thereby”*. The Christians of Berea were said to be *“more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scripture daily”* (Acts 17:11).

The Bible is the means by which you can achieve speaking terms with God, as James 1:18 teaches: *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth...”*. The Bible commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30,31) and every creature to be baptized (Mark 16:15,16). The shame of our day is that so many are found to be ignorant of the imperishable Book of the Ages. To be ignorant of God’s Word is no sin – but *staying* that way is! If you’re going to change for the better, then do it now – your time may be about up! †

Bill Dillon is the editor of Gospel Gleaner and preaches for the Lord’s church in Hickory Ridge, Arkansas, USA.

THE WORD OF GOD



God killed two priests. They were Moses' nephews, Aaron's sons. They were burning incense in their censers as priests were to do. They were supposed to light the incense with fire from the altar. Instead, they used unauthorized fire from elsewhere.

Immediately, fire came from God and consumed them. Moses said to Aaron, *"This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored'"* (Leviticus 10:3).

Nadab and Abihu, these two priests, are remembered for their unauthorized acts and their resulting death. A point was made for all time — Do not take liberties with God's Word!

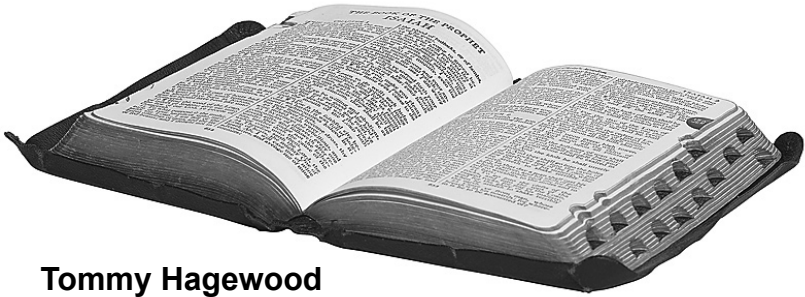
Today, we live in a time when Nadab and Abihu would feel comfortable. Liberty is in vogue. "Do as you please" is popular. But the fact is, God's Word is as certain as ever. We would do well to hold to everything God says, to honor Him by obeying His Word.

Before we do anything unauthorized by God, we should recall Nadab and Abihu. **God means what He says.** †

Rick Cunningham is the preacher for the Main Street congregation in Big Spring, Texas, USA.

THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible



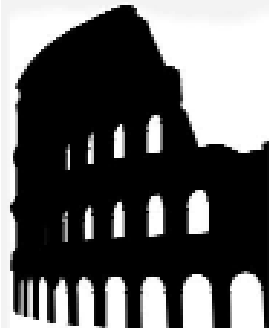
Tommy Hagewood

Following are four important facts about the Bible we should all know.

1. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that came to us from the mind of God. All other books were produced merely by human beings. The Bible, on the other hand, comes from God's mind and was revealed through human agents (apostles and prophets) by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-13; Galatians 1:11,12; Ephesians 3:1-5).
2. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that comes to us from the heart of God. In speaking of God's people in Romans 9:23-26, Paul notes that God has called out His people to make known "*the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory*". This fact is not only revealed to us in this passage but, according to Paul, was also prophesied in Hosea 1:10. This great love is encapsulated in John 3:16.
3. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that tells us **ALL** things we must know, believe, and do to get to heaven (2 Peter 1:3). It will make one a child of God and will make that child complete; nothing else is acceptable for our spiritual needs.
4. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** by which human beings will be judged. The part of the Bible by which you will be judged is the New Testament (John 12:48; Romans 2:16). The basis of that judgment will be the deeds we do in the body while living on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10).

No other book should command our interested attention like the Bible. Why not read it every day?





Romans 9:14-29

Jerry Bates

1. Is it unfair for God to show mercy and compassion upon only certain people? (vs. 14,15)
2. What is the basis of that choice?
3. For what purpose did God raise up Pharaoh? (v. 17)
4. Is it right for man to criticize God's choice? (v. 19)
5. Who has the more power, the potter or the clay? (v. 20,21)
6. What does the illustration of the potter and the clay have to do with God's right to make choices?
7. Who are the vessels prepared for destruction? (v. 22)
8. Who prepared the vessels for glory? (v. 23)
9. Why did God bear, with such longsuffering, the vessels prepared for destruction? (v. 22, see also Romans 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9).
10. Are only Jews included in those that God called? (v. 24)
11. What prophet prophesied that the Gentiles would one day be included in the people of God? (v. 25,26)
12. How do we know that even though most of Israel rejected God, it was not a surprise to God? (v. 27)
13. Who wrote, long before, that such would be the case? (v. 26)
14. What does it mean when Paul said God left Israel a seed? (v. 29)
15. The mentioning of Sodom and Gomorrah is a reference to what future event? (v. 29)

(see the back cover for answers)

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scriptures says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jew only, but also of the Gentiles?

25 As He says also in Hosea "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people, there they shall be called sons of the living God." 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth." 29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah"

Note: In this section Paul is defending God's power to show mercy upon only certain people. Some Jews were criticizing God for rejecting them, claiming it was a violation of His promise to them. Such is not the case. God had fulfilled every promise He made to them. The fact that some Gentiles were being saved was not a reflection upon God's justice, but His mercy. The Jews were lost because of their own unbelief, and their own prophets had foretold that only a remnant would be saved. The remnant identification carries both a message of judgment and of hope.

Repentance

Charles Hodge

Has

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Levels

We don't talk much about repentance now days! It often is a totally missing link in counseling. But sin has to be addressed before God can fully heal the soul. Repentance is not apologizing. Repentance is not sorrow because of the consequences of getting caught. There are at least four levels in Biblical repentance:

◆ **THE LEVEL OF ADMITTING.** "So long" to the blame game. "It is not *someone else's* fault. *I* did it. *I* am accountable. *I* am responsible for my life. It is not that I got caught. I am self-indicted. I will not run, hide, fight any more. I did it, period. Case closed."

◆ **THE LEVEL OF GUILT.** Guilt is grasping the hurt I caused you. It is an ability to enter into the wounded's soul and share in his suffering. David was exceptional in this, "... *against thee, and Thee only, have I sinned.*" David had sinned against Uriah, the Hittite, Bathsheba, society. But guilt involves God! Ultimately, it was God Who had been violated. God hates sin, is the very opposite of sin. Our sins violate the very heart, integrity, and holiness of God.

◆ **THE LEVEL OF CONFESSION.** Confession, too, has been deserted in our time. You do not confess simply because the evidence is public! You do not confess, as in plea bargaining. To confess is even more than admission. Confession involves dependency. It means, "I am at your mercy. I did it. I violated you. I confess it." A confession renders one helpless in the hands of another. Confession is the rumbling of a crumbling heart. Confession eliminates negotiation.

◆ **THE LEVEL OF PROMISE.** "Not only do I grasp your hurt, your position — I, too, hurt! I am genuinely sorry. I passionately never intend to do that again. I broke my heart, too. I am weak, lost, a sinner." Repentance is genuine honesty, in mind, heart, and will. Repentance is truthfulness.

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord..." (Acts 3:19). †

Charles Hodge is a preacher of the Gospel in the USA.

SALVATION

The Valley of Decision

Clarence DeLoach

Man must choose to serve God. It is an active, deliberate purpose of the mind and will. That principle is beautifully illustrated in the book of Joshua. God brought His people to the Jordan River, where He miraculously provided their crossing. However, immediately there was an obstacle. Jericho stood in their way. God said, "*I have given Jericho into your hands.*" God gave it to them by a miracle, yet they complied with His instructions, and by faith the walls fell.

Then came Ai, a small city. However, because sin was in the camp, the army of Israel was defeated. Achan had defied God in taking of the spoils of Jericho. Israel had sinned through pride and overconfidence.

In Joshua 8:30-35, Joshua brought the people to the valley of Shechem. There he built an altar to God and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. The Law of God was there. The Ark of the Covenant was there.

Joshua caused six of the tribes to take their place on the barren, rocky cliffs of Mount Ebal. The other six tribes took their place on Mt. Gerizim, a mountain of green grass and trees.

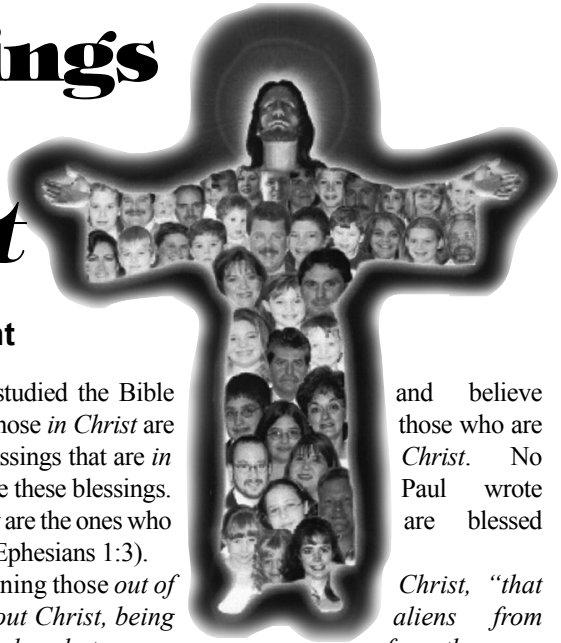
It was to be an object lesson that hopefully Israel would never forget. In this setting, which formed a natural amphitheater, Joshua read the words of the law, in particular the blessings and cursings. All things were done according to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

So, Israel was called upon to decide! Would it be misery, cursing, defeat, and death as represented by Mt. Ebal, or would it be mercy, blessing, and life as represented by Mt. Gerizim?

We are still called to decide. In the presence of God and His Word, we decide whether it will be obedience and blessing, or disobedience and cursing. If you are in the valley of decision, choose today life and blessing! †

Clarence DeLoach is a Gospel preacher living in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

Blessings *in* Christ



Owen D. Olbricht

Almost all who have studied the Bible its teaching will agree that those *in Christ* are privileged to receive the blessings that are *in* one *out of Christ* will receive these blessings. that people who are *in Christ* are the ones who with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Paul also wrote concerning those *out of at that time you were without Christ, being the commonwealth of Israel and strangers of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*" (Ephesians 2:12,13).

and believe those who are *Christ*. No Paul wrote are blessed

Christ, "that aliens from the cove-

nants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12,13).

Importance of Being In

Being "inside" instead of "outside" is important, because those "outside" cannot receive the benefits that those who are "inside" can receive. This was true of Noah and his family. Peter wrote concerning the ark, "*in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water*" (1 Peter 3:20). In order to be saved from the destruction of the ancient world, Noah's family had to remain in the ark. Those outside the ark were destroyed.

Importance of Being in Christ

All spiritual blessings are *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3). Those *outside Christ* cannot receive these blessings while those within can receive them. The only way to enter Jesus to receive these blessings is to be baptized. "*Know ye not,*

SALVATION

*that so many of us as were **baptized into Jesus Christ** were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3) “For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). If a person can receive them outside of Christ, thus without baptism, he can receive them being far off from God and without the following, for those outside Christ do not have these promises . “*that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now **in Christ Jesus** you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*” (Ephesians 2:12,13):*

The blessings we attain by being in Christ:

- Christ.
- Benefit of what is included in God’s covenants and promises.
- Hope.
- God.
- The blood of Jesus, which brings us near to God.

There are other blessings of Jesus’ blood that a person outside of Christ, a person who has not been baptized, will miss:

- Redemption through Jesus’ blood, the forgiveness of sins. “***In Him** we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*” (Ephesians 1:7).
- Being a spiritually new person, with the old life passed away. “*Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Salvation. “*Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is **in Christ Jesus** with eternal glory*” (2 Timothy 2:10).
- Eternal life. “*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is **in His Son***” (1 John 5:11).

Our Hope

If we are not in Christ, thus without baptism, we are without hope. This is why those who heard the Gospel as recorded in the book of Acts, responded as soon as they learned that baptism was necessary (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 35-38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:15, 16:33,34; 19:5). †

Owen Olbricht is a Gospel preacher residing in Sherwood, AR, USA.

Reflections on the Tornado in Joplin, Missouri

John Deffenbaugh

After receiving a call to come to work, I hurriedly drove to Joplin on the evening of May 22, 2011. I had no idea what kind of storm lay ahead of me. Nor did I have any clue of the horrendous tragedy then unfolding between me and my work location. In view of this past week's events and all that we have witnessed, there are some things I feel compelled to share.

Untold dollars lost in the storm, dreams shattered, homes destroyed, lives forever altered, a baby plucked from its mother's arms, a teenager pulled from his father through the roof of an SUV, a husband sacrificing his own life to save his wife's, frantic searches for lost loved ones feared dead, and on and on



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and on this list could go! If you and I haven't shed tears over the sad plight of our fellow man — something is very wrong! These tragic accounts tug at our hearts and rightfully so (Romans 12:15). Yet, there is a greater tragedy amidst all of this pain and suffering.

That tragedy is that many souls were hurled into eternity in the blink of an eye. How many were prepared to make that journey? It is not the loss of life which Jesus tells us to fear, but the loss of our soul for eternity (Matthew 10:28). The true tragedy of May 22nd was the scores of souls who were launched into eternal damnation unprepared to meet their God! If we could have witnessed those souls departing their lifeless bodies on that evening all over Joplin, how many would we have seen escorted by angels (Luke 16:22) to God's tender care?

I feared the loss of a co-worker on that night as I worked. My constant thought was this; "Did I ever offer to study the Bible with him?" How many of those lost that day were in constant contact with members of the Lord's church, and yet never learned of God's plan to save their souls? We must do better! God deserves better from us! Can we say with Jesus; "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work*" (John 4:34)? "*Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest*" (John 4:35b). If the church called the Lord's will not do His will in teaching the lost, then it is not the Lord's church (Luke 6:46)!

Life is a precious gift. Life is fragile. Death is certain (Hebrews 9:27). "*Come now, you who say, 'today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that'*" (James 4:13-15). Indeed our lives should be lived in constant view of God's will and purpose.

Many souls that evening between 5 and 6 p.m. were caught unaware and unprepared. Though May 22nd started out like any other Sunday morning, before the day ended, the lives of infants, children, parents, and elderly alike were done. Are you ready? Are you ready for death? Are you ready for the Lord's return? "*Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour*" (Matthew 25:13). †

John Deffenbaugh serves as an elder in the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Neosho, Missouri, USA.

"Church" Is "Ekklesia"

Sunny David



The English word *church*, as it appears in the English Bible, instead of the Greek word *Ekklesia*, which Christ, in fact, had used when He had promised in Matthew 16:18, to build or establish it, does not convey the same meaning. The word *church* has been derived from the Latin word “*chirche*”, which was commonly used for a pagan house or place of worship, when John Wycliff, in the year 1380, had first translated the Bible into the English language. Wycliff anglicised the Latin word *chirche* to *church*. On the other hand, *ekkleisia*, which is the correct word for the church, and which is used in the Greek New Testament wherever the word church appears in the English Bible, does not mean “a house or a place of worship”, but *ekkleisia* means “an assembly of people, or a body of people”.

