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The Quarterly

Vol. 3, No. 1

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY GREAT MEN
BUT NONE GREATER
THAN JESUS

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**MAKING THE
HEDGE**

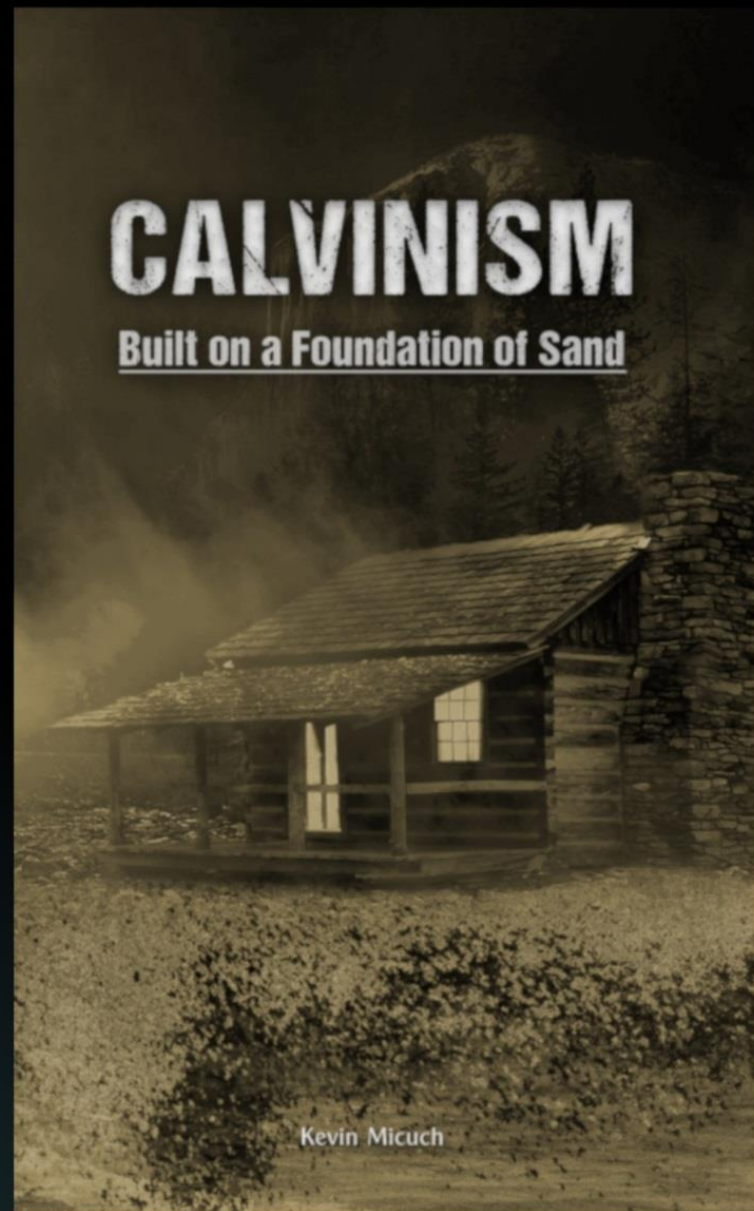
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"Why do Calvinists misinterpret so many plain passages of Scripture? It is because they begin with their philosophical beliefs about God, sin, man, and so on; then they project those beliefs onto the Bible."

-Andy Sochor (PlainBibleTeaching.com)

"It does attempt to make several points against them [the 5 points of Calvinism], by way of Scripture... I give Kevin a lot of credit for wanting to understand Reformed Theology and attempting to demonstrate his views against it. "

*-Douglas John Gill II, Calvinist
(ReformedPresby.com)*



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NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONING?

A new year is upon us, and I've already mailed off two checks where I wrote "2018." Oops. But as that has nothing to do with anything, except to let you know that it's 2019 already (double-check your calendar). And with the new year comes a new issue of *The Quarterly*!

In this issue, we've got some great articles (as always, in my humble opinion) that I'm sure you're going to enjoy!

If you're interested in increasing your evangelistic effectiveness, you'll definitely want to read *Know Your Audience* by Jeremie Beller, which will help you understand the importance of changing your methods to fit the culture—without changing the message. You'll also want to read *Open Doors: Then and Now* by Jim Mitchell. Jim recently baptized a woman who first showed up at the church building because she had a flat tire, and needed a place to pull in so it could be changed.

If you've wondered how you can help foreign preachers and churches become self-sufficient in third-world countries (you know you have), check out *Feeding the World: Physically and Spiritually*.

If you want to understand the superiority and greatness of Jesus, over all others who have ever lived, you might just want to indulge in Gerald Cowan's article, *There Have Been Many Great Men, But None Greater Than Jesus*.

For you lovers of history, we've got several articles that should wet your whistle. *The Persecution of Domitian*, by Tom Baxley, looks at the evidence to see just how bad this 'persecution' really was. *Does Archaeology Disprove the Story of Jericho?* by Richard Mansel, looks at the disputed date. *History of the Pharisees (Part Two)*, by Kyle Frank, continues into the New Testament times. And *Bible Biography: Thomas*, by yours truly, seeks to point out the courageous aspects of the so-called "Doubting" one.

In addition to all that, Perry Hall introduces us to Jesus in the Torah; Jim Stutts pulls no punches in describing unqualified elders; David Dean addresses *Failure to Complete*; Michael Shank explores God's view of lying; Adam Miller gives us insight into preaching at a church where the other preacher has the same name as you; and there is so much more!



Quarterly writers (left to right):
Jamie and Jeremie Beller, Bradley Cobb,
Aaron Patterson, and Gantt Carter

WHAT TO FIND, AND WHERE TO FIND IT

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REDEEM THE TIME

Bill Howard

As you read the first issue of *the Quarterly* for 2019, you can probably look back over just the last few days and weeks, and see that you have run the gamut of human emotions. It seems just days ago you were anticipating the joy of family gatherings and mealtime around the dining table with loved ones. While each day of our life should be filled with thanksgiving to God for all he does for us, we still set aside one day in the fall to celebrate that time we call Thanksgiving: A time when we are prone to reminisce about all the good things which have made our life what it is.

The aroma of the baked turkey and pumpkin pies has hardly cleared the house, and we find ourselves gearing up for another festive time of the year. Christmas is a time of sharing, a time of remembering our parents and our siblings. It is a time of nostalgia and at the same time, a time of joy in preparing for the season of love and giving and sharing with our family of loved ones: parents, siblings, children, and brothers and sisters in the family of God.

While the beauty of these occasions leaves us with fond memories, we move forward into another new year. 2018 has come and gone, and all that transpired is in the record books. Whatever plans,

whatever goals, our wishes, our desires, fulfilled or not, we will leave them as they are, we will change nothing of the year that has gone.

This brought to mind the words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians. “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14-16).

The admonition to *awake* would indicate a state of sleepiness, unconcern, indifference, and failure to fulfill the needs of one striving to serve God. There is little doubt that it could very likely fit each of us from time to time, and we need to be challenged. It is entirely possible for us to become lethargic and become slack in our efforts. It is not likely that a Christian would set out to deliberately descend into this pitfall, but it is so easy for us to be lulled into complacency. Remember, we have an adversary whose sole purpose is to separate us from God by any means possible (1 Peter 5:8). There is a sense of urgency in this call to awaken. If you have allowed yourself to become slack, the longer you remain in that state the more difficult it is to be brought out of it.

Paul said that we as God’s children are to walk

circumspectly, walk wisely and not foolishly. That means being fully aware of our actions, knowing where we are going and having the plan for getting there. We have the guide, the blue-print, and all necessary instructions which are fail-proof. There is no justification in allowing ourselves to be unwise in our ways of living. When we became Christians, we had a goal. We were forgiven of our sins; we were added to the kingdom of God, his family, his church. We desired to escape the pollutions of the world about us; we set ourselves on the course of being with our Creator, time unending in that place that is prepared for us. Nothing has changed; God still loves us, and heaven is in place awaiting those who will inhabit. When all is said and done and the time of judgment is before us, we still have the same two end results. The faithful will be in glory with God; the lost will suffer eternal condemnation. Those are the choices, how can we tolerate ourselves being indifferent and uncaring about our way of living?

Paul continues his thought by saying that we should *redeem the time* because the days are evil. We need to do some thinking about this and have a thorough understanding of his intent. The origin of the word *redeem* is from the Latin and means to buy back, repurchase, reclaim, recover, retrieve, regain, etc. Therefore, it means that we can by one or more means recover that which was once ours. Little Johnnie Tom borrows my rake to rake his leaves one fall. Later, I need the rake so I go to Little Johnnie Tom and advise him of my need. He returns the rake to me. I have redeemed that which is already mine. I have a very nice wheel barrow which is not in use. Fiximer Ted lives down the street and offers to purchase the barrow. We come to an agreement, and Ted now has the barrow. Later, I need a wheel barrow to move some wood, but I have sold mine. I go to Ted and tell him of my situation and offer to buy the wheel barrow from him. Ted informs me he will let me have the barrow back at such and such a price. We agree on this; I repurchase the barrow and thus have redeemed something that once was mine but had been sold. In each case, I retrieved something that could be gained by agreement and action.

Understanding this then, we know that Paul was not indicating that it is possible for us to repurchase time. A definition of time is difficult to come by. It is a season; it can be a period of measured

movement. It can be past, present, or future. We have adapted a system of measuring the passage of time but in no way is any portion of that which has passed recoverable. It is very important that we give thought to this. What then is Paul's message? The word used for *redeem* simply means to take advantage of every opportunity that time provides: Using time to our advantage for the best possible results. Time gone by is forever gone, so have the best plans to use time wisely. That is what Paul meant when he said that we should walk wisely and not as fools. If we have the best plan for the use of time then the evil of the days in which we live will have no power over us.

*Submit yourselves therefore to God.
Resist the devil and he will flee from
you (James 4:7).*

*There hath no temptation taken you
but such as is common to man: but
God is faithful, who will not suffer
you to be tempted above that ye are
able; but will with the temptation
also make a way to escape, that ye
may be able to bear it (1 Corin-
thians 10:13).*

Be wise in our use of time. Never lose sight of our goal. Now, please do this one thing. Clear your mind of everything and think on this. 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God' Matthew 5:8.

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THE *Dangers* OF GROWING UP IN THE CHURCH

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

Yes, you read the title right.

Being brought up by godly parents, and being raised to respect Jesus Christ are wonderful things. Without them, I don't know if I would be a Christian—let alone a preacher—today.

But being raised in the church also presents several dangers. These are dangers that you must take seriously, otherwise your child will most likely be one of the thousands who “leave the church” once they move out of the house.

Hypocrisy Shines Through

A child is taken to church each time the doors are opened, and is in Bible class from a young age. But what happens when that child is at home? Let me share with you what happens in the lives of many (perhaps even most) of these children's lives.

That child comes home and never hears the Bible mentioned. He rarely, if ever, sees other Christians come to his house (except perhaps some of his relatives). In short, he sees his parents as hypocritical. They go to church and are “part of the group” on the Lord's Day, but the rest of the time, they are no different than anyone else.

Now, perhaps you might think “hypocrite” is a strong word to use. Let me say it some other way that maybe will make sense:

If your children don't see you as a Christian throughout the week, what you do on Sunday isn't going to convince them.

And they will subconsciously decide that being a Christian isn't really all that important. And they will either leave or become someone who simply takes up space in the auditorium.

Repentance is Difficult

Being someone who was raised “in the church,”

I say this from my own experience. When I was baptized in my younger years, I didn't view myself as a bad person. I was already praising God during the worship times. I was memorizing my memory verses for Bible class. I listened to the sermons most of the time. I could tell you the plan of salvation.

In short, there was not really any change in my life from what I did before to what I did afterwards. I knew I needed to be baptized, but there really wasn't anything for me to change in my life. I've discussed this with others who were raised in the church, and most of them have described a similar situation.

I think this, more than any other reason, is why so many people are “rebaptized” later in life. They can't remember agonizing over how utterly sinful their lives had been before being baptized because they were acting just like all the Christians, just without being one.

A Lack of a Personal Faith

When children are raised in the church, they often take on their parents' faith *by default*. As in, they are told what is what by their parents, or by the Bible school teachers and the preacher. They simply accept that this is the way things are, and instead of coming to a knowledge of the truth themselves, they start living on an inherited faith.

If you want to know what the difference is, look at the Israelites. Those who crossed into the Promised Land, who had seen God's miracles, were faithful for the most part. While Joshua lived, the people were faithful. While the elders that outlived Joshua were in charge, the people were faithful.

But as soon as people who didn't have to work for the Promised Land came into power, things went downhill and quickly. They didn't have to fight for the Promised Land, they inherited it. They took it for granted. And they fell away.

When someone grows up in the church, they of-

***If your children don't
see you as a Christian
throughout the week,
what you do on Sunday
isn't going to convince
them.***

ten live on an inherited faith. And later in life, if their faith is challenged, it can fall apart because it wasn't really *their* faith.

I had a disagreement with one of my instructors in school about this very topic. I told him that I envied the ones who were converted fresh, brought to Christ out of the world or from denominations, because for them it was a true life-changing decision. They knew where they were and they knew what they were leaving behind. Their faith was absolutely a *personal* faith.

A Lack of Zeal for the Lord

Tying in with the idea of an inherited faith, children who grow up “in the church” often have a lack of zeal for the Lord once they grow up.

Why is this? Part of it has to do with having an inherited faith. You're not likely to be zealous about defending someone else's beliefs. You might say, “But those are *my* beliefs too!” Then if that is truly the case, you'll be defending *your* beliefs. But unless you've decided *for yourself* (making it a *personal* faith) that your parents got it right, you're not likely to be a zealous defender of what they believe.

Part of this lack of zeal can also be attributed to the lack of seeing Christianity lived out in their parents' daily lives. If it's not important to the parents, the child isn't going to think it's very important either.

A Misguided Zeal for the Lord

Some folks who are raised in the church have an ego complex because they are raised with a “we are right and everyone is wrong” teaching. Then they get to thinking that they are so much smarter in the Bible than anyone else. Or worse yet, they think everyone outside the church is dishonest with the Bible. They say things like: ‘The importance of baptism is so obvious! They just ignore the parts of the Bible that they don't like.’

And I can speak from experience (and others' testimony backs it up) that when you're raised in the church, there is a danger of being overly critical of even our own brethren. It was ingrained in my head long ago that people who use one cup during communion are lost because they are “binding where God doesn't bind.” I fully believed at one point in time that we must actively fight anything that went against “what we've always done.” Why? Because that's what I heard talked about.

In short, being raised in the church presents the very serious danger of being a heretic hunter and a spiritual egomaniac who thinks he's better than “all those lost people.”

What is the Solution?

The answer to this question is not easy, but it is worth it if you care about your children and their eternal soul.

BE TRUE CHRISTIANS

If you want your children to grow up to be active, faithful Christians, then the best way to do that is to be an active, faithful Christian yourself. Show them that Christianity is a life worth living outside of the walls of the church building. They need to see that the church family is important to you.

All the church programs, youth activities, and Bible classes in the world won't have the same impact on your kids as seeing Christ lived out in you.

If you want your children to have a true zeal for the Lord and a love for the lost, then they need to see that in you. They don't need to see condescending attitudes towards lost people whom God made in His own image. They need to see *compassion* and *patience* towards people who were raised in denominations who struggle with changing from what **they** were raised with. Most denominational people aren't intentionally ignoring certain Bible passages—they are simply going by what they've always heard and been taught.

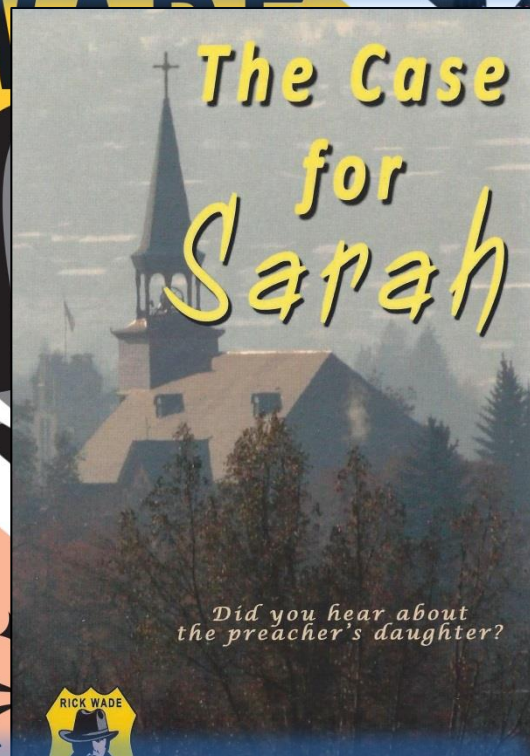
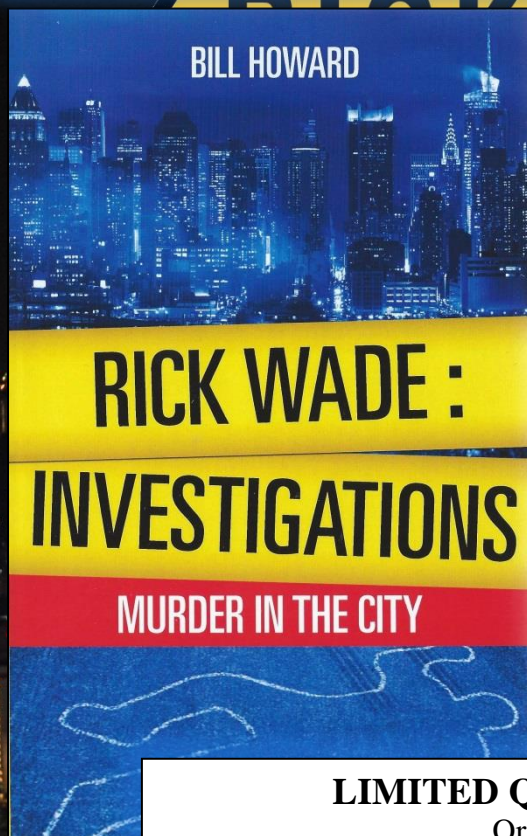
We also need to instill in our children a healthy dose of what it means to be faithful to God. Not just *saying* it, but *living* it. They need to see what it means to be “walking in the light.”

But finally, we need to teach our children not just *what* to believe and do, but *why*. The overwhelming majority of kids raised “in the church” can probably tell you that instrumental music is wrong, but they couldn't explain why they believe that. Without that crucial *why* component, their faith will fall apart. They won't be able to prove it to others, and that will cause them to realize they can't really prove it to themselves.

Are your children's lives worth the work to you?

[Note: This article was originally written for TheCobbSix.com, and continues to be one of the most read and shared articles on the site.]

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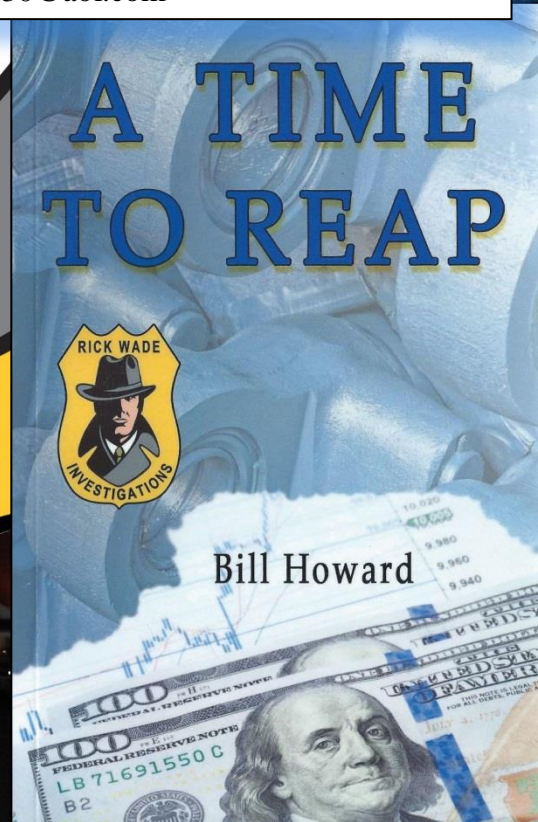
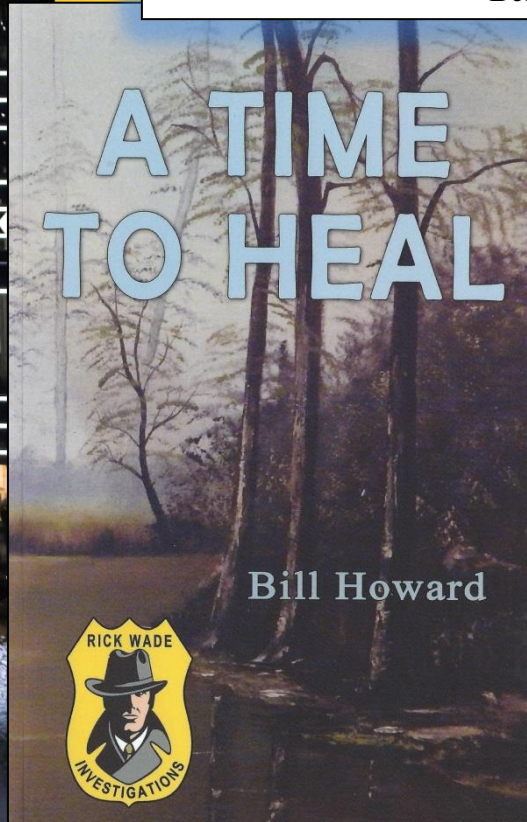


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Two Many Adams?!

Adam T. Miller

From the Summer of 2007 until early 2015, I was blessed to be able to work with the Mayfield Church of Christ in Saltillo, Mississippi. For many of those years, I worked with another minister. It was one of the best working relationships I could ever have asked for, and also a lot of fun. Let me tell you why...

It all started in the late Spring of 2007. I stumbled across an ad: the church in Saltillo, Mississippi was looking for a minister. The ad listed a couple of contact numbers, and so I called the one next to the name *Oscar*. When Oscar answered, the exchange went something like this:

Oscar: "What's your name?"

Adam: "Adam Miller."

Oscar: "Yeah right! What is it really?"

Adam: "...Uh, that's my name."

Oscar: "Are you serious? One of our deacons is named Adam Miller – and he preaches too!"

In short, he told me that I was welcome to come preach that Sunday, but they were nearing the end of their search. That Sunday, I took my family to visit the little town just a few miles north of Tupelo. Upon visiting, I met the other Adam Miller and his family. We discovered we had an awful lot in common – both married with two sons of similar ages; his oldest son was born the day before my youngest (remember that fact for later); both of us were “uneducated” preachers who began our work in ministry while working in the secular world. After a couple of weeks, I was invited to come and work with the Mayfield Church of Christ – and the fun of having two Adam Millers soon began.

First off, there were the constant attempts to try and differentiate between two guys with the same name. It started with “Adam #1” and “Adam #2” – I’m sure you can see where this system was problematic. The next attempt (which unfortunately stuck for a long time) was “Big Adam” and “Little Adam.” I’ve never been accused of being a small person, so while accurate, this naming system also had its drawbacks – honestly, who wants to be

“Big” or “Little”? Finally, by the time that I moved back to Louisiana in 2015, we had moved to the sophisticated “Adam T.” (myself) and “J. Adam” (the other guy). It’s amazing how many times mix-ups could rule the day – I’ll try to relate a few of them to you.

There were several minor things that happened in the first year or so of my time in Saltillo. Adam (not me) started preaching for the Pott’s Camp congregation about 45 minutes away, so we only really saw each other coming and going. Even with that, multiple times, confusion abounded. One evening, Adam called me, laughing hysterically. He had been holding a gospel meeting and found out some interesting information. While at the meeting, one of the men told Adam that he had invited him because they heard him speak on an audio recording from the Chapman church. Puzzled, Adam told him he had never spoken there. Sometime after that, it dawned on him that I had recently spoken at Chapman, and they had thought they were contacting me instead of him – I’m still waiting on my commission as his agent.

One day after stopping by the cleaners to pick up some clothes, I hurriedly tried to put on some pants (and nearly tore them). After struggling and wondering what the cleaners had done to my slacks, I finally checked the receipt and found... J Adam’s address – maybe “Big” and “Little” were more accurate than I thought. There were several other things that happened – in fact they happened all the time.

We used several of the same businesses, I discovered, most importantly the same bank. When we bought our first home, I stopped by the bank to change our mailing address. Sure enough, a couple of weeks later I started getting J. Adam’s bank information. It turns out when it came to bank accounts, he was “Big Adam”! That took a good bit of explaining to get straightened out.

By far, the funniest thing that ever happened to us was when our two sons (born one day apart, mind you) both were registering for soccer. By this time, Adam had now joined me as associate minister at Mayfield, which is also important to the sto-

ry. The registration forms for soccer had spaces for the child's mother and father, their employers and the child's date of birth. To complicate matters, our wives went without us to turn in the forms at the same time. Upon handing the forms to the clerk, our wives watched as the clerk's face went from puzzled, to white, to noticeably uncomfortable. She finally spoke: "Let me get this straight: Hunter's mother is Suzanne, his father is Adam, and he's employed by the Mayfield Church of Christ?" Their reply was "Yes." She continued: "And you're Josh's mother, and his father is Adam, and he's employed by the Mayfield Church of Christ?... So, these boys were born one day apart, they have two separate mothers, one father, and he preaches at Mayfield?!" When they told him that there were two Adam's, the clerk said "Thank you!!! I was wondering what kind of church that was!"

Those are just a few of the many moments that I could relate. My time working with Mayfield and J. Adam were some of the best times of my life. I know a lot of ministers who struggle with discouragement, frustrations, and hardships in their work

– in fact, it can become a common theme. When you read Paul's second epistle to the young minister Timothy, it seems as though even Paul's son in the faith struggled with burnout and discouragement. Timothy benefitted greatly from a co-worker who would encourage and push him to "*stir up the gift of God which is in you*" (2 Tim. 1:6). One of the best parts of my time there was the opportunity to grow and work together with someone who shared so much more than a name with me. I think it is incredibly important that ministers have someone they can share their trials and triumphs with. As the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us, "*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.*" (Eccl 4:9-10). Maybe as important as encouragement is the ability to laugh and enjoy work and our lives as ministers. The Proverbs' writer says, "*A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones*" (Pro 17:22). We would do well for God to bless all our ministers with a J. Adam in their life.

WAKING TO WISDOM ~ PSALM 123:1-2

Xander Pasley

To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.

Sometimes I think we forget the true measure of God's greatness. We flippantly, casually say, "Oh, yeah, I prayed today." Is that the kind of attitude we should have? Look at this! *As a servant looking at the hand of his master.* The servant knows he is not even worthy enough to look his master in the face. God did not allow Moses to see His face (Ex. 33:20-23). He says in Vs. 20 "...Man shall not see me and live." Just like servants, we are not able, not worthy to see the face of God! The Bible says "God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29) and in the verse right before it, says we should worship Him with reverence and awe.

Let's change direction a bit. The picture of God painted here seems so mighty and so distant that there must be no hope of ever coming close to Him. No hope of Him ever hearing us when we petition Him in prayer. But as Christians, we know God is our Father. It's said very often in the New Testament, the sermon on the mount being just one example. If God is our Father, then we are His children (Gal. 3:26). God is mighty and majestic, more than anything or anyone ever known or ever imagined. But He is a loving, caring Father who wants us to be close to Him. He is enthroned in the Heavens, but He's promised us a path through the clouds to His glorious home.

Get close to God, love Him, know Him, but all the while keep in mind that He is Lord, Master, King of kings, and He deserves and demands to be treated as such.

I love y'all, get to know your Father.



DOES ARCHAEOLOGY DISPROVE THE STORY OF Jericho?

Richard Mansel

Introduction

While we believe Scripture and the evidence before us by faith (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6), we know that this belief isn't universal. Non-believers have a different set of standards when they read the words of the Bible. The examples of this disconnect are bountiful.

When faced with stories contained in the Bible, we accept things that non-believers won't, and that is to be expected. Nowhere is this conflict more apparent than in the miraculous. Experiences that fall outside of the norm are naturally contentious.

The Biblical story of Joshua destroying the walls of Jericho without weapons of war is a perfect example. Believers accept the miraculous without question and the rest refuse to do so. But that's a natural reaction from both sides.

The Story

The book of Joshua begins with God's intention for the successor to Moses to lead the nation of Israel into the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1-2). They were commanded to follow the ark of the covenant (Joshua 3:3-4).

Joshua tells the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you"¹ (Joshua 3:5). God reinforces His promise that through faith they will conquer their enemies in the Promised Land (Joshua 3:10).

When the priests entered the Jordan River with the ark, the water "stood still, and rose in a heap" (Joshua 3:16). "Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan" (Joshua 3:17).

Every tribe picked up a rock from the Jordan

¹ All Scripture citations are from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Company, 1992).

and a memorial to the Lord was constructed (Joshua 4:1-7). God had them circumcise the males and celebrate the Passover to solidify their faith and purpose (Joshua 5:1-12).

The Passover took place on the “plains of Jericho” (Joshua 5:10).

In Joshua 6:2, God tells them He has given Jericho into their hands. However, they must do as commanded to secure it.

They were to march around the city for six days and then on the seventh day “seven priests will blow seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark” (Joshua 6:3-4). When the last trumpet sounds, the people will shout and the “wall of the city will fall down flat.” (Joshua 6:5).

Everything occurred just as God said (Joshua 6:1-16).

“Now the city shall be doomed by the Lord to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent” (Joshua 2:1-7; 6:17).

Jericho was the first obstacle for Joshua and Israel in the Promised Land. The task to conquer all of the tribes before them evoked great fear among the spies that were earlier sent into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:17-14:5). Yet, Joshua and Caleb believed in God's power and they were blessed (Numbers 14:26-33).

It took great courage and faith for them, as it does for us today, when opposition to the Word stands and rears its head.

Archaeological Discoveries

Ancient Jericho is now called Tell es-Sultan on the western edge of the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea.² “It's known as the oldest continually occupied city in the world and is the lowest city on earth.”³

British engineer Charles Warren first excavated

the site in 1867-1868.⁴ Later, an Austrian-German team led by Ernst Sellin and Carl Wetzinger excavated between 1907-1909 and again in 1911.⁵ John Garstang dug from 1930-1936.⁶

The majority of the debate comes from the timing of the destruction of Jericho. Excavators sharply disagree as to the date. Sellin and Wetzinger decided on a date in the 1500's B.C. and Garstang arrived at a date around 1400 B.C.⁷

“Garstang asked the young British archaeologist [Dame] Kathleen Kenyon to reexamine his data and come to her own conclusions.”⁸ She labored on the site from 1952 to 1958, applying her keen scientific skills.

With each new excavation, new equipment and the collective knowledge of the field was applied. Each researcher had their own focus and skills to bring to the problem. We have no reason to doubt their authenticity or motives. They

just labored under different suppositions in terms of the authenticity of the Bible.

Their work consisted of digging, scanning and collating what they discovered in the ground before them. Layers allowed them to estimate the eras in which things occurred and conclusions were made.

Kenyon focused on pottery in her digs to date the destruction of Jericho. However, she based her conclusions on what *wasn't* there instead of what she actually found.⁹ She made assumptions that others have found specious.

One of the issues is that Kenyon died in 1978 and her detailed research wasn't published until 1981-1983, so she couldn't be questioned about her conclusions.¹⁰ Her assumptions, however, are used

The majority of the debate comes from the timing of the destruction of Jericho. Excavators sharply disagree as to the date

²<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>

³<https://www.allaboutarchaeology.org/jericho-archaeology.htm>

⁴ Eric H. Cline, “From Eden to Exile: Unraveling Mysteries of the Bible” (Washington: National Geographic, 2007), 99.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Cline, 99.

⁸Cline, 100.

⁹<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>

¹⁰<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/01/Jericho-Does-the-Evidence-Disprove-or-Prove-the-Bible.aspx>

by legions of people who wish to discredit the Scriptural account. According to Kenyon, the Israelites couldn't have destroyed Jericho because by the time they came along, Jericho was already desolate. So, the Biblical story is a fairy tale.

