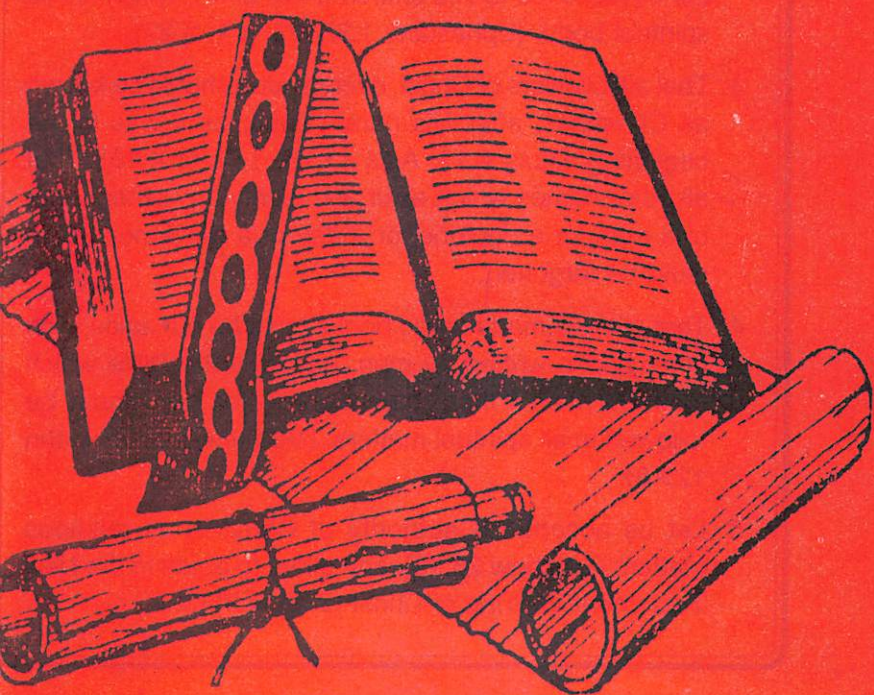


# THE BIBLE TEACHER



## **LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL**

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18). That congregations of His one church everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the church. (1 Corinthians 1:10).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must be told to believe in Christ, to repent of wrong, to confess Christ the Son of God, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands of salvation are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4; 5:22).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, after His name alone, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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Vol. 38

January 2008

No. 9

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## *EDITORIAL*

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

***"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"***

The month of January is named after Janus, a two-faced Roman god that is identified with doors, gates, and all beginnings and that is represented artistically with two opposite faces. It is looking backward and forward. Speaking of the kingdom of God, Christ said, once one has decided to follow Him to enter the kingdom of God and then looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62). A backward look is not always wise. The apostle Paul wrote of forgetting the past or those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. (Phil. 3:13). Yet there are some things we should take backward glance toward. Paul reminded Christians of his days of their baptism into Christ by saying: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). He was telling them to remember that when they were baptized, they were baptized into Christ's death, therefore they had died for sin, died with Christ. (Galatians 2:20). And, therefore, as Christians we ought to walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:4-6). Also, Paul brought to their remembrance that how they should remember that their bodies are the temple of God and therefore they should use their bodies for the glory of God and not for sin or any evil. "Do you not know," said he, "that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The

ending of a year and the beginning of the new one calls for folks to look backward and forward. Being thankful requires one to look backward to how richly we have been blessed in many ways.

Another year is now a history. The year 2007 can now be recorded. Time and experience are quite profound teachers. As the Patriarch said, "Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom." (Job 32:7). How sobering that another year has passed and that we are another year older. We are closer to death than we were last year. What have we learned this year, the year that has just passed? We have seen the brevity and swiftness of life. The uncertainty of life has been etched upon every day. The reality of disease, death, despair, disappointment, destruction and defilement should have gotten our attention in a very unique way. Too, we have seen the frailty and uncertainty of material possessions; and we have seen the power of Satan. Each day and year are manifestations of the longsuffering of God toward us (2 Pet. 3:9). None of us know how long we are going to exist on this earth. But we all know that any day could be the last day of our life on earth. Such should cause us to take each day of our life on earth very seriously. We should not neglect the gift of God, the salvation from sin and evil, that He so lovingly has provides for us all in and through His Son Jesus Christ. We should take advantage of the longsuffering of God, and repent from any and all evil and wrong in our life.

Will we take advantage of the opportunity of each day and year? Some day a year will begin that we will not see to its completion. Some day a year will begin that will be the final year of our earthly life. Some day a year will begin that will be the final year of all time on earth.