Thus, the apostle Peter, speaking of *the church* said, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God,*

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*who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2: 9,10). Church, therefore, in strict biblical terms means: called out people of God, or the body of the people that God has called out of the world. What I am trying to say is that we need to think *ekklesia* whenever we read or speak of *the church*, instead of a building in which the church assembles.*

This, in fact, shows how a translator sometimes would translate a certain word in a sense which would be understood in its most common current usage. Just as, today, if someone wants to learn the meaning of the word “baptism” from a dictionary, it will say something like this: “a Christian sacrament marked by ritual use of water; or a Christian ceremony in which a few drops of water are sprinkled or poured.” Yet, the Bible says very differently and clearly that we are “buried with Christ through baptism” (Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:12). *Baptisma*, the Greek word, means burial, and not sprinkling or pouring.

John Wycliff, who made the first English translation of the Bible, lived in a time when the word “chirche” was most commonly used in the religious world for a place of worship. Since Christians came together in a place, on the first day of the week for worship (1Corinthians 11:17,18; Acts 20:7), Wycliff used the word *church*, anglicising *chirche*, for the “called out body of Christians”. A dictionary, therefore, today describes or defines “church” as a building where Christians come together for worship, or as a place of worship.

As a result, people all over the world think and believe today that the church is a religious building, because of the inaccurate translation of the word *ekklesia*. How wonderful would it have been if the word *ekklesia* had been left as it was, untranslated, as was done with the Greek word *baptisma*, being rendered in transliteration, *baptism*. Just to make a point, the translators of the Bible in Urdu and Hindi languages, which are widely spoken in India and Pakistan, have done rightly so, with both Greek words *ekklesia* and *baptisma*, rendering them as *kalisia* and *baptisma*.

Christ, the Bible says, is not only the builder of the church, but He is also the head of the church, which He has purchased with His own blood (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23; Acts 20:28). Let us think of the *ekklesia* of Christ, when we read or speak of the church of Christ and it will help us to understand how valuable and important is the church to our Lord. †

Sunny David is a long-time preacher of the Gospel in New Delhi, India.

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1. LOVE. Love for God and fellowman is the essence of Christianity. Jesus was asked, “*Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*” Notice carefully His response:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). Churches grow because they love. It is just that simple.

2. PRAYER. Christians have a power that is not available to the world. That power is prayer. James said, “*...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (James 5:16). Great works are accomplished by prayer. Study the book of Nehemiah and notice how the people prayed and prayed again as they accomplished the great task of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. Churches

grow because they pray night and day.

3. STUDY. Knowledge of God’s Word is what moves us to work and build according to God’s instructions. The reason so many are not doing more is because they are not studying. We must never forget that “*...the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...*” (Hebrews 4:12). People who study are moved to build. Churches grow because they study regularly and diligently.

4. GIVE. Growing churches are givers, not receivers. They give of their money and their time. They realize that their purpose is to minister, not to be ministered unto. They know and believe Acts 20:35, “*...It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” Show me a church that is growing and I will show you a church that is unselfish. Growing churches give and keep on giving.

Brethren, let us grow! †

Ken Tyler preaches for the Church of Christ in Arab, Alabama, USA.

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Twenty Years Later

Dalton Key

Twenty years have come and gone since I wrote and published an editorial entitled, “I’m Hanging Up My Sword.” The article was prompted by a conversation I had with another, more experienced preacher during which he said, “I’m hanging up my sword. I never intend to preach another doctrinal or issue-related sermon. I believe in the motivational, positive approach to preaching.” He went on to say that he considered the preaching of such men as N.B. Hardeman and Gus Nichols “old fashioned”. He stated that such men had done “more harm than good” to the church of Christ.

Two decades later, the results are in. An alarming number of preachers, teachers, elders and church members evidently agree with the view expressed by that brother years ago. Generally speaking, sermons have become less doctrinal, softer, and less related to Scripture. Motivationalism and positivism are now heralded by many among us as the most important aspects of worship in general and preaching in particular.

And what have we to show for it? A **thirty-six percent drop** in membership within churches of Christ, from 1978 to 1998, according to the most recent studies in church growth!

It would appear the “more harm than good” has been done to Christ’s church by those who have both denigrated the stalwart soldiers of the past and denounced the very foundations of truth and doctrine upon which the church has stood since the days of the New Testament.

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2).

We’ve had twenty years of preaching everything else. Isn’t it time we got back to preaching the word? †

Dalton Key is a preacher of the Gospel in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, USA.

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God's Special People

Jimmy Clark

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9,10). While it is true that God loves all the inhabitants of the world so that He sent His Son to die for humanity (cf. John 3:16), there is a special relationship that God has with those who are His children through Christ (cf. Romans 31:39). It is important that the world sees how important the church is to God so that all might take heed to the call through the Gospel and be added by the Lord to that special group of people in the world, the church (cf Acts 2:37-47). Consider three thoughts from the Bible that reveal God's thinking about His special people, the church.

- 1. Purposed from Eternity.** Peter wrote earlier in the book of 1 Peter, *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:”* (1 Peter 1:1,2). The Holy Spirit through Peter clearly indicates that recipients of the letter became the elect through the purpose of the Godhead. Paul said it in a similar way in the book of Ephesians, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without lame before Him in love”* (Ephesians 1:3,4). Again, it is written of the church, *“to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Ephesians 3:10,11). The church was no afterthought of God. It is the foreknown product of the manifold wisdom of God.
- 2. Purchased with the Blood of His Own Son.** Peter also wrote of this special people, *“knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things,*

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like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19). Paul stated of the church belonging to God that it was "*purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28). Paul wrote to the Ephesians on this same point. "*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:7). One can tell how significant an entity is by the price paid for it. God gave the ultimate price in His Son and thus declares to the world His esteem of the church. Man can do no better than to see things like God does.

3. **Preserved unto Everlasting Life.** Peter also wrote, "*to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Peter 2:25). God is a faithful Creator to those who "*commit their souls to Him in doing good*" (1 Peter 4:19). †

Jimmy Clark is the preacher for the Bethel congregation near Athens, Alabama, USA.

I Attend the Sunday Evening Assemblies Because:

- I want to go, and I am wanted.
- I need to go, and I am needed.
- I had rather be there than anywhere else.
- My children are watching me and will follow my example.
- My soul is strengthened by the teaching.
- My heart is warmed by the spiritual songs as I praise Him above.
- I am better prepared to meet in discussion those who do not understand the truth.
- I hunger and thirst after righteousness.

PROVERBS 17:22



There goes that fellow who lives just down the road. He's about the smartest person I've ever known. He figured out that brain cells come and brain cells go, but fat cells live forever!

He also has studied a lot about time, and he says that in just two days, tomorrow will be yesterday.

This guy is generous with good advice, too. Just the other day I heard him advising one of the neighbors, "If it ain't broke, fix it till it is."

I've had a question in my mind for a long time, and I think he's just the man that can come up with the answer. I'm confident that he can tell me what disease cured ham had.



As Momma was out walking with her 4-year-old daughter, the little one picked up something off the ground and started to put it in

her mouth. Momma quickly took the item away and told her not to do that.

The child asked why, and Momma said, "Because it's been on the ground. You don't know where it's been; it's dirty and probably has germs."

Her daughter asked, "Momma, how do you know all this stuff? You are so smart."

The mother said, "All moms know this stuff. It's on the Mom Test. You have to know it, or they don't let you be a mom."

The little girl thought for a minute and replied, "So, if you don't pass the test you have to be the dad, right?"

"Exactly," came the immediate response.



Two female bowling teams, one of all blondes and one of all brunettes, went to Chicago for a big bowling tournament. They had some free time, so they chartered a double-decker bus for a tour around the city.

The brunette team rode on the bottom of the bus, and the blonde team rode up on the top level. The brunettes were really having a great time, but one of them realized everything was really quiet upstairs, so she decided to go up and see why the blondes were all so quiet.

The brunette discovered that all of the blondes were scared stiff, star-

PROVERBS 17:22

ing straight ahead at the road, holding on to the seats in front of them for dear life.

The brunette asked, “What’s going on up here? We’re having a great time downstairs!”

One of the blondes feebly stuttered, “YEAH, B-B-BUT YOU HAVE A D-D-DRIVER!”



The math teacher noticed that little Johnny wasn’t paying attention in class, so she called on him and said, “Johnny, what are 2 and 4 and 28 and 44?”

Little Johnny quickly replied, “NBC, CBS, HBO, and the Cartoon Network!”



Frank is 90 years old and has played golf every day since he retired 25 years ago. One day he came home depressed. “That’s it,” he told his wife. “I’m giving up golf. My eyesight has gotten so bad that after I hit the ball I can’t see where it went.”

His wife said, “Why don’t you take my brother with you, and give it one more try?”

Frank replied, “Well, that’s no good. Your brother’s 103. He can’t help.”

She answered, “He may be 103,

but his eyesight is great.”

So, Frank took his brother-in-law with him to the golf course the next morning. Frank teed his ball up on the first hole, swung and hit the ball. He looked down the fairway, then turned to his brother-in-law and asked, “Did you see the ball?”

“Of course I did!” said the 103-year-old.

Frank said, “Well, where did it go?”

The brother-in-law had a puzzled look on his face and answered, “I can’t remember.”



A lot of folks don’t know that there are more Catholic churches in Las Vegas than there are casinos.

It has become somewhat common for some worshippers at Sunday services to give casino chips rather than cash when the collection basket is passed.

Since they get chips from many different casinos, the churches have come up with a method to get the chips transferred into money.

They send all of their collected chips to a nearby Franciscan monastery for sorting, and then the chips are taken to the casinos of origin and cashed in.

This is done by the...CHIP MONKS!”

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart....

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

(Luke 12:6,7)

Is God only a detached power, far off in the distance, as many religions through the centuries have taught? This passage in Jeremiah says the opposite.

God speaks comforting and reassuring words to His children, saying not only that He is aware of our existence but also: "*I know the **thoughts** that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*"

God

promises that His intent toward us is for our welfare, for peace in our lives — and not for evil or ill intent. He *wants* our days, our future, to be filled with hope and expectation of His continual watchful care.

But on what condition is the promise made? That we, as His children, call upon Him and pray to Him with faith in our hearts that He *does* care for us. When does He respond to us? When we seek Him with all our heart, then we will find Him.

Astrology

Evan Adair

Man has been searching for answers since time began. Many have looked at the stars and the study of astrology to answer their questions. Astrology and the study thereof is not new. It has been around at least since the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs (see Exodus 7:11).

Astrology was made a science as we know it today by the Chaldeans who developed the Zodiac theory. History records that Tiberius and Nero resorted to astrology to decide the affairs of the Roman Empire. Again many a person, “famous and infamous”, has looked to astrology to answer his questions.

What does the Bible say about this? *“Ye shall not use enchantment nor observe times”* (Leviticus 19:26). Again, *“Let now the astrologers, the strangers, the monthly prognosticators stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame ...”* (Isaiah 47:13). Hence, here we have God’s command concerning what we should do with the practice of astrology.

First, astrology does not answer our questions to solve our problems and, second, the Lord shall burn up those works. Need there be more said? Jeremiah 10:2 also warns, *“Thus saith the Lord, ‘Learn not the way of the heathen and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the heathen are dismayed at them.’”*

In the New Testament when the Apostle Paul was at Ephesus, many Greeks and Jews who believed on the Lord, but who once practiced magical or curious arts, brought their books — valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver — to be burned (Acts 19:17-20). Much more could be said about the practice of astrology/magical arts, however the above quotes should suffice.

The answers to our questions and problems must come from the greatest peacemaker of all, that being the Lord Jesus Christ. *“... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). †

Submitted by Evan Adair, a Christian living in Del City, Oklahoma, USA.

Are There Many Ways to Heaven?

J.C. Choate

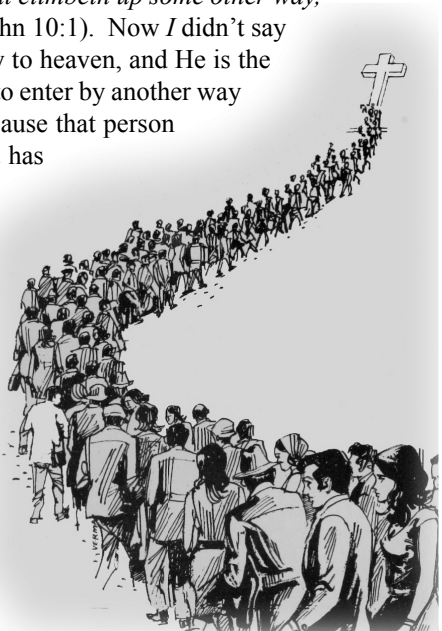
In the religious world, including both those who believe in Christ and those of other religions, most believe that there are many ways to heaven. They explain that even though different roads may be taken, all are headed for the same destination. That sounds good, but it is not what the Bible teaches.

Jesus said, *“I am **the** way, **the** truth, and **the** life; no man cometh unto the Father **but by me**”* (John 14:6). Jesus is saying emphatically that there is but one way to heaven, and that He is that way.

Who said there are many ways to heaven? Jesus did not make such a statement, and neither do those who know what the Bible teaches on this subject. Those who say that there are many ways to heaven are those who believe in many doctrines not found in the Scriptures, and those who believe in “gods” of religions other than Christianity.

On one occasion Jesus said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber”* (John 10:1). Now I didn’t say that but *Christ* said it. He is the way to heaven, and He is the one who says that when a man tries to enter by another way he is a thief and robber. Why? Because that person is trying to follow a way that Christ has not authorized.

It is true that, in this world, it may be possible to travel several roads to reach a particular destination, and most people apply that same idea to spiritual matters. But thinking about the many roads that may lead to a particular city, suppose you are officially authorized to take only one of these routes. In that case you would have to take that one way in order to keep your boss pleased with you. If you took an-



DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

other way, not only would you be going against the wishes of your boss but you would also lose your reward at the end of the way.

So it is in the spiritual realm. Christ is the only way. No other religion offers a Savior; no other religion offers forgiveness of sins. Christ is the one way because He came into this world to live among men and to die on the cross, to be buried, and then to be resurrected, to pay the price for our sins, to reconcile to God all who believe and obey Him, so that they may be saved. If He paid that kind of price, then He has every right to say what He expects of a person if He is going to save him and take him to heaven. In this case, there are not *many* ways; there is *no other way*.

According to the Scriptures, what is the one way the Lord has made to bring about our salvation? First, He states clearly, “... *if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*” (John 8:24). What else is required if one is to be saved? “...*unless you repent [turn away from a sinful life] you will all likewise perish* (Luke 13:3). Is more required of those who want to be saved? “... *whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 10:32). It was in the death of Christ that His blood was shed to pay the atoning price for our sins. How do we reach that blood, so that we may be forgiven? “... *do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*” (Romans 6:3,4). Acts 2:47 says concerning those who were baptized that “*the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*”

Ephesians 4:4,5 says there is **one** God, **one** Lord, **one** Spirit, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** body or church, and **one** hope. There is also one way to worship, and one way to live, that is, being faithful unto death (John 4:24; Revelation 2:10). There will be but one judgment, and one heaven and one hell for all eternity (Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 25:46). With these facts being true, *why* would there be more than one way to heaven? *How can there possibly be more than one way to heaven?*

Christ says that the majority will be on the broad way that leads to destruction, but only a few will be on the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13,14).