Author Bryant Wood and others have examined Kenyon's work and found mistakes in her reasoning.¹¹ Garstang originally sent Kenyon in order to follow up on his work. Yet, she disagreed with Garstang and fell in line with Sellin and Wetzinger with a much earlier date of destruction.

Let's spend a few minutes examining her reasoning.

Kenyon decided that Jericho was a "backwater" and insignificant city, and went from there to make a lot of assumptions.¹² "Kenyon drew her comparative material from large cities like Megiddo, situated on major trade routes far from Jericho. Jericho, by contrast, is a small site well off the major trade routes of the day."¹³

"A careful examination of the Jericho excavation reports as a whole, moreover, makes it clear that both Garstang and Kenyon dug in a poor quarter of the city where they found only humble domestic dwellings."¹⁴

Moreover, Kenyon only dug in a relatively small area.¹⁵

"An argument from silence is always problematic, but Kenyon's argument is especially poorly founded. She based her dating on the fact that she failed to find expensive, imported pottery in a small excavation area in an impoverished part of a city located far from major trade routes!"¹⁶

Strangely enough, some pottery of the wealthy was found by Garstang and was in his findings. However, either Kenyon overlooked it or ignored it.¹⁷

"At the time of Garstang's excava-

¹¹<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

tion, the significance of this type of pottery was not recognized, so it was simply published along with all the other decorated pottery without being singled out for special notice. It showed up in erosional layers on the east side of the tell. Evidently it originated in a large structure upslope, which Garstang referred to as the palace."¹⁸

So the pottery of the wealthy was found in the palace and wasn't found in the homes of the poor.

"She should have paid greater attention to the locally made household pottery she did find, especially because she was dependent on a very limited excavation area in a poor section of the city – the last place to look for exotic imported materials."¹⁹

Kenyon's conclusions led her to believe that the Hyksos destroyed Jericho as they fled from the Egyptians. Yet, discoveries made at Jericho pose problems for her conclusions.

"The most abundant item found in the destruction, apart from pottery, was grain. As noted above, both Garstang and Kenyon found large quantities of grain stored in the ground-floor rooms of the houses. In her limited excavation area, Kenyon recovered six bushels of grain in one season! This is unique in the annals of Palestinian archaeology. Perhaps a jar or two might be found, but to find such an extensive amount of grain is exceptional. What conclusions can we draw from this unusual circumstance?"²⁰

Grain was one of the most valuable commodities in the ancient world. "Grain was so valuable, in fact, that it was used as a medium of exchange."²¹ No one would have left grain to rot if they had overrun and destroyed a city.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

Likewise, few would have failed to see grain on ground floors in simple homes. The grain would have sustained the fleeing armies for a period of time and been as valuable as gold.

On the other hand, the Bible tells us that the Israelites were commanded not to remove any spoils (except for the silver and gold) from Jericho in its destruction (Joshua 6:17-18).

*"Another inference can be drawn from the grain: The city fell shortly after harvest, in the spring of the year. This is precisely when the Bible says the Israelites attacked Jericho: Rahab was drying freshly harvested flax on the roof of her house (Joshua 2:6); the Israelites crossed the Jordan while it was in flood at harvest time (Joshua 3:15); and they celebrated Passover just prior to attacking the city (Joshua 5:10)."*²²

Those who excavated the site and don't believe in miracles believe that an earthquake brought down the walls of Jericho. "Dr. Amos Nur, a Stanford University geophysicist, has written: 'The combination, the destruction of Jericho and the stoppage of the Jordan, is so typical of earthquakes in this region that only little doubt can be left as to the reality of such events in Joshua's time.'"²³

But there's nothing in the text to say that God didn't use an earthquake. Elijah Wood wrote, "If God did use an earthquake to accomplish His purposes that day, it was still a miracle since it happened at precisely the right moment."²⁴

"It is frequently pointed out that Jericho is located in a zone that is still seismically active, since the Great Rift Valley where Jericho is situated straddles the boundary between two tectonic plates: The Arabian plate and the African-Sinai

plate."²⁵

In fact, excavations discovered what appeared to be earthquake damage on walls of Jericho.²⁶

In Joshua 6:21, the text says they "utterly destroyed all that was in the city" and 6:24 says, "But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire."

Kenyon noted, "The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt."²⁷

The text says after the wall fell, "Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:24). If the walls fell to the ground before them, why would

they go up? The archaeologists discovered an answer.

"If God did use an earthquake to accomplish His purposes that day, it was still a miracle since it happened at precisely the right moment."

"When the wall was deposited in this fashion at the base of the tell, the collapsed mudbricks themselves formed a ready ramp for an attacker to surmount the revetment wall. According to the Biblical account, the Israelites who encircled the city "went

*up into the city, every man straight before him" (Joshua 6:20). Note that the Bible states that they went up into the city."*²⁸

The following sums it up nicely.²⁹

- The city was strongly fortified (Joshua 2:5, 7, 15, 6:5, 20).
- The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Joshua 2:6, 3:15, 5:10).
- The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Joshua 6:1).
- The siege was short (Joshua 6:15).
- The walls were leveled, possibly by an

²⁵Cline, 103.

²⁶Cline, 104.

²⁷<https://answersingenesis.org/archaeology/the-walls-of-jericho/>

²⁸<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>

²⁹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³<https://www.nytimes.com/1990/02/22/world/believers-score-in-battle-over-the-battle-of-jericho.html>

²⁴<http://evidenceforchristianity.org/can-you-give-a-summary-of-the-archaeological-evidence-about-jericho-and-the-conquest-of-joshua/>

earthquake (Joshua 6:20).

- The city was not plundered (Joshua 6:17-18).
- The city was burned (Joshua 6:20).

Before we leave the subject, we mustn't forget about Rahab (Joshua 2:1-7; Hebrews 11:30-31).

*"The German excavation of 1907-1909 found that on the north a short stretch of the lower city wall did not fall as everywhere else. A portion of that mudbrick wall was still standing to a height of over two meters (eight feet). What is more, there were houses built against the wall! It is quite possible that this is where Rahab's house was."*³⁰

Garstang said that, "Our excavations have in

³⁰<https://answersingenesis.org/archaeology/the-walls-of-jericho/>

fact proved that after its destruction the walled city was not reconstructed, nor was the site more than partially inhabited, for about 500 years."³¹

Conclusion

Archaeologists have a challenging job and we owe them a debt of gratitude for their work. We take their conclusions and their presuppositions and turn to Scripture and try to piece everything together, if we can.

We can't base our entire faith system on archaeology, obviously. It's a tool and an insight into the past. It goes as far as it can go. However, it can be a faith builder and a teaching tool we can utilize.

Jericho is a fascinating study and there's undoubtedly more work to do.

³¹<http://evidenceforchristianity.org/can-you-give-a-summary-of-the-archaeological-evidence-about-jericho-and-the-conquest-of-joshua/>



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KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Jeremie Beller

One of the first rules of communication is know your audience. So when Peter and the other apostles presented the gospel in Acts 2, their challenge was to explain how Jesus was in fact the long-awaited Lord and Messiah, foretold by Jewish scripture and hoped for by the Jewish people. It was a difficult sell. For starters, the idea of a messiah who would die by the hands of the Romans seemed contradictory. The messiah was supposed to drive the Romans out. Add to that the way Jesus challenged Jewish traditions and authorities of his day, and the task becomes more challenging.

Propelled by the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and the eleven delivered a message in Acts 2 that cut to the heart of 3,000 listeners. How did they do it?

They Appealed to a Common Hope

Since Pentecost was a major religious holiday, bringing people to the capitol city of Jerusalem, the audience was obviously religious. Though the apostles and the broader audience had their differences, they shared a common heritage and a desire to live up to God's calling for their lives and the life of the nation. They were, after all, their Jewish "brothers" (Acts 2:29). That's what brought them together and provided a starting point for their gospel to be heard.

They Appealed to Common Experience

Everyone gathered that day witnessed the sounds of wind and the tongues of fire. Peter used their experience to point to Joel 2. Many in the audience witnessed the wonders and signs Jesus did during his ministry (Acts 2:22). Some even had a front row seat to the crucifixion of Jesus and the following rumors of his resurrection (Acts 2:23). Their shared experience provided a door through which the gospel could connect.

They Appealed to Common Voices

Despite their differences, the apostles and their audience had a common respect for Jewish scrip-

ture and history. David, Psalms, Joel, and the sovereignty of God linked the gospel message with the language and values of the audience without compromise. These references gave familiarity to the claims and linked the story of Jesus with the story of Israel.

Addressing an audience with common hopes, experiences and values provided the apostles a starting point to share the gospel in Acts 2. Jesus was the fulfillment of Jewish hope and history. He was the embodiment of Jewish values and texts. And, the gospel made sense of their experiences over the past three years.

The Challenge Facing Us

If you are looking for a way to teach the gospel to people who share your hopes, experiences, and values, Acts 2 offers a way forward. Unfortunately, the church finds itself in less and less of an Acts 2 setting. The diversity of our culture has created a variety of experiences. Right and wrong, justice and joy, integrity and goodness are defined in drastically different ways, drawn from radically different experiences. We find ourselves in a culture that doubts and questions once-accepted voices of wisdom and authority.

In 2018, Barna research found that 82% of Americans view the Bible as sacred or holy literature (down 4% since 2011), and 21 % see the Koran as sacred (doubling since 2011). Since 1997, Americans who believe in an all-powerful God "who rules the world today" has dropped from 70% to 56% (Barna Group, 2017).

The beauty of the Gospel is that it spans culture and context. Jesus prepared the apostles to take the gospel from Jerusalem to "Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world" (Acts 1:8). He knew the gospel would cross cultural barriers and had the power to change lives of people from all backgrounds.

As Luke traces the growth of the church from Jerusalem to the "uttermost parts of the world," he gives us insight into how it works. Acts 2 com-

municates the gospel to a Jewish audience. In Acts 17, Paul took the gospel to pagan philosophers who neither believed in the Jewish God nor shared Jewish values. Though he did not baptize 3,000 that day, “some men joined him and believed” (Acts 17:34).

Standing in the Areopagus, Paul found common ground where he could. Their numerous idols reflected a shared experience of religious concerns. Their poets, though not inspired in Paul’s eyes, spoke truth that pointed toward Jesus (17:28). Their search for meaningful life (as was the goal of philosophers) provided a common hope which Paul showed was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

Know Your Audience

What if Paul borrowed Peter’s sermon notes from Acts 2 and preached the Pentecost sermon in Athens? Or, what if Peter had preached Paul’s sermon in Acts 2? Would either have been effective? The central message of both sermons was essentially the same, but their approach was different. In both cases, they knew their audience. From

Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, the message remained the same, and those who accepted it responded in belief and baptism.

These differences make teaching our community, neighbors and friends challenging. In some cases, the traditional use of door knocking, film strips, Gospel Meetings, tracts, etc., remain effective when experiences, values, and hopes are shared. But what do we do when we find ourselves ministering in other contexts?

What happens when someone hears us preach or teach the story of Jesus? Do we have just one style and approach that assumes shared experience, values, and voices? Do we consider how to connect the gospel of Christ, without compromise, to their setting? If we look closely enough, we just might find experience, values, and voices in our culture that open the doors to teach Christ.

Thankfully, the power lies in the message of the gospel and not in our techniques.

The Master's Supper

Gantt Carter

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Based upon the example of the early church/apostles, we partake of the Lord's Supper upon the first day of every week (see Acts 20:7 for more info). But what exactly are we doing when we join together in eating the unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine?

I submit that the Master's Supper is a type of memorial service—someone most important and dear to our hearts has died. It is a time when we gather as the people of the Messiah to remember Him and His death upon our behalf. Paul writes to the Christians of ancient Corinth:

"For I received from the Master what I also delivered to you, that the Master Jesus on the night when

He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25; see also Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; and Luke 22:14-23).

Paul tells these holy ones that he imparted to their hearts what he had received from the Lord about the night of His betrayal and arrest. Let us keep in mind that the Master willingly suffered and died for everyone. He had the authority to give up

His life for us, and He chose to fulfill that very task. He explains,

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

Recollection

His retelling of Jesus' words on that night show us the focus of the partaking of the bread and the juice. Communion is to be a time of **recollection**, for we are to think back to the time of the cross, and to express our earnest appreciation for the King of glory who shed His precious blood for us. Without the blood of Jesus, the New Covenant of forgiveness and faithfulness would not be possible. May we always strive to keep our minds focused on Deity and the sacrifice of the cross as we partake with our fellow brothers and sisters in the Messiah.

The Lord's Supper is not some kind of free time during the service to think about our lunch plans or to contemplate our schedule for the week. Do you think God is pleased when we are distracted and discontented during this time of worship to and remembrance of Him?

But partaking of the Lord's Supper is more than just a memorial service of recollection. In fact, it is quite unlike any other memorial service we have ever or will ever attend. For the One we are honoring and remembering in this service is no longer dead! Even during the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus made it clear that this upcoming crucifixion would not be the end for Him (see Matthew 26:29). Just as His suffering and death were not a surprise to Him, the resurrection was always a part of the plan (Matthew 16:21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Consider the way Paul refers to him in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 as "the Master" and "the Master Jesus." Was He the Master (or Lord) when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pen those words? *Yes.* Is

He still the reigning Lord and King today? *Absolutely.* The Father raised Him up from the grave and exalted Him to His right hand (Acts 2:32-33). Therefore, we can "know for certain that God has made Him both Master and King" (Acts 2:36). As we partake of the communion, let us never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is alive and well in Heaven. The cross of the Messiah ought to motivate us to lovingly and humbly obey the Master of heaven and earth.

Proclamation

Paul went on to observe, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Master's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Our continual observance of communion is one key way we declare our Savior and His redemptive work to the world. The Master's Supper then is also a type of **proclamation**. How often do we truly perceive what we do each Sunday morning to be a message to each other and even to the world?

But Paul tells us that this proclamation is to be done until He comes again. Once again we are reminded of the fact that He not only died for us, but He was also resurrected to never die again (Revelation 1:18). He is not only alive, and not only reigning as the King of kings and Master of masters, but our Jesus will return to this world again so we can be with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; Hebrews 9:27-28). As we gather around the table to commemorate His death, we are proclaiming His death, His resurrection, and His coming to all!

Celebration

In light of this recollection and proclamation, I suggest that the Lord's Supper should also be a time of **celebration**. We know that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians), and it makes sense that we should express our gratitude during communion with an aspect of joy in our hearts to Him. The Master's Supper is certainly a time of soberness and sadness (as we dwell on His pain and death), but it can also be an occasion of cheerfulness as we reflect on the point of His death, the power of His resurrection, and the promise of His return.

Testimony for Jesus from His Enemies

By Joshua Hames

It may seem odd to say that some of the best testimony on your behalf can come from your enemies, but it's true. In court, when the other side calls a witness to the stand, it's to prove you guilty. When *they* say something that helps you, it is more powerful than if your friend says it. Let's study some things that Jesus' enemies said about Him, for not only did they testify on His behalf, but did so nearly every time they opened their mouths!

The following is an excerpt from my book **Bible Proofs God's Way: How We Can Know the Bible is God's Word from the Word Itself**. To learn more about it, or read more in depth studies, go to DiggingInTheWord.com.

Hostile Witnesses

Now, like any court, let us consider the witnesses for the other side, those who were there at the time, who saw what was going on, and could investigate first hand, and who *wanted* to find any and every proof against Christ. Let's listen to those who saw Him face to face, and had the greatest motive and opportunity to find out if He was a fraud.

The Sanhedrin could not disprove that Jesus was the Messiah, because there was too much evidence to the contrary. They were so desperate to get Jesus killed, they did something that could not possibly work: they *sought false testimony* (Mark 14:55-59). The fact that they had to seek false testimony was, in a way, testimony from them *for* Christ. Naturally, false testimony cannot agree, and theirs didn't. And even when they testified to truth, such as Jesus' teaching about His resurrection in which He metaphorically referred to His body as the Temple, they still couldn't get their testimony to agree. This is the fate of those who do

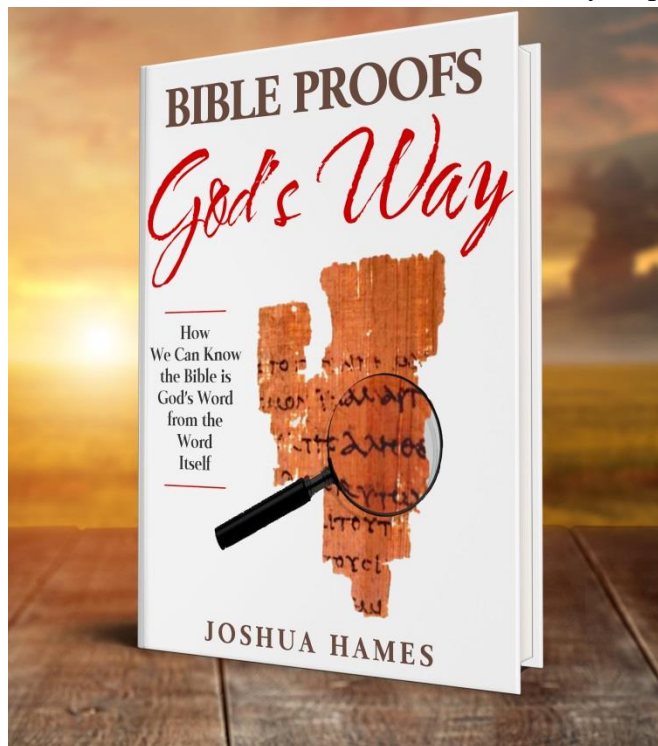
not have truth, whether intentionally dishonest or merely devoid of wisdom; but God is neither, and has used witnesses to prove that very well.

These unfriendly witnesses against Christ confirmed that He was performing signs, since they accused Him of healing on the Sabbath. This occurred on multiple occasions (Mark 2:23-28; 3:2-6; John 5:9-16). They also bore witness that Christ's position was unassailable, as only God's could be. For anyone else to claim what Jesus did would have been blasphemy; and with them being so well-versed in the law, if He had been a false prophet, surely the scribes and Pharisees would have found a way to prove it. But every attempt to

trip Him failed miserably, showing that He was indeed the Messiah.

In fact, the people even noticed the utter lack of substantial accusation from the Jewish authorities. Some wondered if He was the Christ merely because of this fact (John 7:25-26), for anyone else who had claimed to be the Christ would have quickly been dealt with by the Sanhedrin. Yes, Jesus taught regularly in the temple, even when they tried to arrest Him or kill Him, yet they were unable because His time had not yet come (v. 6).

We might not consider a Roman centurion and his soldiers at the crucifixion hostile witnesses, since they said that Jesus was surely the son of God. But let's note that they were not Jews, and most likely not proselytes. They believed because of the wondrous signs they saw at that momentous occasion (Matthew 27:54). Whether they converted for the rest of their life, or only confessed Christ's name at that moment, they still stand as powerful witnesses, more convincing perhaps than a friendly witness.



In fact, what criminal to be executed was ever dressed by the Romans in purple, the garb of kings, or had a sign put over his head, declaring him the king of the Jews, something the Romans were dead set against, and could not countenance with all of the Jewish uprisings that had and would occur? What criminal did the Romans ever want to set free and claim that he was innocent, yet still crucify (v. 23)? What Roman governor had his wife send him a message and warn him not to execute a criminal because of a vision in a dream (v. 19)? What criminal's body went missing, and the Roman soldiers had to lie and say they had been asleep, a capital offense, to explain it (28:12-13)? The Romans, indeed, produced much testimony to prove the Christ, and it's all the greater as being mainly unintentional. And even one of the criminals executed with Christ testified on His behalf (Luke 23:41): dying words are one of the strongest testimonies that a court can accept, and one of the few cases where hearsay is allowed in modern courts.

The Jews similarly would have avoided much about the crucifixion that proved Christ, but they played right into God's hands. They crucified the lamb of God at the Passover, the feast of the substitution of the firstborn, when the death of a king's son (Exodus 12:29-30) resulted in the freeing of the people of God from bondage. They surely would not have had Him executed outside the city, where the sacrifices of atonement were to be carried outside of the camp under the prophetic Law of Moses (Hebrews 13:11). And if they had understood what His blood would do for us, or what guilt and judgment it would bring, they surely would not have cried "His blood be upon us and our children" (Matthew 7:25), for both came to pass: those who converted were forgiven by being covered in that blood; those who did not bore the guilt of that blood, and were destroyed in the most horrific judgment the world has ever seen—carried out by the Romans a mere 40 years later.

Another great witness of the Messiah is Gamaliel, though after the crucifixion (Acts 5:34-39). He gave a testimony that anyone can see is true: all false messiahs will come to nothing, because they are not of God. Only the true Messiah could accomplish what He did, and build a world religion and an eternal kingdom, not by force and ascension to earthly power, as the disciples kept expecting,

but by getting Himself killed.

A Case Study of Christ's Enemies Confirming Him: John 7-8

Testimony of a witness is deemed utterly worthless if he constantly cannot keep his facts straight. Such was the case when they came against Jesus. These learned men of the Law would have been able to catch any false messiah in a lie; yet they had to resort to dishonesty to deny the obvious truth before them—powerful testimony on behalf of Christ. John 7-8 is a case study in human foolishness when faced with the inconvenient truths of who God is and what He has spoken. When it comes to religion, we humans will get all manner of facts wrong. And if a lying witness is trying to condemn a man, chances are the man is not guilty. And in the case of Christ, if He was not guilty of blasphemy, then He really was the Son of God and the Messiah they had been waiting for.

This passage displays one mistake after another made by men, and one proof after another presented by Christ, proving beyond doubt that He was the Messiah. Jesus' own family did not believe in Him, at least initially, even though they knew He had done great works (John 7:1-9); their original obstinance makes their later conversion all the greater testimony to the veracity of the claims of proofs of His divinity. Jesus offered the proof that even His detractors were witnesses for Him, for only the true prophet was hated for accusing the world of sin. Some people believed on Him, but were afraid to speak for fear of the Jews (v. 12). It is usually an inconvenient truth that is coercively suppressed, as these men attempted to do. They recognized that Jesus spoke with learning, yet had not been formally educated; Jesus pointed out that was a sign that He received from God (vv.14-16).

Jesus points out their failure to keep the Law, which they could not deny, so they engaged in argumentum ad hominem, the last bastion of everyone who knows they are wrong, accusing Him of having a demon and being a Samaritan (vv. 19-20; and 8:48). They pretended as if they were not trying to kill Him, then later the crowd admitted that they *were* trying to kill Him (v. 25). The people wondered if He was really the Christ since He was still allowed to speak openly, which was actually why He was able to do so (v. 26). Yet then they make up something: no one would know where the

Christ would come from (v.27)—although later the crowd plainly manifests an understanding of Scripture which predicted where He would come from, Bethlehem, and that he'd be the offspring of David, which they would have known were true of Jesus, since they knew Him (v. 42).

The chief priests and Pharisees sent the authorities to arrest Him, yet He was not arrested (vv. 29, 32, 44). It takes a lot of evidence for an officer to disobey orders, and they testified why they did not arrest Him: no man ever spoke like Him (vv. 45-48). And yet the Jewish rulers judged Him before they heard them, which one of their own pointed out was contrary to the law (vv. 48, 50). They, who were supposed to know and uphold the law, said that no prophet ever arose out of Galilee, yet at least two had, and there was prophecy that the Christ would too (Isaiah 9:1-2).

In John 8, Jesus taught at the Temple itself, something He would not have been allowed to do had He not been the Messiah and possessed God's protection. Imagine an infidel today walking into the Muslims' holiest mosques in Mecca and preaching against Islam and *continuing* to do so, without so much as being drug out, much less executed. His would be quite a sign if he claimed his message was from God; this is in essence what Christ did by defying the greatest Jewish authorities in the Holy City, at the Temple itself!

They tested Him with a woman caught in adultery, yet failed to bring the man, whom they knew, since she was "caught in the act" (v. 4), so their goal was not justice, but to trick Him, for the law commanded both the man and woman be executed.

The Pharisees tried to argue that Jesus' testimony could not be accepted as valid since He testified for Himself, but they overlooked the testimony of two other powerful Witnesses, God and the Spirit (1 John 5:7). Many believed when they heard Jesus speak so boldly (John 8:28-30), saying that the Father was with Him; the fact that He had not been arrested was part of the proof. Jesus also furnished further proof by predicting that He would be "lifted up," after which many more would indeed believe (c.f., John 21:16).

When Jesus spoke the oft-quoted scripture, that the truth would set them free (John 8:32), their reaction was far different than people who take comfort in the passage today. They were angry, because they realized He was telling them that they

were not free. We should learn a lesson from this: part of sharing the gospel is helping people see, compassionately and without judgment, that they are a slave to sin (cf. Acts 17:31). But their denial of ever being slaves was so blatantly wrong, it was as if they denied their entire heritage. For the Jewish nation was born out of Egyptian bondage! Imagine those Israelites coming out of Egypt turning to God and saying "you didn't free us!" But Israel did not just begin with slavery; they continually went back to it. During nearly a millennium of judges and kings, they would continually be forced to pay tribute, carried off into captivity, or enslaved until they repented and God freed them again. The northern kingdom of Israel was permanently carried off into captivity first, and the southern kingdom of Judah was finally carried off by Babylon for 70 years of captivity before God allowed them to return. Yet these Jews tell Jesus that they have never been enslaved. To compound their folly, they make this statement *while living under Roman rule*, and were waiting on the Messiah to free them!

They claimed that they were children of Abraham and God (John 8:39, 41). Yet Jesus points out that true children of Abraham and God do righteous works like Abraham did. They were actually children of Satan for trying to murder a true prophet, just as their fathers had done; their lies alone were proof enough that they were of the Devil, lies that have been thoroughly documented by just this short passage.

Jesus received a shocking response when He told them that anyone who received His word would never taste death (John 8:51): they accused *Him* of lying. But they understood what He was saying at least: He was indeed a greater prophet than the ones before. When He spoke of existing before Abraham (vv. 56-59), they knew He was making Himself equal with God, so they picked up stones to stone Him. The fact that they were not able was yet another sign that He spoke the truth. One can only image the sign He produced when He "hid Himself and went out of the temple." You don't just walk or even run away from a murderous lynch mob; perhaps He even vanished before their eyes.

One wonders at the many unintentional testimonies of Christ's enemies that bolster the truth of His words, and how they still refused to believe.

The Miraculous Birth of Jesus

AND THE MIRACLES THAT SURROUNDED IT

Mark McWhorter

In 2 B.C., Caesar Augustus celebrated his 25th year as Emperor. Rome was celebrating its 750th year of existence. Festivities were held in Rome, its provinces, and client kingdoms. There were magnificent displays and carnivals throughout the empire. A new forum was dedicated bearing Augustus' name.

Augustus was seen as a type of **"Prince of Peace."** He was given the title **"Pater Patriae"** (**Father of the Country**) on February 5, 2 B.C. This was the traditional day that honored peace and reconciliation among all classes of people in the Roman Empire. Throughout this year he was recognized as the one who brought peace and tranquility to the world. He was titled the Guardian and Keeper of the Empire.¹

The Roman poet, **Virgil**, who lived in the First Century B.C., forecast that a child destined to bring in a Golden Age of peace and prosperity would be born at this time.

Seutonius, in the 2nd Century A.D., stated that Romans had long believed that it was destined for the empire of the world to be given to someone coming from Judea.

Tacitus, who also lived in the 2nd Century A.D., records that the majority of Jewish people believed during Augustus' time the east would renew its strength and from Judea a ruler would come. (Interestingly, later around 60 A.D., Nero was advised by some of his court astrologers that it was prudent for him to move his seat of empire to Jerusalem because that city was destined to become the capital of the world. They were a few years late in real-

izing the Kingdom of God/Christ had already begun in Jerusalem.)

At this time active war had nearly ceased and large numbers of legionary soldiers had been reduced from military service over the last five years.

The pirates of the seas had been almost abolished, making sea travel extremely safe.

The Greek language was spoken by a large portion of the known world. The Greek translation of the Old Law, the Septuagint, was widely read and circulated in the Gentile world.

Roman philosophers were looking for a new direction to stem the tide of society's self-destruction. Family life in the Empire had sunk to an all-time low. There was widespread moral and spiritual bankruptcy. Thus, many throughout the Roman Empire were looking for something to fill the void in their lives.

Well-designed road systems made traveling easier than it had ever been. Several nations had large sailing fleets making long-distance travel easier than it had ever been. There is evidence that ships from numerous nations were making contact throughout the entire world. (This is not politically correct with those who insist on the evolution of man's technology and abilities, stating that such capabilities were beyond those in the First Century). This would aid in the kingdom being preached throughout the world (Colossians 1:23).

The Jews were scattered throughout the world, thus giving a familiarity of the One True God, Jehovah, the Creator, to much of the world. They set up synagogues in many cities to which they moved.

There were very interesting and rare astrological events which occurred over the previous 4 years and during 2 B.C.

¹ Think about Jesus being the Prince of Peace. In Isaiah 9:6, he is called everlasting Father [meaning he is the one who gives spiritual birth to those in the Kingdom]. In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is the Author. [This word was used in several ways in the secular realm. One was to describe the person who founded or blazed the trail of a nation. Thus, in a fashion, the Father of a country.

The Fullness of Time

“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

As we proceed through this lesson, keep in mind the phrase, “the fullness of time.” The word fullness is *pleroma* in the Greek. It means *that which fills up*, that which makes something full or *complete*.²

God, who knows all things, had a plan. His plan was to bring forth a redeemer, His Son. The timing for that Redeemer was all-important. His coming was to be at the perfect time in man’s history. Daniel had given a prophecy that the Messiah would come during the Roman Empire (Daniel 2). Jesus would claim in Mark 1:15, “*the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand*.”

Was Jesus right or was he lying?

Was he the greatest con man in history?

Was he really the “only begotten Son?” (John 1:18)

Did God really “become flesh” and tabernacle among us? (John 1:14)

Was God made in the likeness of man and found in fashion as a man? (Philippians 2:5-8)

Was God, who was in the beginning (John 1:1), manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16)?

John the Baptizer

It was a great honor to burn incense in the Temple. Because there were so many priests in the tribe of Levi, one’s turn to burn the incense might only come once in a lifetime. Lots were cast to see who would get their chance. Zacharias was getting his opportunity.² What a thrill to enter the Temple to burn the sacred incense on the holy altar. As he is going about this duty, an angel, Gabriel, appears to him on the right side of the altar and informs him that his wife of many years is going to have a son. Elisabeth had been unable to bear children. It is interesting that the angel tells Zacharias that his prayer has been heard. Since he and his wife are

very elderly, we must assume that his prayers had been going up to God for many years. And, in fact, that particular request of God had stopped at some point due to Elisabeth’s age.

Gabriel says their son, John, will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is going to bring many Israelites back to a proper faith. But most importantly, we are told in Luke 1:17 that, John will prepare the people for the Lord. Surely Zacharias thought of Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” And, Isaiah 40:3, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” And Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

In Luke 1:6, we are told that Zacharias and Elisabeth were righteous before God. They walked in all His commandments and ordinances blameless. God chose godly parents to rear the Lord’s forerunner. This child would also be a miraculous child, born of a barren elderly mother.

Zacharias finds this hard to believe and, thus, is struck dumb (and possibly deaf) until the child is born and circumcised. Zacharias’ speech is miraculously restored after he writes on a tablet to tell everyone that the child will be called John. He now prophesies that his child will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways (Luke 1:76) and that he will be called “the prophet of the Highest.”

Mary

Six months after Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, he appears to a young virgin in the town of Nazareth. Mary is told that she is going to have a son as well. Her child will be the result of the Holy Spirit coming down upon her. Her child will be called “the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32). He will be called “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). His name shall be JESUS (Luke 1:31).

In Genesis 3:15, Satan is told that enmity will be put between Satan’s seed and the woman’s seed. God did not say it would be the man’s seed. This is the first prophecy regarding Christ. Unlike all other babies born, Christ’s conception was not the result of a physical man’s seed. He was the result of the Holy Spirit (God) and Mary’s seed.