Such a year may have already begun. In view of the year that has just passed, and the year that we have now begin, let us pray to God, as did Moses centuries ago, to "teach us to number our days, that we may gain the heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12). This world is not our permanent residence. God has not so willed. (Heb. 9:27). He has created us in His own likeness. (Gen.1:26,27). Like Him we will exist forever. Where are we going to live in eternity? Christ taught: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your

heart will be also." (Matt. 6:19-21). Are we preparing ourselves to live in heaven? Revelation 21:27 says: "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." Is your name written? Why not make sure that it is by doing those things God has asked man to do (Mk. 16:16; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

## *Why The Foundation Is So Important*

J.C. CHOATE

As we know, in this physical world, when it comes to building a house, an apartment building, or anything that is expected to stand very long, then it is necessary to construct it on a proper foundation. Even if we are going to be successful in various fields of work, or in different professions, then we are aware of the fact that it is necessary to adequately prepare by getting a sufficient amount of education or training. When we overlook the importance of this foundation, or that of preparing for the future, then we are in for some bad times.

Our Lord illustrated the need for a good spiritual foundation by referring to the two builders, one who built upon a rock, and the other who built upon the sand. Jesus said, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7: 24-27).

In the foregoing illustration Jesus shows, by contrasting these two earthly builders, who is the wise man and who is the foolish man. Then from that he shows that a wise spiritual builder is the one who hears the sayings of Christ and does them. He is a wise builder because in obeying the Lord then he is building upon Christ. He digs down past the customs and traditions, the worldly things, and even the religious teachings of man, until he comes to Christ, and his teachings, and his way, and there he builds. As a result, he is on a solid foundation. He has the truth. He has

Christ. He is a Christian. He is a member of the Lord's church. Nothing can move him. He has something to hold on to. He has the hope of eternal life.

The other man that Jesus talks about is a foolish builder. He also hears the sayings of Christ but he fails to obey them. Perhaps he does not believe. Maybe he thinks there is plenty of time. He might even reason that he is good enough. Or maybe he goes off after the teachings of men. Whatever the problem, the fact remains that he fails to obey the Lord, and therefore, that which he finally builds on will not hold him up. He is lost and will be eternally lost.

In the long ago, the prophet Isaiah pointed to the day in which the Lord would lay a foundation in Zion. That foundation would be Christ and it would be laid in Jerusalem. But let us read the prophecy. Isaiah said, "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isaiah 28: 16). Please notice the description of this foundation. It would be a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, and a sure foundation. We'll notice these descriptive terms later in the New Testament, all of which refer to Jesus Christ. But the Psalmist David also pointed to this foundation when he said in Psalm 118: 22,23. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." We will also see in the New Testament that this was fulfilled in Christ.

Turning to the days of Jesus, we read, "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" (Matthew 21: 42). In Luke 20: 17,18, in speaking to the chief priests and the scribes, Jesus said, "What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." A literal stone or rock could be used for a foundation, but also if one stumbled on it or fell on it then he could be broken or killed. Likewise, if it fell on one then it could destroy that person. In other words, when properly used then it can be a blessing but when overlooked or misused then it can be a destructive force. The same is true with the spiritual rock, Christ.

Going over to the book of Acts, we have Peter speaking to the high priests, rulers, and scribes about a man that had been healed, and he said, "Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4: 10-12). Paul said concerning Israel, or the Jews, "But Israel, which followed after the law or righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold I lay in Sion, a stumblingstone and rock of offence' and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 9: 33). Here of course Paul quotes from Isaiah 28: 16.

But who is the rock or foundation? Paul says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11). In 1 Corinthians 10: 3,4 Paul said concerning the Israelites, in the days of Moses, "And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was. Christ."

Speaking to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul wrote, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly formed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2: 19-22). Here the Apostle was talking about these Christians as being the household of God or the family of God, which was the church, and how that it was built on the teachings of the Apostles and prophets, and with Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. Not only is the general foundation important, but the corner stone is even more important, or the most important part of the foundation, and he said that Christ was that part of the foundation. Without that foundation then a house, earthly or spiritual, could not stand. Again, Paul said, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to

behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3: 15). With Christ being the foundation, the chief cornerstone, and with the house of God or the church being built there on, then the church serves as the pillar and ground of the truth. That is, the church being built on a solid foundation is therefore in position to hold up the truth or to proclaim it to a lost world.

The Apostle Peter said to the Christians of his day, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." (1 Peter 2: 1-8).

Again, you can see that the writer is showing how Christ was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 28: 16 in that he became the chief corner stone. Note that the very one that the Jews had rejected and stumbled over had become not only the foundation but the chief corner stone or the most important part of the foundation. Peter also shows how that in accepting Christ that he can be a blessing, but to those who reject him then they will be lost.