Which way are you going? We urge you to let Christ be your way, the only way that leads from this world to a home in heaven with the Lord forevermore.†

J.C. Choate was founder and Editor of *The Voice of Truth International* until his death in 2008.



“AND MY PEOPLE LOVE IT SO!”

Mike Mays

Jeremiah’s message for Judah was one the church needs to hear today: *“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!”* (Jeremiah 5:31). The responsibility was laid at the feet of the leadership, but the people also shared the blame; they wanted it that way.

Like the prophets of Jeremiah’s day, some preachers today proclaim messages that originate in the minds of men, not in the mind of God. Like the priests, there are elders in our day who have abandoned the authority of the Bible in exchange for their own authority or the authority of other men. If you do not believe that is true, consider the following.

Some in churches of Christ advocate the idea that devoted people who have not been baptized are saved, brothers in Christ, and members of the church. One brother in Christ maintains that salvation is a process rather than an event, and the unimmersed, who have changed their way of life, ought to be included in the grace of God. Is that true, or is it true that **we are baptized into Christ, into His death, into His church, and into salvation, as the Scriptures teach** (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; 2 Timothy 2:10)?

Some congregations are including instrumental music in their worship. Their contention is that Jesus did not die over instrumental music. Doesn’t the case of Nadab and Abihu reveal how our unchanging God feels about

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

unauthorized worship (Leviticus 10:1,2)? Does the command that we have the Lord's authority for our religious faith and practice no longer apply (Colossians 3:17)? Where is the authorization from God's Word for including drama or women preachers in our worship assemblies, or for observing the Lord's Supper on other days besides Sunday? The answer? There is none in Scripture.

The demand for more "exciting" worship is a call to abandon true worship. Is worship about doing what *we* want or what **God** wants? If the focus of worship is us and not God, it becomes no more than an emotional encounter with ourselves. True worship must be directed to God, governed by His will, and come from the heart of the worshiper (John 4:24; Matthew 15:8,9). If there are no regulations for worship, it would be impossible to do it wrong.

Jeremiah closes verse 31 with a question about what the Jews would do in the end. While God alone will be the final judge, His Word does not forecast a pleasant end for those who reject His will (John 12:48). It is an appalling thing when the leadership in the Lord's church prefers self-made religion to attract the unchurched, and equally sad when God's people "*love it so*". †

Mike Mays preaches for the Ellendale Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, USA

SINGING

Following the institution of the Lord's Supper at the Feast of the Passover, our Lord sang a hymn with the Apostles and went out into the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). We don't know what they sang — nor who led the singing, if anyone.

Paul and Silas were placed in a prison while at Philippi. With their feet fastened in the stocks, we find them praying and singing (Acts 16:24-25).

"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). We are to sing — with the spirit and with the understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15). We are to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19 ; Colossians 3:16).

Christianity is a SINGING RELIGION. In New Testament times, every Christian, as a priest, was to sing, and the singing was never accompanied by instruments of music. Christians were then — and are now — a SINGING PEOPLE.

The power of singing is great. Someone has said, "Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes its laws." Singing can be a great influence — in worship, at work, and at play. **SO LET'S SING!! — Carroll Sites**

Be Not Many Teachers

Bonnie Rushmore

James instructs us in 3:1, *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”* In the time frame of James’ writings, the Jews looked at those who were teachers as a place of honor and respect, and many new Christians desired to be teachers in order to receive prestige among their brethren. It was common in the synagogue to allow anyone an opportunity to stand up and teach those gathered at any given time. The New Testament disciples frequently used this practice to teach Christ and His church to the Jews. This custom may have been a factor in the problem at the Corinthian church that Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 14 when addressing the misuse of spiritual gifts, admonishing the brethren to do all things decently and in order.



James cautioned Christians about their desire to teach, warning them that they will be held accountable for what they teach. Essentially, he said, “Make

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sure your reason for teaching is that you know the truth and want to share that truth with others. Do not teach to be seen, heard and praised. Only teach if you have the ability to proclaim God's Word in a manner for others to understand and apply the lesson to their lives, and always be prepared."

Burton Coffman made the following observation. "In saying, 'Be not many teachers,' James did not seek to discourage any who might have been qualified for such work. As Harper suggested, 'His words were meant to remind us of our responsibilities, rather than to deter us from our duties'" (Harper qtd. in Coffman).

The apostle Paul also addressed unqualified teachers in 1 Timothy 1:3-7:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

Paul instructed Timothy and others what they were to teach and what to avoid teaching. One type of teaching will make strong Christians, and the other will cause God's children to turn away from Him. A qualified teacher must know God's Word and teach it! Unqualified teachers, however, simply desire the notoriety of being a teacher, but they do not know the Word, and they spend their time discussing frivolous, unsubstantiated beliefs.

Neither James' nor Paul's words allow Christians to exempt themselves from fulfilling the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Each Christian has the responsibility to reach out to lost souls and bring them to Christ. Every Christian should be able to tell someone what he or she needs to do to be saved. This is not optional; it is a command (Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15).

Both James and Paul instructed all teachers to be careful what they teach; those who teach will be judged accordingly. As teachers, we are responsible for the truth we present to others, and we are responsible for any error we may

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proclaim. If we teach false doctrine that leads a soul to condemnation on the Judgment Day, God will condemn us for that lost soul. Teachers have a grave responsibility to know the Truth and proclaim only the Truth.

These words of caution should be applied to anyone who makes an oral presentation of God's Word – preachers, Bible class teachers, those involved in one-on-one Bible teaching and those who teach by the written word. The saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword," written by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839, still rings true today. The written word is a mighty tool in the hand of faithful Christians. Many souls have been won to Christ because of a piece of literature handed to them. Not all Christians have an opportunity to teach orally, so some use the written word as a means to fulfill the Lord's command to teach. The written word can reach individuals that do not have access to oral teaching. The written word can be accessed at the reader's convenience, which may not coincide with an oral teacher's time.

Our written words carry the same warning James gave in 3:1, "*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*" As writers, the number of souls exposed to our writings is innumerable. One article or tract can be passed from hand to hand, and we may never know how many individuals read what we wrote. With the use of the internet, thousands of souls can read our words, and we will never know just how many may be affected by our words. As authors, putting God's message in written form for the masses, we better make sure we are teaching only God's Word. Our opinions, our suppositions, any thought that cannot be backed with book, chapter and verse should have a qualifying statement letting the reader know that this thought cannot be proven in God's Word. Anything we write should be presented to the public only after a thorough study of God's Word.

Yes, the pen is mightier than the sword, but what a weight of burden it carries to the author! †

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Bonnie Rushmore lives in Winona, Mississippi, USA and works in the World Evangelism office.

What One Visit Did

Pat Stephenson

In another city where I used to live, we had a visitation program in which the men of the congregation met on Tuesday nights to receive assignments and make calls. Two of the men received the name of a family that had been delinquent in attendance. They called on the family and had an enjoyable visit. The next night the family came to mid-week service. On the following Sunday they were restored.

When the time came for another visitation meeting, the husband in the restored family came out to visitation. Some were surprised to see him there, but he quickly told us all, "I know how much that one visit meant to my family and me. Maybe I can call on someone else and give them the encouragement they need."

That man was a faithful visitation worker as long as our Tuesday night program continued. Even after the program was abandoned for a different approach to visitation, he could

always be counted on to make any calls he was asked to make, His wife became a Bible school teacher, and his four children are now faithful Christians. All this happened because two men made an assigned visit. This does not happen every time we visit someone, but it does happen enough that visitation is one of the most valuable activities in which we can engage.

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25). †



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Is It Possible to Preach ANYTHING, and Not Bother SOMEBODY?

Max Patterson

No man who has preached for any length of time has escaped hearing something similar to this: **“Why don’t you just preach the truth and leave people alone?”** Is that possible? Is it possible to preach so as not to bother *anybody*?

Could I preach that we should abstain from worldliness, and leave others alone? No, because there are so many who love to indulge themselves in worldliness, and never mind that the Bible says *“Abstain from every form of evil”* (1 Thessalonians 5:22 cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

Could I leave others alone and preach not to forsake the assembly? No, because there are many, many people who forsake the assembly, despite the fact that we are told *“not to forsake”* (Hebrews 10:25).

Could I leave others alone and preach that we should hear and believe in Jesus Christ only? No, for there are those who, like Peter, want to erect three tabernacles. Too, the Buddhists would not be happy at all. Neither would the Hindus. God said, however, *“hear ye him (Christ)”* (Matthew 17:5),

Could I leave others alone and preach one baptism? No, because there are several baptisms advocated by religious folks. Never mind that the Scriptures teach one (Ephesians 4:5,) and that it is for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Could I leave others alone and preach about the church? No, because many do not feel the church is important. And this, despite the fact that the Lord died on the cross for it (Acts 20:28).

Of course, I might preach myself — my experiences, feelings, opinions, think-sos. After all, the tendency is to please men, but I can’t do that. If I please men, I can’t please God (Galatians 1:10); I would simply have to quit preaching. But I cannot do that either. Like Paul, *“woe is to me if I preach not the Gospel.”*

So, I’ll tell you what I am going to do. I am going to do what I decided to do many years ago. **I am going to preach the Gospel — the truth — and if people get mad at that truth, that is something they will have to take up with God.** If not in this lifetime, then at the judgment. We will (whether we would get mad about it or not) face God in the day of judgment. †

Max Patterson is a preacher of the Gospel, working in Neosho, Missouri, USA.

Forsaking the Assembly of Ourselves Together

Wayne Barrier

A key passage of Scripture that addresses the issue of attendance at called assemblies of the church is Hebrews 10:25. The passage states, *“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”*. In spite of the very direct call of this passage for brethren to faithfully attend all assemblies of the church, we rarely see congregations with the same attendance at all gatherings. Sunday morning and mid week Bible Study assemblies usually have 40-75% of the Sunday morning worship attendance. Sunday evening worship assemblies usually number 50-80% of Sunday morning worship. There are some exceptions, but very few. Why does this occur? I believe brethren fail to understand the serious consequences of forsaking called assemblies.

First, verse 24 says, *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”*. Brethren who attend faithfully are *“provoked”* unto love and good works. Some may believe themselves adequately provoked without meeting with their brethren. Maybe so, but attendance is also needed to provoke *“one another”*. This also teaches that attendance results in encouragement and strengthening of one another. Those forsaking the assembly are selfishly neglecting to encourage their brothers and sisters. We are all needed at every assembly.

Verse 26 reads, *“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”*. The Hebrew writer (verse 29) says one has *“trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing...”*. The next verses (30-31) warn us that God will judge His people and take vengeance on the unfaithful. Verse 31 states, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*. These verses are strong warnings that those who forsake the assembly are willfully sinning against God and their brethren and will be considered to have *“walked on Jesus”* in disrespect and disregard for the sacrifice He made for us.

To neglect assembly attendance is a sin resulting in one’s fall from grace, condemnation, and eternal punishment (Vs. 27,28). This matter is very serious and must be better taught and understood. †

Wayne Barrier lives in Florence, Alabama, USA and is part of the World Evangelism Team.

WORSHIP

It Starts in the Parking Lot

Bruce McLarty

I recently read an interview with Andy Stanley, a minister in North Atlanta, Georgia, who preaches to about 5,000 people each Sunday. At one point the interviewer asked him, “Is your sermon the pivotal event in the service?”

Stanley’s response was very perceptive. He said, “I often tell our people the sermon starts in the parking lot. You are the introduction.” He believes that if the congregation has not made a positive impression on the visitor before he stands up to speak, the visitor is probably not going to hear a thing the preacher says.

Stanley’s observation reminds us how important those minutes are between the time we park our cars and we pick up our songbooks. Though our minds may be consumed with the hassle of getting ready for church (this is multiplied by 10,000 if you have children), the way we meet and greet our visitors is actually part of the message (a big part) that they will hear that day. With this in mind, the following are a few ways we can work together to improve our sermon introductions:

- Starting in the parking lot, be on the lookout for unfamiliar faces.
- Take the initiative to speak to people you do not know and welcome them.
- If they have children, ask them if they can use some help in finding a Bible class.
- As you enter the building together, introduce your new friends to some other people you know.

I am convinced that it only takes one person to make the difference between, “This is the coldest, most unfriendly church I have ever visited,” and “This is the warmest, most caring place that I have ever walked into in my life.”

Bruce McLarty is Vice-President of Spiritual Life at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, USA.

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” Psalm 122:1

Idolatry, Ancient and Modern

Ronald Bryant



It is frightening to consider, but each human heart is potentially an idol factory!

An idol is an internal spiritual configuration. Idolatry, both ancient and modern, consists in turning away from God and embracing something as a substitute for Him. Interestingly, most idols are not even thought of as “supernatural”. For that matter, they are not even thought of as “idols”. It is observed that some continue to order their lives according to the idolatry of astrological charts and horoscopes. Intriguingly, a large number of people have made an idol out of their physical bodies. This is manifest in the longing for perpetual youth, along with a denial of the process of aging that typically

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feeds this kind of idolatry. However, money, power, and pleasure are the most popular idols of this present age.

Why do people choose idols over God? The most obvious reason is the desire to do away with the fact of accountability to God. We cannot meet God on our own terms, but we can meet an idol on our own terms! Because an idol is our creation, it is completely under our control, and it can be set aside or removed altogether when we so desire. Idols are adaptable, God is not! The prophet Jeremiah described idols as “*scarecrows in a cucumber field*” (Jeremiah 10:5). They do not threaten, nor can they benefit us. Yet, idols are the perfect device for those who desire to remain at the center of their own existence — the autonomous architects of their own destiny. Idols are used to avoid coming face to face with the truth — with God and His will. They that serve idols need face only themselves, and that is the basic appeal of idolatry.

However, idolatry has consequences. Those who serve idols become as dead as the idols they have embraced. Imagining they have obtained great vision, they do not know they are blind. Having dismissed God, they are not able to measure the depth of their own depravity, even when they do experience a troubled conscience. On their part, guilt is denied and every effort is made to drive it below the level of consciousness. Their guilt is not removed, nor abated. Sooner or later that guilt will begin to manifest itself in obsessions that are often not only evil and disruptive, but violent and destructive.

Idolatry is not some innocent escapade or diversion. In all of its forms it is as a manifestation of hostility toward God — it is a rejection of God. This is the reason that worldliness is so often blatantly idolatrous, and it is the reason why the biblical warning is so strong: “*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (James 4:4). †

Ronald Bryant preaches for the Central Church of Christ in Gadsden, Alabama, USA.

“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20:3-5).

WE ARE NOT THE AUTHORS OF OUR LIFE

Glover Shipp

The prizewinning Brazilian author Antônio Lopes de Sá wrote a surprising article for *The Brazilians*, January 2010, a publication for Brazilians in the United States. Quoting Cicero, he noted that “our souls are nothing less than emanations from the universal divine mind.”