² Zacharias was allowed by the Law to retire from Temple service at the age of 50. However, a priest could voluntarily continue to serve. Those who did so were given the highest honor and respect among the Jews.

Mary is told that her cousin, Elisabeth, is also pregnant by the power of God. With this new revelation, Mary rushes to visit Elisabeth. As Mary approaches, Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and tells Mary that she (Mary) is blessed among all women. She also acknowledges that Mary is pregnant with the Lord. She says her son jumped for joy in her womb as Mary approached. [It was told by Gabriel that John would have the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb in verse fifteen.]

Mary replies with joy toward God. Her reply, recorded in Luke 1:46-55, is thought to have been sung. She says that God is remembering the mercy³ about which he spoke to Abraham. This is in reference to the covenant God made with him in Genesis fifteen.

Mary stays for three months and then returns home about the time John is born.

Joseph

Mary is engaged to Joseph, a man of the house of David, the tribe of Judah. When Joseph is informed of Mary's pregnancy, he is unsure what to

³ The mercy of God intended here is the coming of the One seed. She is talking about her baby. Paul referenced this One seed in Galatians 3:16. In that verse, Paul points to the promise to Abram in Genesis 17. In Genesis 12, God promises Abram that his seed will be as numerous as the stars. Therefore, Genesis 12 is not the promise of One seed as is the promise to him in Genesis 17. In Genesis 15, Abram tells God he has not had a son that was promised, so he was going to make Eliezer, his servant, the son. God says that Eliezer is not the son he has been promised. Abram is told to go out and look at the stars. He tells Abram to tell the stars and number them. This would make no sense if Abram is to be convinced about one seed if God is telling him to count many stars. The words used in Hebrew can mean to take an accounting, or get the meaning. It is this writer's belief that the Constellation names were given to man by God. [It is stated in Amos 5:8 that God made Orion. This indicates he did not just create the stars but placed the names upon them. Psalm 147:4 tells us God has names for all the stars. This would involve not only single names but group names.] That is the only rational conclusion why nations throughout history would have many of the same constellations. Most constellations look nothing like what they are portraying. Many seem to be unconnected stars, yet portray something specific. And, in those constellations are symbols of the scheme of redemption coming via a spiritual conqueror. God even stated that, in Genesis 1:14, the stars were for signs. Abram would not have to understand all aspects of that message to understand from it that God had even given the promise of One to come who would be the spiritual salvation of mankind in the stars. And for that One to come from his lineage, he would have to have a biological son.

do. He is contemplating canceling their wedding when an angel appears to him in a dream and confirms for him that the child is conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20). He is told that the child's name shall be Jesus. We are told in Matthew 1:22-23 that all this was done so that Isaiah 7:14 would be fulfilled, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel."

With this information, Joseph marries Mary. This means that Joseph is now the legal father of Jesus. In Luke 3:23, when Jesus begins his ministry we are told that it "was supposed" that he was Joseph's son. The word 'supposed' means 'to think or believe something is proper by law.' Neighbors had no idea that Jesus is actually the Son of God. In chapter one of Matthew, the lineage of Christ is given. It is interesting to note that in verse 16 we are told that Jacob begat Joseph "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus and thus could not "begat" him as all previous ancestors had done in the lineage.

Joseph is a descendant of David (Matthew 1; Luke 2:4). Thus, Jesus' birth begins the fulfillment of Jeremiah 23:5: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." This Branch is raised 'unto' David, not out of David. This is another possible indication that Jesus is not a biological descendant but a legal one.

Approximately thirty years after his birth, Jesus in Matthew 22:42-46 asks the Pharisees how David could prophecy that the Messiah would be David's Lord and David's son at the same time. They could not answer the question without affirming the virgin birth and the fact that Jesus is God.

In Romans 1:3, we read, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; which was **made** of the seed of David according to the flesh." The word for "made" is "became." The word for biological inheritance, "born," is not used. The same word is used in John 1:14 when it says "the Word was made flesh," and Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, **made** of a woman, made under the law." This coincides with Jeremiah 31:22, "For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man." The pregnancy and birth of Jesus is not just

another natural pregnancy and birth. God became flesh.

This legal sonship to Joseph also fulfills Isaiah 11:1-2, “And there shall come forth a rod (a shoot) out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, and the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Luke 3:32 documents that Jesus is indeed from the lineage of Jesse.

The Birth and the Shepherds

Approximately six months later, Joseph takes Mary with him to Bethlehem to take care of a required poll tax by Caesar Augustus. While there, Mary gives birth to Jesus.

His birth in Bethlehem fulfills the prophecy given 700 years earlier in Micah 5:2, “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 old, from everlasting.” Only God has been from everlasting. This fulfillment is just another indication that his birth is indeed miraculous and that Jesus is God.

An angel appears to shepherds in a field near Bethlehem (Luke 2:9). These shepherds are likely those in charge of the Passover lambs used in the Temple. This area about 5 miles southwest of Jerusalem was where these lambs were kept. The fields had a watchtower called Migdal Eder,⁴ the Tower of the Flock.⁵ In the First Century, this tower was considered within the city limits of Bethlehem. There were special mangers in this area for placing new born lambs that were considered acceptable for future sacrifice, particularly those for the Passover and Atonement Day. Only those lambs without spot or blemish were kept here after birth. How appropriate that those in charge of the Passover

lambs will be some of the first to see the Lamb of God. It is also of interest that the One who would be the ultimate High Priest who was the only one who could sacrifice the Passover Lamb, was placed in the manger of the Passover Lamb.⁶ Jesus would sacrifice himself by being led to the Cross.

The angel informs them that Christ the Lord, the Savior, has been born in the city of David. They will know the child because he is wrapped in swaddling clothes and is lying in a manger.⁷ The shepherds are witness to a multitude of angels praising God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

The shepherds see Jesus and tell everyone they can about what they were told and what they had seen. People wondered, but evidently did not take it too seriously. Otherwise, Mary and Joseph would have been swamped with curious and excited visitors. It must be remembered that shepherds were considered the lowliest of those in a career. The Jews would not believe that God announced the Messiah’s coming through lowly shepherds, even if they were priests. And it had become a common belief at this time that the Messiah was going to suddenly appear in the Court of the Temple (Malachi 3:1).⁸

In the Temple

When Mary’s 40 days of purification are fulfilled according to the Mosaic law, detailed in Leviticus 12:2-6, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jeru-

⁴ The Migdal Eder not only was used for the shepherds to oversee flocks in the fields, but also as a military outlook. As such, it was considered a stronghold. Any invading force approaching Jerusalem from the south could be seen from the tower. This usage also has a tie with Jesus’ role as Prince of the Lord’s Army. God is several times referenced as a strong tower; Psalm 61:3; Proverbs 18:10; Nahum 1:7

⁵ Micah 4:8 prophesied of the birth being in this Tower, “O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.”

⁶ There are some commentators who place the birth in the lower room of a normal house. This is where the animals were kept and where families usually slept. The upper rooms were used as guest rooms. It is thought that customary hospitality would not have allowed Mary and Joseph to be turned away from staying in a home. This author believes Micah 4:8 gives too much of a prophecy and connection with Jesus’ future roles for the hospitality custom to over-rule it.

⁷ It was custom at this time for newborn babies to be washed with salt and wrapped in strips of cloth. However, if the normal custom was being referenced, it would not give any specificity for the baby they were looking for. But, this is another reference to the Migdal Eder. Old, worn-out linen priest garments were torn into strips and kept in the Migdal Eder for wrapping the lambs that were placed in the mangers. Jesus was wrapped in these strips.

⁸ A probable reason for Satan tempting Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple wall. Instead of jumping to the outside, Satan was saying jump inside. Angels would not allow him to be harmed and the Jews would quickly accept him as the Messiah. Satan was saying there was no reason to die to be the King of the Jews.

saalem to present him to the Lord and present the proper sacrifice. Every male was to be dedicated as holy to the Lord.

In the Temple was a just and devout old man, Simeon. The Holy Spirit had told him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. On this day, he is brought to the Temple by the Spirit. Simeon sees the baby Jesus (now about 6 weeks old) and takes him up in his arms. He speaks out that God can now let him die because he has seen the salvation and light of not only the Israelites but also the Gentiles. (Luke 2:29-32).

One would think that nothing at this point could surprise Mary and Joseph. But they marvel at what Simeon has said. The Jews as a whole had a misconception that the Messiah was coming to set up an earthly kingdom, with the Jews as His ruling people. Simeon was reiterating what had been stated in Isaiah 9:2, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined," and in Isaiah 60:1-3, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

The multitude of angels had stated that there would be peace on earth. Simeon, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, is showing that this would be peace for all nations through the light of salvation brought by Jesus.

Simeon is not finished. He next blesses them and speaks directly to Mary (Luke 2:34-35). He tells her that her son will cause many to rise and many to fall in the nation of Israel. Her son will be a sign spoken against. And a **sword will pierce through her soul**. This prophecy of their son must also have brought questions to their minds. How would a sword pierce Mary's soul?⁹

⁹ Why Mary is addressed with this and not Joseph can only be conjectured. It is possibly because Joseph would be dead by the time this prophecy is fulfilled, when Jesus is crucified, and will not witness the death of his son. We know he is not mentioned during the crucifixion records. Jesus from the cross tells John to take Mary as his mother. This indicates that Joseph is not alive. Jesus as the oldest child would have the responsibility to take care of her. He transfers this to John. This also is an indication that none of Jesus' siblings believe in him nor are they present at his crucifixion. Other-

Simeon tells Mary that her son will be for the fall of many and for their rising again. The rising again is the word for resurrection. Simeon is prophesying of the resurrection of those who are willing to fall (die) for Jesus. Jesus stated later that he was the resurrection (John 11:25).¹⁰

Immediately recorded after Simeon's presence is an interchange with a prophetess named Anna. Anna is 84 years old and a widow. She stayed in the Temple, praying and fasting night and day. She also sees the baby Jesus and gives thanks to God for allowing her to see the redemption of Israel (Luke 2:38).

After Mary and Joseph complete their requirements of the Law of Moses they return to either Bethlehem or Nazareth to resume their normal lives. They are in Bethlehem when the wise men visit him.¹¹

The Wise Men

Sometime later, wise men from the east come to Jerusalem. They tell Herod that they have seen the star indicating the birth of the King of the Jews. They desire to worship him and to present him with frankincense, gold, and myrrh. The Septuagint version of Isaiah 60:6 has foreign dignitaries giving such gifts to the Messiah. The three gifts were not uncommon to be given to kings. In regard to Jesus being given them, it is interesting that frankincense was intricately involved in the priesthood; gold was particularly considered a gift for a king; and myrrh was considered for healing and anointing in death.

These wise men are more than likely the Chaldean Magi. These individuals were known as the greatest astronomers of the known world. Egyptian, Roman, Persian, and Greek astronomers, among others, went to their schools to learn. They rarely made such long trips with only a few of them present. For such important trips, a large group of them would travel together. And they

wise, Jesus could have transferred the responsibility to a younger brother.

¹⁰ It is possible that the wording could indicate that some would fall as in being crushed by their unbelief. But there would be others who would believe and thus would be resurrected to eternal life. The resurrection being representative of belief and life. The fall being representative of eternal damnation.

¹¹ Most commentators believe they returned to Bethlehem. They believe Luke simply does not record certain events.

would have had a large company of servants with them. Trains of one hundred camels would not be unusual.

It is apparent that these Magi knew of a prophecy which indicated that the Messiah would be born and that there would be astronomical indicators of such. While we cannot know for sure, it is possible and probable that Daniel gave the prophecy. When he was in Babylon, he became the chief of the astrologers and Chaldeans (Daniel 5:11). The Jews highly admired the Magi, partly because of Daniel's association and because the Magi did not worship idolatrous images of God.¹² Philo speaks very warmly of them.

There were some very interesting astrological events that occurred during the years 3 to 1 B.C. The planets, stars, and constellations had patterns, which rarely occur. Time will not permit us to go into all of these, but notice just a little of what **Roman** history records.

In June of 2 B.C. Jupiter and Venus came so close that they appeared as one giant star. They appeared in the Constellation Leo, "the Lion," the Royal Constellation. This Constellation was dominated by the Star Regulus, the King Star. The Romans saw this as demonstrating Roman rule and domination. Jupiter was considered the guardian and ruler of the Empire. Venus was believed to be the beloved mother of the family of Augustus. During a full moon a sheep was led along the Via Sacra and was sacrificed to Jupiter on June 17th, with the day named The Trust of Jupiter. Thirty three days later, Jupiter and Regulus came together. The King planet and the King Star together. The Romans saw this as heaven's approval of Augustus in Rome. In August, four planets aligned longitudinally very close together in the Constellation Leo—Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. Roman and other ancient astronomers looked at this as the sign of a new beginning in historical affairs. The Romans looked to Rome because of these astrological signs.¹³ The Magi instead headed for Jerusalem.

Whether the signs, which the Magi were follow-

¹² It is highly likely that Zoroastrianism is directly linked with these ancient Magi.

¹³ The Roman students of the Magi had probably over time morphed the interpretation of certain events to apply to the Roman Empire rather than the true interpretation. Some of this would have been due to the pressure of staying loyal to the Roman rulers.

ing, was a natural, but prophesied event, or whether it was a supernatural event, it was miraculous. Something had been foretold and it had come to pass. This author personally believe it was a combination of both.

Herod inquires (demands) of the chief priests and scribes as to where the Christ was to be born. Herod is completely convinced that the wise men are indeed looking for a real person. He is told the prophecy of Micah 5:2. Herod tells the wise men to go to Bethlehem and then come back and tell him where they find him. It is Herod's intention to kill the child. He certainly does not want a new king rising up against the Roman Empire.¹⁴

Before sending them on their way he finds out exactly when they first saw the star.

We know it was approximately two years before because later Herod kills all children two years and younger in the Bethlehem area.¹⁵ He does this when the wise men do not come back and tell him where they found Jesus. They went home a different way because God tells them not to return to Herod. The death of the children causes great grief and fulfills Jeremiah 31:15, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."

After the Magi visit Jesus, an angel of God tells Joseph to take his family into Egypt to save the child from Herod.¹⁶ When Herod has died, an an-

¹⁴ In 63 B.C., there had been prophetic dreams and astrologic signs suggesting a "king of the Romans" was to be born who would become the most powerful ruler ever in the Empire. It was ordered by the Roman Senate that all baby boys be killed. Augustus Caesar was born that year and saved from the infanticide. He grew to become the most powerful ruler the Empire had ever known. Gaius Octavius Thurinus, as he was originally named, was adopted by Julius Caesar in his will. Julius was his maternal great uncle. Herod was well aware of the history. He did not want a repeat. He was extremely jealous of his own position.

¹⁵ Bethlehem was a small town at this time. Estimates of the possible number of children of the ages zero to two years of age are between twenty and thirty. Small numbers do not decrease the intensity of the grief experienced in this small town.

¹⁶ It has been wondered how Joseph, Mary, and Jesus survived during the time they were in Egypt. They have even been called destitute refugees by some commentators. However, God providentially had taken care of the problem. The very valuable gifts they received from the Magi would easily have sustained them. Plus, Joseph was a carpenter. Even if funds from the gifts ran out, Joseph could have supported

gel tells Joseph he can return to Nazareth. Hosea 11:1 had foretold, “out of Egypt have I called my son.” We are told in Matthew 2:23 that the prophets had foretold that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. Indeed, he spent the rest of his life growing up in Nazareth until the time of his ministry.

The evidence presented thus far should dismiss any doubt that the birth of Jesus was a miraculous event. His forerunner, his presence in Mary’s womb, the place of his birth, the proclamations by numerous witnesses, his home, and more, all connected with the miraculous and with prophecy.

Names and Titles of the Very Young Jesus

Consider just a few of the names and titles used in reference to the child, Jesus. These give much more emphasis about who He is and why He came, than just an observation of a cute, sweet, little baby.

Jesus – In Matthew 1:25, Joseph called his name Jesus. Jesus means “Jehovah’s salvation.” In Isaiah 12:2, we read, “I will trust and not be afraid; for Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.” In Hebrew, the word ‘salvation’ is Yeshua, or Jesus. In Psalm 9:14, David said he would rejoice in God’s “salvation.” Again the word is Yeshua. In Luke 2:11, we read “unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior.”

Christ – This is the Greek equivalent of Messiah, which means “anointed.” In Luke 2:11, it is stated about the baby Jesus, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” It was prophesied in Psalm 45:7, “Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” He is also referenced in prophecy in Psalm 2:2 as the anointed.

King – The wise men wanted to know “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2) It was prophesied in Psalm 2:6 that God would set “my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” In Jeremiah 23:5, it is stated, “I will raise unto David ...a King who shall reign and prosper.”

Lord – This title denotes authority and dominion. “For unto you is born this day...Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). When Elisabeth saw Mary coming toward her she declared, “the mother of my Lord.” In Psalm 110:1 in reference to the com-

ing Christ, it is stated, “The Lord said unto my Lord.” Jesus reiterated his right to this title in John 13:13, “Ye call me Master and Lord...so I am.”

Immanuel – In Isaiah 7:14 it is stated that the virgin would conceive “...and shall call his name Immanuel.” This was fulfilled in Matthew 1:23 where we find out that the name means “God with us.”

Governor – This title means one who goes first, leads the way, and is chief in war. In Matthew 2:6 it is stated about Mary, “out of thee shall come a Governor.” This was fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:28, “He is governor among the nations” And Zechariah 9:7, “He shall be as a governor in Judah.”

Why is the miraculous birth so important?

1) If his birth is not by a virgin, then he is not God. His deity is called into question. Yet, even the demons confessed him as the Son of God in Matthew 8:29. Were they lying?

Why would the demons perpetuate that lie? It would serve them no purpose.

Paul declared him to be God who purchased the church with his blood in Acts 20:28.

Peter declared him the Son of the Living God in Matthew 16:16. If Paul and Peter are wrong, then their inspiration is called into question and thus all of their other teachings.

Jesus himself declares that he is the Son of God (John 18:37; Matthew 27:11). IF he is not, then he is a blasphemer and a liar. The Jews who accused him of such (John 10:30-33) would be right. Such a man certainly should not be followed in any way.

God, the Father, declared him to be his Son in Matthew 3:17 at his baptism. If he really is not, then God is a liar and cannot be counted worthy of speaking any truth.

2) His authority is impossible if he was not born of a virgin. IF he is not God, then he could not be tried as required and prophesied (Isaiah 28:16). Without being properly tried he could not be the author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9). Only the one born of a virgin was to be the one with authority (Isaiah 9:6-7).

3) His once-for-all resurrection would be impossible without the virgin birth. All other resurrected individuals died again (For example, Lazarus and the saints at Christ’s death). If no virgin

them with his work. The maximum amount of time that Jesus and his parents lived in Egypt is two years. Herod died in early 1 B.C.

birth, then no death and resurrection (Hebrews 2:14-15).

4) If no virgin birth, then no atonement is possible through his death. Hebrews 10:5 states, “A body thou hast prepared for me.... sacrifices and offerings thou wouldest not.” All the sacrifices of the O.T. pointed to his sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 9:18-22; 10:1-18). IF he is not God and the perfect Lamb, then he gives no atonement.

5) If there was no virgin birth, then there was no ascension and coronation. Daniel 7:9-14 tells us that the Son of Man (Christ) was brought to the throne and given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

6) His mediatorial work is impossible without the virgin birth. Hebrews 4:14-16 says he is a high priest who can be touched with our infirmities and was tempted in all ways as we are. We therefore can come boldly unto the throne of grace. But if he is not God, then he is not our mediator.

7) The 2nd Coming is impossible if he was not born of a virgin. John 16:28 quotes Jesus saying, “I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” Back in chapter 14 he stated in verses 1-3, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and

prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

We began by bringing our attention to “the fullness of time.” Indeed, the miraculous birth of Jesus came in the fullness of time. God through His providence brought all things to a zenith—everything physical and spiritual. The world was made ready for the coming of the Savior. Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus stated in Matthew 5:17, “Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” He stated in Luke 24:44 that all things written by Moses, the prophets, and in the Psalms about him must be fulfilled.

We preach Christ crucified. Without his miraculous birth, the crucifixion would mean absolutely nothing. But God did become flesh. And in the flesh, he died a horrible death so that we might have the hope of eternal life in Heaven. In Matthew 1:21 we read, “She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.”

Hopefully this lesson has helped to convince you that Jesus is the Son of God.

The steps of salvation are only possible because of Jesus being God. One has nothing to believe without the miraculous birth. There is nothing to repent of if Jesus was not God in the flesh. There is no confession if Jesus was not born of a virgin. And there is no reason to be baptized if Jesus was not the Messiah God, born of a virgin.

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The Persecution of Domitian:

J U S T H O W B A D W A S I T ?

Tom Baxley

For as long as I can remember I have heard preachers and Bible school teachers mention the terrible persecution that took place by order of the Emperor Domitian and how terrible and bloody it was. It was always said that it far overshadowed Nero's, since Nero's was confined to the city of Rome, while Domitian's was mandated across the whole empire. This must have been an incredibly terrible trauma if it was this bad; from the way that many have made it out, there must have been tens of thousands who were martyred during this reign of terror. Ray Summers notes about this persecution that Domitian "is the emperor who has gone down in history as the one who has bathed the empire of the blood of the Christians."¹ This is a most impressive statement to make, given the other persecutions that Christians endured from the likes of Diocletian and others. So just how bad was this persecution?

To begin answering this question, I first went to the literature of the Roman historians. Suetonius mentions the persecution of Christians by Nero almost in passing. He writes, "Punishments were inflicted on Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous superstition."² However, when dis-

cussing Domitian, Suetonius notes his cruelty several times,³ but strangely enough, never in connection to Christians or Christianity. There is mention of him having the Jewish taxed "with a peculiar lack of mercy," but, again, this is not directed to-

wards Christians or Christianity. Tacitus details the persecution that came upon Christians during Nero's reign. Many (including Tacitus) believed Nero was the one who ordered the fire (of A.D. 64), even in his day: "But all the human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiation of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace." Later he writes of

the punishments, "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."⁴ Once again, when it comes to the persecution of Domitian, which has been rumored to be as bad or worse, there is silence.



¹ Summers, Ray, *Worthy is the Lamb*, p. 83. Taken from Ogden-Jenkins Debate

² Suetonius, *Nero*, 16

³ Suetonius, *Domitian*, 10-12

⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44

Tacitus says nothing of an ordered persecution against Christians: not in Rome, Asia, or anywhere else in the empire.

Now this seems rather odd: why is there *no* record of this terrible persecution by the Romans of the time period, but plenty of record for one that was allegedly less significant?

What further perplexes me is the letter from Pliny to the Emperor Trajan. Trajan came to the throne of the Roman Empire about 2 years after Domitian's "reign of terror" came to a close. In this letter, Pliny, who was a Senator during Domitian's reign, confesses that he really doesn't know what to do with Christians, having never participated in their trials.⁵ There might be some explanation or reason as to why he never participated, but it seems rather odd that a government official has never experienced or participated in a trial of a Christian if it is the case that there was a massive, ordered persecution going on during his time as senator.

Having examined the Roman historians, I then turned to the Ante-Nicene collection. The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians is often dated to the end of the first century because of the "sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened to ourselves."⁶ It is assumed this is speaking of the Domitianic persecution. Hegissipus (110-180) notes that during Domitian's reign, some of the grandsons of Judas, half-brother of Jesus, were brought before Domitian because they were descended from David. They were questioned about their wealth and admitted to supporting themselves by their own labor, as evidenced by the corns on their hands. They were also questioned as to the Kingdom of Jesus, its timing and nature, and they confessed that it would be at the end of time. "Thereupon Domitian passed no condemnation upon them, but treated them with contempt, as too mean for notice, and let them go free. At the same time he issued a command, and put a stop to the persecution of the Church."⁷ Tertullian (145-220) notes Domitian as a persecutor,⁸ as does Lactantius (250-325),⁹ and the Martyrdom of Ignatius (?).¹⁰

The Acts of John (150-200) notes also that Domitian was a persecutor, but also claims John drank poison in the presence of Domitian and did not die, the same poison killed a criminal to test its lethality, then John raised the criminal from the dead, and before he was banished to Patmos he exorcised a demon from a slave-girl in Domitian's house.¹¹ Amongst these writings, some of which Eusebius will cite in his history, note that something happened to the church during the reign of Domitian, and that many see it as being at least on par with what Nero did. It is curious that one of the earliest writers who make specific mention of Domitian, Hegissipus, was born 14 years after the persecution was ended. Even if we take the martyrdom of Ignatius as being written in 107 or shortly thereafter, it is still 11 years after the persecution would have ended, and neither this work nor Hegissipus give any detail as to how bad this persecution was—they are little more than vague references (including, and especially, the line from Clement), which stand in sharp contrast to how a Roman non-believer described the persecution of Nero.

Finally I consulted biographies of the emperor, himself. Brian Jones, who wrote the first English biography of Domitian, is skeptical that he ever ordered a persecution against the Christians. He writes, "In Christian tradition, Domitian has often been portrayed as the second persecutor (after Nero) of the early church, and, despite the paucity of evidence, the tradition persists, a tradition that reached its full extent not on Domitian's death, but fifteen hundred years later, in the writings of Cardinal Caesar Baronius."¹² After discussing whether or not Flavius Clemens and Acilius Glabrio were Christians (and there others that Hegissipus named but Jones does not discuss) his final comment in the section on the Christians is worth noting, "Perhaps a few Christians were amongst those executed or banished during the 90s: that hardly constitutes a persecution."¹³

Similarly, Kevin Rhodes, who is now the director for the Brown Trail School of Preaching, published the same sentiment: there is no evidence that

⁵ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96

⁶ ANF, 1.5; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885-1887. 10 vols. Repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979.

⁷ ANF 8.763

⁸ ANF 3.22

⁹ ANF 7.302

¹⁰ ANF 1.129. Ignatius was martyred in 107, but it is unclear when the work was written.

¹¹ ANF 8.560-2

¹² Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 114.

¹³ Jones, 117.

Domitian ever ordered a persecution against Christians, empire-wide or otherwise. According to Rhodes, there is no evidence to substantiate the claim of Eusebius that Domitian was the second to promote persecution against Christians.¹⁴ Rhodes, whose work is more focused on the relationship between Domitian and Christianity, demonstrates that Domitian was, in fact, an unstable man who was desperate for validation and that he did much to invigorate the emperor cult. Thus, whatever persecution befell Christians during Domitian's reign, particularly in Asia, would have come at the hands of the locals, and it was likely an economic reaction to Christianity rather than a religious one, like what is found in Acts 19:23ff. "Therefore, while Domitian did not institute a policy of persecution or pressure against Christians directly, his own pursuit of imperial legitimacy led to this consequence in the province of Asia where conditions proved favorable for the enemies of Christians."¹⁵

After examining the Romans, the church fa-

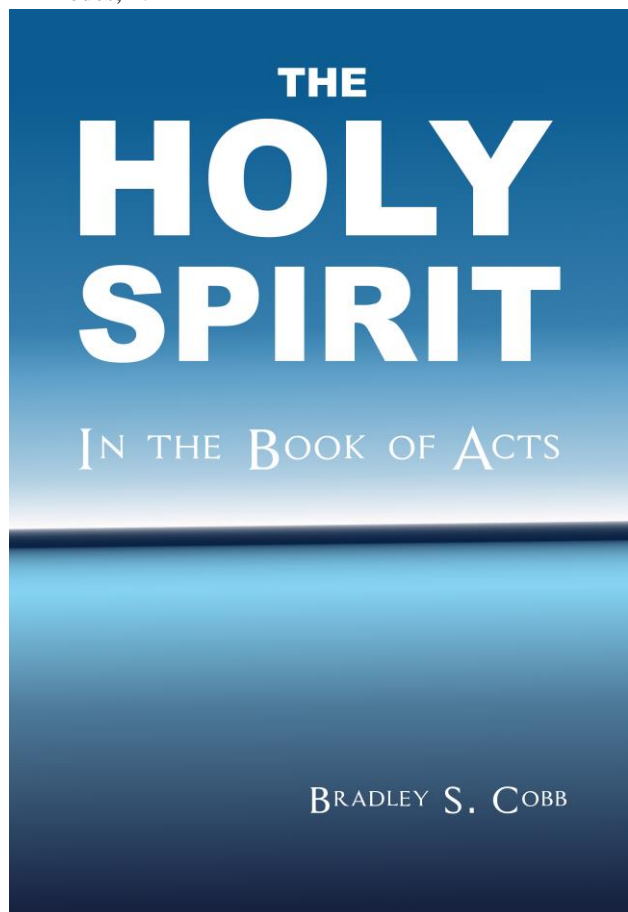
thers, and modern historians, what can be conclusively, and responsibly, said about just how bad Domitian's persecution was? Given the evidence that is available to us, we must concur with Arthur Ogden, that all really can be said is that a persecution MAY have taken place during the reign of Domitian, but we need to be responsible in how it is presented and take into account that at the present time there is no evidence to suggest that 1) it came from Domitian as a direct order; and 2) that many thousands were slain during this time and that the empire was bathed in the blood of Christians.¹⁶ During Domitian's two-year "reign of terror" it is very possible that people who were targeted by him were, in fact, Christians, but there is no evidence that they were targeted BECAUSE they were Christians. "What is prosecution to a Roman governor may be interpreted as persecution by a Christian."¹⁷ Let us always be careful to be honest with the evidence and to call things what they are.

¹⁴ Kevin Rhodes, *A Consequence of Legitimacy: Domitian's Conflict with the Senate and the Imperial Cult's Conflict with Christianity* (Celburne, TX: Hopkins, 2017), 185-186.

¹⁵ Rhodes, x.

¹⁶ Ogden-Jenkins debate

¹⁷ Rhodes, 16.



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Jerusalem

John Krivak

*How the faithful city has become a harlot,
She who was full of justice!
Righteousness once lodged in her,
But now murderers.
Isaiah 1:21, NASB*

Old Jebus and Shiloh are her antecedents. Geographically antecedent, David conquered old Jebus from the Jebusites (1 Chron. 11) and eventually, when Yahweh chose the place “*where I will cause My name to be remembered*” (Ex. 20:24), the name Jebus was changed to Jerusalem. David consolidated his rule over Judah and Israel and established his throne here. However, the theological antecedent for Jerusalem is Shiloh. The Ark of the Covenant would land here in the Promised Land (Joshua 18). Young Samuel got his start at Shiloh and old Eli met his end here. Wickedness among the priests (the sons of Eli) provoked God to give His own place over to the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). The uncircumcised enemies were even allowed to take the Ark of the Covenant! The Ark would find Jerusalem as its next location inside the Holy of Holies within the Temple that Solomon would build. Jerusalem would have done well to learn the lesson of

Shiloh for, as everyone knows, history will repeat.

By 586 BC, the wickedness repeated and so did the sacking of God’s Holy Place—this time by Babylon. Jerusalem was conquered and would still be under the shame of pagan authority six centuries later while Jesus walked the earth. Just like Shiloh, Yahweh stood by and let the enemies of His people dominate them. The Davidic dynasty endured for four centuries, but now was brought down to the dust. The Ark would never be seen again. Jerusalem had become the new Shiloh (Jer. 7:12-15; 26:1-9). Would there be yet another Shiloh cycle in history?

The Eschatological or Olivet Discourse

Be careful. It is easy to misread the “eschatological discourse” of Matthew 24 (and parallels, Mark 13 and Luke 21). We tend to get things wrong because we are historically so far downstream from Jesus that we tend to look for fulfillment of His words *in our future*. Try instead to listen from an early first-century perspective, as did those who heard the Lord speak on the mount called Olivet. This is more easily done in Chapter 23, where eve-

ry other line is addressed to “*scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites*”—throwbacks to earlier days. They are hailed by Jesus with “*Alas!*” or “*Woe!*” The word may express sorrowful lament or angry warning. This emotive expression points to coming judgment with condemnation, so Jesus probably expresses both warning and sorrow, both lament and anger. He may well have spoken the bitter words through tears, hoping against hope that what is inevitable might not have to be. What ends this chapter and writes the foreword for Chapter 24 is this:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, “BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!”