In Matthew 16: 13-19 Christ spoke to the Apostles about what the world thought of him. The Apostles explained that some thought that he was one prophet and others thought that he was another prophet. But that was not what Christ was looking for. He could not build his church upon that kind of faith in him. Then he turned to the Apostles and asked them what they thought of him. They explained that they believed that he was the Son of God. As a result the Lord then responded by saying that he was going to build his church upon that confession, that is, that they believed



that he was the Son of God. In Acts 2 the Apostles preached the gospel of Christ and some three thousand souls obeyed the Lord and on saving them he added them to his church. But what did he build the church on? The church was built upon Christ, that is, on the fact that he was the Son of God. Not only so, but the church continues to rest upon that fact even up to our day. If it could have been proven in years gone by that Christ was not the Son of God then the church would have fallen or gone out of existence long ago. But the church still exists and the only possible way it can stand is based on the fact that Christ is the Son of God, that he is the rock, the chief corner stone. As Paul said, he is the sure foundation.

## *Sharing Your Faith With Your Family*

JUSTIN GUIN

One of the greatest responsibilities a Christian has is to share his or her faith with others. There should be urgency in spreading the good news of Christ because there are many who do not know Christ. Your friends, co-workers, and others may not have heard the gospel in its purest form and obeyed God's gospel plan of salvation. It really hurts when those who are lost and need to hear the Gospel is our family. Whether it be your husband, wife, children, or more distant relative you want them to be in a correct relationship with God, and it hurts us when they reject the message of Christ. Also parents and grandparents have a responsibility to share their faith with their children and grandchildren. I want to share some thoughts with you that I gleaned from a lesson on Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

First, we must share our faith convincingly. In Deuteronomy 6:6 we read the following words: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." When we allow God's commandments into our heart it will change the way we live. Those around us will see the difference because we are allowing God's word to transform our lives. As a result of the commandments transforming your life you will be able to teach your spouse, children, and other relatives convincingly by your

words and actions.

Second, we must share our faith diligently. When your spouse will not support you in your faith or your children do not desire to live a godly life it is easy to get discouraged. Consider the first part of Deuteronomy 6:7: "You shall teach them diligently to your children....". Webster's Dictionary defines diligent as "constant effort to accomplish what is undertaken." We must never give up in sharing our faith with our family (or anyone) and make a constant effort to teach them.

Third, we must share our faith conversationally. Notice the second part of Deuteronomy 6:7: "... and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." One of the easy ways to share your faith with your children is through everyday conversation. You can teach them about many biblical subjects by asking them questions or by addressing situations as they arise. You can encourage family members to consider becoming a Christian when you have opportunities to speak to them. The precepts found in God's word should readily be on our lips so we can bring them up at any given time.

In conclusion, we must look for opportunities to share our faith with our family. This will strengthen your family and will also strengthen the local congregation. May God bless you as you share your faith and serve Him!

## ***The Discovery of Life***

**MICHAEL L. KING**

Man, for the most part, lives in a quandary while in search of the real meaning of life. Those Greeks who were reasoning with Paul on Mars' Hill in Athens were searching, but looking in all the wrong places. Paul pointed them away from their "unknown god", by declaring unto them the true God Who is able to *"give to all life, and breath, and all things...though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our very being"* (Acts 17:23-28).

Happiness and fulfillment in life are so close, but for many they remain but a distant figment of their imagination. It is vitally important that we get a grip on what really constitutes life. The

Lord said, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). When any of God's creatures are not enjoying that "abundant life," His will for man is thwarted.

What a thrill it is in the spring of the year to go to the garden after having planted rows of seeds and to find them responding to God's nurturing rain and sunshine! As the growth progresses, additional joy is experienced with the blooming and development of fruit. The real satisfaction is realized when harvest allows one to glean the benefits of much labor and patience.

In like manner, can we truthfully say that God delights as He walks through the "garden of my life"? It is altogether possible to be a Christian and still miss the abundant life! Those who respond to Jesus and are born again truly enter into the realms of beginning again and a newness of life.

Spiritual renewal (Romans 12:1,2) is similar to a spring of water which perpetually springs up into an abundant flow from resources deep within. It is expected by God that the Christian live an abundant life now. It is possible that we have allowed the headwaters to be depleted due to a lack of spiritual growth.

Tremendous trust must characterize each life that would be bountiful with joy and hope, both now and in eternity. We must make ourselves available to God and trust Him to lead us into new areas of spiritual growth, without fear of failure.

The Lord commissioned His devoted apostles to spread the Word in His absence and promised that He would *"be with them always"* (Matthew 28:18-20). He had told them that He would be seated at God's right hand making preparation for them to join Him (John 14:1-3). They accepted the promise of God's grace and power as sufficient to meet their genuine needs in their lives in serving Him.

God assures us that we can experience His blessings in this life and in heaven as well. There is great comfort in confidently believing that in living as God's children in this life, His goodness *"shall follow me all the days of my life"* (Psalm 23:6).