He went on to conclude that there are two obvious consequences to this assertion:

- That a superior intelligence which gave birth to our existence is present in us.
- Such a presence demands that we fulfill our mission or objective for our life.

His points were well taken. We are the result of a superior act of intelligence, which means that we are here for a

purpose far beyond just serving ourselves. Paul reminded us, “*For me to live is Christ ...*” (Philippians 1:21). Our purpose for living is engraved on our souls from our conception. It is to glorify God and serve Christ in our own unique way. Each person is unique, with gifts and talents that no one else possesses to the same degree. Inertia, accommodation to this world, failing to fulfill or overlooking our gifts — these are grave illnesses of soul and heart.

The following tale expresses well the idea of purpose in life:

An elderly farmer was digging holes on his property. Despite the heat of the day, he was singing. A passerby



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asked him, “Old man, what do you have to sing about. You are tired and sweaty. What do you hope to accomplish? Why not take it easy?” The farmer answered, “I’m planting fruit trees.” “But, at your age, why plant fruit trees? You will not live to eat their fruit.” The old man paused, wiped the sweat from his face and said, “Certainly I won’t eat of their fruit, but I am doing for the next generation what my parents did for me. I am leaving my farm a better place than it was when I inherited it.”

Such an attitude reveals a sound model of ethics, human dignity and understanding of what we owe previous and future generations. We repay our parents and teachers by using wisely what they transmitted to us. Just today I was conversing with a Christian nurse. She commented that the younger generation of nurses has a weak work ethic. They appear to be blind to the needs around them, unless these needs are repeatedly pointed out to them.

Being motivated to do good to others brings us huge benefits. Being useful to others, we become useful also to ourselves. We do not serve to be served. We serve because that is the nature that God instilled in us. Yet, as we serve, we find ourselves blessed beyond measure. *“Give and you shall receive,”* says Jesus in Luke 6:38.

During the opening ceremonies for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, B.C., the director applauded the thousands of volunteers who went beyond what was expected of them, to make the Olympics a reality. As Olympics organizers were all interdependent, so we are all interdependent. John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less”

We are here because God wills for us to be here. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that we are not our own; we were bought with a price (the blood of Jesus). Writer Allen Webster notes that Jesus made a blood donation to us. Since the cost was so high of rescuing us from sin and giving us the opportunity to live in Heaven with our Savior, we must realize that we have a purpose for living.

What is our purpose? What is our mission in life? How we understand and answer these questions has a significant influence on how we travel through life and into eternity. †

Glover Shipp is a preacher of the Gospel and an elder in the church in Emond, Oklahoma, USA.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT DAILY WORK FOR GOD?

Charles Box



We know there is the need for seven-day service to God. Laborers are needed for God's service now. Jesus said, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few*" (Matthew 9:37). There is so much that needs to be done and so many things that each one of us can do to help one's local congregation to be an honor to God. Our goal must be to lift up God in the world every day that we live upon earth.

The reason for our existence is to glorify God with our daily service. "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*" (1 Peter 4:11). All of our actions must be guided by that desire to glorify God. "*Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). In 1 Chronicles 16:29 we read, "*Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness*". By inspiration Paul wrote, "*Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit*" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

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What do we know about the daily work of God?

❖ **We know that we must be active participants in God's work.** We must think of the work of the church as MY work. Make every possible effort to attend every assembly of the church. This includes Sunday and Wednesday Bible classes (Hebrews 10:24-31). Determine that the Lord and His work are going to be first in your life. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). We read in Hebrews 11:6, *"Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder to those that seek Him"*. We cannot please God without proving our faith. As Christians, we should want to live out God's purpose for our life. If we take action on what we believe, there can be results. The formula is belief, action, and then results.

❖ **We know that we must continually invite and bring outsiders to the church assemblies.** All of us have someone in our acquaintance that we can influence to come with us to the services of the church. If every member of the church would be serious about this one thing, our growth would be phenomenal. Make a serious effort to invite at least two people each week to our assemblies. Go by and pick up people for the services. Sit with them when they attend. Make them feel at home. Let them feel our love. Introduce your visitor to others. Put forth a special effort to have your visitors in your home. Go to work for God! *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12). In all we do, we should try to glorify God by taking the good news of salvation to others. Luke 6:45 says, *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh"*. If our heart is grateful to God for salvation through Jesus by the Gospel, then we will want to invite others so that they can learn of Jesus also.

❖ **We know that we must be responsible for our family and for its participation and conduct in worship.** Always be on time at each assembly. Help your family be a credit to the Lord and a good influence in conduct. Your children cannot be expected to conduct themselves properly without parental supervision. *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4). The church will grow when our focus is on getting our families to heaven.

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❖ **We know that we must continue to be attentive and faithful to God in everything.** We should be ready to sing, and sing from our hearts, during every assembly. *“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). Let us pray daily for the church and its work. We need to pray for one another because we all stand in need of prayer. *“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Colossians 1:9). During every assembly, we should listen to every word of the sermon, trying to know and apply more of God’s Word to our daily living. *“And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful”* (Titus 3:14). As you listen carefully to the sermon, it is not only good for you, but also an object lesson to our visitors. Visitors will notice these little things. They will be impressed for good.

❖ **We know that we must be enthusiastic about Christ and His church.** Let us talk to others about the good things that go on in our congregation. Talk to your friends about the lessons you hear, and how much you are helped and inspired. Talk about our mission work and youth work. Talk about our Bible classes. And, **SAY NOTHING TO DISCOURAGE OTHERS.** In order to impact culture in a dramatic and life-changing way, the church must make itself visible through **Gospel preaching, human compassion, and good works.** We must talk up the good that is said and done. Paul wrote, *“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Colossians 1:10).

❖ **We know that we must continue to use our talents for God.** If every member of the church would just use his or her talents for God, many lives could be touched. It is easy to be critical of others when we are guilty of not using our talents. Christians who do what they have the ability to do will be blessed, and they will likewise be a blessing to others. But what a terrible fate awaits those who do not use their talents for God! *“...For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 25:14-30). Great things can be accomplished for God if we will all do what we can in His service. Let us be like Mary, *“She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying”* (Mark 14:8).

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❖ **We know that we must pray earnestly each day.** Pray for our elders and their work. They watch for our souls. *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you”* (Hebrews 13:17). Pray for unity. Jesus prayed for unity and so should we. *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”* (John 17:20,21). Pray for lost souls who need Christ. Pray for those friends and relatives who need the blessings of God. Encourage them. Also pray that you can grow spiritually. There is power in prayer. *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16).

❖ **We know that our work for God must be daily and consistent.** Jesus is our example. *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (1 Peter 2:21). One of the examples that He left was that He went about doing good. *“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him”* (Acts 10:38). Those who are actively “doing good” in their lives are to be commended. You are being obedient to God, and your actions are godly. Please continue to show by your daily actions what can be accomplished for God. Please continue to be that example of righteous living to please God.

Is it your desire to honor God? If so, it is time to become a Christian now! To become a Christian you must hear the Gospel (Romans 10:17), believe in Jesus (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Christ as Lord (Acts 8:37), and be baptized to be saved (1 Peter 3:21). After baptism, follow Jesus in faithfulness as He leads you home to heaven (Revelation 2:10). ☩

Charles Box works with the Walnut Street Church of Christ in Greenville, Alabama, USA.

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:23,24).

That Good May Come

W. T. Hamilton

If there were only some way that during the dark days of trial and suffering one could see that good may come from it! But how difficult that is. While Joseph was confined to an Egyptian dungeon, he had years to ponder the question “why?” Surely there was no answer then evident. Just as these experiences worked out for his good and the saving of his people, blessings often come in disguise today. Consider the testimony of these who learned by experience:

David: *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:71).

Job: *“He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”* (Job 23:10).

Paul: *“If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:17,18).

James: *“The trying of our faith worketh patience”* (James 1:2).

Peter: *“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s suffering: that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy”* (1 Peter 4:13).

Hebrews: *“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless...”*

Writer: *“...afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are...”* (Hebrews 12:11).

While the clouds are the darkest and the storms the heaviest, remember these golden words from God. Think of the good that might come as a result of today’s sufferings. *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us as a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Corinthians 4:17,18). †

W. T. Hamilton was a writer and Gospel preacher for many years, particularly in the state of Texas, USA.

God Uses Tribulation to Prepare Us for Greater Service

J. Lee Roberts

If we read the Scriptures closely, we will see that not only does God use peace, blessings, and good things to shape our lives as His children, but it is often also necessary to use hardship and pain to correct or strengthen or direct us.

Our assurance is that, as we remain faithful to Him, whatever comes into our lives — whether it brings joy or pain — will ultimately be used for our good.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:1,2).

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:6,7).

*“These things I have spoken to you, that **in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation;** but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).*

*If you **endure chastening**, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best*

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to them, but He for our profit, **that we may be partakers of His holiness**. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, **afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:7-11).

“**Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word**” (Psalm 119:67).

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that **the testing of your faith produces patience**. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

Loving God Under Trials

“Blessed is the man who **endures temptation**; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James. 1:12).

“For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined” (Psalm 66:10).

“By faith **Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac**, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (Hebrews 11:17).

“Beloved, **do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but **rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12,13).

“And we know that **all things work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore **I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong**” (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

For this reason **I also suffer these things**; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that **He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day**” (2 Timothy 1:12). †



5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

The Grace of Giving

Paula Bates

1. Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the _____ of God bestowed on the _____ of Macedonia. 2 Corinthians 8:1
2. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the _____, and you will have _____ in heaven; come, follow _____”. Matthew 19:21
3. So let each one give as he purposes in his _____, not _____ or of necessity; for God loves a _____ giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7
4. But as you abound in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us — see that you _____ in this _____ also. 2 Corinthians 8:7
5. Give and it will be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together and _____ will be put into your bosom. For with the same _____ that you use, it will be measured back to _____. Luke 6:38
6. How did the Macedonians give? That in a great trial of _____ the abundance of their _____ and their deep _____ abounded in the riches of their _____. 2 Corinthians 8:2



1. grace, churches
2. poor, treasure, me
3. heart, grudgingly, cheerful
4. abound, grace
5. running over, measure, you
6. affliction, joy, poverty, liberality.

Answers:



The ABC's of Fatherhood

Keith Parker

Want to be a fantastic father? Then be like...

Abel — a righteous man (Hebrews 11:4)

Barnabas — an encourager (Acts 4:36)

Cornelius — give generously to the needy (Acts 10:2)

Daniel — a man of prayer (Daniel 6:10)

Enoch — please God above any (Hebrews 11:5)

Fortunatus — refresh the spirits of others (1 Corinthians 16:17,18)

Gaius — a baptized believer (1 Corinthians 1:14)

Hezekiah — live with wholehearted devotion (2 Kings 20:3)

Isaac — love your wife (Genesis 24:66)

Jesus — leave an example (1 Peter 2:21)

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Kish — give your children some responsibilities (1 Samuel 9:3)

Lazarus — show hospitality (John 12:1-3)

Manoah — ask for wisdom in child-rearing (Judges 13:8)

Naaman — have the faith to do the foolish (2 Kings 5:14)

Onesiphorus — don't be ashamed of truth (2 Timothy 1:16-18)

Philip — teach your children to speak for God (Acts 21:8,9)

Quartus — support the local church (Romans 16:23)

Reuben — stand up for your siblings (Genesis 37:21,22)

Stephen — filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5)

Timothy — know the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15)

Urbanus — a fellow worker in Christ (Romans 16:9)

Uophsi — raise children willing to explore (Numbers 13:14)

Watchman — as Ezekiel, watch for the souls of your family (Ezekiel 33:7-11)

Xerxes — submit to the wishes of your wife (Esther 5:1-3)

Yahweh — just like Jehovah (Genesis 2:4)

Zaccheus — desire to see Jesus (Luke 19:1-10)



Keith Parker is a gospel preacher working with the Hendersonville Church of Christ in Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA.

**BUT WE ALL, WITH OPEN FACE
BEHOLDING AS IN A GLASS
THE GLORY OF THE LORD,
ARE CHANGED INTO THE SAME IMAGE
FROM GLORY TO GLORY,
EVEN AS BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.
(2 CORINTHIANS 3:18)**

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Suggestions to Prevent Divorce

Jerry A. Jenkins

The attitude of God toward divorce is clearly revealed in the Bible. The prophet Malachi stated: *“I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith”* (Malachi 2:16). It has been declared that America’s greatest danger today is the disintegration of her homes.

A divorce is the public and legal declaration of the death and disintegration of a home. Divorce is no respecter of persons. It happens to the rich, poor, educated, illiterate, in fact, it does invade every bracket and strata of our national life.

No couple begins with the thought

that this marriage is not going to work out. Many who find themselves experiencing this agony never dreamed it would happen to them. What can be done to fortify our homes against the possibility of divorce? Please remember that certain dangers to the family relationship must be avoided at all cost.

Following are some suggestions that could make a great difference in your future happiness:

1. Young people should recognize that marriage is for adults. Certainly, this is not meant to be a put-down for the young. It is a recognition that marriage demands great responsibilities. Every study ever done indicates that it is better to reach emotional maturity before entering into the responsibilities of marriage.

2. Young people should recognize that romantic attraction alone does not guarantee happiness or ensure success in marriage. Romantic attraction may be nothing more than the chemical reaction of a male to a

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female and vice versa. Romantic attraction is an essential for a good marriage, but there must be something much more than this if the marriage is to be beautiful, fulfilling, and satisfying through the years.

3. Young people should recognize that marriage is a part of God's plan for life. This decision should be a matter of earnest prayer for guidance. It has been often stated that a family that prays together stays together. This writer firmly believes this to be the case. If young couples can enter their marriages, making vows as in the presence of God, and invoking His blessings upon their actions and asking for His help, they will succeed.

To insure the abundant life, it is imperative to put Christ at the center of that life. The ancient writer stated: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5,6). †

Jerry A. Jenkins preaches for the Roebuck Parkway congregation in Birmingham, Alabama, USA.

God Knows Who I Mean

Janet Jenkins

It was Sunday. My husband and I had been invited to our son and daughter-in-law's house for dinner. After the meal had been put on the table, my two grandsons, ages six and eight, were also called to take their places. They were sitting across from my husband and me. Their dad asked the youngest son to say the prayer. We had just returned from worship where the last announcer had asked that everyone pray for the sick. He asked all of us to pray especially for Harry who was very ill.

The grandson leading the prayer for the food also prayed for the sick but called another man's name instead of Harry's. After the prayer, his mother said, "You called the wrong name for the man who was sick". The young boy looked at his mother in a nonchalant manner and said, "It doesn't matter, Mom. God knows who I meant".

As I sat quietly looking at the child, I thought of God's words regarding children. Isaiah 11:6 states "...a little child shall lead them." Our faith in prayer should be like that of the small child who called the wrong man's name while praying. If we make a mistake when asking God for anything, we can be assured that He knows what we mean. He is omniscient. †

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The home, as we know (or once knew), is in serious trouble. The title of this article implies that many homes are weak and in grave danger. Failures in the home are everywhere, having a devastating effect on our society in an alarming way.