Then Jesus leaves Jerusalem’s Temple and declares its future fall: “*Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down*” (24:2). Three questions¹ from the disciples follow this up:

- **When will this happen?**
- **What will be the signs forewarning Your coming** (in destructive judgment that destroys our Temple)? Careful! We tend to read every mention of Jesus’ “coming” (Greek *parousia*) as reference to the Second Coming—the return of Jesus that ends time and history, triggering the Final Judgment of all humanity. The question asked here is not about that; it is about the near-future destruction of Jerusalem. When that has actually transpired, it will evidence that Jesus had “come” as He had said.

¹ Only two of these questions appear in the parallels of Mk. 13:4 and Luke 21:7. They ask of the timing of the events of 70 AD and of the preceding signs that will give warning. Yet only Mark (13:32) and Matthew (24:36) will shift, by way of contrast, to the Second Coming (but see Luke 21:34-36)—the timing of which is unknown even to Jesus and is frighteningly without signs of warning. All three Synoptic Gospels follow-up with admonitions and parables (especially Matthew) stressing the demand for watchfulness.

- **What will be the signs of “the end of the age”?** This question actually does relate to the Second Coming when Jesus returns for universal judgment and to gather His people to himself.

The first two questions concern Jerusalem and concern events that, by now, have already taken place. This is the “preterist” view and it suggests *that everything Jesus says through v. 34 has already been fulfilled!* The generation hearing Jesus speak would still be alive when His words came true (see v. 34). That means we should not be looking to the future for fulfillment. And therefore, anything previous to v. 34 that “sounds like” the Second Coming is not about that! That end-of-time event enters discussion only in vs. 36ff. Note the contrast: one could see the destruction of Jerusalem coming by tell-tale warning signs, but the arrival of the Second Coming came with no more advance signs than a “thief in the night.” Even Jesus couldn’t predict that!

The historical fulfillment—when Roman armies (four legions) under command of then General Titus (son of Vespasian, who would succeed him as Emperor of Rome) surround Jerusalem in a siege—was too horrible for us to even imagine. Josephus, who was of Jewish-priestly descent and was employed by Rome as journalist and historian, was an eyewitness who captured a riveting account in his work, *The Wars of the Jews* (you should read it). 66 AD, leading up to and culminating in 70 AD were bloody years. The earlier words of warning by Jesus, along with the ancient prophets, became heavy with fulfillment. Warring factions of the Jews had destroyed each other’s storehouses of food even before the Romans arrived, and widespread starvation cruelly afflicted the whole population even before blood flowed in rivers. Women, children, and the elderly were not spared. In gruesome fulfillment of the curse set forth in Deut. 28:53-55, Josephus (*Wars* 6.3.4) describes a starving mother roasting and eating her son. The whole city was set to flame and heaps of corpses filled the streets during six months of the worst suffering ever in human experience. Those who managed to survive were set to slavery or were sent to Rome to be paraded in shame and defeat while Rome celebrated complete victory. Titus carted off huge quantities of gold and, as flames engulfed the Temple, the Roman victor entered the Holy of Ho-

lies².

The huge scope of human suffering qualifies the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD as the “Great Tribulation” (Matt. 24:21)³. However, even more horrendous is the significance and meaning of the event: this was the end of Judaism⁴! The covenant (through Moses) binding Israel to God had been broken. God judged His people and, now, utter loss of all previous privilege and blessing could be evaded only by the New Covenant with Israel’s Messiah, Jesus. Jerusalem had again become Shiloh.

Jerusalem and Revelation

We have been looking at the Olivet Discourse in Matthew, Mark, and Luke; what about John? He was the author of the Fourth Gospel, which differs significantly in style and form from the others. He also wrote Revelation, and it looks like that mystery-laden writing contains another treatment of the approaching 70 AD judgment-destruction of Jerusalem. If so, Revelation is John’s “Olivet Discourse”!⁵

What evidence leads in this direction? First, Revelation 1:7 is taken to be the statement of that book’s theme⁶: ***“BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE***

*Before Roman
persecution begins, anti-
Christian hostility comes
nearly always from
Judaism (represented by
Jerusalem)*

² Roman historian Tacitus reports that Roman general Pompey besieged Jerusalem in 63 BC and that he also entered the Temple, possibly the Holy of Holies. Emperor Caligula was scarcely prevented from having his statue erected on Temple grounds in 40 AD.

³ The 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem is also called the “Great Tribulation” in Revelation 2:22 and 7:14.

⁴ The Rabbinic or Tannaitic Judaism (that emerged to produce *The Mishnah* and which strove to carry on without a Jerusalem Temple) was but a scholastic and intellectual substitute that simply refused to admit defeat. With the Old Covenant broken, with Temple destroyed and priesthood ended, Judaism had lost connection with God.

⁵ Revelation may have been written, by the apostle John, even before the Gospel. The argument that the Greek in the Apocalypse is more primitive convinces some, but not all. A better argument is that John’s Gospel omits the Olivet Discourse because he had written of it already in Revelation. This makes better sense than supposing the reverse order of writing, with no mention of the Discourse in the Gospel at all.

⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, 3rd ed., (Fountain Inn, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 1998), p. 121-132 and *Perilous Times: A*

CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him....” (NASB). This passage has the same combination of Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10 that we find in the Olivet Discourse: ***“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory”*** (Matt. 24:30). That is telling.

Second, both set forth the same time constraints.

While Revelation envisions a “coming” of Jesus to be seen by “those who pierced Him,” Jesus declared on Olivet: ***“...this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”*** (Matt. 24:34). Both passages see fulfillment in the generation that heard Him speak and had Him crucified.

Third, both passages warn readers of coming tribulation (Matthew 24:9, 21, 29; Revelation 1:9; 2:10, 22; 7:14). In each case, the warning fits the 70 AD destruction⁷ of Jerusalem.

Fourth, the agent of this coming tribulation is the ***“ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION”*** in Matthew (24:15) and is ***the beast(s)***⁸ in Revelation (chapters 13-19). The “abomination of desolation” (from Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) begins as an historical reference to ***Antiochus IV Epiphanes***, an evil pagan ruler who touched off the Maccabean Revolt when he desecrated the Jerusalem temple by sacrificing a sow-pig on the sacred altar in 167 BC. Daniel, like Jesus, uses the “abomination” as reference to a future ruler who will likewise desecrate the temple. The beast of Revelation likewise stands for Roman kings that persecute God’s people. One of them, Titus, will be the new “abomination” and

Study in Eschatological Evil (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999), p. 135-138.

⁷ This interpretation requires dating the book of Revelation to pre-70 AD, which is quite possible. See Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. The majority date the writing at 95 AD.

⁸ The red/scarlet serpent or dragon, which is Satan, causes two beasts to appear, one on land (13:1ff.) and another on sea (13:11ff.). The beast(s) represent Rome and the Emperors (17:10), especially those who persecute and ***“make war with the saints”*** (13:7).

he will be the “beast.” The beast kills Christians and also has sights on another enemy: the harlot who rides the beast (Rev. 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2).

A fifth reason for equating Olivet with Revelation is the “harlot.” I believe the harlot is Jerusalem for several reasons. First, she cannot be equated with Rome⁹ because that is the identity of the beast on which she sits. Further, the beast (Rome) attacks the harlot (17:16)—so, if she is also Rome, then it’s Rome against itself. Second, she wears purple and scarlet. While these may be the colors of the Roman emperor’s robe, they also are (with blue) the oft-repeated colors of Tabernacle curtains and of the official dress of the priests and high priest (Ex. 28:5-8). Third, while the beast wars against God/the Lamb and His saints, and wars also against the harlot, she aligns herself with the beast against the saints (17:6, 17). So, Rome opposes Christianity and Judaism. And Judaism, siding with Rome, persecutes Christians! *Before Roman persecution begins, anti-Christian hostility comes nearly always from Judaism (represented by Jerusalem)*. She aligns with Rome to crucify Jesus and to persecute Christians, yet Rome will visit her with destruction. Fourth, she is identified with “the great city” (17:18; 18:16-19). In 11:8, that city symbolically is called Sodom (immorality) and Egypt (slavery)—“**where also their Lord was crucified**”! That clinches it, right? And later, she is called Babylon, Babylon the great—it was Babylon that first razed Jerusalem! The wicked city falls by God’s judgment; and God’s bloodied and persecuted Christians celebrate (18:20; 19:1-6). Finally, calling Jerusalem (representing Old Covenant Judaism) a harlot is nothing new (Isaiah 1:21). From OT times, harlotry and sexual promiscuity are metaphors for idolatry and spiritual unfaithfulness. Both Israel and Judah are guilty with historical regularity. Clearly the harlot of Revelation is Jerusalem (i.e. Old-Covenant, Messiah-rejecting, Christian-persecuting Judaism as she existed in the days before 70 AD). This makes her, the harlot, the identical target for condemnation both for Jesus on Olivet and for John the Revelator. The theme of

both the Olivet Discourse¹⁰ and Revelation is the same: the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem.

Are You Surprised?

I am guessing that at least some readers were already aware that Matthew 24 is largely about Jerusalem. But I would also guess that more than a few would say, “*I have always thought Jesus was talking about the Second Coming!*” It’s an easy passage to misread.¹¹ Probably even fewer of us recognized Revelation’s harlot as Jerusalem. That is also a tough passage to interpret. The importance and significance of Jerusalem is easily overlooked and forgotten by modern readers.

Now, there is yet one more passage that is all about Jerusalem, and yet it is likely that not a single person among us has made that connection! I will close with a promise to reveal that passage in a future sequel to this article.¹²

¹⁰ Interestingly, to underscore its relation to Revelation, some refer to the Eschatological or Olivet Discourse as the “little Apocalypse”!

¹¹ As an aside, I recall late British Baptist scholar G.R. Beasley-Murray declaring that he undertook a detailed study of Mark 13 because he was tired of commentators “playing ducks and drakes” with the passage! Thus he wrote *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* and also is famous as author of *Baptism in the New Testament*. Here is a Baptist who believes in water-baptism for the remission of sins!

¹² [Editor’s note: Having skimmed briefly over the next article in this series, I can assure you that you will be intrigued, challenged, and surprised by the passage our beloved brother John references.]

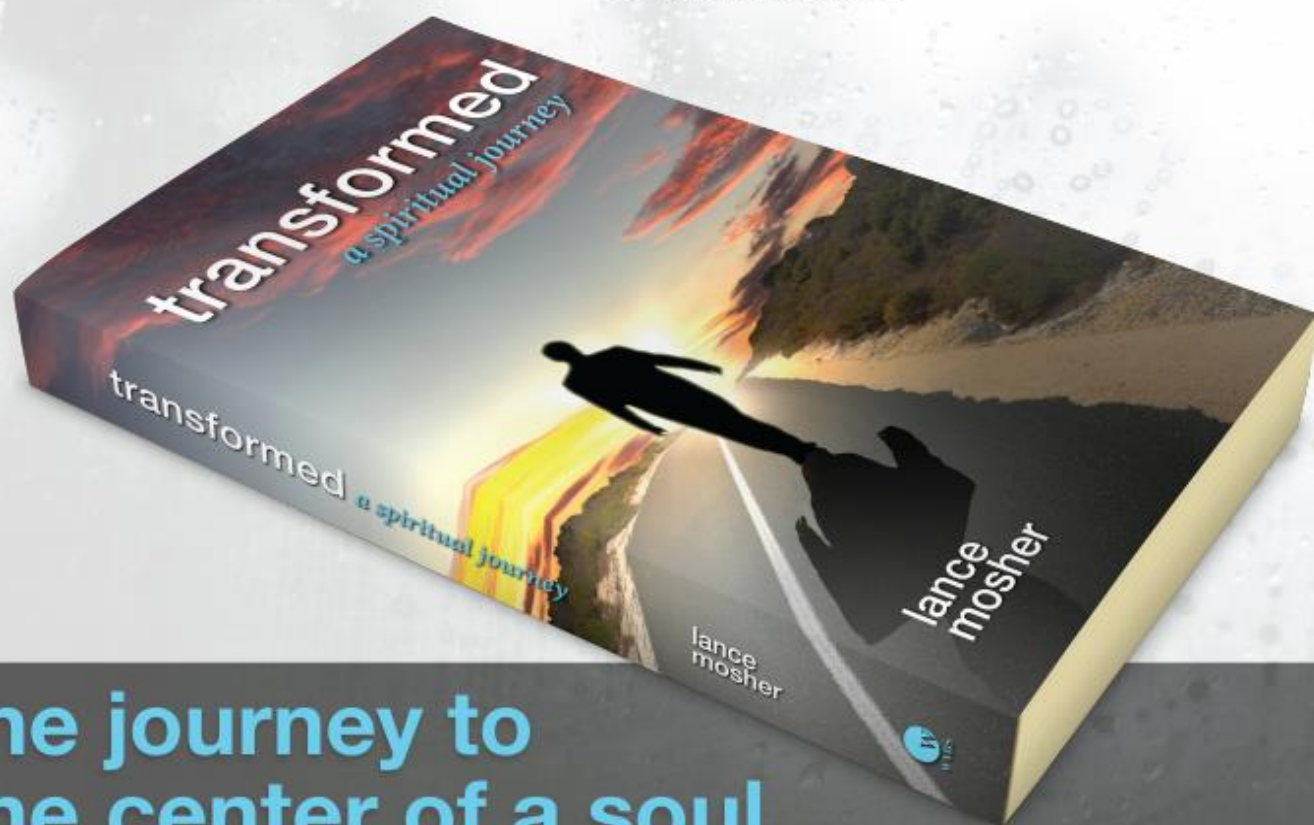
⁹ Although it is easy to understand the temptation to identify the harlot with Roman Catholicism when the battle raged with early Protestantism (early 16th century), that breaks the bounds of expectation, clearly and often established by the author of Revelation. Indications are that everything written expected quick fulfillment (1:1, 3, 7; 22:10, 12, 20).



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INTRODUCING JESUS:

FROM THE GOSPELS BACK TO GENESIS

Perry Hall

The Bible is like peeling the layers of an onion. Yes, both can make you cry, but that is not the point. The point is, there is much more to both than just the surface. Concerning the Bible, if we see only the surface, it is still the most amazing book anyone has ever read. If we go deeper, we begin noticing how 66 books are really one; consequently, we become even more astonished, maybe even shocked. What we see is one character throughout. Personally, when I see how 40 writers separated by 1500-plus years, often writing beyond their knowledge of one character, I'm more convinced we have received something superior to any human mind. That is because the divine oracles are from a divine mind beyond human comprehension. To use colloquial language, the Holy Spirit is a literary genius!

In this exercise, we are going to think backwards. Instead of showing how the Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Jesus through prophecies; we are focusing on how the four biographies look backwards to Genesis 1-2. This isn't so much "type/antitype"; as it is a nod and wink saying, "God keeps telling the same stories, just

changing the characters." What we will notice is the writers of the inspired gospels, both openly and discreetly, keep calling us back to the foundation chapters of Genesis 1-2. Whether in words or word pictures, it is only right that the gospels echo Old Creation; that's because they are introducing New Creation.

Let's peel back the pages of the Bible and see how Jesus was in the beginning, and how each gospel writer relates, through different methods, Jesus' pre-incarnate power and humble birth.

MATTHEW AND GENESIS

Matthew is the most "Jewish" of the four gospels. There is a remarkable connection between the first 5 chapters and the Torah, which is the first 5 books of the Bible. But first, chapter divisions are not part of the inspired text. A man named Stephen Langton divided the Bible into chapters in the year A.D. 1227. Langton was a professor at the University of Paris and later he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. I don't know if Mr. Langton saw this pattern, and "chapterized" Matthew accordingly; but whether the chapter division is coincidence or

providence, there is an amazing connection.

Matthew 1 – Genesis

- *Matthew 1:1 – “The book (Gr - biblos) of the genealogy (Gr - genesis) of Jesus Christ....*
- *Genesis 2:4 – “These are the generations [lit., These are the generations; LXX biblos] of the heavens and the earth”*

Point - The same God responsible for the generation of the heavens, earth, and man is also responsible for the generation of Jesus.

- *Matthew 1:2-16 – Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus.*
- *Genesis 5 (and more): The rest of Genesis is filled with many genealogies of these same people and even more.*

- *Matthew 1:23 – “God is with us”: This is about God incarnate. Jesus is “the exact expression (or imprint, representation, copy, reproduction) of His nature” (Heb.1:3). The ASV phrases it this way: “the very image of His substance.”*
- *Genesis 1:26 – “Let us make man in our image”. Looking at this from an ANE (Ancient Near East) perspective, this means man is God’s representation on earth.*

- *Matthew 1:20 – “what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit”*
- *Genesis 2:7 – “Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.”*

Matthew 2 – Exodus

- *Matthew 2 records “The Massacre of the Innocents”. This time the royal order came from a king of the Jews after the magi visited Jesus sometime after His birth: Matthew 2:16 [HCSB] “Then Herod, when he saw that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the male children in and around Bethlehem who were*

two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men.

- *Exodus 1 records the horrific command of the Pharaoh given to the Egyptians: “You must throw every son born to the Hebrews into the Nile” (Ex.1:22)*

While thinking on this, did you notice two more parallels? 1) As Moses was rescued to become a deliver, so Jesus was saved so that He could save. 2) Moses was placed in a rather unusual baby carriage – a reed basket. Jesus’ first baby crib was a food trough for animals.

Both commands concerned only “baby” boys being murdered.

Both Pharaoh and Herod were afraid of losing their throne.

- *Matthew 2 records an ironic twist. After Jesus’ birth, and due to the upcoming murderous rage, the parents of Jesus take Him to escape down to Egypt to save His life (2:13-14).*
- *Exodus begins with the children of Israel in Egypt.*

- *Jesus leaves Egypt to return to the Promised Land. All this was done to fulfill prophecy: “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Mt.2:15; Hosea 11:1).*
- *Exodus is so-named because the Israelites exit from Egypt beginning their journey to the Promised Land.*

Matthew 3 – Leviticus

- *Jesus’s Ministry;*
- *Priesthood’s ministry.*

- *There is another connection. Jesus was “about 30 years old” when baptized (Luke 3:23). According to Numbers 4:3, priests and Levites began serving at age 30.*
- *While much of this is also in Exodus, the very name “Leviticus” refers to the tribe of Levi from whence the priests came.*

Matthew 4 – Numbers:

- *Jesus in the Wilderness to be tempted, where He succeeds.*
- *Israel in the Wilderness where they are tempted and fail.*

Matthew 5-7 – Deuteronomy:

- *What is the Sermon on the Mount? Many things, but one thing is Jesus is clarifying what the law really was about. There are two contrasting phrases: “You have heard” and “But I say to you.”*
- *What is Deuteronomy? Linguistically the name means “second law” because Moses is going over the laws earlier given. But notice Deuteronomy 1:5 – “Moses began to explain this law”. To “explain” means, “to make distinct or plain.” That is what Jesus did too.*

Isn't this an ingenious way to teach the story of Jesus to Jews? The first 5 chapters are the Torah incarnated in Jesus.

MARK AND GENESIS

Mark is unique in this way: it is the ADD version of the gospel accounts! Everything is “immediately,” and Mark is action-packed like a Summer blockbuster movie!

Both begin with “beginning.” When the Holy Spirit inspired Mark, the beginning is immediately connected to Genesis (as is Matthew and John).

- *Mark 1:1 [HCSB] The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*
- *Gen 1:1 [HCSB] In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

Both Mark and Genesis are attacks on the religious and political status quo. Remember that both Pharaoh and Caesar considered themselves gods.

- *Mark – Who is the greater God-King?*
- *Genesis – Who is the greater god-King?*

Both begin describing God as a “plural singularity”:

- *Mark 1:1 – “Jesus Christ, the Son of God”*
- *Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God” (plural of el - elohim)*

“The beginning of the’ ...there is an ancient Roman inscription from about the same time as Jesus and Mark. It starts: ‘The beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus.’ It’s the story of the birth and coronation of the Roman emperor” (Timothy Keller, King’s Cross, pp.14-15).

Both begin with preparations for later work:

- *John the Baptist is about preparation for Jesus who will organize the kingdom: Mark 1:2 [HCSB] As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way. (3) A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!*
- *Days 1-3 are preparation and days 3-6 are organization: Genesis 1:2 [HCSB] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*
- *The later work in Mark has Jesus taking control of His enemies' territory. Genesis doesn't have an enemy in chapter 1, but it does have God taking control of the formless and empty world, shaping it for life to come.*

Both begin with water and Spirit:

- *Mark 1:8 [HCSB] I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*
- *Genesis 1:2 [HCSB] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

Mark presents his own unique take on Jesus in both Genesis and in the flesh.

LUKE AND GENESIS

Luke's connection to Genesis 1-2 is not in words, but in pictures and symbolism. In the story of Christ's birth (Luke 1-2) we have:

- *Luke 1:35 - The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary.*
- *Luke 2:8 - Darkness because the shepherds are out at night.*

- Luke 2:8 - Animals being taken care of because of the shepherds; plus another animal scene where the birth takes place in a place wherein Jesus is laid in a feeding trough (i.e. manger).
- Luke 2:9 - Light breaking the darkness because “the glory of the Lord shone around them” as angels announce the birth of Christ.
- Luke 1-2 - Jesus' life beginning miraculously because a virgin conceives and gives birth.

Looking at this again as shown above, does this remind you of another story? (Genesis 1)

- Genesis 1:2 - The Spirit of God hovers over the surface of the deep.
- Genesis 1:2 - "Now the earth was formless and empty and darkness covered the surface."
- Genesis 1:28 - Then God said, "Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and everything that crawls in it." And Adam names all the animals.
- Genesis 1:3 - Then God said "Let there be light." And there was light.
- Genesis 1:26 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our likeness and in our image"...and God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils and he became a living being.

The similarities between original creation (Genesis 1-2) and the birth of Jesus may be just a coincidence. Those do happen even within God's holy oracles. Yet consider this: The birth of Jesus is the beginning of New Creation's story. Plus, although Old Creation and New Creation are very Pauline concepts, why wouldn't Paul's friend and traveling companion share those thoughts as well?

Let's look again at the last comparison, creation of man from Genesis 2, and Mary's conception of birth of Jesus.

- *In Luke we have: God, Spirit (can be translated breath) plus Mary (dust to dust) equals the second Adam.*
- *In Genesis 2 we have: God, breath, plus dust/dirt equals the first Adam.*

While it might be a stretch to parallel dirt and Mary, please consider this parallel: Both bring life only when there is seed. But this time both produce life without “seed.” What is not a stretch is both “births” are miraculous and performed by God on-

ly once.

- Maybe that is one explanation for why God created Eve from Adam, and not from the dirt (like the theory of Lilith's creation).
- As woman came from the 1st Adam, so the 2nd Adam came from a woman.
- And again, as “For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, and all things come from God” (1 Corinthians 11:12).

As mentioned above, in the creation of Adam and Jesus' bodies there is something missing—seed. Why the virgin birth? There are so many reasons, such as illustrating grace and resurrection. But just as important is that the virgin birth is about accomplishing what only God can—creation.

JOHN AND GENESIS

Of the four biographies, John's is recognized the most easily as comparable to Genesis:

1. Both begin with “In the beginning” (John 1:1; Genesis 1:1)
2. Both present God as a plural singularity:
 - *John 1:1 - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*
 - *Genesis 1:1 - “In the beginning God” (plural of El – Elohim)*
 - *Genesis 1:26 – “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’”*

This makes for bad grammar, but beautiful yet mysterious theology. Notice how the language deals straightforwardly with the reality that God is singular yet plural without analogy, metaphor, or trying to explain:

Genesis 1:26-27: Then God/elohim (plural) said, “Let us (plural) make man (singular) in our (plural) image (singular), according to our (plural) likeness (singular). They (plural) will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” So God (plural) created man (singular) in his (singular) own (singular) image (singular); He (singular) created him

(singular) in the image of God (plural); He (singular) created them (plural) male (singular) and female (singular).

I hope adding the plural and singular notations did not make the reading distracting; but instead made it even more apparent and awe inspiring. Following the inspired lead, I'm not going to make analogies or explanations. Such either diminishes God, falsifies His reality, or creates a more complicated explanation than given in inspiration. Such is hilariously exhibited in "St. Patrick's Bad Analogies" (<https://youtu.be/KQLfgaUoQCw>).

God is beyond our experiences and realm. How comprehensible would your explanation of electricity be to a pilgrim? And that's simple compared to defining God! Humanity cannot even grasp the eternity in which God exists, let alone the God of eternity! As Jesus said, "When you see me you've seen the Father" (John 14:9); so when we see Genesis 1:26-27, we see a glimpse of the reality of God as a plural singularity.

3. Both are about creation of all things:

- *John 1:2-3 – "He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him.*
- *Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*

4. Both emphasize God being "verbal":

- *John 1:1 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
- *Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29 – All these verses are God speaking.*

5. Both associate life with God:

- *John 1:4 – "Life was in Him, and that was was..." (The Greek word for life/zoe) occurs 32 times in John, which is 25% of NT uses.*
- *Genesis 1:11-13 is the beginning of life on planet earth: "Then God said, 'Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And it was so.... Evening came and then morning: the third*

day." (Hmmm, life begins on the 3rd day by emerging from the ground. Jesus came to life again on the third day emerging from a ground cave).

6. Both associate light with God:

- *John 1:4 – "Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men" (the word light/phos appears five times just in John 1, describing Jesus). For those science and word geeks, we get our word photon from phos, meaning "a particle representing a quantum of light or other electromagnetic radiation. A photon carries energy proportional to the radiation frequency but has zero rest mass." Sounds somewhat like Jesus. Jesus, light, and photons all energize despite having "zero rest mass." Since we have already discussed life on planet earth, here's another science connection. Our word photosynthesis is likewise derived from phos. It does the same thing Jesus does and what happened when God said: "The process in green plants and certain other organisms by which carbohydrates are synthesized from carbon dioxide and a source of hydrogen (usually water), using light as an energy source. Most forms of photosynthesis release oxygen as a byproduct."*
- *Genesis 1:4 – "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."*

7. Both speak of darkness:

- *John 1:5 – "That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it."*
- *Genesis 1:5 – God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and called the darkness "night". Evening came and then morning: the first day."*

John's gospel, unlike Matthew and Luke, does not contain a birth story of Jesus because John's gospel is taking us back into the past and up into heaven. Jesus is the Creator.

The four gospel accounts are not the only places where we can peel back the layers, and the pages, and find Jesus. When it comes to holy writ, Jesus is literarily omnipresent.

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY GREAT MEN, BUT NONE GREATER THAN JESUS

Gerald Cowan

INTRODUCTION:

Mark 8: 27-38, John 4:12, Mt. 12:41-42

I remember boxer Cassius Clay, also known as Mohammed Ali, claiming, "I'm the greatest." I also remember when John Lennon said of the Beatles, rock music group, "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus Christ now." Both were wrong, and so also a host of other would-be-greats.

More has been written and spoken about Jesus of Nazareth than about any other person. No one has had a greater impact than Jesus upon the world of his own time and all subsequent time. We are willing to say that of all the great men who ever lived or who are now alive, none is greater than Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews, the Christ of the Christians. Compare him with any other man, by nearly any standard you choose, and all others will fall short. We would not minimize the accomplishments of great men, but we do need to see that Jesus excels and exceeds them all, and how he does it. I will give you six things, make it seven, in which Jesus is the greatest.

THERE HAVE BEEN GREAT PHILOSOPHERS BUT THEY DO NOT COMPARE WITH JESUS.

Outstanding philosophers have been produced in all ages, in all great civilizations. Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, reduced the logic of thought and argument to a scientific process and formulated the basic rules of deductive reasoning (from general principles/laws to specific examples). The whole world is indebted to him for the improvements he made in the way humans communicate with each other. Sir Francis Bacon, of England, did a similar service for scientific investigation by formulating the principles of inductive reasoning (from specifics to generalities).

But *man never comes to know God through human philosophy and wisdom* - that is, through the exercise of his own mind. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Jesus revealed God and His will to us, something

human philosophers could not do. Jesus himself was *the express image of God*, morally speaking (Hebrews 1:3). He could say, "*When you have seen me you have seen the Father*" (John 14:9). He could also say that the words he spoke were spirit and life (John 6:63), and yet they were not his own words. They were "*the words of Him who sent me*" (John 7:16), given to Him by God. So, "When you have heard me, you have heard the Father."

THERE HAVE BEEN GREAT POLITICAL LEADERS AND RULERS.

BUT NONE GREATER THAN JESUS.

Alexander of Macedon, commonly called Alexander the Great, conquered much of the world of his time and did much to benefit those he conquered and ruled. But he could not conquer and control himself, and within a few years of his death his kingdom was divided among petty selfseeking generals, and soon fell to its enemies.

Caesar and the Roman emperors who followed him conquered the world too, and made about half the world's population slaves to Rome. For that, most of the world understandably hated both Caesar and Rome. The Roman empire fell too, and for 1500 years Italy has not been able to regain its former glory as a world power.

Napoleon, whether genius or madman, could not hold his empire together. The same can be said about Hitler, and perhaps a few others. Greece, Germany, France and Italy are prominent nations, but their greatest glory is far behind them.

We could list other great world powers - some nineteen or twenty in all, including Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. But the answer will be the same for all: they rise and flourish for a while, but in time their glory fades and they fall - they give way to others.

But Jesus established a different kind of kingdom. He said, "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36). It is a spiritual rather than political kingdom - so that one can be a citizen of any earthly kingdom or nation and still be a citizen of the

Lord's heavenly kingdom (Romans 13:1-4, Philip-
 pians 3:20-21, 1 Peter 2:9-14, and Revelation 5:9-
 10). Jesus did not come to enslave mankind, but
 rather to set men free - free from spiritual darkness
 and ignorance, free from sin and shame, and free to
 serve God (John 8:32 and 36, Luke 4:16). Jesus
 came to be the servant of all mankind, and give his
 life so that the lives of all could be improved (Mat-
 thew 20:28). The world has much for which to
 thank him. He came not to bring death but life - a
 more abundant spiritual life - to all who would re-
 ceive him (John 3:16, 10:10, and 1:11-12).

The kingdom that Jesus established more than
 nineteen centuries ago still exists, and will exist
 forever, on earth until earth ends, and then eternal-
 ly in heaven. Enemies have been dedicated to its
 destruction, but it lives on. Sometimes in places
 and among people one might think least likely to
 accept it - savage primitive tribes, sophisticated
 and materialistic people, even communistic and
 atheistic people - it springs up and flourishes.
 Some 500 years before Jesus the prophet Daniel
 said that when the kingdom was established it
 would be everlasting; there would never be an end
 of it (Daniel 2:44). We see that as true today, and
 we expect it to be true as long as the world stands.

**GREAT SCIENTISTS HAVE APPEARED,
 BUT NONE GREATER THAN JESUS.**

Many have helped us to understand the universe
 - the relationship of the sun, moon, and planets of
 our solar system in particular. Copernicus and Gal-
 ileo are names that should be known to every high
 school student. More than many others, they
 helped us to understand the true position and rela-
 tionship of our solar system to the universe.

But Jesus is greater than they, because the Son
 of God in him created all these things and set them
 in order, and he himself maintains their orderly
 operation (John 1:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians
 1:16-17). That makes Jesus greater than Benjamin
 Franklin, Isaac Newton, Thomas Edison, Albert
 Einstein and a host of others who taught us to uti-
 lize dependable "natural laws" in order to harness
 electricity, atomic energy, etc. Einstein was a geni-
 us in mathematics. But he could not count the
 number of separate items in the world. God in Je-
 sus knows the number of hairs on every head, and
 everything else. God in Jesus initiated the laws of
 nature and he keeps them operating in a dependa-
 ble and predictable universe.

Another group of scientists has shown us a great
 deal about life and living things. But Jesus *is* life.
In him was life, and the life was the light of men
 (John 1:4). He is the Lord in whom *we live and*
move and have our being...he gives life and breath
to all men (Acts 17:25, 28).