Just as God provided for His Jewish nation returning from Egyptian bondage, He will care for His people today! With His custodial care and providential oversight of them, He saw to it that quail flew into the camp, manna was gathered by the baskets-full, and water poured generously from the rocks (Numbers 11:4-9,31,32; Exodus 17:6)

God will also assess and bless us according to our daily needs. Paul preached what he practiced, *"Seek those things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above...Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him...And let the peace of God rule in your hearts...and be ye thankful"* (Colossians 3:1,2,10,15). Abundant living gives fullness to life now, with eternal rejoicing to follow. The key to the discovery of life is to find God, *"For in him we live, and move, and have our being."* For He is *"not far from every one of us"* (Acts 17:27, 28). The promise is, *"for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"* (Matthew 7:7,8).

If you desire the abundant life now, become diligent and determined with your search. The content of Paul's prayer for his Ephesian brethren echoes this writer's sentiments for each reader, *"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:16-19).

## *Wait on the Lord*

DAVID MACY

A meek man who is on his way to the top stands still and waits on the Lord, instead of forging ahead and making a blunder and getting everything in a tangled mess for the Lord to unravel. It is almost unbelievable how convoluted and involved our lives can become if we don't humble ourselves and *wait on the Lord* before we make any major decision or important move.

It takes a meek, submissive, trusting person to wait on the Lord, because waiting is one of the most difficult things we have to do. It is much easier, many times, to move ahead and try *something* than it is to wait for God's shaping and answers to prayers.

A lady was watching a potter at his work, and she noticed that one foot was kept busy while the other one remained still on

the ground. She said, in a kind and sympathetic tone, "How tired your foot must be." The potter raised his eyes and said, "No, ma'am, it isn't the foot that works that's tired, it's the foot that stands."

*"My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us"* (Psalm 62:5-8). We wait on the Lord by committing ourselves into His hands, being subject to Him, and being silent before Him. When a person is meek and lowly, and completely submissive to the Almighty God, the Lord can guide and direct his life, through His word, through opening of opportunity and closing doors in denial, and through using every sort of tool in His providential care, down the right paths which lead to happiness, peace, and security in His love.

There are two giant hurdles we must leap over before we can wait on the Lord and receive the tremendous blessings which come with waiting. These two hurdles are **pride** and **self will**. When we can lay pride to rest and replace it with meekness, and send self will packing and put God's will in its place, we can truly wait on the Lord. The results of our waiting will be astounding to ourselves, and to others.

My personal life has been like a constant tug-of-war, with God on one end of the rope and myself on the other. When I have stood still and let God work in His own time schedule, everything was ultimately successful. When I pulled to have my own way, contrary to what God knew was best, everything was downhill, and failure was my constant companion.

Those who have not obeyed the gospel to become children of God have not yet learned to submit to the Lord and wait on Him. If this is your situation, my friend, please give up the struggle and let Him have His way with you. Believe in Him with all your heart and meekly obey His simple commandments. (Acts 2; Romans 6:3,4). You will find rest for your troubled soul. God will give you salvation, and reward your faithfulness with eternal life, and you will be forever glad you let Him have His way with you.

# *Did God Drown In The Tsunami?*

J. RANDAL MATHENY

When thousands of people perish in natural disasters like the tsunami that hit Asia on 26 December 2004, questions naturally arise. Why did this happen? Was this a direct punishment from God? If so, who was He punishing? And why? How could God allow such evil in the world as this, if He is loving and all-powerful? Does the presence of such bad things mean that God is not real?

For many centuries people have asked such questions. They are not new, although they become new to us when we see people suffer from natural disasters or when we ourselves are affected by them.

## **OUR ASSURANCE IS SHAKEN**

Above all, such questions do not reflect badly upon the limits or deficiencies of God, but upon our own finiteness and inability to comprehend the greater issues of the universe. Science is helpless at such moments, human thoughts fail, man cannot even sense the arrival of the tsunami like so many animals that fled the low-lying areas hours before it made shore. For all our efforts, we are at the mercy of a world careening toward destruction. The movie that shows man saving his world from a meteor is not only fiction, but fantasy.

Many lives were lost in the tsunami, and we feel deeply our own vulnerability, but God did not drown in the tsunami! **What died in the waves were our assurance that life goes on as normal and our belief that today will be just like yesterday.** We must confess that we do not know **what will happen** or **why** many things happen. God's ways and purposes are beyond us. *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God"* (Deuteronomy 29:29). Through Isaiah, the Lord reminds us, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:9).

But there is still sense to be made from the tsunami.

## **SOMETIMES GOD EXPLAINED**

If God were to speak from Heaven and say, "I am doing this for this reason," we would know. Sometimes God did reveal that He was the immediate cause of a disaster. The Bible says that *"the Lord hurled a great storm on the sea"* when Jonah fled from

his presence (Jonah 1:4). God was directly behind that storm, with a specific purpose for causing it.

Likewise, through the prophecy of Joel, the Lord foretold that He would send a plague of locusts as punishment for the sins of Jerusalem and Judah (Joel 1:1-20). When God reveals His mind, then we may know! As the latter part of Deuteronomy 29:29 says, *"... but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."*

But God rarely identifies a natural disaster or occurrence with a special purpose of His.