This problem has not left the church untouched. Brethren, we can make a tremendous difference by proper biblical teaching and being an example. We can and must make a difference — or we are going to be known as failures. The key to our success is commitment to God's way and will. To do any less will be failure.

But how do we strengthen our homes? What is most needed? The first step would be our awareness of

the present urgency to act now! I emphasize “now” because it is an urgent matter, demanding the immediate attention of everyone involved.

What determines weakness in our homes? Our society is not correctly measured by the size of our cities, the strength of our military, the influence of our economy, or the significance of our political standing with the world. The church cannot successfully be measured by the size of and grandeur of our buildings, the numbers on our attendance boards, or the influence of our members, etc. Likewise, our “homes” cannot be measured by the fineness and size of the houses we occupy, or all the “things” we may “own”, or by the

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way, we may appear to others. Our nation, along with any other nation, can be correctly measured only by the strength of our homes. The church will be no greater than the homes of the members who occupy them. God ordained and established the home as the basic building block of society, and He has given instructions for its organization and operation which make it happy and strong. Every failure and weakness in a nation, in the church, or in the home is a direct result of not following completely God's instructions.

To strengthen our families will require us to put God back as Head. Some men boast of being the head of their house. Unfortunately, many fail to recognize that God is really the Head of every Christian home, but many have eased Him out of His place. Materialism has become His substitute! God must truly be the Head of our homes and His Word must be our guide.

To Israel of old, God gave through Moses the following admonition concerning homes: *"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates"* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It seems as though they did a good job for a while, but did not continue to follow God's instruction very long. See Judges 2:8-15.

If a child came to you and asked you if Jesus lived in your home — how would you answer? We may push God out of our homes and try to build without Him, but let it be known, *"it will be in vain"* (Matthew 7:24-27; Psalm 127:1). Oftentimes we go to the wrong "experts" for counseling when problems arise. God (His Word) is the real expert (2 Timothy 3:17; 2 Peter 1:3).

Whose responsibility is it to strengthen the home? Husbands and fathers — listen up. God gave us this enormous responsibility (Ephesians 5:22-6:4). How do we measure up, fathers? It is better to face the truth now and make the necessary changes than to wait too late. Divorce and desertion are major factors in many failures of the home, but some fathers have deserted their families even though they are still at home.

Wives and mothers — listen up. You, too, have been given an enormous responsibility. Your role in the home is assigned to you by God. You must fulfill it if we are to have strong and healthy homes. God calls upon you to be a virtuous woman. You are to be noble in working for the good of the family (Proverbs 31:10-31). We really need mothers back in the home on a full-time

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basis, particularly in those formative years. Those early years are so vital to the proper development of children that you cannot afford to shift your responsibilities to someone else, especially to strangers! Too many wives and mothers have answered the call to the god of materialism. Children need mothers more than those things which a few extra dollars will permit you to buy. Go to Titus 2:1-5 and note what Paul says. It still works if it is followed.

What our homes need now is the discipline and training of our children. The book of Proverbs clearly teaches the importance of correction and discipline of children (Proverbs 23:13,14; 13:24; 29:15). Whether or not we accept the arguments for or against spanking (corporal punishment) in moderation, we do recognize the need of other discipline strategies. Parents need to accept their God-given roles and fulfill them, regardless of what society or psychology hands us. The book of Proverbs offers much help on this subject. Do we still believe Proverbs 22:6?

Our children need and deserve our constant love and guidance. This love needs to be directed in the right way. You see, a house may be equipped with all the latest conveniences and luxuries, but fail as a home for a lack of love and guidance that is continual. Tell your children you love them and then prove it with your godly guidance (Titus 2:4; 1 John 3:18). May God help us in giving them the spiritual molding they need and deserve (Ephesians 6:4). We will succeed as parents when we've caused our children to understand the importance of putting God first in their lives (Proverbs 15:16; Matthew 6:33). A fear (reverence) for God is more important than being rich and successful by human standards (Proverbs 16:6); the fear of God will make them rich (Proverbs 22:4).

Brethren, I have written about two groups of people — parents (husbands/wives), and children. Parents, let us not neglect our responsibilities. Children, do not neglect your responsibilities — you must respect and obey God's Word, too (Proverbs 23:22; Colossians 3:20; Ephesians 6:1).

God's Word is our instruction book! If we follow it, we succeed in meeting the needs in our homes. If we fail to follow it, we fail in meeting the needs in our homes. I pray we will all resolve to go forth with God's Word and "*Set thine house in order*" (2 Kings 20:1). May it be said of us, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Joshua 24:15). May "*the joy of the Lord be our strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10). God bless you in your efforts. †

Jimmy Young works with the Nettleton congregation in Jonesboro, Arkansas, USA.

Love Is...

SPC Alex Gibson

Love is kind, love is gentle, love does not boast, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth. Love never fails, love does not seek its own, love is selfish and selfless at the same time. Love has given breath to creation and will sound this world's end. Love has made a man out of many a boy and turned many strong men into childish boys. Love has taken little girls and made them lovely young ladies, and turned many an older woman into graceful beauties. Love can turn you on your head and make you a fool. It can make you many times stronger than you are and motivate you to do anything. For love, the Father gave us His Son. For love we give our vows of constant care and support. For love, we will climb mountains and cross oceans.



What is this thing called love?

That question might slip by you but then, again, if you're between the ages of 13 and 19, I'm guessing you don't listen to much of ole blue eyes. But the question of love is a simple one with a simple answer: Love *is*. It is a state of being, it is alive and moving in whomever has it. It is God's chosen mode of *being*, as *God is love, so love is God*.

But am I talking about the simple emotion or the physical attraction? Yes and no. The Bible mentions mind, body, heart, and soul. All are capable of love in their own ways. When you hug and kiss someone you express affection and get a small and sometimes big rush from it. That is part of the physical aspect of love, the affection given in a physical way. Then there's the heart, the emotional ties that make us feel lighter than air when we are around a person or are thinking of them. This is what gives us the butterflies in the pit of our stomach. The mind aspect is the knowing that they are there, a constant safe haven for us, a person with whom we can feel safe and know they will help us without the usual thought of reward. Then there's the soul, the deep longing for the beloved that compels every aspect of our being to seek that one and not let go.

HEY YOU KIDS!

If that sounds too simple then it is only because you bring your own complexities to love. I will explain. If I look at a child who is trying to learn how to ride a bike and love him enough to teach him, then I will help him by giving him a bike, and training wheels. You may ask why I didn't mention protective gear, but in my day we fell down and bounced back up; none of this whining "I skinned my knee, let's go to the doctor" stuff. Bone sticking out? Walk it off! But I digress. I will help him to learn and watch him go. So why is that a good example of love? Well, it's simply taking the time to be in a relationship with the other person. That's what love is about: being with the other person and putting his good at the forefront of what you are doing with him.

Love means being willing to be "inconvenienced", using your time, your resources, and your prayers to come to the aid of a friend or loved one who is in trouble. It may mean counseling for long hours on the phone, making an unexpected trip to the home of the troubled friend, moving over and making room for someone to stay in your home until his situation improves. It means looking for opportunities to share knowledge of God with a friend who does not have that anchor. It means taking those longings to God in prayer.

"But he called me..." Love keeps no record of wrongs, so guess what? It doesn't matter; it's in the past.

"But I..." That's not important, either. Love isn't about *you*, its about the *other person* in the relationship.

"But can't I...?" Nope, you can't. Love isn't about *you* or *your* good.

Christ loved us perfectly, and so He died for that love. That is true love.

Love has no quantity, so it's silly to say that you can or cannot love someone enough for something. Love, in its honest form, should be ready, willing, and able to do anything for the beloved. That lesson seems to be a bit beyond most people these days, though, which is part of the reason why the divorce rate is so high.

My honest wish is that those of you reading this would examine your relationships and compare them to what God says love is, and to His example. Then try to make your relationships measure up, insofar as is humanly possible. This is not just a wish for you but for myself as well, as I'll be the first to admit to my many shortcomings, with which my wife usually is so patient. So let's keep working at it, and write me with any feed back. †

For feedback email Alex Gibson at zex1@hotmail.com or PO box 1111, Oak grove KY 42262, USA.

All Creation

Kimberly Reagan Waggoner

My Lord hath crafted every morning,
Each crimson sunset, in blazing glory,
Tranquil brooks, and rapid waters roaring,
Placid doves, and mighty eagles soaring.

Each bright, wee bluebird's sweet, fluid song,
Every gliding moonrise, and breaking dawn,
Each bounding buck, and feeble fawn,
And wildflowers' grassy meadow throngs.

My God created the midnight's stars,
That wink and sparkle from realms afar;
He made sea cliffs, by crashing wave ever carved
And azure skies, so vast, unfathomably large.

My Lord hath made all creatures and lands!
Each ocean wide, and grain of sand!
A task so great, I fail to understand,
Yet I know all creation is the work of His hands!

Ask What Ye Will

T. Pierce Brown

One of the most astounding passages in John 15 is found in verse seven. Jesus says, “*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*”. Albert Barnes says, “This promise had particular reference to the apostles. It is applicable to other Christians only so far as they are in circumstances similar to the apostles, and only so far as they possess their spirit.”

It has been our practice to apply John 15 to all Christians, although as Barnes says, “It has particular reference to the apostles”. However, we need to know even in the case of the apostles what the promise meant. Were they given a sort of “blank check” so that whatever they asked they would get? When Trophimus was left in Miletum (or Miletus) sick (2 Timothy 4:20), can we logically suppose that Paul did not pray for him? Do we find that all the apostles or early Christians were granted everything for which they prayed? The answer surely is apparent. They were not. Then what does the promise mean, and of what value is it to us? Even if Barnes is right, what would it mean to be “in circumstances similar to the apostles”? Are any of us in similar circumstances?

It seems evident that the key is to be found in another direction. It is to be discovered by understanding what Jesus meant by “*If we abide in Christ and his words abide in us*”. If we can conceive of a person whose “*every thought is brought into captivity to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 2:5), and we so live that “*the life of Christ might be made manifest in our mortal flesh*” (2 Corinthians 4:11), and our will is to always do the will of the Father (Luke 22:42), then we can conceive of one to whom this promise is sure.

It may not be clear to us why we need to pray if all we pray for is what God already wants to be done. Further study might help us to see that whatever God wants to be done will not always be done unless we do it in accordance with His rules. This is one of the points where Calvinists have so grievously erred. They have assumed that since God is omnipotent, whatever God wills must happen. It is not so, as the Bible abundantly shows, both by express statements and examples. The clearest proof of it is perhaps in 2 Peter 3:9 where we find, “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men*

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count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance". It should be clear that God wills that all men be penitent and saved, but it will not happen, because God allows men to do contrary to His will.

There are at least three things that need to be noted about this promise. First, we must have the proper union with Christ and abide in that union. At this time we are not dwelling on the fact that this passage alone spells the death knell to the false doctrine that a person who is once saved from his past sins can never be lost. Some theologians have tried to make it sound as if he is talking about those who seem to have union with Christ but do not. The passage does not remotely suggest that.

Second, in order for this promise to be appropriate, our lives must be regulated by His words — "*my words abide in you*". A person can be in Christ, yet at any given moment his actions not be determined and regulated by what Christ wants.

Third, when those two things are in evidence, we still must pray and ask for that which we want. We may often hear the question, "Since God loves us and already knows what we want and need, why must we ask for it?" There may be several reasons for this, but one is that in asking for it, we clarify in our own minds whether or not we really want it, how much we want it, and what we will do with it if and when we get it. A father may know that his little son needs a bicycle in order to accomplish what he wants to accomplish, but until the son realizes he needs it and wants it enough to ask for it, the father may know that he would not use it properly if he had it. So he refuses to give it to him until and unless he asks.

One may still not understand the fantastic scope of this promise if he does not realize that there are two Greek words that are translated "will". The verbs are "thelo" and "boulomai". Without going into an exhaustive study of the difference, the implications of it, let us realize that every Christian must have his "boulema" — his fixed and deliberate basic purpose — to do the will of the Father. However, at times his "thelema" — his temporary wish — may not coincide with that. But when his life so conforms to God's will that even his wish (thelema) is the same as God's will (boulema), then that wish will be granted if he asks for it. This is why James could say in James 5:16, "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*". This is why we need to "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). †

T. Pierce Brown (1923-2008) lived and preached in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

The Encouragement Connection

Tom Kelton

Rivet your attention on the following excerpts from Proverbs. In your own words, to what positive purpose of speech do they refer?

“Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad” (Proverbs 12:25). *“A soothing tongue is a tree of life”* (Proverbs 15:4). *“Pleasant words are a honey comb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones”* (Proverbs 16:24).

Those verses zero in on the capacity of words to encourage or lift the spirits of others. New Testament references piggyback on this point from Proverbs. As far as the apostle Paul was concerned, vocal encouragement is a command, not an option, among Christians: *“Encourage one another, and build up one another”* (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

The New Testament Greek word for encouragement contains the idea of being called alongside another. On the coldest winter days we do this to some of our cars. When one battery is so weak that it cannot spark its engine, we bring another car alongside and connect the working battery with heavy cables to the weaker battery. Nothing is changed in the car that won't start. But with the direct infusion of power from the other vehicle, the weakness is overcome, and the stranded car is able to function on its own.

We Christians often need to connect with the battery in others in order to get started or to keep going in difficult circumstances. We need someone to come alongside and give us a “jump”.

When the energy oozes out of the batteries of folks around you, how can you infuse them with power to keep going? You can give others a “jump” when you:

- Compliment a character trait or course of action you've observed in them.
- Tell them how something they said or did spurred you on spiritually.
- Say taken-for-granted things, such as, “I'm your friend”, “I'm willing to listen”, or “I care about you”.
- Defend them against unfair criticism.
- Call to find out why they missed worship.
- Pray with them over a need they've expressed.
- Describe the vacancy they'd leave in your life if they were no longer around. †

Before his death, Tom Kelton was a writer and preacher at Pharr, Texas, USA.

A Righteous Man

Betty Tucker

Daniel was referred to as a righteous man by Ezekiel (14:14). The Bible tells us little about his early years. However, we can imagine that he was the type of child that every parent brags about.

When Judah was taken into exile by Babylon (Daniel 1:1,2), Daniel was about sixteen years old. He watched his world crumble around him. He had to leave his family and most of his friends, to live in a foreign culture.

He and three friends were chosen by King Nebuchadnezzar to be schooled in the royal classroom (1:6). They were given Babylonian names. Daniel became Belteshazzar. His friends became Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their food was to be the best in the land — wine and exotic food from the royal table.

Daniel was an exceptional young man. He was confident that God could make him and his friends physically strong, even though they did not eat the king's food (verse 8ff).

When the king examined them at the end of the training, he found Daniel and his friends superior to the other students, and wiser than the royal magicians (verse 20).