Sigmund Freud and others like him in psychol-
 ogy and psychiatry have helped to explain the
 workings of the human mind. But Jesus doesn't
 need to be told what is in man's mind. He knows
 (John 2:25). Before him all things are *naked and*
open, everything is laid bare. He reads our minds
 as easily as we might read a book (Hebrews 4:12-
 13). As the wise man said, *of the making of books*
there is no end (Eccl. 12:12). That leads us to the
 next group.

**MANY GREAT POETS, PLAYWRIGHTS,
 AUTHORS, AND TEACHERS HAVE
 APPEARED, BUT THEIR WORDS DO
 NOT EQUAL THE WORDS OF JESUS.**

William Shakespeare set a standard for litera-
 ture that has never been surpassed. But even
 Shakespeare's words will someday be forgotten.
 The "bard of Avon" is not immortal. Sir Winston
 Churchill wrote an excellent **History of the Eng-
 lish Speaking People**, but it is already badly out-
 dated. It will have to be re-written. Milton, Shelley,
 Browning, Burns, Keats, Gray, and Dylan Thomas
 of Great Britain, Schiller and Goethe in Germany,
 Emerson, Tennyson, Whitman and Sandburg in our
 own country - these are just names to most people
 of the present generation. Their poetry is not on the
 lips or in the hearts of people in this generation.

But of the words which Jesus spoke it can still
 be said, "*No man ever spoke like this one*" (Mat-
 thew 7:28). His words are still being repeated, and
 they will endure even when the world itself has
 passed away (Matthew 24:35). No one else has ev-
 er had the impact that Jesus has exerted in his
 words and life. He did not simply reflect life as it
 was being lived, making some few cautious modi-
 fications or recommendations. He told us how life
 ought to be lived. No one else can ever say, "*The*
words I speak are spirit and life" (John 6:63), or
 "*The words which I have spoken will judge you in*
the last day" John 12:48).

**MANY GREAT HUMANITARIANS
HAVE APPEARED, BUT NONE
GREATER THAN JESUS.**

Abraham Lincoln will be remembered in human history as the man who freed the slaves in the United States. I have seen a great statue of Lincoln in Parliament Square, in London, England. But Abraham Lincoln, as great as his accomplishments were, could not tell men how to live in peace with each other, and could not persuade them to do it. Racism existed before Lincoln. It still exists and exerts tremendous pressure in America and in most nations of the world. Prejudice and inhumane treatment of each other because of such flimsy external excuses as race, color, nationality, etc. are common and cannot be removed by legislation.

Jesus provides the ultimate answer to the problems of human prejudice and slavery. He frees us from slavery to others by bringing both masters and servants into the family of God and making peace for them in himself (Ephesians 2:14-22, Galatians 3:26-29). He also came to free us from slavery to the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15, 2 Timothy 2:25-26). Not least, he came to free us from ourselves (Luke 9:23, Colossians 2:20-23).

**THERE HAVE BEEN MANY GREAT
PHILANTHROPISTS, BUT NONE CAN
MEASURE UP TO JESUS.**

The word philanthropist comes from *PHILEIA* and *ANTHROPOS* and is literally “a lover of mankind/humanity.” We usually associate the word with some person who has given a lot of money or done some great thing in behalf of mankind, or a segment of mankind. This is certainly appropriate: giving and doing for others is supposed to be evidence of love and concern for mankind. However, one may give for reasons other than philanthropy. Tax relief and enhancement of personal reputation are more common than true philanthropy. Many notable contributors to charities and other programs for the betterment of mankind are very selective in determining who is to receive what and how much. Most philanthropic contributions and works are national; few are international. Some are geared to certain racial or ethnic groups, such as NAACP, Indians (Native Americans), Scandinavian Americans, etc. Some are geared to gender, age, or sexual orientation: children, men only, women only (NOW), geriatrics

(AARP), homosexuals, etc. Many (like A. Carnegie) are dedicated to education, the arts, recreation, etc. We are not objecting to the right of the individual to lend his support in areas of particular interest to him. But we use this to make an important contrast.

The love and good works (true philanthropy) of Jesus were and are universal, with spiritual benefits (John 3:16; compare John 1:11-12, Matthew 20:29, Matthew 11:28-30, Galatians 2:20). The greatest work of Jesus was in behalf of the souls of men, not their bodies (Ephesians 1:7, 14; 1 John 2:1-2). There were times when he refused to feed, heal, or minister to the bodies of those who sought him, but he does not refuse to feed the souls of those who seek it from him.

**THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANOTHER
PERSON ON EARTH WITH POWER TO
FORGIVE HUMAN SIN.**

This certainly sets Jesus apart from all others who have ever lived. Apostles and prophets could not forgive sin. In John 20:23 Jesus said to the apostles, “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*” To understand his meaning we must look at the tenses of the Greek verbs. *They are forgiven* (*APHEONTAI*) is literally *they have been forgiven*. *They are retained* (*KEKRATEINTAI*) is literally *they have been retained*. When they preached the requirements of God and people obeyed, they could say, “God has forgiven your sins” (they knew if repentance was genuine). When one did not obey, or did not have the proper attitude and motive, they could say, “God has not forgiven your sins, and will not until you repent.” On their own, the apostles could not forgive or retain sins any more than they could bind or loose requirements in God's name according to their own will and desire (Matthew 16:18, 18:18). They could only pronounce forgiveness or the lack of it as it was revealed to them by God that He had forgiven or refused to forgive the guilty one. They could not bind one's sins upon him in a way that made it impossible for him ever to be forgiven. All they could do was pronounce what God revealed to them about His response to a person's attitudes, actions including sins. Clergy in some religious groups claim the power to forgive or bind sins by their own choice and action; their followers believe

and accept the claimed power. But it is bogus. It is an example of blind guides, blind usurpers leading blind followers. Someday they will all wake up in the same ditch of destruction. The blind leader stumbles over something and his followers stumble over him.

Preachers and prophets, pastors, priests, and popes can only pray for forgiveness. They cannot announce it or pronounce it done, for themselves or others, since nobody today is inspired as the apostles were; nobody has any apostolic powers, privileges, or prerogatives.

But Jesus can and does forgive sins (Matthew 9:6). He also died as a sacrifice for sin, so that justice could be satisfied when sins are forgiven (Romans 3:21-26). We know that when we fulfill his commands and stipulated requirements we have his promised forgiveness and salvation.

CONCLUSION:

Great men come and go, but Jesus Christ is eternal. He is *the same yesterday, today and forever* (Hebrews 13:8, Revelation 22:13). There have

been other men as great as any of those we have named, and there may yet be another Aristotle or Bacon, another Alexander or Caesar, another Galileo or Copernicus, Newton, Edison, or Einstein. Another Shakespeare may arise, or another Churchill. There may be another Abraham Lincoln. But there will never be another Christ! He appeared once in history to bring salvation to the world (Titus 2:11-14, Galatians 4:4, Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:18-20). He will appear again - the same Jesus and not another (Acts 1:11). But the next time he comes it will be to bring the world to judgment, to save in heaven forever those who have lived faithful Christian lives, and to reject in hell forever those who have not lived faithful Christian lives (Matthew 25:35-46). If you are looking for a Savior, one who is worthy of your life, then I recommend to you Jesus of Nazareth, son of God and son of man, Messiah and Christ, our Lord and Savior (Philippians 3:20-21, Galatians 3:26-29, Colossians 2:10-14).

WHY WE LIVE HOLY LIVES

Kyle Frank

The reason we are to live holy lives can be originally found in the book of Leviticus. Chapter 11, verses 44-45 tells us:

For I am Jehovah your God: sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that moveth upon the earth. For I am Jehovah that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

To show the great importance of this statement, he repeats the exact same thing in 1 Peter 1:15-19. How important is that that God would repeat it?

Every family has certain family traits which distinguish it from all other families. As an example, Titus 2:14—Zealous of good works. John 13:35—

Love for our brethren. These are very important as they are to be found on the path of holiness and sanctification.

There are three reasons why we should strive to strive to live holy lives:

Because God is Holy

*1 Peter 1:14-16—as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance: but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, **Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.** God has called us to salvation*

God has called us through the gospel; and in 1 Thess. 4:7, we see *why*:

***For God called us not for uncleanness,
but in sanctification.***

1 Cor. 1:2 unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are **sanctified** in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. A definition of sanctified is to “set apart”; and a “saint” is one set apart for a holy purpose. For what are we set apart and called for a holy purpose? Each and every one of us are being formed into something, but what is that to be? We can set ourselves apart for service by how we are formed. We either reform ourselves after our “former lusts” or reform ourselves to develop holiness by being “set apart” for that purpose. We are to be holy every moment of every day! It is a lifestyle, not an occasional occurrence.

Because God Will Judge the World
1 Peter 1:17

We must live reverent, holy lives if we are to call God our Father. As our Father, He gives us provisions which bless us (Matt. 6:30-33, 7:7-11). But, with God’s blessings come responsibilities for which we will be judged (cf. Luke 12:48, Matt. 25-

14-36). Because God is our Father and our provider and impartial judge, we should live a reverent life before him (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Because Of Our Redemption Price
1 Peter 1:18-19

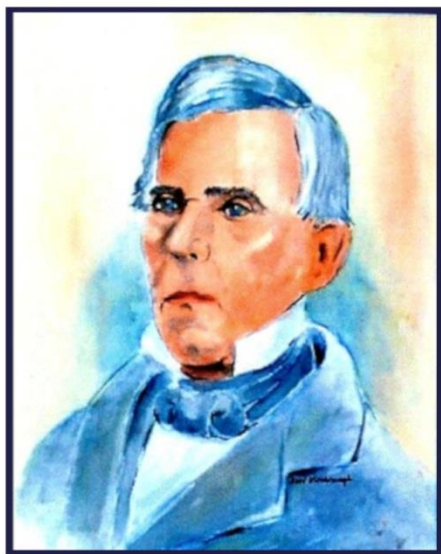
When we live holy lives, we show that we recognize and HONOR what it took to save us.

- 2 Cor.8:9—It took unselfish humility and generosity.
- Eph. 2:4-5—It took God’s mercy, love and grace.
- Rom. 5:8-9—It took Christ’s willing death.
- Rom. 12:1-2—On this basis we are urged to be holy.
- Eph. 5:25-27—Jesus died so we could be holy.

Conclusion:

Set your hope on the grace to be received when Christ returns. Only Holy people can do so with assurance. Are YOU prepared for His Return?

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OPEN DOORS

T H E N A N D N O W

Jim Mitchell

The beginning of the year is typically seen as a time of renewal or resolve in a variety of areas. People make New Year's Resolutions for everything from the trivial to the truly significant. At the start of 2019, I suggest we look at God-given opportunities, rather than resolutions. The former puts God and His word at the center of our focus, our outlook, and our planning, while resolutions may have a tendency (no matter how well-intended) to make the wishes and needs of the individual the initial focus.

An **Open Door** is mentioned six times in the New Testament, with important lessons, principles, and applications found in each inspired and timely passage.

Open Door #1

Consider the letter Jesus dictates to John for the congregation in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13). The church at Philadelphia is one of two congregations which did not receive a reprimand from our Lord, the other one being the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11). To the Christians in Philadelphia, Jesus states "*I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it*" (3:8). The Lord notes that even with a "*little strength*," they have kept His word, and have not denied His name (3:8). The overriding principle of which Christ speaks is mentioned in verse 10 - "*...you have kept My command to persevere*." Readiness to make use of **open doors** when they appear, requires Christians who, through their perseverance, are ready to make use of those opportunities, no matter how delayed they may seem in coming. Therefore, the determination to persevere in keeping the word of Christ and not denying His name shows an awareness of the need to be prepared to make use of those open doors, no matter when that opening occurs. **In the first place then, to make use of Open Doors, PERSEVERANCE IS NEEDED.**

Open Door #2

In the second place, Open Doors OFTEN INVOLVE DIFFICULTY. The events recorded in Acts 14:8-27 culminate with the statement in verse 27 that God "*had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*." In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas healed a man who had been unable to walk from birth (vs. 8-10), prompting the populace to conclude "*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*" (v. 11). Luke records that the people are intent on making sacrifices to them (vs. 12-13), which the apostles barely restrained them from doing (vs. 14-17). Instead of the ritual of sacrifice, outsiders from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the crowd to stone Paul and drag him out of the city, leaving him for dead. It is in the context of all of this opposition that God "*had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*."

It is interesting, is it not, that the message of the Gospel was one of inclusion, while many early Jewish Christians had a hard time dealing with the Gentiles being fellow heirs in the Gospel with them (cf. Acts 10, 11, 15). Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the eleven "*you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8), and yet it took persecution to get the disciples beyond Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 8:1-4). The door of opportunity existed prior to Acts 8, but it took some hard lessons before the application of the Lord's statement was made. Add to that what it took to convince Peter to go preach the Gospel to a Gentile family (Acts 10). Even those closest to Jesus had difficulty in understanding the impact of what He had said. Prejudice and discrimination have indeed been around for a very long time and are even seen in the mindset of the disciples in the early part of the book of Acts.

Open Doors may indeed be surrounded by chal-

lenges, whether due to persecution, prejudice, or compromising the simplicity and truth of God's word—which is also not a new phenomenon (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Open Door #3

Twice in Paul's writings to the church at Corinth, he mentions an Open Door. The first of these is in the last chapter of First Corinthians and refers back to another event recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. After telling the Corinthian Christians that in the future he might want to spend the winter with them (1 Cor. 16:5-7), he writes "*I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries*" (16:8-9). Paul taught in the synagogue in Ephesus "*and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God*" (Acts 19:8). When pressure became too great in that environment to continue, "*he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*" (Acts 19:9b, 10). The message of Christ had a deep impact on the Ephesians, both in their practice of the dark arts (witchcraft and sorcery – Acts 19:17-20), as well as upon those whose livelihood was connected with the patron goddess of Ephesus, whose huge temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world (Acts 19:23-41). In both of those areas, the power of God through the message of Christ reigned supreme. **In the third place, to make use of Open Doors, false teaching, false religion and/or materialism need to be exposed.**

Open Door #4

The second reference from Paul to the Corinthians about an Open Door occurs in the second chapter of Second Corinthians. "*...when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother, but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia*" (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Paul's statement reflects back on the events recorded in Acts 16. "*Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia but the Spirit did not*

permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:6-10). Paul was correct about an Open Door being presented to him while he was in Troas, but it was far different from what his plans were originally. **In the fourth place, Open Doors may be very different from what is expected.**

Open Door #5

In the fifth place, Open Doors for the Christian always focus on the Gospel. As he reached the close of his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul wrote "*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving, meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak*" (Col. 4:2-4). His request manifests the same focus he maintained in his life and which he mentioned to the Christians in Corinth: "*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Open Door #6

In the sixth place, for Open Doors to be effective, a positive response is required. Listen to the Lord's invitation to the church at Laodicea in the letter He dictated to John. "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*" (Rev. 3:20). The Laodiceans, reprimanded for being lukewarm (not totally committed to Christ but not totally dead spiritually) is, unfortunately, not a passage which the 21st century church relates to itself – but in all candor it probably should. Open Doors are all around us for sharing the Gospel, reaching the lost, and for growing "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

How determined are we to make use this year of the Open Doors the Lord has placed before us?

Jim Mitchell

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Thomas

Bradley S. Cobb

Thomas holds the distinction of being the only apostle whose name is usually prefaced with an adjective: *Doubting* Thomas. Of course, that phrase doesn't appear in the Bible, but that's how he's frequently referred to in books, sermons, and other writings.

Like Bartholomew (aka Nathanael), the only details we know about Thomas, other than that he was an apostle, are found in John's gospel account.

Courageous Thomas

The first mention of Thomas (whose name literally means "twin")¹ in John's gospel account comes in chapter eleven. Lazarus has just died, and Jesus tells His disciples (including Thomas), "Let's return to Judea." The disciples were not thrilled with this idea at all, since the Jews had tried to kill Him the last time they were there. But Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; I'm going to go wake him up." That definitely confused the apostles, and

so Jesus told them, "Lazarus is dead."

It's after this statement of Jesus that the apostles know Jesus is going back to Judea, and Thomas

tells his fellow disciples, "Let's go so we might die with Him." Though this expresses courage, extreme loyalty, and love for Jesus, it also shows a lack of understanding. He was saying, "Let's go with Him, ready to die with Him if need be."² But Thomas didn't understand that Jesus had something more planned for him and the other apostles. Thomas didn't see the big picture that included Jesus arising from the grave (more on that later). He saw this return to Judea, it seems, as the final stand in the life of a great Rabbi who was being rejected by the Jewish people. But

Thomas went with Him anyway.³

After arriving in Judea with Jesus, Thomas



¹ John says he is called "Didymus," which is the Greek word for "twin." Several theories exist as to the importance of this name. Some assume it means he is a twin brother of one of the apostles, others that he is the twin brother of Jesus, others that he had a twin sister, and so on and so forth. More will be said on this matter in the "traditions" section of this chapter.

² Thomas speaks in the subjunctive mood when he says this, showing a possibility. Thus, we *might* die with Him.

³ The text of John 11:16 could also be read as though Thomas is speaking about Lazarus: Let's go so we might die with Lazarus. While grammatically this makes sense, it doesn't make any logical sense. Can you truly picture Thomas telling the other apostles, "Let's go to Judea so we can die with Lazarus"? See E.W. Hengstenberg's discussion on this passage for a fuller discussion on who Thomas was willing to die with.

would have heard the mournful cries of Mary and Martha who each told Jesus, “If you would have been here, our brother wouldn’t have died!” With the idea of death and dying on his mind, Thomas might have felt sadness and been resigned to his own (so he thought) impending death. Certainly, he would have been curious when Jesus replied with the words, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one believing in me, though he were dead, yet he shall live. And the one living and believing in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”⁴ Thomas might have been thinking, *I’m alive, and I believe in Jesus...maybe I won’t die after all.*

Then, Thomas was present when Jesus prayed to the Father, saying that His prayer was so that the people might believe. Thomas then heard Jesus utter the words, “Lazarus, come forth!” and he watched as Lazarus came out, alive. He witnessed the power of Jesus to raise the dead after four days.⁵ It should have served as proof that Jesus could rise from the dead after just three days, yet Thomas doubted.

Confused Thomas

After the Lord’s Supper was instituted, and Judas left to betray Jesus, the Lord began to tell the apostles that His time was almost up.⁶ He told them that He was going to go, and that they would not be able to follow Him right then. Peter expressed confusion, saying, “Where are you going?” After Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for His followers, and that they knew the way, Thomas expressed confusion as well. “Lord, we don’t know where you are going; how can we know the way?”⁷

From this, we get an insight into Thomas’ character. Just like Peter, he had a difficult time grasping the concept that Jesus would be raised from the dead after his death. He was fiercely loyal to Jesus, ready to die with him, but he was stuck on thinking in mortal terms.

Jesus replied, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through me.” Whether Thomas understood what Jesus meant at this point isn’t stated by John. But lest

anyone wants to bad-mouth Thomas for his lack of understanding, take special note that Thomas was one of *three* apostles who expressed their confusion in this instance (Philip being the third).⁸

Doubting Thomas

The apostle had, just hours before Jesus’ death, proclaimed his willingness to die for Him before he’d ever deny him.⁹ But soon afterwards, he forsook Jesus, running away into the night. The Sunday following, he heard rumors about the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus, but he didn’t believe them. That evening, Thomas was noticeably absent from the gathering of Jesus’ disciples, and missed the appearance of the Lord in their midst. Why he was absent isn’t given. It could be something as simple and innocent as sickness, or, given what John records for us, it might be that he was dejected. Perhaps he wouldn’t gather with them because *Jesus is dead; it’s over.*¹⁰

But soon after that meeting that he didn’t attend, the other apostles tracked him down and began to tell him an amazing story: Jesus *is* back; He appeared while you were gone! Thomas wasn’t going

⁸ See John 14:7-12.

⁹ Matthew 26:35

¹⁰ Barton W. Johnson said, “The failure of Thomas to be present with the other disciples was probably due to his utter despair” (*The New Testament Commentary, Vol. III.—John*, page 302). Larry Deason, in his “*That You May Have Life...*” *An In-Depth Study of the Gospel of John* (pages 405-406) presents a plausible scenario:

Thomas earlier was so willing to follow Jesus into the dangers of Judea that he led all the rest (see John 11:16), but is now filled with a grief made worse by a sense of guilt; he had not made good his promise to die with Him. “Why should he be dead and I still alive?” he asks himself. And then he learns that they have seen Him alive—all but he. They try to console him, but he cannot share their joy. Day after day that week, one disciple after another tries to convince Thomas to believe. “I believed once,” he says. “I believed that He was the Messiah and would deliver the nation from all its woes. But look where it got me. Dashed hope is worse than no hope at all.”

One after another tries to describe for him in detail what he saw when Jesus appeared. Finally, Thomas has had enough. To curtail all further attempts to convince him, he shouts out in his frustration, “I will not believe unless I myself see His wounds. Unless I myself actually feel the nail prints and put my hand into His side.” The other disciples are shocked into silence, and Thomas is finally left alone to his guilt and grief.

⁴ John 11:25-26.

⁵ John 11:41-45.

⁶ See John 13:26-33, especially note verse 33 and the phrase “yet a little while I am with you.”

⁷ John 14:1-5, especially verse 5.

to get his hopes up. Surely he *wanted* to believe them, but he wasn't going to believe something like that unless he saw it for himself.¹¹ His answer to the other apostles was a strong one: "No, I will not believe unless I see the print of the nails in His hands, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and might thrust my hand into his ribs."¹²

The next Lord's Day, Thomas gathered with the rest of the apostles, the doors being shut, when Jesus appeared in the middle of the room. He approached Thomas and looked at him, and submitted to Thomas' desire for proof. "Bring your finger here and behold my hands. And bring your hand here and put it into my ribs, and do not become unbelieving, but believing."¹³ Thomas wasn't chastised verbally; Jesus didn't ask him, "Why didn't you believe the others?" But you can almost guarantee that in the midst of his joy over seeing Jesus alive, he was also disappointed in himself for not believing. But he didn't let that keep him from accepting what he saw.¹⁴

Thomas went from doubt in the physical resurrection of Jesus to proclaiming Him as both Lord (Master) and God. Seeing Him raised from the dead confirmed that Jesus indeed was the Christ, and that He also was God.¹⁵ This is not, as some wish to argue, Thomas calling Jesus "My Lord," and then pausing, looking upward to heaven and saying to the Father, "My God." There is nothing in the text to justify such a splitting of Thomas' statement.¹⁶

¹¹ Ted Clarke said of Thomas, "He deserves criticism because of this. None of us today have seen the Lord, but we believe the testimony of the men who did see Him. Thomas should have believed the combined testimony of the other apostles" (*Preaching School Notes*, 2008-2010, notes on John 20:24-29; Bradley Cobb, Editor).

¹² The Greek of John 20:25 has Thomas using two negatives to express his refusal to believe without visual evidence. See *An Outline Commentary on John* by Max Patterson, page 254.

¹³ John 20:27, Modern Literal Version.

¹⁴ It's worth noting here that Thomas does not appear to have actually touched the nail-prints or thrust his hand into Jesus' side. Seeing Him there in front of him was enough to prove that Thomas had been wrong to doubt.

¹⁵ There are many Old Testament prophecies which point to the Christ being God, among which are Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, Zechariah 12:10, etc. Thus, Thomas had a much greater insight into the nature of Jesus and the Messiah than some people even today do.

¹⁶ There are examples of someone speaking and changing the person to whom he is talking. Perhaps the most obvious one

But, after Thomas' statement, Jesus gives him a gentle reminder about the importance of faith and trust. "Because you've seen me, you have believed; those who have not seen [me] and yet have believed are blessed." This is reminiscent of what is said in Mark 16:9-16:

Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. And she went and told them that had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, did not believe. After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they didn't believe them either. Afterwards, He appeared to the eleven as they sat eating, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them which had seen Him after He was risen. And He said to them, "You go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The one, having believed and having been baptized, shall be saved, but the one having not believed shall be damned."

From that point forward, we have absolutely no indication that Thomas ever had doubt regarding Jesus again.

The final mention of Thomas comes in John 21, where the apostle joins with Peter in an unsuccessful evening of fishing, followed by Jesus telling them to fish on the right side of the boat. The result was that they caught so many fish that they couldn't lift them all up onto the boat. Thomas

is Mark 2:8-11. But in those cases, the change of audience is given to us in the text. There is no such indication in John 20:28. Funny enough, there is such a change in verses 26-27, where Jesus speaks to the apostles, then just to Thomas—and again, it is spelled out for us in the text. Therefore, those who argue that Thomas' words "My God" were addressed to the Father instead of Jesus have no basis for their argument except for the false doctrine which they are trying to defend, denying the deity of Jesus Christ.

helped row the boat to shore where Jesus Himself was fixing breakfast for them. He ate the fish and bread, knowing he was eating with the Lord.¹⁷

Traditions about Thomas

Who was Thomas' Twin?

The name *Thomas* is the Aramaic word for "twin," and John informs us that he was "called Didymus," which also means "twin." Thus, this was his nickname as well. Guy N. Woods says, "It seems most likely that Thomas had a twin brother or sister; how else may his name be accounted for; but, there is no mention of either in the sacred writings."¹⁸ But that hasn't stopped people from making guesses.

One tradition is that he had a twin sister named Lysia, while another tradition says he was the twin brother of Jesus Himself, and is to be identified as Jude¹⁹ (there is a lot of extra-biblical evidence to suggest his name was Judas Thomas).²⁰ Another tradition is that his twin brother was named Eliezer.²¹ It could also be that Thomas *looked* like someone (Jesus, perhaps), causing the nickname to be used.

The "Gospel of Thomas"

There are two different writings with this title. One of them makes up stories about Jesus as a youth, such as these:

Jesus, when five years old, was playing in the fjord of a mountain stream; and He collected the flowing waters into pools, and made them clear immediately, and by a word alone He made them obey

¹⁷ John 21:1-14.

¹⁸ *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, page 234.

¹⁹ McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 10, page 367. Eusebius seems to make this connection as well, though he doesn't say that this Judas is the brother of Jesus. *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, Chapter 13, paragraph 10. The east Syrian (Mesopotamian) churches still identify Thomas with Jude, and call him the twin brother of Jesus.

²⁰ In the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, he is called "Judas Thomas," and the names are used of him interchangeably. The Old Syriac translation of the New Testament reads "Judas Thomas" instead of "Judas, not Iscariot" in John 14:22.

²¹ See *Homily II*, Chapter 1, in the Pseudo-Clementine Literature section of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, page 229. It is possible that this is a different Thomas, but it is noteworthy that he is a twin and accompanies Peter and Zacchaeus.

Him. And having made some soft clay, He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when He did these things. And there were also many other children playing with Him. And a certain Jew, seeing what Jesus was doing, playing on the Sabbath, went off immediately, and said to His father Joseph: "Behold, your son is at the stream, and has taken clay, and made of it twelve birds, and has profaned the Sabbath." And Joseph, coming to the place and seeing, cried out to Him, saying, "Why are you doing on the Sabbath what it is not lawful to do?" And Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them, "Off you go!" And the sparrows flew, and went off crying...

And the son of Annas the scribe was standing there with Joseph; and he took a willow branch, and let out the water which Jesus had collected. And Jesus, seeing what was done, was angry, and said to him, "O wicked, impious, and foolish! What harm did the pools and the waters do to you? Behold, even now you shall be dried up like a tree, and you will not bring forth either leaves, or root, or fruit." And immediately that boy was dried up. And Jesus departed and went to Joseph's house. But the parents of the boy that had been dried up took him up, bewailing his youth, and brought him to Joseph, and reproached him because, they said, "You have such a child doing these things."

... He was again passing through the village; and a boy ran up against Him, and struck His shoulder. And Jesus was angry, and said to him, "You shall not go back the way you came." And immediately he fell down dead. ... The parents of the dead boy went to Joseph, and blamed him, saying, "Since you have such a child, it is impossible for you to live with us in the village; or else teach Him to bless, and not to curse, for He is

killing our children.”²²

This work, usually referred to as *The Gospel According to Thomas*, was a favorite among the Naasseni, a second-century Gnostic sect.²³

Another work, titled *The Gospel of Thomas* is a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus which was discovered in the Nag Hammadi Library. About half of the sayings are similar to things found in the true gospel accounts, while the others seem to have a Gnostic origin/slant to them.

“Acts of Thomas”

This work, which some experts date to the first century, was held in high esteem among some of the heretical groups.²⁴ “The main heresy which it contained was that the apostle Thomas baptized, not with water, but with oil only.”²⁵ This work may be the origin of the tradition that Thomas evangelized in India.

The story begins with the apostles gathered together to assign regions of missionary work. Thomas got stuck with India, and wasn’t happy about it. He complained, then prayed, saying, “Wherever You wish to send me, send me else-

where; for I am not going to the Indians.”

So, Jesus appears and finds a traveling Indian merchant who is looking for a carpenter, then tells him, “I have a slave, a carpenter, and I wish to sell him.” And He points to Thomas at a distance, and then writes out a bill of sale that says, “I, Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter, declare that I have sold my slave, Judas [Thomas] by name, to you Abbanes, merchant of Gundaphoros, the king of the Indians.” Then Jesus went to Thomas and began walking with him to Abbanes. The Indian merchant asked Thomas, “Is this your master?”

Thomas said, “Yes.” The Indian says, “I have bought you from him.” And Thomas was silent.

They go to a wedding feast in India where Thomas is hit on the head by a wine-pourer for using too much perfume, then Thomas prophesies that the man will be forgiven for this action in the world to come, but on the earth, he was going to be killed. Thomas then sings a song in Hebrew (so no one there understands), and a lion kills the wine-pourer.

Later, Jesus appears to the groom, who thinks He is Thomas, for they looked identical.²⁶ The wedded couple is converted to the Lord, which greatly upsets the king of India, and he demands Thomas be arrested. But Thomas had already sailed away to other parts of India.

Sometime afterwards, the merchant who had bought Thomas went to see the king because the king wanted a new palace built. He hired Thomas to build it, and provided him with money to buy materials and to pay the workers. Several months later, Thomas sends him a message that the temple



²² *The Gospel of Thomas*, first Greek form, 2-4. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, page 395.

²³ This quote is given by Hippolytus in *The Refutation of All Heresies*, Book 5, Chapter 2. See *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, page 50.

²⁴ There is debate among scholars whether this was originally written in Syriac, then translated to Greek, or if it was first in Greek, then in Syriac, and then back into Greek when the original Greek writing was lost. It is highly doubtful that this book is to be dated any later than the middle second-century.

²⁵ From Professor M.B. Riddle’s “Introductory Notice” to the Apocryphal Acts in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, page 357.

²⁶ If this were true, it would explain why the Jewish leaders needed Judas to identify Jesus. They wouldn’t want to accidentally grab Thomas instead.

is done. So the king comes to the city, and asks where the temple is, and the people told him, “He has neither built a palace nor done anything else of what he promised to do; but he goes around the cities and districts, and if he has anything, he gives all to the poor and teaches that there is one God, and heals the diseased and drives out demons...” So the king tracks down Thomas and asks him directly, “Have you built me a palace?” And Thomas replies, “Yes, I built it.” The King says, “When, then, are we to go and see it?” Thomas’ reply is, “You can’t see it now; but when you have departed this life, then you will see it.” So Thomas and the merchant are thrown into jail while the king decides how he wants to kill them.

But, in the night, the king’s brother dies, is taken to heaven, and sees the palace that was built in heaven for his brother, and demands to be taken back to the land of the living so he can buy it from the king. The king, seeing his brother come back from the dead believes about the heavenly palace, and frees Thomas and follows him.²⁷

Other Traditions about Thomas

A work attributed to Clement of Rome states that Thomas argued before Caiaphas that what Jesus taught was exactly what the Old Testament prophets believed.²⁸ Later, the same writer said that seven years after the Lord’s ascension, Thomas was preaching to the Parthians.²⁹

²⁷ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, pages 535-549.

²⁸ *Recognitions of Clement*, Book 1, Chapter 61. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, page 93.