### **NO SPECIAL MEANING**

Jesus said that, among other things, *"there will be famines and earthquakes"* (Matthew 24:7), but that these would not be signs of the end or of any immediate activity of God which would deserve the attention of the disciples. *"But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs"* (verse 8). So "for Jesus all these things were merely preliminary" (Jack P. Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Part II [Sweet, 1976], p. 122).

This means that Jesus' followers could not tie the famines and earthquakes to the direct action of God or to some purpose of His in history. Perhaps He was the immediate cause of a certain natural occurrence, which had behind it a divine reason, but it was not something that humans could discern or with which they should be concerned, in terms of God's history of redemption.

How, then, should we consider the natural disasters that happen today?

### **WHEN WE SUFFER**

If they happen to us, we should consider that the suffering and damage we have experienced are not a punishment from God, but that they are a sign that this world has been injured by man's sin and that our planet has been *"subjected to futility"* and *"groans"* in its present state (Romans 8:19-22). In this state, even innocents will suffer. The earth convulses because it will be destroyed, *"being reserved for fire," ... "and the earth and its works will be burned up"* (2 Peter 3:7,10).

Aside from the immediate physical and emotional needs that may arise from an earthquake, tsunami, volcano, flood, famine or other natural occurrence, we must consider that the earth is destined to be destroyed. The destruction we have witnessed, the suffering which we have experienced, is but a prelude to the final

and definitive end of this world. We must prepare for eternity! If we live but for this world, woe to us! (Compare 1 Corinthians 15:19.)

If I have sought for God and obeyed His gospel, in the final day *"this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality"* (1 Corinthians 15:54). With faith in God and hope of receiving a *"kingdom which cannot be shaken"* (Hebrews 12:28), we may say with all confidence and courage:

*"God is our refuge and strength,*

*A very present help in trouble.*

*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change*

*And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;*

*Though its waters roar and foam,*

*Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride."*

(Psalm 46.1-3)

### **WHEN OTHERS SUFFER**

If the tragedies happen to others, our first concern should be to offer aid. On this occasion, that has been the response of many around the world, and this is right and proper. When Agabus prophesied in Antioch of a world-wide famine, that church, instead of debating *the problem of evil* or the *why* of natural disasters, immediately decided to help the Christians affected in Judea. *"And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea"* (Acts 11:29). So they fulfilled the spirit of Paul's exhortation, *"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith"* (Galatians 6:10).

The greatest good we may do, of course, is to point others to the need for salvation beyond this life. Every opportunity should be taken to preach the gospel and share the blessed hope of eternal life with God. When the foundations of life are shaken, we may rightfully point to the arrival of the new heaven and new earth, where *"there is no longer any sea"* (Revelation 21:1). Every source of evil will be banished, and thus every reason for crying and sorrow will vanish (verse 4).

God did not drown in the tsunami, nor did the waves wash away our hope. On the contrary, it proved once again the brevity of life, the fragility of our world, and the solidity of our faith in the God who loves and offers much more in eternal bliss.



# ***New Testament Simplicity***

**CHARLES BOX**

Man is impressed with pomp and ceremony. God is unimpressed with "the show of religion" which seems so important to man. God is impressed with simple, humble love and obedience. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (Jn. 15:14.)

Tradition, elaborate services; organizations, and endless ritual consumes the religious thinking of many. God warns against such things. Observe the following: "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts." (Lk. 20:46.) "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." (Mt. 23:9.) "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues." (Mt. 23:5-6.) These and many other scriptures are violated continually by man's desire for show and ceremony. New Testament simplicity is far different.

## **NEW TESTAMENT SIMPLICITY IN SALVATION**

Faith is the beginning point of all acceptable service to God. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17.) Faith is the motivation for all obedience toward God. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Heb. 11:6.) Repentance is also required. Repentance is a change of mind or heart which results in a change in life. "The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:9.) It is either repent or perish. Confession of faith in Jesus as Lord also plays a part in our salvation. (Rom. 10:9-10.) A simple confession of one's faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ is a necessary step in conversion. The final step in becoming a Christian is baptism into Christ. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27.) Every command of God is important and baptism is a command of God. (Mk. 16:16.) The New Testament plan of salvation is a simple plan, but salvation can be obtained in no other way!

## **NEW TESTAMENT SIMPLICITY IN WORSHIP**

Acts 2:42 expresses the simplicity of New Testament worship. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." New Testament worship included: (1) The apostles' teaching. The church must be taught so it can be edified. (1 Cor. 14:19.) (2) The collections were to be made weekly on the first day of the week. Christians were to give (1 Cor. 16:1,2.) (3) Breaking bread or the Lord's Supper was also part of first day of the week worship. (Acts 2:42.) Paul delivered to us what Jesus had delivered to him concerning communion. (1 Cor. 11:23.) (4) Prayers are offered as a part of Christian worship. (Acts 2:42.), and (5) Praising God in song is part of New Testament worship. (Acts 2:47.) The Corinthian Christians were commanded to sing. (1 Cor. 14:15.) The New Testament pattern for worship is simple. Let us never forsake New Testament worship. (Heb. 10:25.)