A Teller of Dreams

While Daniel was in the royal court of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which disturbed him. He called his wise men and demanded that they tell him the meaning of his dream, even though he could not remember it himself (2:5-10).

When they could not do as he commanded, the king was wroth and determined to kill all of the wise men in the land. But Daniel requested time, assuring Nebuchadnezzar that he would tell him his dream and the meaning thereof.

Daniel's faith was so strong that he was confident he could interpret a dream that he had never seen. He was part of the group targeted for death.

The four young friends prayed that God would reveal the secret dream. That night, in a vision, the king's dream was made known to Daniel (2:19).

Then, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar about the great statue (verse 31). For this study we are not concerned with the image or its meaning. Suffice it to

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say that Daniel interpreted the dream. The king was so appreciative that he acknowledged God as “*a Lord of kings*” (verse 47).

King Nebuchadnezzar then made Daniel ruler over Babylon, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were installed in positions of honor.

A Mysterious Message

After Nebuchadnezzar died, Belshazzar reigned. He gave a great feast, with wine that was served in holy temple vessels (Daniel 5:1-3).

Suddenly, there appeared a man’s hand, writing on the wall! The king was so frightened that his knees knocked together. He called all of his wise men, promising to richly reward the man who could decipher the strange message.

Once again, Daniel revealed the message to the king. Belshazzar’s kingdom would be divided. That night, the king was slain, and Darius the Mede ruled in his stead (5:30,31).

Darius set Daniel in a high position, which caused jealousy among his peers. They conspired to discredit him. So they convinced King Darius to decree that any who would not bow down to worship him would be thrown into the den of lions (6:7,8).

Daniel learned of the hateful edict, but he continued to pray to his God as he always had. The king could find no way out of his dilemma, except to abide by his law.

Daniel was cast into the lions’ den. King Darius said to Daniel, “*Your God will deliver you*” (6:16). Early the next morning, the king came quickly to the lions’ den. He was vastly relieved to find Daniel untouched by the lions.

In this study, we have watched as Daniel encountered treachery of those men who were jealous of him, faced lions, and dealt honestly and bravely with foreign kings.

This righteous man met each predicament with an unwavering faith in his God. In Daniel 10:12, the emphasis is on prayer — “*Then said he unto me, ‘Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words’*”.

We noted at the beginning of this lesson that Ezekiel called Daniel a righteous man. He was listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Daniel relied upon God as his support system, and he was never disappointed. †

Betty Tucker was a staff writer for *The Voice of Truth International* before her death in 2008.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

Zechariah, the Right Kind of Father

John Gipson

Not all fathers are created equal. Some relish the role and delight in their children, while others could not care less. But blessed is the child who has a loving, caring father.

John the baptizer had the right kind of father. His father, Zechariah, was a priest before God. Sadly, not all fathers are religious. Some are concerned only about wealth or pleasure. God has no place in their lives. Consequently, no thought is ever given to training their children in the paths of righteousness. Timothy, of New Testament fame, was blessed, in that from a child he was taught the Holy Scriptures which were able to instruct him for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Zechariah made a wise choice in selecting a companion who would be the right kind of wife and mother. She, too, was a godly person. Her name was Elizabeth, and she was one of the daughters of Aaron, a descendent of the High Priest. The right kind of father picks the right kind of woman to be his wife.

The right kind of father establishes a God-fearing home. Here is Luke's inspired testimony about this couple, "*And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*" (Luke 1:6). Just look at their devout example. Their lives were pleasing to God. They were not pretending. They were righteous "before God," and not just making a show before others.

Zechariah was a prayerful father. One of the heartaches of this family was the fact that they didn't have any children — and both were advanced in years. But God can do the impossible. While Zechariah was serving before God at the altar of incense, an angel appeared with a startling message, "*Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John*" (Luke 1:13).

Jesus gives us the ultimate assessment of John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist...*" It pays to have the right kind of father and mother! †

John Gipson works with the Windsong Church of Christ in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA.

BIBLE FIND

Opposites

Bonnie Rushmore

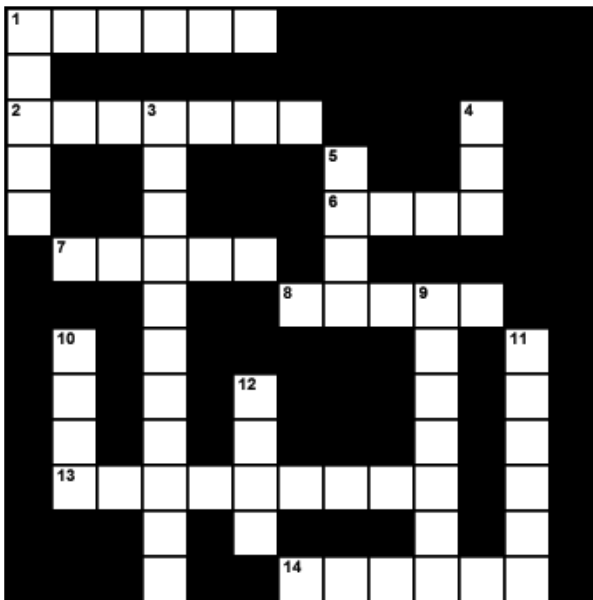
Give a positive word for each negative clue.

Across

1. Hell
2. Impatient
6. Defy
7. Lie
8. Anger
13. Ignorance
14. Rough

Down

1. Grumpy
3. Slothful
4. Sorrow
5. Hate
9. Covetous
10. Forceful
11. Arrogant
12. Anxious



When Should My Baby Be Baptized?

Charles E. Burch

When asked by some who were lost, “*What shall we do?*” the apostle Peter stated, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*” (Acts 2:38). Notice the purpose of baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, for one who is not a Christian to receive the forgiveness of sins, baptism is a must.

As we search the Scriptures, we cannot find a single command or example of infants being baptized. There are three prerequisites to baptism that an infant cannot do. He cannot **believe** (Mark 16:15,16); he cannot **repent of sins** (Acts 2:38); he cannot **confess Christ with the mouth** (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10). These points prove that baptism is not necessary for infants. Is it not strange that the Bible does not mention, or command, or illustrate a practice so widely believed and practiced in religion today? The silence of the Scriptures on the point of infant baptism speaks loudly. Infants evidently are not born in sin, or they would be subjects for the New Testament baptism.

Sin is personally committed. The very fact that the judgment day will be based upon the deeds each person has done disproves the theory that we inherit someone else’s sin. Notice what Paul said, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*” (2 Corinthians 5:10). To the Romans he wrote, “*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Romans 14:12). No one will answer for another’s sin, but only for his own. Again God’s word says, “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son...*” (Ezekiel 18:20). The child does not inherit sins from his parents or anyone else.

Therefore, your baby is in a saved relationship with God and does not need to be baptized until he/she has reached the age of accountability. Yet it is sad that many today are being deceived, believing that they are going to heaven because they were sprinkled as infants. Please search the Scriptures, for they will judge everyone on the great Judgment Day. Jesus said, “*He that*

BIBLE QUESTIONS

rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). No man has the right or authority to change God’s Word. The Lord would have all to be saved. The apostle Peter wrote, *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). God sent His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all who are willing to obey. If we are saved it will be on God’s terms, and not on man’s. Without obeying the Gospel, one is lost (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). †

Charles E. Burch is a retired preacher of the Gospel living in St. Elmo, Alabama, USA.

Faith – What Is It?

Ardron Hinton

FAITH is having an extra eye
That sees past time and space,
Seeing beyond this earth and sky
To a world of love and grace.

FAITH is holding an unseen hand,
A hand with power to spare,
Providing grace by which we stand
As we live within His care.

FAITH is believing what He has taught
And learning to live His way,
Committed to doing just as we ought
And walking in truth each day.

FAITH is standing on truth received;
It’s not blind as many think,
Resting on solid facts believed,
It’s our earth-to-heaven link.

BIBLE QUESTIONS

How Does the Lord Open the Heart?

Mike Benson

Question: “Please explain Acts 16:14. What does the Bible mean when it says, ‘...*The Lord opened her [Lydia’s] heart...*?’ By what means did He accomplish this? Does He open our hearts in the same way today?”

The passage reads, “*Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyratira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*” Several observations are in order. Note:

1. The term “heart” is used here in a figurative sense and refers to Lydia’s intellect. Scripture teaches that when a person engages his or her heart, he/she “thinks” (Matthew 9:4; Hebrews 4:12), “understands” (Matthew 13:15), “reasons” (Mark 2:6), “perceives” (John 12:40 NAS), and/or believes (Romans 10:10). Thus, when Luke, through inspiration, recorded that Lydia’s heart/intellect was “opened”, he simply meant that she had come to a comprehension and acceptance of Paul’s message (cf. Luke 24:45; Acts 26:18); she had been receptive to the Gospel (verse 15; cf. Acts 8:6,12; Hebrews 12:1,2). Compare Ephesians 1:18, “*The eyes of your understanding (heart-NIV) being enlightened....*”

2. The Lord opened Lydia’s intellect by means of His Truth (Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 15:1,2; James 1:12). Truth removed all obstacles which would have prevented Lydia from accepting the good news about Jesus being the Messiah. All wrong ideas were removed so she could believe (Jerry Moffitt, “Acts,” *Moffit’s Bible Commentary – the New Testament*, Vol 1, 180). Likewise, the Lord opens our hearts (Luke 8:15) through the very same agency (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; Psalm 119:104,105,130; 19:7a) today (John 6:63; 8:31,32).

3. Lydia’s heart would have been considered closed had she refused to hear and obey. Compare 2 Corinthians 3:15, “*But even to this day, when [the law of] Moses is read, a veil [covering-ERV] lies on their heart*”. As one author notes:

The statement that the Lord opened Lydia’s heart implies that previously her heart was in some way closed. It was certainly not closed by the hardness of a sinful life, or by inherited depravity; for such

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a supposition is forbidden by the steadfastness with which, under great temptation, she had previously clung to the worship of God. It was closed in the sense in which the pious and earnest heart of a Jewish worshiper might be closed. Every Jew, and every Jewish proselyte, was at that time so wedded to the belief that the coming Christ would establish an earthly kingdom, as to have the heart very tightly closed against the conception of a crucified Christ, whose reign as a king is purely spiritual. It was this that had caused the mass of the Jews to reject the Christ while he was still on earth and it continued to be their “stumbling block” (John 5:44; 1 Corinthians 1:23). Whether Lydia was a Jewess or a proselyte, this was “the hope of Israel in which she had been instructed, and for which she had been taught to devoutly pray; and if the natural effect of it had not been removed from her heart, she must have rejected the gospel, as did the mass of those who had been her teachers. The statement then that the Lord “opened her heart” means that he removed this mistaken conception [through the Truth –MB] which would have prevented her from receiving the Christ (J. W. McGarvey, “Acts xvi 133-15,” New Commentary on Acts of the Apostles, 90-91). †

Mike Benson is a Gospel preacher living in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA.

Questions Answered

Jim Martin

Jesus answered, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me*” (John 14:6).

1. How can I be saved?
 (“I am the way”)
2. How can I be sure?
 (“I am...the truth”)
3. How can I be satisfied?
 (“I am...the life”)

What Is “Baptism With Fire”?

Royce Frederick

John, the forerunner of Jesus, said, *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Matthew 3:11). Who is “you” in this verse, and what is the baptism with “fire”?

YOU — Jesus was talking to the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7), but He clearly used the word “you” in a general way to mean “people”.

1. *“I indeed baptize you with water...”* John did not baptize the Pharisees with water. *“And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him”* (Luke 7:29,30; see Matthew 21:25). So, “you” meant people in general, without telling which people.

2. *“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit...”* The New Testament tells of only two occasions of baptism with the Holy Spirit, in Acts 2 and Acts 10. These did not include the Pharisees and Sadducees. Again, “you” meant “people”.

So, like the others, *“He will baptize you with...fire”* reveals that Jesus would baptize people with fire, but it does not reveal which people.

John was not telling them who would be baptized. He was telling them who has the greatest power! John was a mere human and could only baptize with water. But Jesus, the Son of God, has the power to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire!

BIBLE QUESTIONS

BAPTISM WITH FIRE — In Matthew 3:10-12, John mentions fire three times: *“And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire ...He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”*.

John is not referring to the *“tongues, as of fire”* on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:3. “Baptize” means “immerse”. The apostles were baptized (immersed, overwhelmed) with the Holy Spirit, but not with fire. The *“tongues, as of fire”* sat on the head of each apostle; they were not immersed with fire that day.

Matthew 3:10 and 12 show that 3:11 is not referring to a *“trial by fire”*, as in some verses (see 1 Peter 4:12).

John was speaking of eternal punishment in fire. He was warning the Pharisees and Sadducees that the wrath (3:7) of God would come upon all who do not truly repent. Jesus often spoke about the punishment of eternal fire which awaits all who reject God and *“those who do not obey the gospel”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8; see Matthew 13:40-42, 49,50; 25:41; Mark 9:43-48; John 15:6). At the end of the world, all people will be raised to life and judged by Jesus Christ (John 5:28,29; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10). He will cast the disobedient into the eternal lake of fire, baptizing (immersing) them in fire forever (Revelation 20:14,15). John compared it to throwing a fruitless tree and chaff into a fire (Matthew 3:10,12).

Jesus has the power to punish sin. All of us sin and deserve to be separated from God forever (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Jesus also has the power to save us through His death for our sins, and you have the power to accept His grace by being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)! †

Royce Frederick is the Editor of *International Gospel Teacher* and lives in Fort Worth, Texas, USA.

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” John 5:28-30

FRAGILE: HANDLE WITH CARE

Curtis Camp

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Have seen sign on glassware, etc., “Fragile: handle with care.”
 - 1. Life is like that. Is fragile and needs to be handled with great care – and prayer.
- B. Bible encourages us to pray:
 - 1. Luke 18:1, “...always to pray and not to faint...”
 - 2. Matthew 14:38, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter...”
 - 3. Colossians 4:2, “Continue in prayer, and watch...”
 - 4. 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.”
- C. Some of the fragile things of life that need to be handled with prayer:

I. PHYSICAL LIFE

- A. We take our day to day life for granted, but actually it is very fragile and deserves to be handled with care and prayer.
 - 1. “Brittle thread of life” – may be snapped at any moment by auto accident, plane crash, hunting accident, heart attack, and a hundred other things.
 - a. James 4:13-15

II. MARRIAGE

- A. Fragile and needs to be handled with prayer.
 - 1. Being greatly desecrated in this country.
 - a. Divorce is all too common. One out of three marriages end in divorce. Fragile! Homes being broken and lives being hurt – even destroyed.
- B. Must be recognized as a sacred relationship and should be entered into in a sacred and serious manner.
 - 1. 1 Peter 3:5-7, “...husbands, dwell, honor...”
 - a. When members of a family sincerely pray for each other, the family relationship will be greatly strengthened.
- C. Need to give notice and praise to those married fifty years and longer. Thank God for these.