²⁹ *Recognitions of Clement*, Book 9, Chapter 29. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, page 189. Origen agreed with this assessment, see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, Chapter 13.

Clement of Alexandria seems to argue that Thomas did not die a martyr’s death.³⁰ But Hippolytus says:

*Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and Margians, and was thrust through in the four members of his body with pine spears at Calamene, the city of India, and was buried there.*³¹



This story about his death is also recorded in *Consummation of Thomas the Apostle*.³²

The Christians of St. Thomas

In India, in the 1500s, Portuguese sailors landed and discovered a group who called themselves “Christians of St. Thomas.” This group taught the necessity of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and were governed by elders. They rejected the authority of the pope,

and rejected celibacy for their ministers. They rejected praying to saints, and rejected images. As a result, they came under heavy persecution from the Catholics, including torture and death. Well over half of the Christians of St. Thomas finally accepted Catholicism.³³

But their existence does seem to give some validity to the missionary work of Thomas in India.

³⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Strata, or Miscellanies*, 3.4.25. Found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. Page 385.

³¹ *Hippolytus on the Twelve Apostles. Where Each of Them Preacher, and Where He Met His End*. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, page 255.

³² This work is a sequel of sorts to *Acts of Thomas*, and many consider it to be part of the same writing.

³³ This information comes from McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 10, page 368.



THE BIBLE'S PERSPECTIVE ON LYING

Michael Shank

A preacher noticed a group of boys standing around small stray dog. "What are you boys doing?" he asked.

"Telling lies," One of them replied. "The one who tells the biggest lie gets this dog."

The minister was shocked and said to them, "When I was your age, I would never have thought of telling a lie."

The boys looked at each other, all disappointed. Finally, one shrugged and said, "I guess he wins the dog."

INTRO

Let's first take a look at our lesson text, which is Rev. 21:8

The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

It's important to notice how liars are put into the same category as murderers, whoremongers, and idolaters!

You and I see "degrees of sin"; in our minds, we "rate" levels of sin: a lie (low), adultery (high), rape and murder (at the top). But in God's eyes, it's clear that lying is just as grievous as adultery

and murder, and will receive the exact same sentence.

To lie is to be counted among the worst – listen to what Paul wrote Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:10,

For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine...

WHY IS A LIE AS BAD AS MURDER?

Why? Because it may be just as destructive as murder! Lying destroys trust and a good name. Proverbs 22:1:

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.

Lies conceal the truth, which leads to injustice. When I was in third grade, me and another guy poured glue in this kid's seat, and he sat in it! The teacher found out, but the guy who helped me lied and said it wasn't him, and he pointed to another guy. That other guy, who had nothing to do with it, got a paddling with me. The lie led to an injustice.

And immediately in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the

whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered to him, "It is as you say." And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing (Mark 15:1-3).

When people make decisions based on lies, they make bad choices. Lying contradicts the very nature of God. God cannot lie.

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (Titus 1:2).

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us (Heb. 6:18)

Who is the father of lies? Read John 8:44.

You are of your father the devil, and you will do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not dwell in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own [nature]: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

When we choose to lie, we choose to imitate the father of lies, and we need to be reminded of what Jesus told those who kept deceit in their hearts:

You are of your father the devil, and you will do the desires of your father.

And God hates lying. I want to show you something interesting. Proverbs 6:16-19 says,

These six things does the LORD hate: yes, seven are an abomination to him: A proud look, a lying

tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among brethren."

Okay...we clearly see that lying is listed as 2 of the 7 things that God truly hates, but notice the other things in these 3 verses; things that we can't overlook as well:

- A proud look; arrogance – there's a lot of that in our brotherhood.
- Fantasizing about wicked things; a twisted imagination – men, pornography falls under that one.
- Running quickly toward mischief – gossip might be a form of mischief, be careful.
- And Sowing discord among the brethren – I've seen and heard enough of that from

some brethren to last a thousand lifetimes!

No wonder lying is listed among the ten commandments, "Thou shalt no bear false witness" (Exodus 20:16).

WHAT CONSTITUTES A LIE? WHAT IS A LIE, EXACTLY?

Any intentional distortion of the truth is a lie, even the most subtle distortion. That's a big pill that's hard to swallow today.

Let's be clear on something; lying is a *deliberate*, intentional deception; a twisting of the truth. Lying is NOT misunderstandings in communication, or a lack of perfect recall. And miscommunication, or sometimes a lack of having all of the information, can cause us trouble, and strife, and arguments. So we've got to do our best in communicating with one another.

But any intentional, deliberate distortion of the truth, however subtle, is a full-blown lie, regardless of how we want to label it. "A little white lie" does not exist!

And we now live in a culture where truth is subjective, and lying is the norm. Our culture is turn-

Let's be clear on something; lying is a deliberate, intentional deception; a twisting of the truth. Lying is NOT misunderstandings in communication, or a lack of perfect recall.

ing the ability to deceive into an art form that they like to call *SPIN*! Lloyd Steffen wrote,

“Honesty now looks like a dubious virtue, if not an actual vice. It is studied and examined as a stratagem rather than as a hallmark of character. It has come to the point that we don't even use the word “lie” anymore. Instead we say things like, “strategic misrepresentation” or “reality augmentation.” But whatever word you use, it's STILL lying and it seems to have become the modus operandi of our society. Historians lie by re-shaping history to conform to current morals. Advertisers lie to sell their products. Politicians lie to garner votes. With the proper turn of a phrase or clever combination of adverbs and adjectives, a falsehood—an out and out lie—can be made to sound just like truth. A horrible crime can sound like a natural, even noble deed. And tragically, in our culture this is a skill that is admired. These days our world tells us that lying is not only okay, but necessary to get through life; and through society's re-classification of lying, the practice of lying is no longer distasteful or unacceptable.”

With this in mind, listen to Isaiah 59:3-4:

No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.

Sounds like Isaiah is describing our culture today, doesn't it? David said in Psalm 12:1-2:

Help, O Lord! For the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to

his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception.

You see, we're Christians. We don't lie. We know the sin of lying, as well as the consequences. None of us want to jeopardize our salvation by telling intentional, deliberate lies...

And friend, Satan knows how we think. He knows that we're not going to deliberately lie, so he tempts us all to lie in ways that we tell ourselves we're *not* lying. Let me show you, and boys and girls, listen up:

Lying by withholding information:

“Honey, you're on a diet, and I found a McDonald's cup in your car. Did you go to McDonald's today?”

“Yeah, but I had a salad and a diet coke!”

“Oh, okay, well good.”

Now I just didn't tell her that I *also* had a 10-piece chicken nugget combo meal and a quarter pounder dressed like a big mac! Lying by withholding information.

Lying to save someone's feelings:

“Honey, does this dress make me look fat?”

That ain't even fair. Guys, I know it's tough. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no, lest you fall into condemnation. But sometimes I want to say, “God, what about the condemnation of my wife? God, you ain't got to live with her!”

“Little white lies” we tell to escape the daily problems of life:

That annoying neighbor of yours is knocking at your front door again, wanting to borrow something else. He never takes care of the things you loan him to use. You open the front door, and he says,

“Hey, can I borrow your weed-eater for a couple of hours?”

*It has come to the point
that we don't even use
the word “lie” anymore.
Instead we say things
like, “strategic
misrepresentation” or
“reality augmentation.”*

You say, “Man I’m sorry, I’d love to help ya out, but it’s not running right now. Sorry.”

Well, it’s **not** running right now – it’s out in my building and it’s turned **off**. It’ll be *running* the next time *I start it up* – but it *ain’t running right now*, you see, and...that’s not a lie...is it?” You understand how Satan deceives us through semantics?

Lying for pride:

Can you now see how Satan got to Ananias and Sapphira? Why did they lie? They were under no obligation. The situation in Acts 5 was an opportunity to give voluntarily. I’m sure that Christian couple thought they were telling a little white lie, but God used their sin as a teaching opportunity.

Why did they lie? Because they probably wanted people to feel a certain way about them. They lied to the Apostles for fellowship, or popularity, or to be seen by their brethren as “good.” They wanted to be called good like Barnabas in Acts 11:24, and their little stretch of the truth cost them their lives.

And you know the ironic part of this story? There’s a lot of Christians that stand in judgment of Ananias and Sapphira today, poking out their chest, and in their minds saying, “*Well...I would never had done something so horrible as that!*” Then they’ll turn around and say their weed-eater ain’t running!

LET EACH ONE OF US TAKE GREATER CARE, THAT WE DON’T RISK LOSING OUR ETERNAL SALVATION

Christians must be a people who speak the truth. Let’s wrap it up with the following verses:

Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: for e are members one of another (Eph. 4:25).

The context of Ephesians four tells us that speaking truth is part of what it means to be a new creation in Christ; it is at the heart of being a Christian. Colossians 3:9 parallels this:

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

Jesus taught us how to avoid even the subtle white lie when He said, “But let your communication be, Yes, yes; No, no: for whatever is more than these comes from evil” (Matthew 5:37).

James echoes Christ’s teaching in James 5:12:

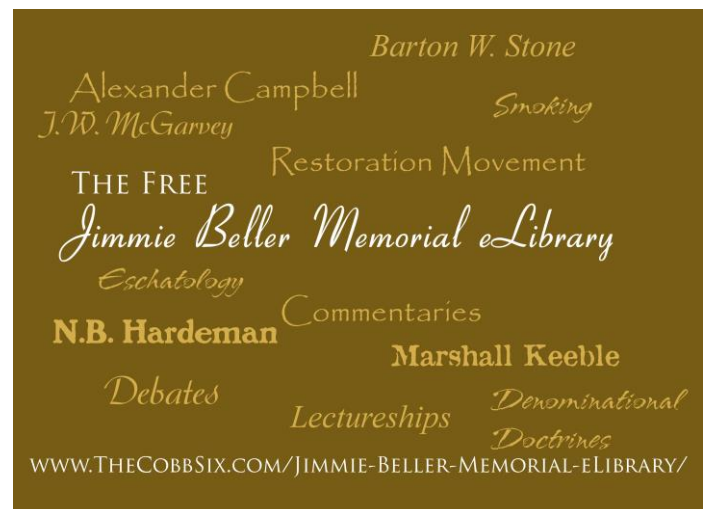
But above all things, my brethren, do not swear, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yes be yes; and your no, no; lest you fall into condemnation.

Psalm 101:7 should make us all see the importance of telling the truth. It says:

He that practices deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that tells lies shall not tarry in my sight.

No unrepentant liar should, in their wildest dreams, think that they will be saved.

Jesus said, “I tell you Nay but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). We must repent of lying, and make a commitment to tell the truth in everything, eliminating even the “stretch of truth,” Amen?



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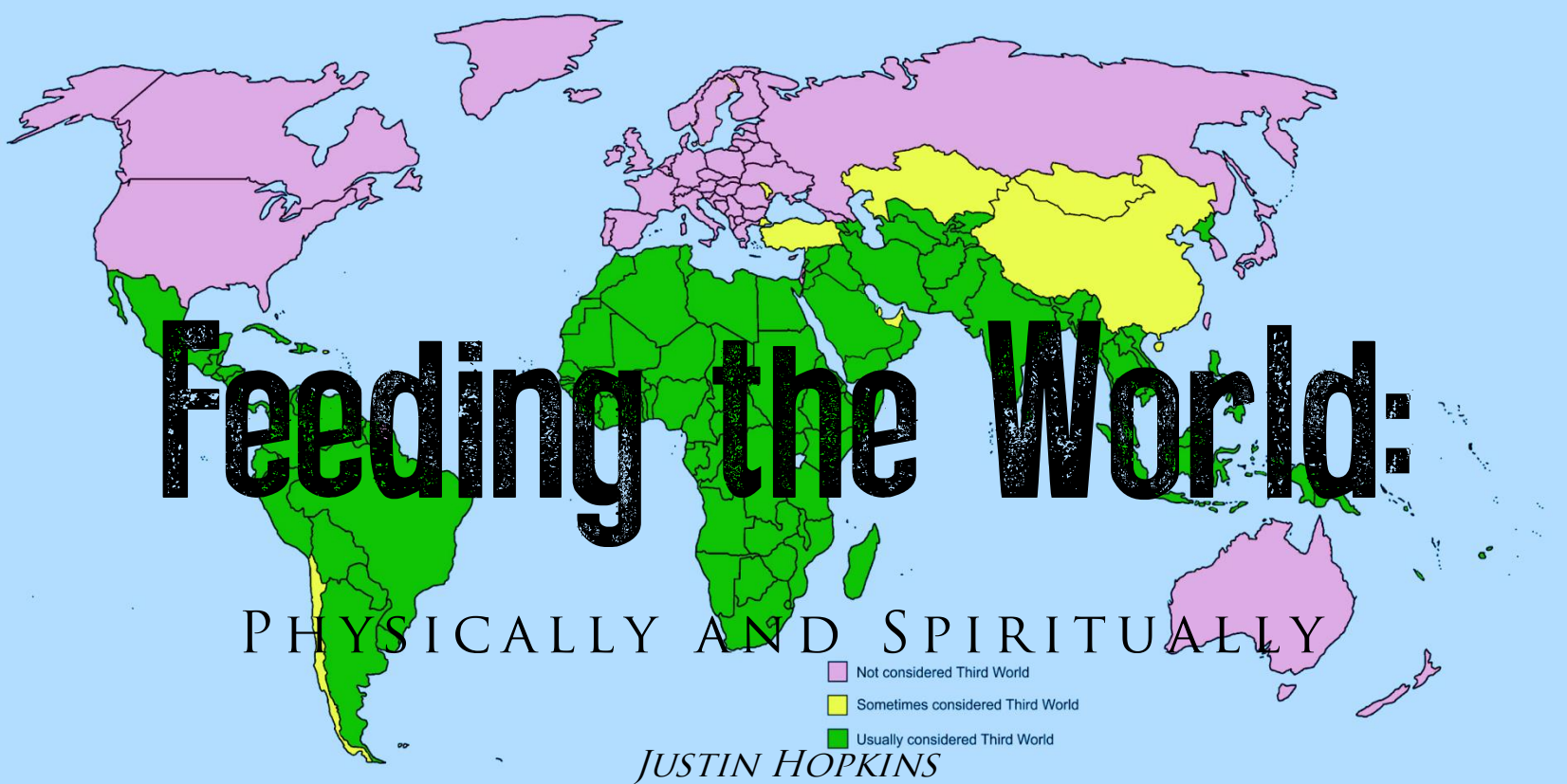
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One of the biggest struggles for preachers and Christians in developing countries is being able to be completely dependent upon God spiritually while still being completely self-reliant physically. There is a vast difference between being self-sufficient and self-reliant. Self-sufficiency is an unachievable goal because nobody on this earth is self-sufficient; we all need support and resources from outside. However, self-reliance, the ability to look after our own affairs, is both achievable and necessary for us all.

There are many Christian men who have a desire to spread the Gospel in these impoverished countries, which account for half of the earth's land area. However, after just two years in ministry, 3/4 of these men quit preaching and go back into secular work because they cannot feed their families. Most of those who continue preaching are receiving support from American congregations.

In 2010 Gage Coldwater was in Kathmandu, Nepal teaching students at a school of preaching. All of the students asked if he could support them financially when he returned to America. Clearly, he couldn't support them all, so he asked what they would do with the money if he sent it. They all had

the same answer: buy food for their families. Having grown up around farming, brother Coldwater asked why they don't just grow the food for themselves. The students explained that they didn't know how, but if somebody could teach them, then they wouldn't need support to preach. So, he began teaching them to grow food crops in small gardens, fertilizing with compost, and raising rabbits for meat.

This was the beginning of a mission with a singular purpose: to train preachers of the Gospel

to be self-reliant through agriculture. Under the oversight of the elders of the Vidor church of Christ in east Texas, the Manna Project was born. The need for this type of training among our brethren is great, and so



brother Coldwater traveled to Cameroon, Tanzania, Haiti, Micronesia, Uganda, and Ghana helping other mission works and providing this much-needed resource. After seeing the need, Gregg Knight also began helping and has traveled to Haiti, Micronesia, Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania, and Cameroon.

In Haiti, an orphanage gained the ability to provide quality produce for the children with the construction of a hydroponics system on their roof and

being instructed in its proper use. In Micronesia, preachers have been able to grow food for their families and sell crops at the market to purchase clothing, shoes, and other basic necessities. In many other places, students of preaching have been able to support their own ministries after graduating, even providing benevolent aid to their villages with the crops that they grow.

In 2015 came a request for a preaching school in the foothills of the Ruwenzori Mountains of western Uganda. After traveling there to visit the local brethren and discuss the possibilities, the land was obtained and construction of the school facility and supporting farm was undertaken by the local brethren under the guidance of brother Knight. In early 2018 the first class of students graduated, sending nine faithful Gospel preachers into the surrounding villages, and the second class of thirteen is now half-way through the program.

With the skills they have learned, these men of God are reaching souls with the Gospel, and impacting their communities. The local congregations have begun growing crops around the church building in order to provide food for the poor and needy in their villages. This has opened more and more hearts and doors to the Gospel of Christ.

In 2017 a door of opportunity opened in the district of northwestern Cameroon, and a school of preaching and farm were established on ten acres on the Kumba River in Modelle. The first class of students is scheduled to graduate in April of this year. Since its founding, the Modelle School of Preaching has been al-

most entirely self-funded through agriculture. Each week the students are invited to go out into the surrounding village and preach. New congregations are being planted and then watered at a rapid pace!

As 2018 has come to a close, it has been an exciting and fruitful year. In Talawanda, Tanzania, just outside of Dar es Salaam, the land was donated for a new school of preaching. With the help of Lee Wright, the preacher in Knott, TX, and Maurice Gasper Wis-

sibo, one of the original workers at the Ruwenzori school, a new school has been constructed. The first corn harvest at Talawanda has yielded over 14,000 pounds! Because of the increase that was given by God, students will begin studying at Talawanda in March, and the school will be completely funded by the farm.

Talawanda has a very high concentration of Muslims. In response to this opportunity, a search was made for evangelistic materials designed to reach those caught up in the false systems of Islam. Unable to find any, the tools were created. A series of five studies begins in the Koran and demonstrates that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and that the Scriptures contained in the New Testament are His all-authoritative Word. From there the Bible is studied to

show that Jesus Christ has all authority, and about the one true church that He built, and how one can be saved and added to that church. These lessons are freely available and have already begun to be translated into six languages!

This was also the year that I began working with



the Manna Project. My sweet wife said that I needed a hobby, and she got me started roasting coffee. Over the last few years, I have gone deep down that rabbit hole, and am now a member of the Specialty Coffee Association and the Roaster's Guild providing specialty coffee to a few select coffee shops and grocery stores. In 2017, after Hurricane Harvey I traveled to the coast and helped with the cleanup effort, cutting up and removing trees that had been destroyed.

I used the wood from those trees to fire a limited edition roast of coffee and wanted to give the proceeds back to the hurricane relief efforts. When I saw all brother Coldwater and the Vidor congregation were doing, and the positive impact that it had, opening doors for the Gospel, I gave the funds to them to use. I wanted to do more, so since that time I have been donating a portion of every bag of coffee to the Manna Project.

In the summer of 2018, I was invited to travel to the Ruwenzori Mountains with brother Knight for two purposes. First, I was to teach in the school of preaching. Second, I was given the opportunity to visit with preachers there who are working to support themselves by growing coffee. Ultimately the goal in this is to help them grow their farms and profitability to the point that they are not only self-reliant but also able to provide benevolent aid to their villages in the hopes of opening hearts to the Gospel.

This fall I was invited to come on board with the Manna Project full time as Academic Director. My first task is to create and implement a new academic program for our three schools of preaching. We will be teaching students in four tracks: Bible Knowledge, Leadership, Fundamental Doctrines, and Agriculture. One of the most exciting things about this new program is the block-schedule that will be introduced. Each track will be given one day of the week (agriculture gets two days because

farming is hard work!). These tracks will be open to members of area congregations. There are men who would like to study and grow, but cannot leave their families and their villages for the two years that the school requires. However, if they can come just one day each week, then over the course of eight years they can complete the entire program!

The hope is that this program will provide the needed knowledge and skills to men who will grow to become the elders and deacons that are so badly needed, and one day, the elders who oversee the work of their local preaching school that is self-reliant.

The work has reached thousands

of souls, and done good that will only be told in Heaven. But with over 700 mouths to feed on the mission, this comes at a great financial expense.

As we depend on God for his grace, mercy, and peace, we are working to help our brethren around the world become more self-reliant so that they too can teach others to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Get in touch. Check out the free resources and tools that are available from our websites: <https://mannafarm.org> and <https://azimuth.media>. Schedule a presentation for your local congregation, or a seminar on agriculture, evangelism, Reaching Muslims, or teacher training. Drink some Epic Coffee. Mission work never tasted so good! <https://woodsmokedcoffee.com>

Get involved. Pray for us! Share this information with others who would be encouraged to know that the Lord is doing great things in His church. Volunteer. There is much work to do, and we'd love to have you along for the ride. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send more laborers into His fields. Support our work financially. Every little bit helps.

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DO IT HEARTILY

Devin Self

First off, let's start by reading Colossians 3:23,

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

Now, do we ever throw in the towel, or lose motivation on things because we see or hear of someone else doing "great" things or things that might be better than what we have done? We sometimes get into the habit of measuring ourselves with others and basing our lives around trying to win some sort of pride race. We must clarify that just because we might hear of these people doing great things; that doesn't necessarily mean it is great in God's terms. There are plenty of people out there in the world that do good things and behave properly on a daily basis, but have no involvement in church or worshiping God. So will they get a pass on the day of judgment? No, I think not.

This is kind of a long passage of scripture but read Matthew 25:14-30:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five

talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now after this do you think we should complain

that we have been entrusted with so little as compared to someone else? I would hope the answer would be no. We must rather do it heartily like the widow in Mark 12:42-44.

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

And like the woman who anointed Jesus in Mark 14:1-9:

After two days was the feast of the Passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

We must be like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada

in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22:

And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.

One last passage. We must be like Onesiphorus in 2 Timothy 1:16-18:

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

One of the rarest traits found is faithfulness. Faithfulness in being a husband, wife, Bible class teacher, elder, deacon, mother, father, friend. God calls us to greatness in the ordinary.

Do it heartily.



HISTORY OF THE PHARISEES (PART 2)

Kyle D. Frank

Having traced the birth and early history of the Pharisees in an earlier edition, we will now look at the teachings and late history of the Jewish Sect known as the Pharisees. We know that they came to an end during the abortive rebellion of the Jews to their masters, the Romans. The crushing of the rebellion occurred during the siege and complete destruction of the city of Jerusalem in AD 70. We need only cover a period of about 70 years, a blink of time when dealing with He who is outside time.

Doctrines of the Pharisees:

1) They held to the oral law as having as much authority as the Torah. All the explanations, conjectures, and false doctrines that Moses had told them about were right there. Detailed explanations and instructions were meant to build a hedge around the written law so none could touch it with false doctrine. What they could not see was that THEY were the false teachers that Moses had told them about.

2) Future Life—They were poles apart from the Sadducees on the subject as well as the Essenes. They believed in the sovereignty of God but also the free will of man, and on most if not all of these doctrines they were in conflict with the others.

3) Angelology/Demonology—They held to a developed hierarchy of both. Some accused them of taking these from Babylon and Persia.

4) Humanity—They were the champions of human rights, as this doctrine would indicate. Despite clear-cut examples of how they *really* saw things as shown by Jesus in the Gospel records, they supposedly saw all men as equals (at least, according to reference materials).

It would be relatively easy to point out these doctrines in the Bible (Gospels and Acts), they held to them tenaciously, but didn't live them. Or, another example we can see is how Paul saw the divisions betwixt the Pharisees and Sadducees, and he played it like a fine violin. See Acts 23:8-9:

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees

confess both. And there arose a great clamor: and some of the scribes of the Pharisees part stood up, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: and what if a spirit hath spoken to him, or an angel?

Paul was a crafty individual who knew how to get things done. He played the system to his advantage and his opponents never knew what had hit them! This type of blind compliance was not unusual in that day and time. Whatever party you belonged to most often resulted in your personal vote on any given subject on any given day. Saul (Paul) sat at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the best and brightest of all the Jewish doctors of the Law. Paul spoke of his "merits" as a Pharisee in Philippians 3:4-7:

Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ.

After talking up his "Hebrewness" he then proceeds to tell us that when it comes to God, it was all a waste. We see in the New Testament several times attempts were made on his life. It brings to mind another scripture: John 16:2.

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God.

These characters were serious, they meant business; Jesus, in the last scripture, warns the extent that they were prepared to go to. They had murder in their hearts, and this is the "real" history of the Pharisees in the New Testament. They were there, they were throughout the world of those days, and our spiritual forefathers had to deal with it.

Jesus was open and upfront about how they re-

ally were. In Matt. 23:13-39 he shows us what was really going on inside these characters:

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted. But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense ye make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive greater condemnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is a debtor. Ye blind: for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? He therefore that sweareth by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And he that sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that sweareth by the heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel! Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which

outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

In the time of the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus was not attacking a proverbial “straw man.” These were BAD dudes and he made it very clear how bad they really were. His attacks were appropriate and justified. They were really that bad in truth and it took the son of God to make it clear to everyone that what was about to happen to them was a righteous judgment. When Jerusalem was eradicated, the unholy Pharisees were getting their just reward from a righteous judge who was carrying out the sentence of death upon those who said: *And all the people answered and said, His blood be on us, and on our children* (Matt 27:35).

So be it!

Is a Church Without Elders a True Church of Christ?

Jim Stutts

The correct answer to the above question can mean the difference between peace and problems in a congregation. False teachers/preachers possessed with “eldermania,” (an obsession with appointing at least two warm bodies, calling them “elders,” thus passing the buck of work to them), have appointed **unqualified men** in many places. The church needs strong elders and should have them, but **only when** men meet the scriptural requirements (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). When unqualified men are appointed, **they are not elders**, but phonies and the preacher appointing them has sinned. It has been said, “You can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig!” You can also call an unqualified person an “elder,” but are they? Would a woman called an “elder” be one? Would a single man, or one without children, or one with a temper, or one who is a drunkard?? I don’t think so! Just because they are faithful, nice, good citizens, close friends or relatives, wealthy or good looking, that doesn’t make them qualified!

Some preachers argue that men are qualified if they collectively meet the qualifications. In other words, if one man can’t teach and others do, then he is qualified because all qualifications in scripture are met by the entire eldership. Such a view is exploded by Titus 1:6 which states, “*a man*,” (**not** an eldership in totality) must meet the qualifications **BEFORE** being appointed!

Before accepting a work with an elderless church, a preacher should make it clear to the church his God-given mission. Too many preachers have neglected to **first**, “...*set in order the things that are lacking*...” (Tit.1:5), **before** ordaining elders. Some operate on the **false notion** that a man lacking the exact qualifications will grow into it. In other words, if he can’t teach, he can learn how **after** his appointment. If he has a bad temper, he can work on it **after** being appointed. If he is not

blameless, given enough time people will forget he was to blame. If he is a drunkard, he just needs to be working on it **after** appointment! If he occasionally commits adultery, he can repent later **after** appointment?! Preachers believing and teaching such, and members backing such, will succeed in leading the church into huge problems, if not apostasy. My work with one congregation had an “elder” who was appointed by a preacher, two weeks after being baptized! (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6). Question: was he an elder?? Sadly, he was the best of four elders!! Such was a disgrace. Since the preacher is commanded to rebuke an erring elder so others may fear, what would happen should this oft disobeyed/ignored plain command be obeyed?? (1 Tim. 5:20). The firing of a preacher most likely would ensue! But why hasn’t this authority of the preacher been restored??

Once a phony is installed as an elder, getting them out of office is much harder than installing them! If the preacher neglects *his job* in insuring that only qualified men are appointed, then phonies will be given the reins of power which can destroy an otherwise good congregation. When fake elders swallow the “power pill,” look out! A preacher friend of mine worked hard to appoint elders, but when he appointed them, they fired him as their first item of business! If members, who knew a man is not qualified, supported the preacher’s “eldermania,” then they may regret it. Phony “elders” can be scripturally removed but much turmoil will result. **How much better to appoint qualified men only!** The *reap what we sow* principle certainly applies here! (*Galatians 6:7*)

Those arguing for elders in every church in order to make them a true church of Christ, are doing so out of Biblical ignorance. *Not one church in the Bible started with elders!* In Acts 2, the first church was added to **without elders** (*Acts 2:47*). Was it

unscriptural and not a church of Christ? Did the Lord add souls to something unscriptural?? **The same is true of every other congregation established.** Looking at all the epistles, we find **only** the Philippian letter was addressed to its “*bishops and deacons*,” and the Ephesian elders are mentioned in Acts 20. Thus, we must conclude that congregations of true **churches of Christ** existed in the first century **without elders!** These elderless churches collected money, communed, were united, did things decently and in order, disciplined erring members, evangelized, helped the needy and dozens of other good works! (*Acts 8:4; 1 Cor. 1, 5, 11, 14, 16*)

Is it better to have elders? Yes, but **only** when the church is mature enough to have qualified men! I was in a church once, consisting of 15 women, one teen boy (me!), and an 82 year old man. Since the “men” were unqualified, should some of the women have been appointed elders? Was it a true church? When this church matured, qualified men were appointed elders. It is sinful to label an imma-

ture congregation an untrue church. We also should not call unqualified men “*elders*”! That title must be earned and scriptural. **Through wicked “elders,” the apostasy was to come (Acts 20:28-30). Today, wicked “elders” are continuing the fulfillment of this prophecy!**

Are we arguing for perfection? No, for there are no perfect men! But what does “blameless” mean? Some teach that the qualifications for an elder are the same for every Christian, excepting the family ones. Such is a partial truth. Would a new convert be able to teach, convince trouble makers (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9-13)? Most likely not. But is he a Christian? Yes, but immature. Is a baby a human? Yes, but an immature one. So it is with congregations and some Christians.

A church member is a Christian even though he may lack many qualifications required for elders, and churches are true churches without elders, though immature (assuming everything else is scriptural). It is **better** to be unorganized **scripturally** than to be **unscripturally** organized!

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Failure to Complete

David Dean

If the children of Israel were to stand before a judge in our modern courts, they would be referred to as “repeat offenders.” A quick glance into the sordid history of the nation reveals constant failures that ultimately result in the nation splitting into two different kingdoms—both of which God punishes. Knowing the history of the children of Israel forces us to ask, “What caused this decline?” Instead of “decline,” it could better be described as “descent into depravity.” Was the start of this descent under the reign of Saul? Perhaps it started with the death of David; or maybe it was the wives of Solomon that brought about the utter depravity we witness under the reigns of the Kings of Israel. After all, the history of the kings reveals that “Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:30), painting a truly troubling picture of the state of morality during this period. So again, we ask, “When did it all start?”

This descent for the children of Israel could best be traced to the book of Joshua. Moses, that great man of God, has died, leaving his replacement to continue dealing with a group that God described as “a stiff-necked people” (Deut. 9:13). Joshua’s leadership starts off strong. He gives clear and concise commands to the children of Israel, having been encouraged by God. Marching orders are given, and Jericho falls by the hand of God (Joshua 6). The second city to fall is Ai, but its capture is far from the triumphant victory at Jericho. The seventh chapter of Joshua begins with, “But the children of Israel committed a trespass” (Joshua 7:1). Even with this first failure, Joshua brings the people back to God, punishing Achan, and the conquest begins once again. As we exam-

ine the book of Joshua, things appear to be on the right track. Sure, we see problems here and there, but repentance leads to victory, and glory is given to God. However, this impressive display of faith and obedience to God would not continue.

While under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites were given very clear and specific instructions concerning the inhabitants of the land of Canaan.

God declares the Canaanites must be “utterly destroyed,” and the Israelites were to “save alive nothing that breathes” (Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18). God even goes so far as to name the nations of the land and pronounce judgment on each of them. As we have already seen, Joshua has a great start in obeying God. Then we get to the ninth chapter of the book of Joshua...