## **NEW TESTAMENT SIMPLICITY IN ORGANIZATION**

The church of Jesus Christ is organized under Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. (1 Pet. 5:4.) Elders serve under our Chief Shepherd to oversee the flock, the church. (Acts 14:23.) Elders must be qualified men. (1 Tim. 3:1-7.) The church also has qualified men who serve, called deacons. (1 Tim. 3:8-13.) There are also evangelists or preachers who use God's authority in their teaching. (Acts 21:8.) Preachers work and live under the oversight of the elders. Each local church is self-governing and is answerable only to God. This simple New Testament organization will work in any culture and at any time.

## **NEW TESTAMENT SIMPLICITY IN BENEVOLENCE**

Jesus said, "You have the poor with you always." (Mt. 26:1.) Jesus went about doing good, (Acts 10:38.) Let us follow His example. Christians are to work to meet their own needs and to assist those who need help. (Eph. 4:28.) God's plan is simple. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10.) Proverbs 14:21 is a great principle that is still true today. "He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he." Caring for the needy is practicing pure religion. (Jas. 1:27.) New Testament simplicity is seen in the matter of benevolence. Those who honor God will have mercy on the poor.

## **NEW TESTAMENT SIMPLICITY IN CHRISTIAN GROWTH**

Growth is necessary for all living things. In the life of a Christian there must be growth or there will soon be spiritual death. (2 Pet. 3:18.) Peter describes Christian growth in the following words: "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior." (2 Pet. 1:5-11). The New Testament principle is simple—grow or die!

## **NEW TESTAMENT SIMPLICITY IN EVANGELISM**

Church growth is simple when God's pattern is followed: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2.) Soul winning puts purpose and meaning into Christian living. "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psa. 126:5-6.) The purpose of a Christian is to produce other Christians. (Mt. 7:19-21.) God's way is simple. You have learned the truth. Now, go and tell others!

New Testament Christianity is a pure and simple expression of our love and devotion to God. Man may wish for pomp and ceremony. God is pleased with sincere, simple love and service. "... For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7.)

## ***"I Promise: I Love You"***

**DAVID THURMAN**

After the birth of Jesus, the evil King Herod attempted to kill

the Son of God while He was still a toddler. God warned Joseph in a dream, and this righteous man took his family to Egypt. Matthew tells us this fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea, *"Out of Egypt I called my son"* (Matt. 2:15). The passage Matthew quotes from is an amazing text, that is, it describes the nature of our God. The ultimate message of Hosea 11:1-11 is simple. God is saying, "I promise, I love you."

*"When Israel was a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. The more they called them, The more they went from them; They kept sacrificing to the Baals And burning incense to idols. Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; But they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love, And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; And I bent down and fed them. They will not return to the land of Egypt; But Assyria— he will be their king, Because they refused to return to Me. And the sword will whirl against their cities, And will demolish their gate bars And consume them because of their counsels. So My people are bent on turning from Me. Though they call them to the One on high, None at all exalts Him. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, And I will not come in wrath. They will walk after the LORD, He will roar like a lion; Indeed He will roar, And His sons will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, And like doves from the land of Assyria; And I will settle them in their houses, declares the Lord"* (Hos. 11:1-11). As we read the above verses, we first see how important it is that God loves us. And we desperately needed the gift of His love.

### **WHAT WE WERE: REBELLIOUS CHILDREN**

Hosea writes these words concerning the nation of Israel, which had turned away from God to foreign idols, the Baals. Yet, God describes the people as His children. He had blessed them, but they had rebelled and turned to other Gods. God even made life easier for them, lifting the yoke from them and gently tending to them. Still, these people insisted on turning from their loving Father to false gods.

The fact is all of us are rebellious children. While God wants what is best for us, we turn away and live for ourselves or for the world. *"There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one"* (Rom. 3:10-12). In spite of God's goodness toward each of us, we each have gone our own way. Not one of us has returned the good that God has given us. We were all rebellious children.

### **WHAT WE DESERVED: RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT**

Hosea 11:5-7 spells out what rebellious children deserve. God warns them another nation (Assyria) will rule over them. They will suffer loss and violence. All of their grandiose plans to build or to be happy and successful will be thwarted. God wants us to realize that our decision to ignore Him will mean suffering for us. Israel deserved to be punished.

But, all sinners deserve to be punished. *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23). All of us are sinners. All of us have earned death because of our sin. We have no room to complain to God. He has blessed us, equipped us and reached out to us as a loving Father. Yet, we each go our own way and then face God's righteous judgment. It is a judgment we bring on ourselves. It is a judgment we deserve.