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

III. CHILDREN

- A. I would be afraid to try to rear my children without prayer.
 - 1. They are so young, tender, and fragile. So moldable and pliable. With all the influences to which they are subjected in this day, I would hate to try to rear them without the help of the Lord. They could be broken and ruined for life.
 - 2. Psalm 127:3, “Lo, children are a heritage...”
 - a. Since they are from the Lord, should I think of trying to rear them without His help?
 - b. Do not need rough, harsh, cruel treatment. Need the tenderest care and prayer possible. Need the inspiration of a godly example in the home and in daily life. Need a reverence and respect for God and His Word.
 - c. Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way...”

IV. THE SOUL

- A. If physical life is fragile and needs to be handled with prayer, how much more the spiritual life and things pertaining to the soul?
 - 1. Alien sinner, of course, is not saved by prayer, but by belief and obedience to the Gospel. Christian, however, cannot save his soul and protect it from the ravages of sin without giving much care and prayer to it.
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 10:12, “Let him that thinketh he standeth...”
 - a. At close of day – afraid to pillow head without asking God’s forgiveness for every sin committed that day, thank Him for every blessing He has bestowed upon me, ask Him for strength to overcome temptation, and ask Him to bless my loved ones with physical and spiritual health.
 - b. James 5:16, “prayer of a righteous man...”

CONCLUSION:

“O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry,
Everything to God in prayer.”



Curtis Camp was a preacher for many years, primarily in the state of Texas, USA.

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Ephesians 4:1-6

Jess Nutter

INTRODUCTION:

- A. “Unity” defined: State of being one, singleness, absence of diversity.
- B. “Christian Unity”, therefore, is when “oneness”, “singleness”, and the ‘absence of diversity’ are found among Christ’s followers.
- C. The purpose of this lesson is to study “Unity” from the Bible perspective.

I. CHRIST BUILT BUT ONE CHURCH.

- A. His promise was, “I will build MY CHURCH” (Matthew 16:18).
- B. History reveals that for many years this “oneness” continued.
- C. The interruption of this unity was predicted (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Thesalonians 2:3-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5).
- D. One can trace the multiplication of churches throughout history. They number over 38,000 now (World Christian Encyclopedia).

II. DOES THIS DIVISION PLEASE GOD?

- A. CHRIST PRAYED FOR UNITY (John 17:20,21).
- B. Paul condemned division (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).
- C. Church commanded to guard against division (Romans 16:17; 2 John 9-11; Titus 3:10,11).
- D. Every plant, not planted by God, shall be rooted up (Matthew 15:13).

III. UNITY IS RIGHT AND DESIRABLE

- A. It is both “Good” and “Pleasant” (Psalm 133:1).
- B. It an answer to Christ’s prayer (John 17:20,21).
- C. It recognizes the “One fold” of which Jesus spoke (John 10:16).
- D. All men are reconciled to God in one body (Ephesians 2:16).

IV. THE BLESSINGS OF UNITY

- A. It gives strength and stability (Matthew 12:25).
- B. It would hasten the conversion of the world (Mark 16:15,16).
- C. It would reduce infidelity (John 17:20,21).
- D. It would eliminate wasteful spending and competition.

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

V. CAUSES OF DIVISION

- A. Lack of respect for the Word of God (Matthew 15:1-9).
- B. Ignorance of the Word of God (Matthew 22:29; Romans 10:1-3).
- C. Prejudice [willful ignorance] (2 Peter 3:5) .
- D. Desire for preeminence (3 John 1:9).
- E. These result in CREEDS, UNSCRIPTURAL NAMES AND PRACTICES which divide. (Some would be offended if called “Baptist”, “Methodist”, etc, but all accept “Christian”).

VI. REMEDY FOR DIVISION

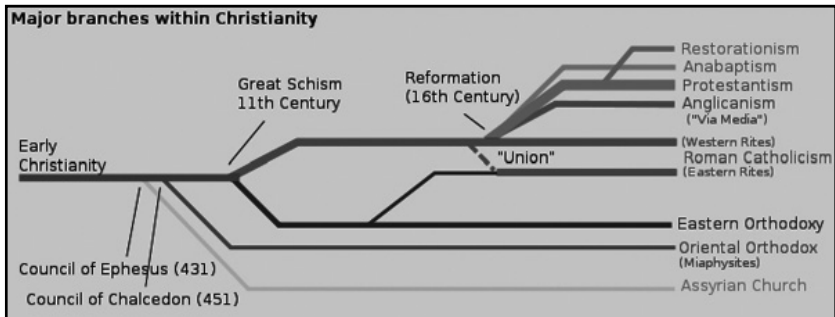
- A. All speak “The same thing” (1 Corinthians 1:10).
- B. All “Walk by the same rule” (Philippians 3:16).
- C. All “Walk by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7), which comes by the “Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

CONCLUSION:

The formula for unity is a simple one. Will you renounce all human creeds and “*continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine*”? †

Chart of Churches

Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia



Church history and all church historians would agree with the basic accuracy of this chart. It is a fact: **only one church was begun by Christ**, and all of the denominations have developed through the creation of new doctrines and new organizations by men. *If we want to be Christians, why would we not choose to be members the church that was actually begun by Christ?* It exists today. He said it would never be destroyed (Mt. 16:18,19).



Israelites in Egypt

Rex Banks

From Genesis, chapter 37, the land of Egypt becomes the backdrop to many of the events of the patriarchal age, as the Lord's plan for the

nation of Israel unfolds in history. Because widespread idolatry among the Canaanites would have been a constant threat to Abraham's descendants, the Lord providentially resettled Jacob, his sons and their families in "the land of Goshen" (Genesis 47:4ff), a rich pastoral district located east of the Nile River. Genesis, chapters 37-50, chronicle the life of Joseph, one of Jacob's sons who was sold into slavery by his brothers and who rose to power in Egypt. Enjoying Pharaoh's trust and support, Joseph was able to provide haven for Jacob's family in Goshen when the land of Canaan was caught in the grip of a famine. In Genesis 46:6 we read:

"And they took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him."

Settling in the "land of Goshen" (Genesis 47:1-11), this group of about 70 descendants of Abraham *"were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them"* (Exodus 1:7). Although Jacob and his family were initially welcomed by the Pharaoh of Joseph's time (Genesis 47:5,6) several generations later *"a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph"* (Exodus 1:8) and this king *"appointed taskmasters [over the Israelites] to afflict them with hard labour"* (Exodus 1:11). To further retard the growth of the Israelite population, the king ordered the destruction of all male children born to Hebrew women (Exodus 1:15ff). Abraham had earlier been warned by God that his descendants would be *"strangers in a land that is not theirs"* where they would be *"enslaved and oppressed four hundred years"* (Genesis 15:13) before possessing the land of Canaan as an inheritance (15:16).

There may now be extra-biblical evidence for the presence of Semites in Egypt at the appropriate time. According to Exodus 1:11, the Hebrew slaves were used to build "storage cities, Pithom and Rameses", and under the

BIBLICAL HISTORY

heading Avaris we have the following in Britannica: “[Also] called PI Ramesse, biblical Raamses, modern Qantr, Khafna, or Tall Ad-daba’a... Situated in the north-eastern delta about 62 miles (100 km) northeast of Cairo, the city lay in ancient times on the Bubastite branch of the Nile.”

David Rohl (**A Test of Time**) tells us that the city of Avaris (biblical Rameses) was located by Manfred Bietak of the Austrian Institute of Egyptology in the 1960’s and that Bietak made the “startling discovery” that most of the tombs which were excavated were of Asiatic origin. It turns out that the “people who had populated the sprawling city of Avaris originated from Palestine and Syria!” Rohl tells us that “Bietak has identified eleven main levels of occupation (during this period of Asiatic occupation) ...indicating a considerable time interval between the arrival and departure of the foreigners.” He also tells us that an anthropological analysis of the skeletal remains showed that “more adult women were buried in the settlement than adult men” and that “there was a higher percentage of infant burials... than is normally found at archaeological sites of the ancient world.” Clearly this is consistent with the biblical account, where we read of the Egyptian king’s edict that male children born to the Israelites be put to death (Exodus 1:15 ft).

Also consistent with the biblical account is information gleaned from a papyrus roll (Brooklyn 35.1446) which contains the names of ninety-five slaves/servants. Rohl tells us that “over fifty per cent of the ninety-five names are Semitic in origin” and that a number are biblical names. He adds: “The great American philologist William Foxwell Albright long ago recognised that the names of these Asiatic people belong to the North West Semitic language group which includes biblical Hebrew.” Rohl tells us that Bietak discovered shallow burial pits all over the city of Avaris, containing the remains of victims of some terrible disaster. Interestingly “analysis of the site...suggests that the remaining population of the town abandoned their homes and departed from Avaris en masse.”

This harmonizes with the Biblical account (Exodus chapters 2-12), which tells of how the Lord raised up an extraordinary Hebrew leader named Moses who became the instrument of Israel’s deliverance at the appropriate time. Empowered and directed by the Lord, Moses called down upon Egypt a series of ten plagues, after which Pharaoh permitted the entire nation to depart, en masse, from Egypt. (This is often referred to as “The Exodus”.) Clearly, we need to be cautious about handling this material, but many find a correspondence between Bietak’s discoveries at Avaris and the Biblical record. †

Rex Banks is a preacher of the Gospel in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Who Am I ?

Rebecca Rushmore

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. If you guess my name after the first clue, give yourself a score of 100 points. If you know who I am only after the fifth clue, your score is 60, etc. When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of Scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's Word.

1. A king promoted me above the other princes, and after my promotion, all the king's servants bowed down when I passed by (Esther 3:1-2).
2. After one man would not bow down to me, I became angry and plotted to have all of that man's people destroyed (Esther 3:5-9).
3. The queen invited me to attend a banquet with the king two days in a row (Esther 5:4-8).
4. The banquet with the king and queen did not ease my anger against the man who would not bow to me (Esther 5:10-13).
5. My wife and friends suggested I build a gallows to hang the man who angered me, so I had it built (Esther 5:14).
6. The king asked me what he should do to honor a man (Esther 6:6).
7. Since I thought the king meant to honor me, I suggested the man be royally clothed and led about the streets on a horse and proclaimed to the people (Esther 6:9).
8. The king instructed me to do those things for the man who angered me
9. (Esther 6:10-11).
10. The king found out that I had plotted to destroy the queen's people and _____ (Esther 7:3-6).
11. One of the king's men told him about the gallows I had built for _____; the king used it to hang me, instead (Esther 7:9-10).

See answer on inside back cover

My Score: _____

Where Am I ?

Rebecca Rushmore

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. If you guess my name after the first clue, give yourself a score of 100 points. If you know who I am only after the fifth clue, your score is 60, etc. When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of Scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's Word.

1. I am the oldest city that has always had someone living here since I was founded.
2. Many different nations have ruled over me.
3. I was a major trade center during biblical times.
4. Three major caravan routes passed through me.
5. My two rivers make me an oasis on the edge of a desert.
6. Abram asked the Lord if his servant from here would be his heir (Genesis 15:2).
7. Naaman the leper claimed my rivers were better than the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:12).
8. I was the capital of Syria during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 11:23-25).
9. I am a city in modern day Syria.
10. The apostle Paul was converted here after he was blinded on the road (Acts 9:1-19).



See answer on inside back cover

My Score: _____



How Do You Measure Up?

24. And again I say to you, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

25. When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

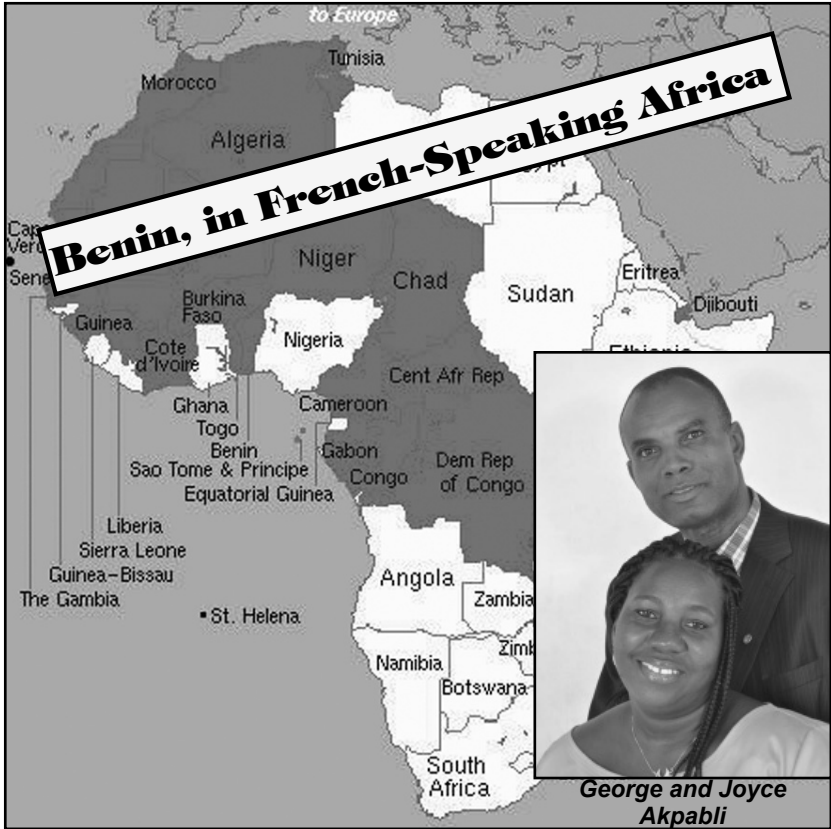
26. But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

27. Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?”

28. So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29. “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” Mt. 19:24-29

FROM THE HEART OF...



Dr. George Akpabli

George Akpabli, a native of Ghana, West Africa, became a missionary for the Benton church of Christ in 1992. The intent was to work with a small established church in Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean.

Political problems forced him to leave, and he located in the French-speaking country of West Africa. At that time there were no known churches of Christ in the country of Benin. George, his wife, a six-year-old son and one convert from the country of Togo had their first worship service in that country in May 1992.

FROM THE HEART OF...

Over the next two years there were two small congregations started in Benin. In 1994, Benton elders, Bill Morgan and Ed Jones, visited Akpabli for the first time. While they were there, Akpabli shared his dream of starting a preacher-training school to train Africans to teach the gospel to other Africans. George had attended a similar school in Ghana in years past. The Benton church of Christ decided to fund this dream that George had. In 1995, **Benin Bible Training Center** became a reality, with 18 students starting a three-year curriculum in rented facilities in Cotonou, Benin. These students came from the French-speaking countries of Benin, Burkina-Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ivory Coast and Togo.

In 2002, BTC began an expansion program that now results in a campus outside Cotonou that has eight structures and all necessary facilities to accommodate 60 students in training. Since its beginning, BTC has graduated 98 preachers who are now serving more than 200 congregations in 10 French-speaking countries. Most of these were started by BTC graduates.

With the continued help of churches and individuals in America, Benin Bible Training Center has the potential to lead thousands upon thousands to the cross of Christ in the French-speaking countries of West Africa.



Participants in a tent meeting in Benin.