The Gibeonite people approach Joshua and the leaders of the Israel, crying out, “We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us” (Joshua 9:6). The Israelites, while expressing concern that these travelers might be from

the land of Canaan, never actually approach God and seek His guidance. Instead, they look at the food and other articles produced by the Gibeonites and accept their word, making a covenant with them and directly violating the command of God. When Joshua learns of the deception, he punishes the Gibeonites by forcing them into slavery, but even this does not remove the sin associated with disobeying the command of God. This failure to heed God’s word starts a downward spiral. God notes that “Joshua was old and advanced in years,” but “there remained much land to possess” (Joshua 13:1). The remainder of the book of Joshua does not focus on the conquest of Canaan as the reader would expect; instead, we find a dividing of the

“A town in Israel has basically become Sodom, and the combined moral guidance of the rest of the tribes is little better (brutal civil war, near extinction of Jabesh-Gilead, stealing women and forced marriages, etc.).”

spoils. It is not until the book of Judges that we see the fate of the conquest being discussed once more—fate that does not bode well for future of Israel.

The book of Judges is a depressing book in many ways. As Luke Dockery, a brother in Christ, expressed, “Judges 19-21 seems to me to be the moral low point of the entire Bible. A town in Israel has basically become Sodom, and the combined moral guidance of the rest of the tribes is little better (brutal civil war, near extinction of Jabesh-Gilead, stealing women and forced marriages, etc.).” The opening of the book of Judges is little

better. Starting with the nineteenth verse of the first chapter, we see a series of statements all pointing to one truth—Israel failed. By the twenty-seventh verse we read, “Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants”; the twenty-ninth, “Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites”; the thirty-first, “Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco”; and so on. This failure to complete the conquest is but the first step in a series of missteps that leads to a “descent into depravity.”

-This is an ongoing series-

UNSUNG HEROES:

Women in the Ministry of Jesus

Travis Anderson

INTRO:

Over the past few issues we have been looking at Unsung Heroes. That is, characters in the Bible who we either know little to nothing about, or they are well-known names, but different parts of their stories are often overlooked or neglected.

Let's continue that theme again as we look at the Unsung Heroes of Jesus' ministry: the women. We won't be looking at these instances as in-depth as we have others, but it will be more like a survey. This is because, instead of the main theme being a person or what we can learn from one Unsung Hero, I want the overall theme to shine through: Jesus loved women and often would go out of his way to show the world how he felt about them

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

The Catholic Church has elevated Christ's mother to a level that Scripture never does. But at times, in trying to get away from *that* idea, we have understated her place in Scripture.

She was a wonderful woman, full of faith. The song of praise in Luke 1:46-55 highlights this fact. She trod a difficult path. I am sure there were few who really believed that she was pregnant without ever being intimate with a man, both during and

after her pregnancy. It was probable that when others laughed and scorned at Jesus, that if she was present, she caught it too. When her other children refused to believe Jesus was the son of God and the Messiah who would save the world from their sins, I am sure they made life difficult for her.

We have no evidence she ever gave up the faith in her son as the Christ. She was the one who brought the issue of a lack of wine to Jesus in John 2:1-5. It seems that although we have no record of him performing miracles up to this point, she seemed to know he could fix this problem. He kind of scolds her, but goes ahead and fixes the problem anyway. What exactly that exchange means, I don't know, but it does reveal that she knew something about Jesus' abilities before even his disciples knew, showing the close relationship they obviously had.

That relationship was so close that she was there as he hung on the cross (John 19:26-27). His brothers, his earthly father, and most of the disciples were nowhere to be found on this horrific day, but there was Mother, within ear shot, witnessing her son, her flesh and blood, being tortured and eventually killed in the most horrible way known to mankind—and she was there *for him*. And

Christ, being hung in such a way that breathing—let alone talking—would have been incredibly painful, only uttered seven phrases, and one of them was dedicated to making sure one of his most trusted friends on this earth took care of the woman who meant so much to him.

While Christ was of course God on earth, I am sure her faithful and loving raising impacted the love he had for the other women he encountered in his ministry, including...

Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

The fact that Martha had her own home in this society likely meant she was a motherless widow. In this instance we see two women choosing to put priority on two different things: Mary on Jesus, and Martha on house chores. While we normally say, ‘Be Mary, choose Jesus, not worldly things,’ there is a bit more to this instance than we may realize.

Some Rabbis were from a school of thought that stated women were not to be taught the Scriptures.

"It is better that the words of the Law should be burned than that they should be given to a woman."¹

There were more, and far more vile quotes from rabbinical writings, but the point is women were, as a general rule, not to be taught Scripture. So Martha may have thought what she was doing was not just more important, but the correct thing for a woman to be doing, and that it was Mary who was shirking her duties as a woman.

Notice how Jesus addressed the situation: He didn’t scold her. He didn’t even tell her to stop what she was doing. He just let her know that her sister had made the better choice about what was important. Jesus is letting them, people of that time, and us today know that women are to learn and apply the word of God in their lives just as much as men. Their souls mean just as much to God as men’s do. Women were second class citizens in this culture, but Jesus is showing that in his kingdom, they are equal in importance—not in roles, but in importance.

What I find beautiful is this simple statement, combined with whatever other teachings they may have received from Jesus had an effect on her.

In John 11:17-27, Christ has been informed that Lazarus, the brother of these two sisters, has died and so he is beginning to make his way to Bethany where Mary and Martha were. It’s now Martha that is putting Jesus first, going to him to have her problems solved, and it’s Mary that has put something first in front of Jesus.

Verse 5 points out that he loved them, showing the close personal relationship he had with them. In all of Scripture, only three times is it stated that Jesus loved individuals: John, Mary, and Martha.

The Samaritan Woman

Of all the recorded conversations involving Jesus, do you know who the longest one is with? The Samaritan Woman at the well in John 4.

The Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews to the point where the woman is shocked a Jew would even talk to her (v 9). His disciples were pretty shocked he would talk to her (v 27). Getting into the *why* and *how* and *when* things became this way is not something I have space for in this article, but by this point in history, both sides were taught to despise the other.

Christ shows them, and us, by conversing with this woman, that the love of God crosses all man-made dividing lines. He shows that the work that will be accomplished on the cross in the coming years was not just for Jews, it was not just for males, but for all of mankind, regardless of race or gender—and Christ expects his people to treat others the same way he did. Just looking back at America’s history, and seeing how many Christians defended the use and abuse of slaves, shows you not everyone listened to him.

But there is something else we can learn about Christ and women here: he used not just men, but also women, to spread the good news about the Messiah (John 4:39-42). That’s empowering, but it also shows that women have a responsibility to show Christ to others just as much as men do. Jesus didn’t just expect them to share the gospel, but also had them become disciples.

Joana, Susanna, and others (Luke 8:1-3)

We tend to only think of men following Jesus around, but here Luke specifically tells us there were women who were present as well. The fact that they were “providing for them out of their own means” and traveling with them would have been taboo in that culture for two reasons: (1) women

¹ Rabbi Eliezer, as quoted in Clarke’s Commentary.

should not be financially supporting a man. As women were seen as second-rate citizens, even if a woman had the means to help a man, he should not lower himself to taking her help. Christ crossed that line and allowed the women to have a role in contributing to his ministry, the same as men did.

(2) Men and women were not to travel together if they were not family. At the very least Susanna was married, and yet traveling with other men without her husband. This was forbidden then, much like it is now in the Middle East. Christ's solution to the problem of lust was not to segregate and degrade women, but to expect both men and women (but especially the men) to be able to control themselves. We see this some today even in our culture, that single men or single women shouldn't be around other married men or married women. Christ's solution was to just behave like children of God.

The Unnamed Women

There are several of these women; women who only appear once, whose names are not given, but Jesus uses something about their words or actions to teach the disciples a lesson.

The Nameless Mother

Mark 7 tells us that Jesus took his disciples kind of out of the way to maybe a short break from their constant life as missionaries. Other than this story involving this mother, it appears that nothing else of note happens on this trip.

There they find a mother whose daughter has a demon in her. She is a Gentile Roman Citizen, meaning she has three strikes against her in the eyes of the Apostles. She is begging Jesus to come heal her daughter, and the apostles in turn beg Jesus to tell her to leave them alone. Jesus commends her faith in him, and heals her daughter, showing the disciples that no matter how much they may look down upon someone, it is ultimately one's faith that makes someone pleasing before God.

The Woman of the City

Luke, in the latter part of chapter seven, describes a Pharisee hosting Jesus and his disciples in his home. A woman of the city, meaning a prostitute, comes up to his feet, which would have been sticking out away from the table as they reclined at tables for important meals such as this, and begins to wash them with her tears, her kisses, and her

hair—and uses an expensive perfume on his head.

The Pharisee is disgusted, not at the woman, but that Jesus, who claimed to be a teacher, would allow such an unclean prostitute to touch him, let alone kiss and wash his feet. Christ responds by saying the love she showed him in that one act was more than anyone else who was there. And then he forgives her of her sins, for her love was great.

Women giving their all

As I am rapidly running out of space, these two will have to simply be mentioned before we move on. The widow who gave the two coins (Mark 12:41-44), and the woman who anointed him (Mark 14:3-9).

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene first pops up in the passage mentioned earlier in Luke 8, of women following Jesus. Most of what we know of her takes place around and after the crucifixion. She was one of the women in Matthew 26:55-56 who witnessed the crucifixion while most of the male disciples had fled fearing their lives. She was close by as Joseph of Arimathea laid him in the tomb (v 61).

The next four things all have something in common, and I'll explain its significance momentarily.

- She was among the women who were the first people to discover the empty tomb when they came to anoint his body.
- She was among those same women as they told the male disciples about the empty tomb.
- She was the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection.
- She was then told to go tell or 'witness' to others about it.

The reason those four are significant is in that culture, women were not allowed to give testimony in court, because they couldn't be credible witnesses. Why? Because they were women of course! Yet God specifically had women be the first to tell others that Jesus is risen; and Christ specifically chooses a woman to appear to first to tell everyone that he is risen. Because Christ again wanted all of mankind to know that no matter what any society or culture says about women in their kingdom, women will always hold a high and unique place in His kingdom.

CONCLUSION:

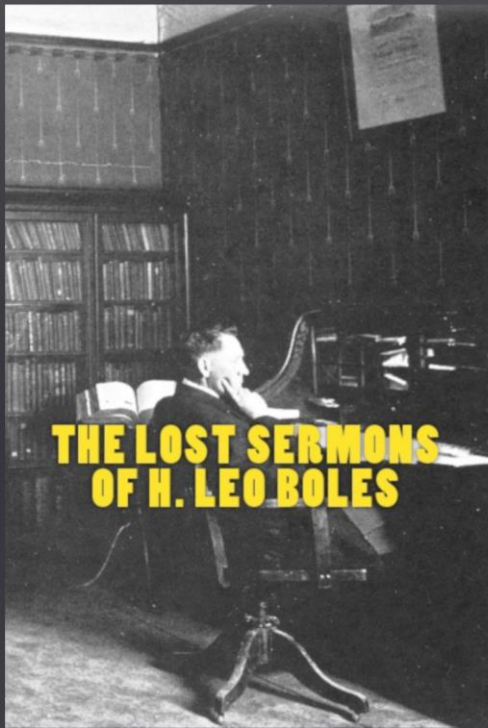
Women held a high view in the eyes of Christ. As the body of Christ, as disciples of his, if we fail to view women in the same light, we have failed to truly follow Christ. If we, the church, truly see ourselves as disciples of Christ, we will have the same regard for women in all we do and say.

Without women, the ministry of Christ would have looked a lot different. No, the women don't take up a lot of space in the gospel accounts, but that's probably because Christ didn't need to correct them much, it was the men who had all the issues. (Insert laughter here.) But clearly, whether it's Mary his mother in the begging, Mary and Martha throughout his ministry, the unnamed women time and time again, or Mary Magdalene at his crucifixion and after his resurrection, women were a big part of Christ's ministry. Their faith and his interactions with them teach us that.

The word of God guides women to the truth of God. God used women to show how to keep our priorities straight. God shows that women have a role in the spreading of the gospel message, be it by telling others about Jesus, giving up what they had to follow Him, or by using their means to support the preachers of the good news.

He shows that women, even while having the disadvantage of being women in a male-dominated society, can have an impact on generations to come just by showing love and faith. And God loves women who give all that they have, no matter how much or how little it may be in the eyes of others.

Scripture teaches us that within the church, there is a unique role for men to play. Jesus shows us that there is a unique, and equally important role for women to fill as well.



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TABERNACLE SHADOWS

THE BRAZEN ALTAR

Mark McWhorter

The Table of the Lord

The Brazen Altar is called “the table of the Lord” in Malachi 1:7. In the context the Israelites were offering blind, lame and sick animals on the Altar. They also were offering polluted bread.

The picture given is of God eating those things which are offered on the Altar. Malachi says God refuses to eat anything which is less than perfect.

The animals and other items burned on the Altar are symbolically being eaten by God through his Fire. With some of the sacrifices, the priests were given a portion for them to eat. Thus, there was a communion of eating at God’s table in which God and his priests were eating together.

This reference to God eating at his table sheds light on one of Jesus’ statements. “For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come,” (Luke 22:16-18). (See the Table of Shewbread for further discussion of this principle.)

“I am the Bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst,” (John 6:35; and see 48-51). Jesus said he was the “bread of God,” (John 6:33); and the “true bread,” (John 6:32).

In John 6:53, we read, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” In verse 56, he says, “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”

Jesus told the apostles that in the kingdom, they would be able to “eat and drink at my table,” (Luke 22:30). Thus, the table is not just a reference for the Lord’s Supper. We may eat the words of Jesus anytime. This should impress upon us the serious nature of Bible study. We are dining at Christ’s table. It is as if he were standing by us as we study. When we teach classes and study with others, there is a communion with our Lord.

Seen First

The Brazen Altar was the first thing seen when one entered the Gate. It was placed in the center of the Court, in front of the Laver and Door. Jesus and his crucifixion are the center of the gospel.

Paul stated, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Christians should make certain that they present Jesus in their lives and words. Preachers should do their best for listeners to hear and see Jesus rather than the preacher. Teaching and preaching is supposed to be about presenting Jesus, not impressing people with the teacher or preacher.

Remember that those outside the Wall saw the white linen. They did not see the poles. The linen represented the righteousness of God. The Gate represented Jesus. And as one entered the Court, the first thing seen is Jesus as the Brazen Altar and the ultimate sacrifice.

The Smoke

The smoke from the Altar was always seen. The fire was to burn continually and never go out. Con-

sidering the number of Israelites, the number of sacrifices must have been tremendous. It is likely the sacrifices were being made around the clock.

The persistent smoky pillar was smaller than the Pillar of the Cloud and Fire, but was just as permanent.

With the Cloud / Fire covering spread out over the camp, the Altar smoke rose into the covering. This symbolized God's approval and reception of Christ's sacrifice.

It was also a symbol of Christ's sacrifice being incorporated into Heaven. It covered all those who chose to live under the Cloud.

God's presence was seen above the Holy of Holies and then spreading over the people. But there was no way for man to contact that Cloud. His holiness was untouchable. However, God gave a way for each person to indirectly contact the Cloud. He had them burn sacrifices so that the smoke could rise and contact the Cloud. But even that contact was only allowed if the Fire that God gave was used for the burning. The person giving the sacrifice was impressed with the fact that it was not their giving of the sacrifice that made them acceptable. It was dependent on it being given in the proper manner which involved using what God had given. The sacrifice had to be burned with a Holy Fire.

Giving a perfect sacrifice and burning it with a perfect Fire, assured that the smoke rising was a holy smoke. God would not accept an unholy smoke. It was the smoke that rose and touched the holy Cloud. God does not permit himself to become unholy.

Christ on the Altar (cross) was a perfect sacrifice. The spiritual smoke rising from him was a holy smoke. It is that holy smoke that covers Christians.

Christians must stand on the Brazen Altar as a living sacrifice. Christians do not have to die. But they do have to present themselves as holy and perfect. The spiritual smoke arising from God's fire burning the Christian will rise as a holy smoke.

Several Offerings

There were several offerings offered on the Altar.

- Burnt offerings of bulls, sheep, goats, doves, or pigeons were for wholly consecration.

- Grain offerings of cakes or wafers of fine flour were for perfection through suffering.
- Peace offerings of a goat or lamb for reconciliation in all relationships.
- Sin offerings of a bull or lamb for dealing with the nature of sin.
- Trespass offerings of a female from the flock: a lamb, goat kid, dove, pigeon, or grain for acts of sin against God and man.

(Leviticus 1-6; 7:11; Hebrews 8:3; 9:11-14, 18-22; and 10:1-4.)

The Wages of Sin

The wages of sin is death, (Romans 6:23). The sacrificial animal had to die to be on the Altar. It was then burned. Before the blood could be taken into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, it had to come from a dead animal.

Before Christ could enter Heaven and present himself as the perfect sacrifice he had to die.

Before the Christian can go into the Holy Place he/she must die, then be buried in baptism (and thus washed), then enter for worship. Since God did not want or command a person to die physically to be righteous, he had his Son die for us. Humans contact Jesus' blood at baptism. His blood and death contacts us and makes us holy. It prevents us having to physically die. A person does have to spiritually die; dying to the life of sin.

To Slaughter

The Hebrew word for 'altar' means 'to slaughter an animal.'

Jesus was the Lamb, led to the slaughter, (Acts 8:32).

The English word 'altar' comes from the Latin 'alta' which refers to that which has been elevated or lifted up. The parts of the animal had to be lifted up on the Altar. Jesus was lifted up on the cross. He as the Altar was elevated.

John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The animal was initially tied to the horn of the Altar. This is the drawing to, before spiritual death of the believer.

Shovels, Basins, Fleshhooks and Fire Pans

There were brass shovels, basins, fleshhooks (3 pronged forks, 1 Samuel 2:13), and fire pans (censors), (Exodus 27:3).

These had to withstand the continuous hot fire. They were used for cleaning, aiding in obtaining food, used in collecting blood, and used for maintenance. Christ and Christians are involved in correcting and reproofing, (2 Timothy 3:16). These actions help in cleaning and maintaining the Church.

Shovels were used to collect the ashes and putting them into the pans. Christians use shovels to collect the Scriptures connected with the Savior's sacrifice. These include his prophecies, life, death, etc. While Jesus is no longer on earth, his scriptures are. Collecting them is important work but must not be the end of all labor. Staying at the Cross (the Altar) will not and should not be the end of all labor. Staying at the Cross will not allow growth. Staying there will not allow preaching to the world. This is one of the problems with individuals becoming monks. Staying away from the Cross too long is not good either. Staying away will allow the importance of the Cross to fade from memory.

The firepan was used to transport the Fire as the Israelites journeyed to a new site. The priests carried it. Remember the Fire came from God. Christians are in charge of transporting the cleansing fire of God, which in this context are the judgments that come from the scriptures being preached and taught, (Psalm 9:8; Isaiah 42:4; and John 7:24).

Christians cannot fall short of making proper judgments on others and helping them to repent. Else the living sacrifice of the person in question will not be found as a sweet smell by God. Failing to make judgment brings condemnation and causes separation from God.

Christians cannot add judgments that are not given by God. That would be the same as using false (man-made) fire.

The pans were also used to carry ashes outside the camp to a clean place. The ashes were a symbol of the finished sacrifice. Christ said, "It is finished," as he gave up the spirit on the cross, (John 19:30). He was carried to Joseph's clean tomb, (Luke 23:53 and John 19:41). The Christian is constantly carrying the finished ashes of his sacrifice to those outside the camp. The ashes (Scriptures) allow them to learn of his magnificent sacrifice. And hopefully encourages them to start on the path to joining him on the Altar.

The pans were also used to carry hot coals to the Altar of Incense. The Christian is involved in carrying these coals along with songs, praises, and prayers. These things can only be accepted by God if sent up by the burning of the holy coals made from the holy Fire at the Brazen Altar.

The basins collected the blood from the sacrifice. The blood was poured at the base of the Altar or sprinkled at various locations within the Tabernacle. Jesus' blood was poured out from his body when it was pierced while on the cross. He gave drops of blood when praying in the Garden the night of his trial. He also gave drops throughout the night and the next day as he was hit, scourged, and had thorns placed on his head. The Christian figuratively carries the basins at all times when worshipping. It is a constant reminder of the Savior's blood. Christ figuratively carried a basin of blood into heaven (Holy of Holies) as the High Priest.

The fleshhooks were used to manipulate the sacrifice on the Altar so that it would burn completely. They were also used by the priests to obtain their portion of the sacrifice to eat. Each Christian has the right to draw out their portion of Christ's sacrifice. Each Christian can eat freely of what they take. The fleshhook is a reminder to each Christian that he/she bears responsibility for Christ's sacrifice. It is as if each Christian is using the fleshhook to maneuver Christ's body on the cross. As a living sacrifice, each Christian should be willing to give a portion of himself to other Christians. It is an appropriate sharing of our spiritual knowledge and love. There is a communion among Christians that is special, (Hebrews 10:24-25 and Romans 15:14).

Transporting the Brazen Altar

When traveling the Altar was to be covered first with a purple covering. The vessels (utensils) were placed on the purple cloth. Then they were covered with badger skin. The coverings are symbols of Divine Royalty and lowly human. The two parts of the Incarnate Christ. The purple covering also brings to mind the purple robe placed on Jesus as he was being beaten and abused by the Roman soldiers.

Christians place themselves as servants to the royal King Christ. They are covered by the human Christ by his sacrifice.

Christians travel to the world in confidence, knowing that they rest on Christ and are covered by Christ.

While all the Israelites could see the Altar when inside the Court, they were not allowed to see it when traveling.

All other nations were not allowed to see it. All they could understand was that the Israelites were carrying something that had no real beauty.

Nothing appeared to be of value other than it was being carried by humans. Isaiah 53:2, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." The world sees no beauty in the Cross. Isaiah 52:14, "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

In his incarnation he called himself the Son of Man more than he referenced himself any other way. It was used in reference to Ezekiel 95 times. Son of Man was a signal that Jesus was a prophet

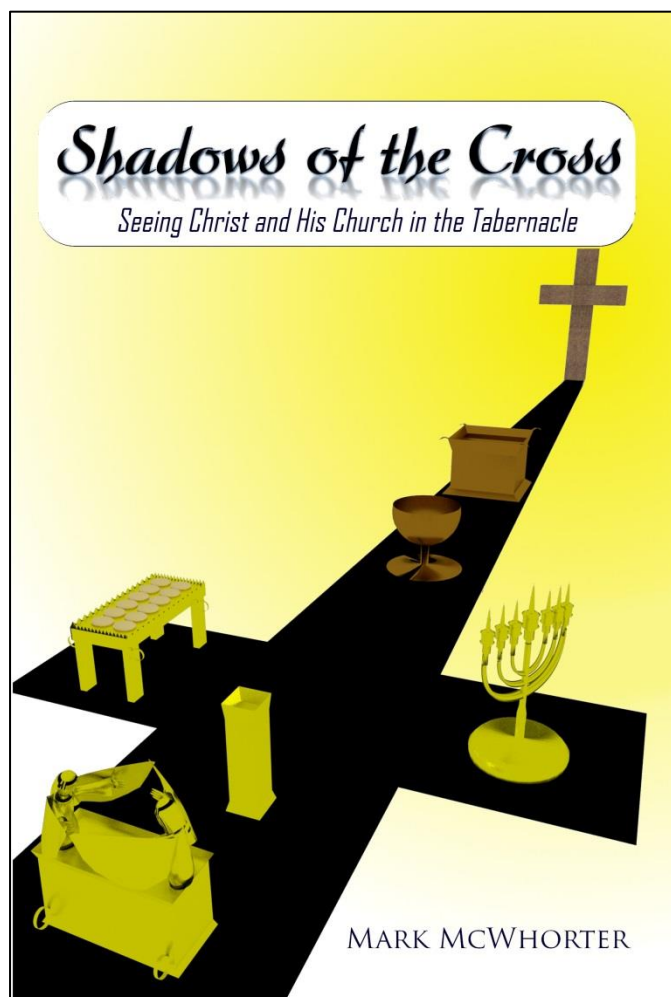
as great as Ezekiel. It emphasized that while on earth he was a man and he was inspired. Only as a man could he die a physical death. Only as a man could he be a proper sacrifice. Only as a man could he be the example for all humanity.

Much of the world would see his death as an ugly event that was a failure. But if they will look closer, if they will come to the Tabernacle, they can learn more about the Son of Man. And then go even further into the Tabernacle to have all spiritual blessings.

The Altar was carried by the staves in the rings which were on the outside of the Altar. The Altar was not directly carried. Instead the staves were needed to carry it. Christians do not directly carry Jesus. They indirectly carry him by carrying the Scriptures. The Bible is not beautiful on the outside. It really can look very much like any other book. However, when one uncovers it, one sees all the marvelous things that are told by the real Jesus.

Conclusion

The Brazen Altar was a very important piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. It is truly amazing how God used this piece of furniture to depict numerous aspects of Jesus and the Church.



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Paul Darst

A NOVEL
Daniel R. Lucas

Chapter Twenty-Eight: The Will of Man

The will of man is stubborn. It does not change in a moment. If on evil bent it forms the habit. Habit cannot be suddenly changed. Virtue and truth once banished from the soul of man do not easily return from exile. Remorse must ply the conscience with anguish ere the desire can be fully curbed. The seaman in the storm may pray, but such piety is ephemeral, it passeth away with the clouds. 'Tis only remorse for evil done, not fear of consequences, that can subdue the will. Yet sorrow for sin can work a true repentance, that God and the angels delight to behold. The goodness of God leads men to repentance. That goodness began to become clearly perceptible to Paul Darst. The mistakes of the past began to impress seriously his religious nature. The fact that God regarded his creatures with compassion; that Jesus loved even his enemies, and was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth; that God had given the infallible testimony of prophecy, led him to recognize the power, wisdom, and love of God, as manifested in the person, life, and character of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. On the other hand, Unruh Henry hardened his heart, and became more angry at God, and Christ, and his people every day. Step by step he was removing the "Uncaused Cause of causes all" farther and farther away, until no conception of his character was possible to his distempered intellect. The power of the soul was completely submerged in the fallacies of an atheistic philosophy, until the wonderful, the immutable wisdom, power, and goodness of God became as but evanescent marvels. Dread was the only settled and secret power of his life. To be, to live, to always carry about the fearful thought of utter annihilation. To sit on the bar-

ren sands of the desert of Epicurean Atheism, to hear the howl of the coming tempest, to dread the lightning stroke of a fatalistic ending, who could bear it? It is unnatural, but the soul was benumbed. That higher power of the heart, that rises serenely above all storms to the bosom of the everlasting Father; that feels at noonday and in the silent majesty of the midnight hour the encompassed arms of the infinite love, was gone, buried under the rubbish of a philosophy that says the absolute that lies beneath all phenomenal existence, is forever unknowable, and a God, if there be a God, must be undiscoverable by the intellect of man. With a grand spirit, that might have climbed the mountain of holiness and breathed the pure air of a heavenly spirituality, expanding into all the fullness of a pure and holy character, he sank to the level of the lowest, to a complaining, repining cavalier. His friends noticed that his physical frame was gradually giving way, that the fell disease, consumption, had laid its wasting hand upon him, and not many moons would wax and wane ere he would sink into the grave. Dr. Van Buren noted the gradual approach of the destroyer, but was powerless with all the remedial agents at his command to stay the onward progress of the malady. Darst, reproaching himself with the thought that perhaps he was somewhat to blame for some of the harsher and more wicked sentiments of Henry, tried to reason with him about his condition. He would not listen. To Love alone, and to his true and saddened wife, did he exhibit any degree of the tenderness that once in childhood blossomed in his soul. To Love he would often say:

"And what is death? It is only a relief from this suffering. I am ready to die. I cannot help it." And then in the weak complainings of all fatalists he would repine: "I am not to blame. Circumstances

and destiny control me. If there is a God, he is to blame. Why did he give me my being and all my passions if I am not to gratify them?"

After following this course for awhile, his better nature, not wholly hidden yet, would rise up and he would feel humiliated at the disgrace attending such a confession. Then he would curse his Creator with the venom of hatred.

At this the reader may wonder, but it is natural. You will see people who are poor curse those who are rich, simply because they are rich. You will see the outcast, the woman who has sold herself to sin, and the libertine, rail at the virtuous simply because they are virtuous and respectable. So the atheist, who has denied God, trampled upon his law, and become his enemy, will hurl defiance at the Omnipotent, even in the hour of death. Truly man is a majestic and sublime being when he can become the friend or enemy of an infinite God, the approved child or the alienated, rebellious offspring of the Father of all. Volition is a priceless, but a fearful gift, and results in the highest happiness when its possessor rises to the serene contemplation of duty performed, of wrong patiently suffered, of evil overcome, and righteousness fulfilled; but of the deepest misery when it weakly succumbs to sin, blindly murmurs at fate, rails at virtue as a lost art, and becomes the veriest slave of passion led captive into the dungeons of self-righteousness, arrogance, and pride. To this was Henry descended. Sad and desolate the fate. But could it be otherwise? Yes; if God had made man a machine; if God had never delegated power or will to man, man would never have sinned. But then he would not have been man, for it is that very will, that volition, that makes the man, it is the man.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Seeking Light

When Paul was convinced of the divine authenticity and authority of the Bible, he propounded a question in the congregation of this character: "Now, I have accepted the Bible, but I find various churches in town, differing in their creeds or confessions of faith, all drawn, they say, from the Bible. I have no time to examine them to see which one is right. What shall I do? I want to be right, and I know it is wrong for me to profess something I do not believe; in fact, that would be hypocritical, and I do not like to take anything on the faith of

others when they disagree. I see my companions here, and with your permission, Mr. Love, I would like to illustrate what I mean. Here is Mr. Wingood, a Presbyterian, I will ask him a question.

"Mr. Wingood, shall I join the Methodist church?"

Thus appealed to, Mr. Wingood did not know exactly how to answer. He could not say yes, for he could not advise a man to do a thing he would not do himself, and he certainly did not believe the teachings of that church. He could not say no, for that would necessitate him to give a reason, and he did not wish to do that in a public assembly, for it would hurt their feelings for him to say that the Methodists did not teach the truth. At the same time he was conscious that the clear blue eye of a certain young lady was upon him. And did not that clear blue eye, peeping out from under that coquetish hat-rim that hid those golden curls, belong to Katy Lanire, and did he not expect to walk home by the side of that same Katy, and perhaps, someday — well, never mind someday, now — and was not Katy a devoted Methodist. He was as brave as most men, nevertheless there was a struggle between his honesty, his sectarianism, and his charity. His honesty said, don't do it, for he did not believe it right. His sectarianism said, don't do it, for we want Paul in the Presbyterian church. His charity said, if you do you will hurt the feelings of the Methodists, and they honestly and sincerely believe they are right. He studied a moment and said:

"I prefer not to answer the question. There are some things involved in it that I do not clearly understand, and my answer might not be satisfactory."

"Then I will ask Mr. Lanire, who is a Methodist, this question: Mr. Lanire, shall I join the Baptist church?"

Mr. Lanire found himself in exactly the same predicament of Wingood. He remembered that not two hours previously he had been trying to persuade a friend to join the Methodist church, who was inclined to unite with the Baptists, because they practiced immersion, and had agreed to see the preacher in charge to get him to immerse that friend, and now that friend was present. And besides, did not his pulses thrill a little faster that day when he had called to see Lucy Belcamp, and did she not give him a sweet and tender smile when she invited him to call again, and did he not expect

to accept the invitation, and — but there is no necessity for any more and now — was not Lucy a rigid Baptist? And so he said:

“I do not think I am the proper one to answer that question.”

“Then,” said Darst, “if these gentlemen cannot tell me, what am I to do? I will ask the question once more. Mr. Belcamp, you are a Baptist, shall I join the Presbyterian church?”

Mr. Belcamp had been studying the question over as to how he should answer it, and had found an answer in his own mind, but when the question was put direct he could not see the matter as clearly as it had appeared to him. He feared no pair of blue eyes or the loss of any sweet smile, for in forming an “entangling alliance” with the placid, sober, and sedate Emma Wingood, the Presbyterian, they had mutually pledged not to interfere with each other’s religious opinions, and both were to have the liberty to say what they desired on these questions on all occasions, only they would not talk to each other about them. His first impulse was to say no, and give his reasons, but a thought induced him to say:

“I do not know just how to answer, and I would like to hear the opinion of Mr. Harvey, who is a Congregationalist, on the subject.”

All eyes were turned to Mr. Harvey, who immediately replied:

“Mr. Darst, I will answer any one of your questions yes, with one condition, that you are honest and sincere.”

“Shall I join the Baptist church, did you say?” asked Darst, not seeming to understand the answer given.

“Yes, if you honestly and sincerely believe it

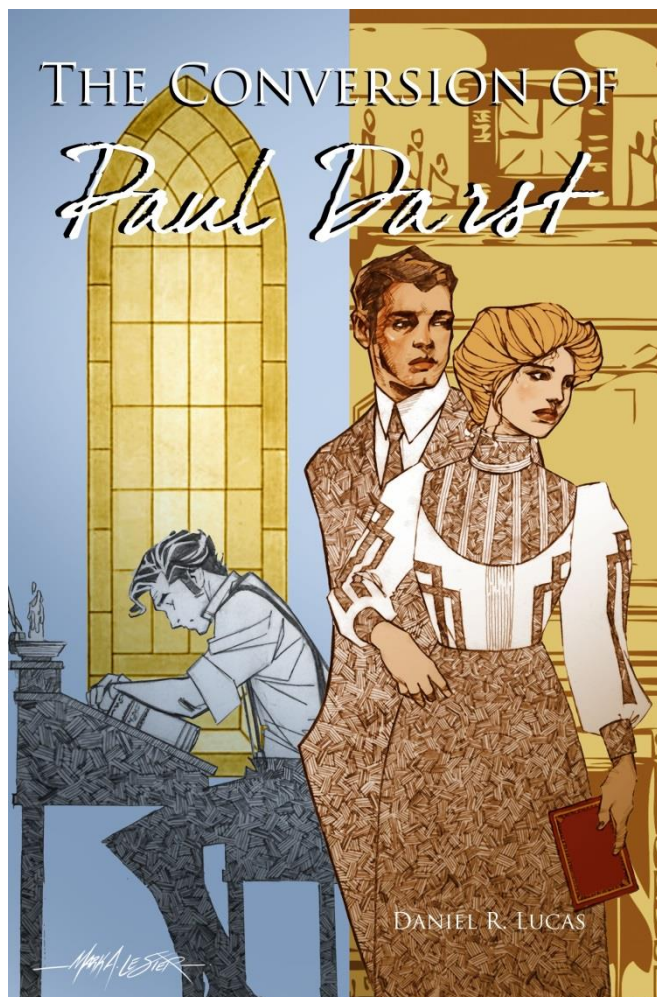
right, for I believe a man has a right to do anything he believes to be right. ‘Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind’ is what the Scripture says, and I believe it.”

“Yes, that is what the Scripture says, but that does not help my case,” said Darst, “for I cannot be fully persuaded in my own mind, until I have something to guide me in its formation. I do not know whether the Baptist church is right or not, and how can I find out without examining its teachings with all the other creeds to find out which is right. I have not time, or perhaps the ability, to do that.”

“Well,” said Harvey, “you have the Bible; take that and examine it, and choose the church that comes the nearest in their teachings to it; and, of course, my opinion is, if you do that you will be a Congregationalist. Whether you do or not, that is just what you will have to do, take the Bible and conscientiously follow where that leads you, and I am certain if all these gentlemen here were questioned they would tell you the same. Is it not?” turning to Wingood, Lanire, and Belcamp, who all nodded assent.

“Well, then, if I take the Bible,” said Paul, “it seems to me you are none of you in accordance with it. Let me read you a passage or two from it. I find in a prayer that Jesus uttered, after praying for the unity of his apostles, this language:

*‘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, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.’
John 17:20.*



"Here the Savior prays that all believers may be one, and I find that you are divided, or else I do not understand in what that oneness consists. Mr. Love, is there any means by which we can find out what the Savior meant by that unity?"

Mr. Love had been a quiet, but very much interested listener to the proceedings, and now seemed to be in a quandary at the novelty of the question. Seeing his hesitation, Rose Leyden quietly arose, as if to speak. All eyes were turned toward her with astonishment. Her cheek mantled with a slight blush which betrayed some embarrassment under the steady gaze of the audience, which increased as she gazed for a moment full in the face of Paul. It was only a moment, however, for she soon regained her self-possession. It was the first time they had seen each other face to face since the morning of their separation. She knew that many in the audience, though claiming to be followers of him who said, "judge not that ye be not judged," had judged her harshly, but it mattered not to her now. In a voice clear, and at first slightly tremulous, she began:

"I do not know whether it is right or proper that I should speak or not, but I think I can answer Mr. Darst's question."

Mr. Love replied:

"Mr. Darst is seeking truth, and surely is ready to receive it from any source."

"Then," said Rose, "Mr. Darst, will you read first Corinthians, first chapter and first verse?"

Darst read as follows:

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

When Darst had read thus far Rose inquired:

"Mr. Darst, to whom is that letter addressed, according to this introduction?"

"It is addressed to all that in every place call on the Lord."

"Is it addressed to the Christians, or saints, in Bethel?"

"Certainly it is, for it says, 'all that in every place,' and that must include Bethel."

"Very good. Now read from the 10th verse what

Paul says to them."

Darst reads:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

"Now, as Mr. Darst has no prejudices in this case," said Rose, "I will ask him a few questions, and if he answers incorrectly any of our friends present can correct him. My first question is, What does Paul mean by the phrase, 'by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'?"

"He means simply by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ," replied Darst.

"What does he say of their speaking?"

"They are to speak the same thing."

"Of their actions?"

"They are not to be divided."

"Of their thoughts?"

"They are to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

"Now, brethren," turning to Wingood, Lanire, Belcamp, and Harvey, "are the saints at Bethel keeping that commandment? Are they united in the same mind and judgment? Are they speaking the same things?"

All confessed they were not.

"Why are you not?"

"Because we can't all see alike," said Wingood.

"Has the Savior given his people a commandment to be one, and made the faith of men in a measure dependent thereon? And do you say it is an impossibility for Christians to obey it?"

"I don't know. I have always thought that persons could not see alike, or be united in their religious faith, but still Jesus says, 'grant that they may be one, that the world may believe,' and I confess it looks reasonable. I am sure the subject is not clear in my mind. There are some arguments in favor of divisions, are there not?"

"Yes, the Jewish Christians at Rome made an argument in favor of sin, because where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, but when a positive commandment of Jesus comes in conflict with an argument, which must prevail?"

"The commandment, of course. But I heard a man say the other day, that it was a fine thing Christians were so divided, for if they were all

united in one church they would persecute those opposed to them.”

“Well,” said Rose, “suppose you adopt the argument, and let us look at it. Was Jesus a persecutor?”

“No, he had a spirit entirely the reverse of that; he prayed for forgiveness even to his murderers.”

“If a man is a Christian will he not have ‘the same mind that was in Christ,’ and be like him?”

“Certainly. Paul says, ‘if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.’”

“Then, of, course, no number of Christians will ever persecute. Whenever they begin to persecute, they cease to be Christians, and the result is they will not long remain united.”

As Rose uttered this she saw in the audience her father steadily gazing at her, and his changing countenance was an index of the emotions thronging his heart. Bitterness was there yet, but he could not utterly subdue the fatherly pride that this young lady who thus reasoned, to the wonder of all, was his daughter. Rose, conscious of the rectitude of her own motives, continued unfalteringly:

“Sectarians always persecute, Christians never. The sectarian Paul was a persecutor; the Christian Paul was not. Carnality persecutes; spirituality forgives. Forgive your enemies is the burden of the breeze that is wafted across the hills of Judea. Harmless as doves, is the echoing voice of the only begotten of the Father. If one man is a Christian he will not persecute; if half the men in the world were Christians they would not persecute, and if all were, there would be no persecution, certainly.”

“Well, Miss Leyden,” said Belcamp, “can you tell us why we are not united?”

“Perhaps we can get some light on the question, if we will see what caused the division in the church at Corinth. Mr. Darst, will you read, commencing at the verse following the one containing the commandment for union?”

Darst reads:

“For it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them who are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.”

“Now read the third verse of the third chapter.”

Darst reads:

“For ye are carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?”

“That will do. Mr. Belcamp, will you now tell us what was the cause of division there?”

“It was about men; but that is not the cause of division now. We are divided about doctrines now.”

“That is true, but it is just the same. You are divided about the doctrines of men, and carry the division so far as to separate yourselves entirely in your communions from one another, while the Corinthian brethren did not do that.”

“What! Are there no divisions among us about things taught in the Bible?”

“No; everything about which you differ is not clearly taught in the Bible, and has nothing to do with man’s salvation. If a thing is clearly taught in the Bible, there can be no division over it, for its teachings are regarded by you all as plain, clear, and infallible. As you desire, Mr. Darst, to be right and on the safe ground all the time, let me give you a rule to govern you in your investigation of divine truth. Whenever you find anything about which two honest, intelligent, and candid Christians disagree, just reject it as a cause of division, and when you find that in which they all agree, accept it; if it is a fact, believe it; if a command, obey it; if a promise, claim it as yours. And if all these good brethren will agree to do the same thing, they can unite together at once; and what is better than all, none of them violate a single conscientious conviction.”

“That looks reasonable,” said Mr. Harvey, “but I am afraid it will not be practical. I think you will find some difficulties in the way, and if you bind us all down in one faith and practice to just the things in which we agree, I fear our creed would be very small and entirely too narrow.”

“Well, my opinion is,” said Mr. Wingood, “it would be rather broad. A creed that would take us all in, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian, would be rather an extended one.”

“Large or small, broad or narrow, I propose to adopt it for the present as my rule of action,” replied Paul, “and I want to test it tomorrow night at our meeting.”

It was so understood, and the meeting adjourned. Rose and Love departed at once with Dr. Van Buren and his wife, but the gossips of the congregation had to discuss the affair.

"A woman preacher!" said one.

"I don't care if she is," said Katy Lanire, "I know Rose is sincere and honest; and that she has more sense than some of those who talk about her, is very certain."

"O, she just wanted to show off before that young preacher; and since Paul won't let her be Mrs. Darst she is going to try to be Mrs. Love," said a young lady in the hearing of Job Raines, who responded:

"If I was you, I wouldn't measure other people's turnips in my own half-bushel, and show my jealousy quite so plain; but then it's a woman's privilege to abuse a woman, I suppose," he added, somewhat apologetically.

Judge Leyden walked home quietly and thoughtfully, and it was late at night ere he retired. At last he slept, a troubled, dreamy sleep. He was alone on a barren desert. The scorching rays of a summer sun increased an already overpowering thirst. Must he die thus? No; for just before him appeared his daughter Rose, with a cooling draught of pure water. As he was about to raise it to his lips, something touched his elbow and dashed the cup to the ground. He turned and beheld a demon, a seven-headed monster, and on each head and his body a name. He read the names on each head, Pride, Envy, Malice, Prejudice, Malevolence, Hatred, and Spite. On the body, in large letters, the name, Bigotry! Terrified, he awoke, and for a long time pondered on his dream, and hid it in his heart.

Paul Darst thought — but if I tell you what they all thought, it will make this chapter too long. As I remember tonight what they all thought and said, I can only think of what Moore has so beautifully and exquisitely expressed:

*"Poor race of men," said the pitying Spirit,
Dearly ye pay for your primal Fall.
Some flow'rets of Eden, ye still inherit,
But the trail of the Serpent is over them all."*

Chapter Thirty: Common Ground

The audience that gathered to hear the subject of Union discussed was a large and attractive one. Some were there with open, honest, inquiring hearts; knowing that truth alone can make men

free. This class are the salt of the earth, the leaven of humanity. Some were there to condemn, if an excuse offered for so doing, and if no excuse could be found, to manufacture one. These are the thorns, the scales, the grasshoppers of society. Some were there to pass away the time, to gratify idle curiosity, it is so much easier to hear something than to think something to talk about. This class are usually harmless, and, like the quack's remedy, if they do no good, they also do very little harm. But he alone is truly useful and wise who is willing to learn. No one is so ignorant as he who thinks that wisdom will die when he passes away, that he has reached the acme of human knowledge. Dissatisfaction with the surroundings and conditions in which he is placed is universal with intelligent man. In fact, much as it may be decried and as much as it may be urged upon us to be content, it is a necessary adjunct of intelligence. Present attainments can never satisfy. Mind, like a river, must flow onward, it cannot remain stationary. Knowledge, like a great unexplored sea, is the outlet of mind, and while there is anything unknown, mind can never be at rest. It may be satisfied sometime, but not in this world.

The congregation joined in singing, in sweet and solemn strains, that grand old hymn, commencing:

*"How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,
When those who love the Lord,
In one another's peace delight,
And so fulfill the word."*

After this Mr. Love offered a fervent prayer for the blessing of the God of love to be with them. The reporter of the Daily Bugle, who was present, said "it was touchingly and sublimely eloquent," with a few more pathetic adjectives to close up the sentence. In noticing the reports of the meetings of the various city preachers and their prayers, I find we have as many kinds of prayers as we have of sermons. I have made a little note of them as I pass along, and find on my list, declamatory prayers, logical prayers, eloquent prayers, synthetical prayers, analytical prayers, pathetic prayers, sympathetic prayers, oratorical prayers, historical prayers, exegetical prayers, (and last, but not least, a polite prayer, in which the preacher commences by saying: "We would suggest to thee, O Lord, the propriety of bestowing thy blessing upon us, as it will

be gratefully appreciated,") and so on to the end, with some prayers of faith. Well it is that we know that God hears all prayers, but answers only those that are offered in faith for the things promised and in the way he has directed.

Darst then read the rule he adopted, to take the common ground where they all agreed, and opened the subject by saying: "I cannot, of course, adopt any one of your confessions of faith as a whole, as they do not agree. I will ask Mr. Love to conduct the examination, as he has more experience and knowledge of such matters than myself. I am a sinner and desire to become a Christian, a member of the church, that I may live the Christian life. I would first like to know how that is to be done."

Mr. Love offered a few preliminary suggestions, that as Messrs. Wingood, Lanire, and Belcamp, each understood the teachings of their several churches, that they should vote aye, or no, on the propositions as suggested. To this all agreed, when he said:

"Here is the book we call the Bible, which Paul says, 'is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,' all of you who believe this and agree in it, vote aye."

All voted aye.

Mr. Wingood desired to explain his vote by saying: "Of course, we all believe the Bible, but differ in our interpretation of it."

"That is true, but we want to find the common interpretation, that in which you all agree. I understand you all say you believe the Bible?" said Love.

"Then," said Darst, "I am safe in adopting the Bible as my only rule of faith and practice."

"Then, we will go a step farther. The Bible teaches that, in order to become a Christian, a man must believe in and confess his faith in Jesus, the Son of the living God. What say you to requiring this of Mr. Darst?"

All voted aye.

But Lanire, explaining, said, "Of course, we agree that faith in Jesus is the principle by which we are saved, but I think he ought to be required to believe the Bible to be the word of God."

"That is true, but does he not confess his faith in that, when he accepts Jesus?"

"Most assuredly he does," said Harvey, "for if Jesus is the Christ, the Bible is true, if he is not the Christ, the Bible is false."

"A very good explanation, for Jesus with one hand reaches out over the Old Testament and sanctions the authority of the prophets, while they point to Jesus for fulfillment; with the other he reaches out over the apostles and gives them all the authority they possess, and they testify of Jesus, so that the Bible stands or falls with Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. This much then is settled. The Bible also teaches that a man ought to repent of his sins, forsake them, and turn to the Lord. All that are in favor of requiring Paul to do this, in order to union with you, please vote aye."

All voted aye.

"Now you are agreed as to what a man must believe, with all his heart, and the change that must take place in his life and practice, and as all organizations must have some formal act of admission to rights and privileges, have you one on which you agree?"

"Christ instituted baptism," said Belcamp, "and we use that as a formal admission into the Baptist church."

"Mr. Lanire, what does your Discipline say about this?"

"It says: 'Baptism is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, and is a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized.'"

"Mr. Wingood, what does your Confession say?"

"It says: 'Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, for the admission of the party baptized into the visible Church.'"

"That will do. Your confessions of faith all agree that baptism is an ordinance of Jesus Christ to be kept in his church until the end of the world, all therefore in favor of requiring all who unite with you to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will vote aye."

All voted aye.

"But we do not all agree in the mode of baptism," said Wingood.

"I am aware of that, but I am trying to find that on which you can agree. There are three actions called baptism and as you are commanded to all 'speak the same thing' we will test those. First, let

us try sprinkling. Many good and pious people believe it to be valid, and think the Scriptures authorize it, you who are in favor of adopting it as the action of baptism vote aye.”

Mr. Wingood arose and said, “My creed says dipping is not necessary, and that sprinkling will do; I can vote aye.”

Mr. Lanire also said, “My discipline gives all their choice, and says sprinkling is right, I vote aye.”

Mr. Belcamp followed, saying, “I am sorry to differ with my brethren on this subject, but I do not believe sprinkling is authorized by the Scriptures. The word baptizo, the word the Savior used, does not mean to sprinkle, and no Lexicographer of any note gives it that definition. I do not wish to argue the question, but I am compelled by the teaching of my church, and my own conscientious convictions, to vote no.”

Mr. Love then presented pouring as the action of baptism with the same result, after which he followed with immersion, desiring all who agreed in immersion to vote aye.

Mr. Belcamp said, “I vote aye of course, for we practice that as the action of baptism and nothing else.” Messrs. Wingood and Lanire both voted aye, remarking, that, of course, they believed immersion to be valid baptism, they couldn’t do otherwise, as their creeds recognized it as baptism.

“Very good, then,” said Mr. Love, “you all agree that a man must believe in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, and confess his faith in him, that he must repent of all his sins, and be immersed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to constitute him a member of the church; that then is common ground where all can stand.”

“I prefer to stand there at least,” said Darst, “for it must be right and safe where all agree.”

[To be Continued]

Letter to the Editor

“my all-time favorite!”

Just finished the recent edition of *The Quarterly* and loved it—maybe my all-time favorite! Bet you didn’t know I am a fan of the Hittites—their approach to covenant is much more egalitarian than the terms-of-surrender approach of Assyrian suzerain/vassal covenants. The Hittite form better explains features of the Sinai covenant, and fits the historical chronology much better (see Joshua Berman, *Created Equal*). I also love the early post-canonical Christian writings, such as Clement. Both treatments of the Pharisees were good, as were other articles.

Your reflections on Jerry Dowell highlighted shortcomings in my own ministry and leaves me wishing that I earlier had mentoring like that.

John

A Note from the Editor

To all of our readers, I thank you very much. I know the other writers are greatly appreciative as well. We have around twenty to thirty men (depending on their schedules) who write for this magazine (thus far). And often, I am asked, “What topic would you like me to write on?”

So, dear reader, I thought I would simply “pass the buck,” so to speak, and ask you: What topics do you want to see covered in a future issue? Send your comments or questions to CobbPublishing@gmail.com

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About the Authors

Travis Anderson grew up in Southwest Missouri, attended Brown Trail School of Preaching, moved to Bismark, IL (where he still preaches), and is excitedly engaged. He loves being the father of his two children, playing softball/baseball, and doing the work of a minister (even with its difficulties).

Tom Baxley is presently the minister for the Highway 9 church of Christ, but has high hopes of one day venturing to Middle-earth, hoping to rebuild and minister to the great city of Osgiliath, and finally teach them the greatness of ultimate frisbee and disc golf. Until that time he will remain in Alabama with his wife and three children.

Jeremie Beller has lived in Oklahoma his entire life. He has spent more time in school than any person should, receiving three degrees from Oklahoma Christian University (BA, MA, and MDiv) and a PhD from the University of Oklahoma (Communication and Social Influence). He has served the Wilshire Church of Christ since 2007, and serves as an adjunct professor at OCU. Jeremie's wife, Delaina, teaches 4th grade at Oklahoma Christian Academy. They have one son (Keaton) and one daughter (Kayden).

Gantt Carter lives in Elk City, OK, with his wife (Julie), and their two growing children. He preaches for the 2nd & Adams congregation, enjoys martial arts and fishing, teaches online Bible classes, and was one of the stars of an underappreciated YouTube show about FBI agents.

Gerald Cowan has taught at the British Bible School, done mission work in Albania, written for several brotherhood papers, preached for five decades, and continues to encourage a young man (your editor) to be a better Christian. His "Personal Periodicals" are available via email. Contact him at GeraldCowan1931@aol.com.

David Dean serves the church of Christ in Fouke Arkansas. He divides his time between studying God's Word, preparing for various sermons and bible classes, and spending as much time as he can with his wife and two children. In whatever time is left David can be found with a book in his hand

and a cup of coffee!

Kyle Frank is a disabled workaholic whose idea of fun is spending twelve hours a day reading the American Standard Version (of 1901), Restoration Movement biographies, sermons, and seeing how many writing projects he can keep going at once. He also runs So and So Publishing.

Perry Hall has preached for over three decades, and has degrees in History and Philosophy. His marriage is nearing the big 35 mark. He has successfully endured and recovered (mostly) from last year's back surgery. He and his wife have four children. He occasionally writes at PerryDox.com

Joshua Hames has been the Hispanic minister at Crestview church of Christ in Boaz, Alabama, since 2011. He's the author of 3 books and counting. A former carpenter turned accountant, he currently processes all invoicing for the fire hydrant capital of the world (look for the word "Albertville" in the next casting you see). He is a husband, and the father of two beautiful blessings from God. He takes great pleasure in propagating and growing plants, and reading about the social sciences, literature, history, and economics. You can find him at: DiggingInTheWord.com

Justin Hopkins is an avid coffee drinker who enjoys roasting high-grade specialty coffee with a unique Texas flair. Whatever coffee he doesn't drink he shares with others. He is blessed to be married to an amazing author and a better cook. Together they are raising three boys and work to create solid Bible class curriculum and books. Justin also preaches for the Lord's church in Itasca, Texas, and works with the Manna Project to train preachers in Africa. Contact Info: (210) 593-8329 justin@woodsmokedcoffee.com

Bill Howard is a former elder, preacher, and restaurateur who spends his "retired" time writing detective novels and studies for new Christians, as well as encouraging others and supporting the new elders where he attends in Dale, Oklahoma.

John Krivak is a constant student of the Bible and church history, especially the Restoration Move-

ment and Alexander Campbell. He studied Bible and Biblical Languages at Harding University. He can be contacted at jkrivak@zoominternet.net.

Daniel R. Lucas was part of the Union army during the Civil War, and served as a Chaplain for several years afterwards. He died over 110 years ago, and probably never considered that you would be reading anything about him in 2019.

Richard Mansel is a preacher, writer, book-lover (whose passion lately is histories focused on World War II), and former editor of *Forthright Magazine*.

Mark McWhorter is an overachiever, a finder of treasure, explorer of old and significant houses, occasional dumpster-diver, and an expert in everything from open-heart surgery to Russian politics. (And you think I'm making this stuff up...) He is also one of three writers for the *Quarterly* who are former residents of Marion, IL.

Adam Miller studied electrical engineering at Louisiana Tech and Bible at Southern Christian University. He has preached for congregations across Louisiana and Mississippi, and is currently back home as minister for the Plain Dealing church of Christ. He has conducted mission work in Tanzania, St Vincent & the Grenadines, and New Mexico. Adam has been involved in construction for over 20 years as a builder and now as a licensed home inspector. His greatest accomplishment is being married to the former Melissa Griggs, and having two wonderful sons, Caleb and Joshua.

Jim Mitchell recently purchased the copyrights to Ivan Stewart's Open Bible Study program, and has been using it to great success. He and his wife Jen-

nifer live in Oklahoma City, where he works with the Cherokee Hills congregation.

Xander Pasley is a rebellious 17-year-old, chained in his parents' basement. Okay, not really, though he does actually live in the basement. He spends half his nights writing encouraging posts for his friends, with Caleb Lehman. He is homeschooled; and like most homeschooled kids, he has no problem socializing with anyone, whether old or young.

Devin Self is a proud husband and father, who attends the Gravel Hill church of Christ, outside of Dover, AR. He enjoys filling in for the preacher when given the opportunity.

Michael Shank wrote a book that went viral, *Muscle and a Shovel*. He has written two other published books, and his wife, Jonetta, has written another. They have recently moved to Texas, where Mike sells machinery parts for oil rigs.

Jim Stutts is retired from full-time preaching, but still takes every opportunity to encourage younger preachers. He likes old cars (even ones that don't like him), and spending time with his family (especially the grandkids).

Bradley S. Cobb spends his early morning hours listening to podcasts on money, manhood, war, and the Bible, while loading boxes on some of those big brown delivery trucks that seem to be all over the place. He also occasionally crawls through 50-year-old insulation and dust to run wire, in addition to editing books, stories, and manuscripts for authors both dead and alive. He's proud to be married to his best friend, and they have four Christian teenagers (one of whom just turned 18).

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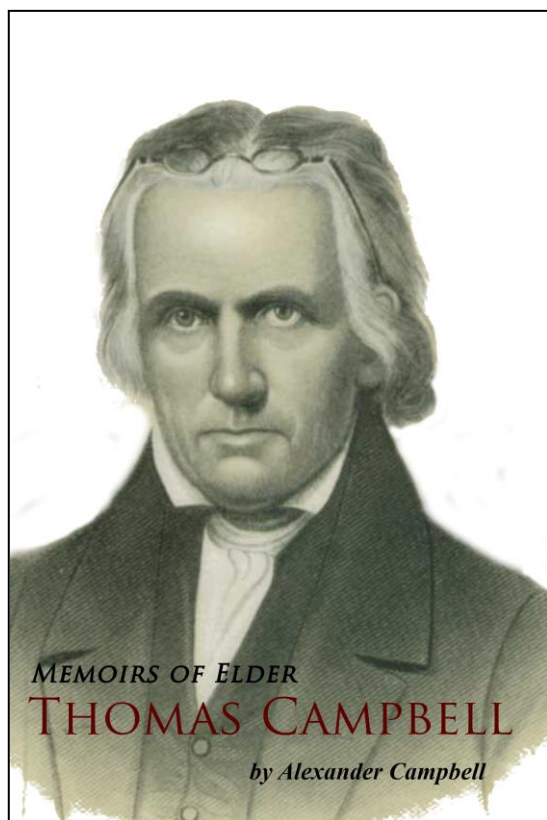
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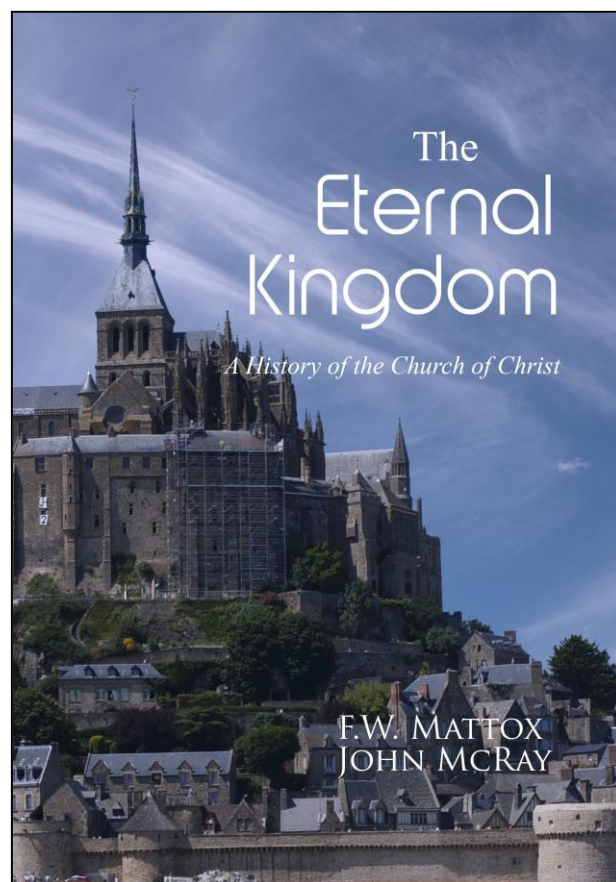
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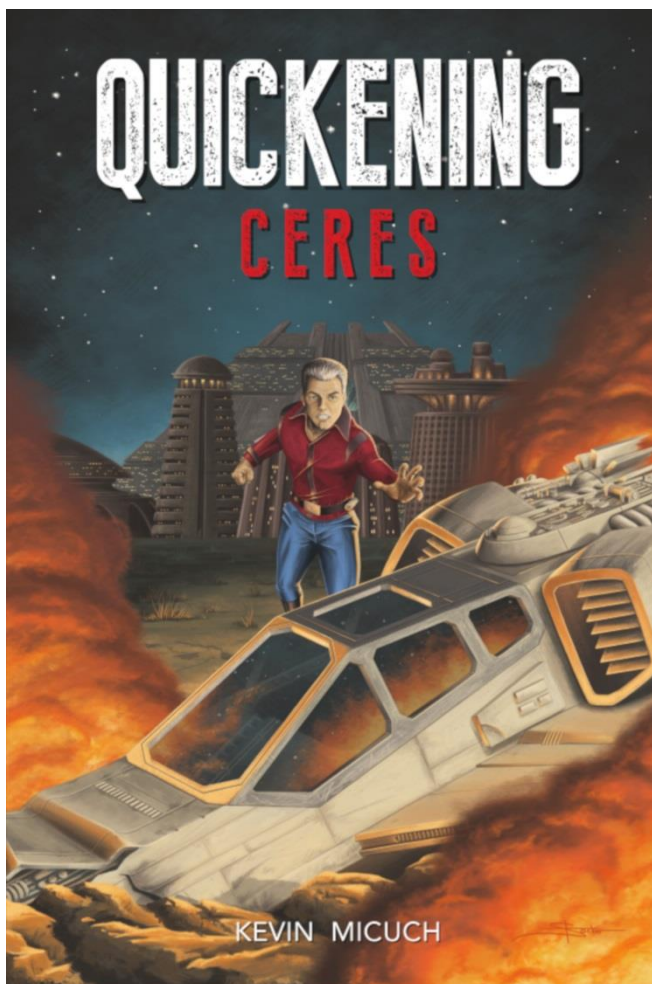
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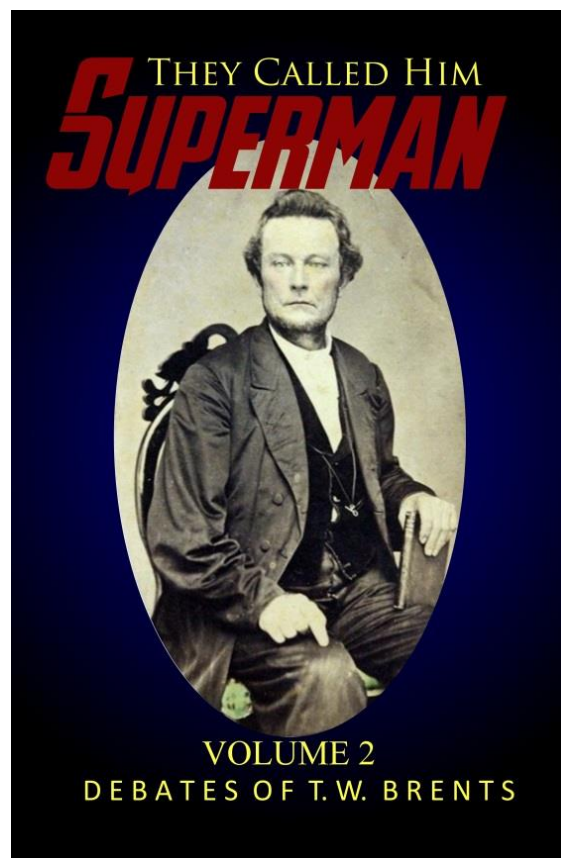
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