### **WHAT WE RECEIVED: REFRESHING LOVE**

Even as God warns Israel of its nearing destruction, He encourages them with His love. God tells them He cannot treat them as strangers. He tells His rebellious children that His compassion is aroused. God cannot cast out His children. Instead, He offers them hope when they return to Him. Although Israel did not deserve compassion or mercy, God is too loving a Father to just give up on His children.

This is still the good news for us. We wandered away from God. We deserved His wrath and severe punishment. But God is moved by compassion and reaches out to us in love. Thank God we don't get what we deserve, but what we need. *"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:6-8). God proves His love for

us, in that, while we are sinners, Jesus willingly died for us. God hates our sin, to the point of condemning us. But, our Father still offers us salvation, simply because He is moved by compassion. We got what we needed, not what we deserved, and that tells us much of the quality of God's gift toward us.

### **THE GIFT IS AN UNENDING BLESSING**

God reminds Israel that He called them out of bondage in Egypt. He taught them to walk, protecting them by taking them in His arms. He was the One who blessed them and healed them. God did all this, even while His children were turning away from Him or giving credit to other gods. God led them with love, making their lives easier and richer. God did this in spite of their sin.

When God blesses, He keeps blessing. It is wonderful to know that we often receive so much from God, in spite of our failings or rebellion. *"He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* (Matt. 5:45b). God is generous toward His creation, even though His creation has turned from Him. God blesses us unendingly, even though we do not deserve it.

### **THE GIFT IS UNYIELDING LOVE**

God did not give up on His children in Israel. He loved them too much to just write them off. Instead, He forgave them and overlooked their sins. Even as He prepared to punish them, He offered hope and a way out of their predicament. Salvation from God is a gift of unyielding love.

God continues to love the world like that. Our world continues to go away from God, looking for solutions in politics or social programs. We think we can find safety in strong economies or in big armies. While we turn to other "gods" for our answers, the One True God continues to love His world. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). God keeps blessing us because God's love is unyielding.

### **THE GIFT IS UNCOMPROMISING HOLINESS**

When God calls Israel back, His children return trembling. They are in awe of their Father and concerned about how He will treat them. That is, they know they have done wrong and deserve punishment. They come back because of His love, but they realize God's standards are in place and will not change. God calls His

children back to a life of righteousness that reflects the Father.

This is still true. God does not bless us out of love just so we can go on chasing other gods. The Father saves us from our guilt so we can live our lives for Him. *"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Cor. 5:14-15).* God is willing to forgive us. But, when He forgives us He calls us back into a holy lifestyle that reflects His values.

### **So ACCEPT GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU**

Too many people are afraid of God. This is understandable when you consider the holiness of God and His hatred of sin. But, Hosea reminds us that God is moved by compassion for those He has called. God's desire is to forgive you and call you back to Himself. He does not want to condemn you or see you suffer. God loves you too much for that.

I invite you to accept God's love for you. See what He has done in sending Jesus to die in your place. See the value God places on your soul. Understand that God loves you enough to pay the price for your sins and forgive you.

### **So ACCEPT GOD'S WILL FOR YOU**

Coming back to God is not simply basking in His compassion. His love should convince you that God wants you back. But when you come back, you must accept His will for you. That include His holiness in your life. That includes your submission to His will.

I invite you to accept His will for you. *"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:37-38).* These people were convinced they had sinned. They asked what to do. Peter told them and tells us to accept God's will. He told them to repent, turning from their rebellion. Then he tells them to be immersed in the name of Jesus. That is what you should do, right now. Come back to the God who promises His love for you. Accept His love and accept His will by obedience.

# *The Providence Of God In The Book Of Ruth: Shelter Beneath The Wings Of God*

**WADE WEBSTER**

Generally, providence refers to God "providing in advance." No doubt, you recall how that God through Joseph provided in advance for a coming famine. Although Joseph's preparation helped the Egyptians, it was not done on their behalf. It was done for Jacob's family through whom Christ would ultimately come. In like manner, in Ruth, we find God providing food for Ruth, through whom the Messiah would ultimately come (Ruth 2:3, 19-20; 4:14-22). Ruth would seek and find shelter beneath the wings of God (Ruth 2:12; cf. Mt. 23:37). In studying this grand subject, we will notice four pivotal points: Ruth's qualification, desperation, expectation, & participation.

## **RUTH'S QUALIFICATION**

Since every good and perfect gift comes from above (Jam. 1:17; Acts 17:28), all men to some degree enjoy God's providence. For example, consider the rain. Obviously, rain is one of God's provisions which He can give or withhold as He desires (Jam. 5:16-18). Since rain precedes the harvest, it even meets the definition of providing in advance. This providence is given to all men—just and unjust (Mt. 5:45). While all men enjoy "general providence" like rain, there is a "special providence" that is reserved just for those who "love God" and "who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28; cf. Rom. 1:6-7; 6:3-4, 17). In Ruth, we find an example of someone who enjoyed this "special providence" because she loved God (Ruth 1:16-17) and answered His call (Ruth 2:12). What about us? Do we meet the qualifications to enjoy God's "special providence"? Do we love God (Mt. 22:37; John 14:15)? Have we answered the gospel's call (2 Thess. 2:14).

## **RUTH'S DESPERATION**

As you likely know, God's providence often shines the brightest in the darkest of times. For example, take the book of Esther. As you recall, King Ahasuerus signed an unalterable decree authorizing the slaughter of all Jews. Desperate times



called for desperate measures as Esther risked her life to intercede for her people (Est. 4:16). In the book of Ruth, we find situations almost as dark as those in Esther. Two widows named Ruth and Naomi come home "empty" (Ruth 1:21). To survive, they must engage in the demeaning (Ruth 2:5-7), draining (Ruth 2:7, 9), and dangerous work of gleaning (Ruth 2:9, 15-16, 21). Obviously, they were dependent upon the unmerited favor or grace of others (Ruth 2:2, 10). They were in a desperate position. Immediately, they needed food; and ultimately, they needed redemption. Within the context of the book, they would find both. A wealthy farmer named Boaz would let Ruth glean and would take her to be his wife. It is the desperation of Ruth that provides the dark background by which we can better see and appreciate God's providence.

### **RUTH'S EXPECTATION**

By definition, hope is "desire coupled with expectation." Obviously, Ruth both desired and expected to find grain. She desired grain because she was hungry and she expected it because she was God's child. Please understand that Ruth in no way had earned the grace she found. She expected it because of God's goodness and not her own. She knew that the God under whose wings she had come to trust provided for His people (Ruth 2:12). In faith, Ruth went out expecting to find grace (Ruth 2:2). Although Ruth hoped for grace, she could not have imagined the amazing grace that she would find (Ruth 2:3-10, 14-16). Like Ruth, we can certainly go out with confidence that we will find grace. We can "know" or "be sure" that all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28). When we put God first, we can know that the needs of life will be met (Mt. 6:33; Psa. 37:25). I think that it is also interesting that Ruth expected God's providential care to come to her through some person (Ruth 2:3). Obviously, at the time, she did not know that the person would be Boaz. I think that there is a great point to be made in this observation. After all, God uses people in His providence. As we have already noted, He used Joseph in Egypt and Esther in Persia. In Ruth, we find that He used Boaz in Bethlehem. Perhaps, at present, He is even using us to provide for another one of His children.

## **RUTH'S PARTICIPATION**

It seems to me that one of the things that we often overlook in our study of God's providence is man's participation in it. Providence involves man's participation. Consider a couple examples of this:

- God provided grain in Egypt through the planning and preparation of Joseph; however, Jacob and his family had to go down there to get it.
- God provided for Esther to be selected as Ashasuerus' wife; however, Esther had to have the courage to go in before him unannounced to make her request (Est. 4:16).

In like manner, God would providentially get Ruth to the right field (Ruth 2:3), but then Ruth would have to do her part. God led her to grain, but He couldn't/wouldn't make her glean. Gleaning was up to her. As you know, Ruth did her part (Ruth 2:7, 15, 17, 23). Had Ruth been unwilling to glean, then hunger would have been the result. Furthermore, God could lead her to the field of a near kinsman, but the rest was up to Ruth. Ruth would have to pursue the relationship if she wanted redemption (Ruth 3:1-13). Although it seems clear that Boaz was very interested in Ruth (Ruth 2:5, 8-9, 14-16), he was hesitant to approach her because he was not sure that she would be interested in a man so much older than her (Ruth 3:10). If they were to get together, Ruth had to do her part. Don't you think that it is interesting that Ruth did not end up in the field of the kinsman who was nearer than Boaz? Obviously, if she had sought redemption from him, she would not have found it. After all, when given the opportunity to redeem, he turned it down (Ruth 4:1-6). Surely, our God knows what He is doing. Today, in His providence, God is providing for our needs as His children. However, we must make sure that we are doing our part. We must make sure that we are taking full advantage of the doors that He is opening for us (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12). He will open them, but we must be willing to walk through them.

If we learn nothing else from the book of Ruth, we should learn that God can and will provide for His children. His hand is providently working in the glove of history to provide for His people.



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*Printed and Published by Sunny David for Church of Christ, B-350, Chitranjan Park, New Delhi and Printed at: Print India, A-38/2, Mayapuri Phase-I, New Delhi-110064. Editor: Sunny David.*

Regd. No. 26921/71

Postal Regn. No.

DL(S)-17/3154/2006-2008

Licence to Post without Prepayment

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Posted at Lodi Road H

Total No. of pages 24 + cover

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