THE PEOPLE

The country of Benin is much like other French-speaking countries of West Africa. The metropolitan areas of Benin are slowly progressing in infra-

FROM THE HEART OF...

structure, transportation, communications, and education. Most of the country, however, is populated by poor farmers living in rural villages that lack these amenities.

While Christianity is making a notable advancement in Benin, the country remains the voodoo capital of the world. Worship of things seen in nature is widespread. A small percentage of the population practices Islam, but that percentage is growing. Catholicism is widespread and has been for many years.

Survival in rural Benin is a challenge due to a lack of technology and modern tools and conveniences. That said, the culture of Benin is excellent in many ways. The people are humble and appreciative, placing an emphasis on family life. Family discipline is obvious in their culture, and the desire to learn true Bible knowledge is a growing phenomenon. The people of Benin and French-speaking West Africa openly show appreciation for biblical teaching and are eager to share it with others.

F.A.C.E.

Created in 2007, F.A.C.E., or French African Christian Education, is an organization primarily responsible for providing resources and direction to the Bible Training Center (BTC), a preacher-training school located in Zinvie, Benin. Going forward, F.A.C.E. also plans to provide resources and leadership for vocational and healthcare training in West Africa.

THE WORK

Like preacher training schools in the US, the mission of F.A.C.E. is to train preachers via the Bible Training Center (BTC) who will spread the gospel to the French-speaking nations of West Africa.

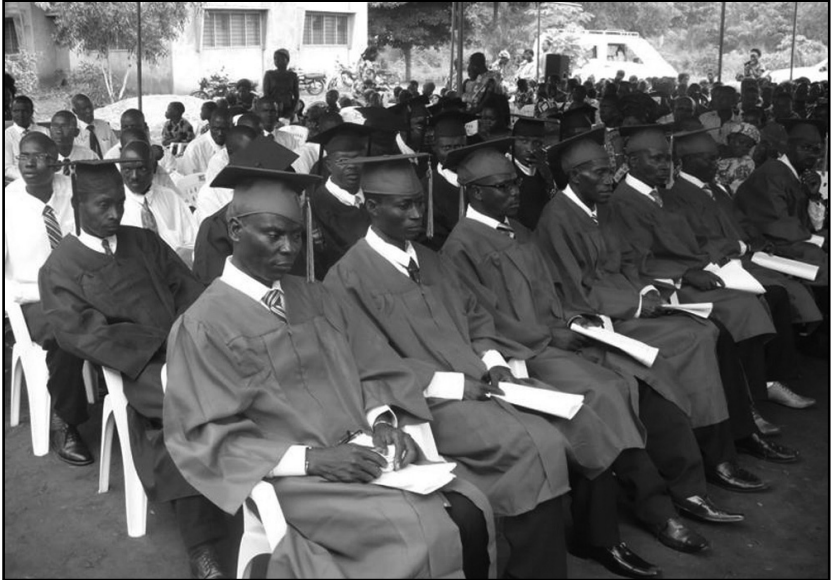
F.A.C.E. is currently involved in 10 African countries. BTC Director, George Akpabli, has adequate staff and facilities to recruit and train French-speaking evangelists. Students come from established churches and go back after graduation to plant new churches in nearby villages.

BTC students travel to remote villages on weekends for evening preaching, using gas generators to provide electricity for lights and speaker systems.

The present emphasis is to build facilities for two satellite schools and re-establish churches in Bohicon and Abomey. A few years ago, a group of American missionaries planted churches in the cities of Bohicon and Abomey that disbanded when the missionaries left. They are now seeking BTC graduates to regroup.

FROM THE HEART OF...

Many natives of Benin are illiterate and only speak an unwritten dialect. Top graduates in Parakou and Tchaada — locations of satellite schools under construction — speak the local dialect of their regions and will train converts to preach and evangelize in the language of the area. Many churches will spring forth from these efforts.



This year's graduation class. Students not only participate in classwork but are involved in evangelism on weekends.

F.A.C.E. is working to bring internet access to the BTC campus to better access and distribute biblical materials. Architectural plans have been drawn for a large worship center that is lacking on the BTC campus. Vocational training and healthcare outreach programs are in the developmental stage.

THE NEED

Currently, F.A.C.E. is seeking help for the African mission in the following areas:

- Mission teams willing to encourage graduates working in the field.
- Board members dedicated to ensuring the teaching of sound doctrine.

Those who are reading this report, who would like to help monetarily or by

FROM THE HEART OF...

coming over to spend time with us on the field, should contact our sponsoring elders: **Benton Church of Christ, 3091 Main St., P.O. Box 228, Benton, KY 42025; Elder: Ed Jones (270-527-8719; or Keith Travis (270-227-0253).**

Although American churches have done great work in sending trained missionaries to foreign lands, there are advantages to training native preachers on their own soil. For example, it is far less likely to Americanize rather than Christianize the local brethren when the preachers are Africans who are trained at home. Native training also eliminates the problem of American-trained Africans wanting to stay in the U.S. With native schools such as the BTC, students do not go back home — they ARE home.

Factoring in the advantages of studying in their native language and the elimination of culture shock, training preachers on African soil simply makes sense. It also makes financial sense — native preacher-training is far less expensive than bringing African brethren to the United States for education.

While West Africa is mostly French-speaking, countless local dialects are spoken throughout the region, and the lost souls there benefit greatly from native-born and native-trained preachers who can speak their language. To reach the lost, BTC graduates must have reliable transportation, and securing such is a great need for F.A.C.E. Motorbikes are the most prevalent means of transporting students and local preachers, but a bus is needed. Many times a new preaching point will culminate in several responses, but it is often miles to an adequate water supply for baptisms. A bus would greatly assist in meeting that need.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are three significant ways you can become personally involved with F.A.C.E. and the work in West Africa: prayer, giving, and physical involvement.

- **Prayer.** Seek to learn more about this mission and pray for it. God tells us in James 5 that fervent prayer can accomplish much.
- **Giving.** What began as a relatively humble effort has now, in its magnitude, become a “think big” project. Consequently, large sums of money are needed to sustain the work and ensure its growth.
- **Physical Involvement**

We need people who will travel to Benin to encourage the students and the brethren and take part in the effort of spreading the Good News in French West Africa. We also need dedicated people to seek out new churches and individuals here in the United States who will help sustain and grow this project.

FROM THE HEART OF...

Finally, in our educational program, we have a vision — a vision that involves expanding into healthcare, vocational training, and youth activities — and people are needed who can provide leadership for that vision.

BENIN RELIGION

•Religious Background

The Roman Catholic Church is a very predominant religion in Benin, having been introduced into the country 150 years ago. The Spanish and Breton Capucins (Catholic missionaries) arrived in Benin around 1660. In 1843, the Methodists arrived in Benin and settled in Ouidah. When the French conquered Dahomey in 1894, free reign was given to the Catholic missionaries. However, the growth of this church is now very low as a result of traditional African religion and the rise of the Evangelical religious groups. Another factor in the slow growth of the Roman Catholic religion is the rise of the various African Independent Churches. These are established by Africans, and they normally have no mission link with the established religions in North America or in Europe. The religious atmosphere is very tolerant because the rise of the democratic process has given rise to the freedom of association and its attendant rights. The people of Benin are very religious/superstitious. As a result of this, religion is a very relevant factor in the lives of the people. The people, therefore, are very receptive to the gospel.

The second largest religious group is the syncretic Celestial Church of Christ. Islam is strong, having been one of the oldest religious traditions in Benin. There are traditional Protestant churches, such as the Lutheran and Methodist faiths, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal groups along with hundreds of one-man founded religious descriptions and a large number of sects. The Assemblies of God are strong. The chart below shows the present status of Protestant and Evangelical groups.

Church	Membership	% of Population	Local Churches
Catholics	342,373	5.5%	1,410
Methodist	75,888	1.2%	502
Evangelical Churches	358,197	5.8%	3,968
Celestial Church	202,538	3.3%	1,226
Other sects	20,776	0.5%	299

This is from a study done in 2002 of 430 religious denominations studied in Benin.

FROM THE HEART OF...

Other statistics

Traditional religion	35%
Islam	20%
Christians	10%
Catholic	26%
Others	2%
No religion	6%
Undeclared	1%

(Source: 2002 population census; Taken from the book: “Va et Raconteur - Histoire des Eglises Protestantes et Evangeliques du Benin – Annuaire Evangelique”. Publier par ARCEB in 2003.)

A large part of the population is still living far from the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Islam has expanded on a national level because of its social action and its awareness of the importance of basic education. Catholicism is deeply rooted, thanks to its tolerance of syncretism and its diverse social activity. Two principal factors contributed to the slow evangelization of Benin: the entrenchment of traditional religion in mentalities and ethnic groups and the Marxist revolution that began in 1972. Though not preventing the work of evangelism, the revolution created a climate of fear and encouraged the voluntary repatriation of many missionaries.

The 2002 study showed that the participation of believers in Bible studies is very weak. This could be due to the fact that Benin, with more than 70 local dialects, has written Bibles in just a few of them. Leadership training is another factor, with most of the church leaders being illiterate.

Because of the superstitious nature of the Beninese society, belief in sorcery and witchcraft is very strong. Most of the native preachers favor a very strong insistence on the power of Jesus to destroy witchcraft and sorcery. This also favors the syncretic practices where religious practices which were in other times offered to the rivers, the mountains, the ocean, etc. are now done in a “cleansed” way when they are offered in the name of the God of the Bible. The Bible is put upfront but prayers are offered in the name of angels, and various sacrifices similar to Old Testament practices are offered at midnight on the beach but accompanied by readings from the book of Psalms.

It is noteworthy to mention that Benin has one official national religious holiday devoted to the worship of the traditional gods. On that day, other traditional religious worshippers all over the world converge on Benin for a big celebration. In Bible terms, Benin is the seat of Satan.

FROM THE HEART OF...

CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Benin, being a French-speaking nation, was not entered early by the Churches of Christ, due to the language barrier. However, Ghanaian school teachers who were members of the Church of Christ, recruited by the Benin government to teach English language, were the first to begin teaching and preaching the gospel in Benin. Their efforts did not bear much lasting fruit because when they were transferred to another city, what they started wound up. This was the case until another Ghanaian Christian missionary, George Akpabli and his family, moved to Benin in February 1992. They obtained official government status for the Church and gave life to one of the small churches started in Se, Mono Region of Benin by Godfried Kwao, one of the Ghanaian English-language teachers.

To accelerate the work of preaching the gospel, a leadership training school was started by George Akpabli in August 1995 to train gospel preachers. Preacher students were invited from other French-speaking nations of Africa where known churches of Christ existed. The school, a 3-year training program, provided workers for the evangelization of Benin. The preacher students and graduates worked hard, leading to the rapid expansion of the Church from the city of Cotonou to the other parts of the nation.

Two American missionary teams worked in Benin for a long period, with churches planted among the Fongbe and the Adjagbe speaking people of Benin.

SPIRITUAL NEEDS

- More men to reach out to the unreached people of Benin, especially native preachers.
- Less evangelized regions, such as the Northern parts of Benin, need attention, as do evangelized immigrant and minority groups in the cities and throughout the country.
- Imaginative evangelism, church planting and new-Christian nourishing are urgently needed, especially in these times of increased receptivity to the message of Christ.

Contact Ed Jones, F.A.C.E. Executive Director, at eljones@newwavecomm.net with your commitment, ideas, and strategies.

Dr. George Akpabli, originally from the country of Ghana, is director of the Benin Bible Training Center in Cotonou, Benin. His email address is akpabli@yahoo.com.

What Can You Do to Help Spread the Word?

- For just a moment, put yourself in a village in Africa, or even in a large city in India, or in the jungles of South America. You are an immortal soul, living in a perishing body. How will you knowledgeably prepare for the judgment and eternity that awaits us all?
- Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.

So you are born into an unbelieving home, you live according to the religion of your parents, you grow old, and you die, thrust into eternity to meet the God you never knew. What unspeakable tragedy! This scenario is LIFE for the majority of the people of the world.

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- We want to give \$_____ each month to help send this magazine to mission fields of the world, including the USA.
- As a congregation we want to help print and circulate 100,000 copies of each issue of this magazine by making a special contribution to this effort. We can specify where the copies we pay for will be used, whether in our personal work, in jail ministry, overseas, or . . .

(Return this form in an envelope, along with your check, to the following address, stating your wishes.)

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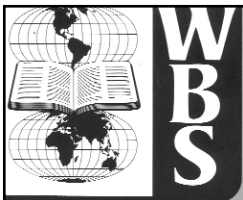
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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search (page 28)

1. No.
2. God's sovereign choice, not due to man's works.
3. So that God may show His power and the His name would be declared over all the earth.
4. No.
5. The potter.
6. Just as the clay has no right to criticize the potter so man has no right to criticize God.
7. Children of Israel or unbelievers.
8. God.
9. Because God wants all men to repent.
10. No.
11. Hosea.
12. Because Isaiah prophesied that only a remnant would be saved.
13. Isaiah.
14. This is a message of judgment and hope. Some of Israel would be saved.
15. Final judgment.

Bible Find (page 85)



Who Am I? (page 98)

Answer: Haman

Where Am I? (page 99)

Answer: Damascus

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

The exact date of the beginning of the Lord's work in Benin is unknown, Brother Godfred Kwao is, however, known to be the first to organize a congregation in the south-western part of the country. Godfred was recruited by the Benin government from Ghana to teach English language in the high school system in Benin in 1983.

George Akpabli, also from Ghana, went to Benin in February 1992 and met Godfred. George went as a missionary under the oversight of the Benton Church of Christ. The Church of Christ was officially registered by George with the Benin government on 13 May, 1992.

Today there are 73 congregations in Benin. There is an effective preacher training school situated in Cotonou under the leadership of George Akpabli. This school has trained 92 Gospel preachers for 10 French-speaking nations of Africa. Historically, voodoo originated in Benin, so its influence can still be seen in local superstitions, celebrations, markets, and religion.

The Church:

Republic of Benin



Government of Benin: Republic

Head of State:

President THOMAS YAYI BONI

Location: Western Africa, between Nigeria in the east, Togo in the West and Burkina Faso in the north.

Land Mass: 42,710 sq miles.

Capital: Porto Novo.

Population: 8,532,547 (2002 census)

Language: French, Fon, Yoruba, 52 more.

Education: Literacy - age 15 and over can read and write. Total population: 34.7%; male: 47.9%; female: 23.3%

Religion: "Christians" 42.8% (Catholic 27.1%, Cestatal 5%, Methodist 3.2%, Other Protestant 2.2%, other 5.3%) Muslim 24.4%, Vodun 17.3%, other 15.5%

Ethnic Groups: Fon and related 39.2%, Yoruba and related 12.3%, Barba and related 9.2%, Peulh and related 7%, others.

Economy: The economy of Benin remains underdeveloped and dependent on subsistence agriculture, cotton production and regional trade.

Life expectancy: years male: 57.42 years; female: 59.76 years.

Communication: telephones, radio, TV, internet.

Transportation: Railways, airways, roads, waterways.

Monetary Units: CFA francs

Secular Facts:

