

James, the
Son of Alphaeus

Jonah's View of
Nineveh

Too Short to be a
Christian?

The Christian Response to
the Abortion Crisis

Did Christian Baptism
Replace Jewish Circumcision?

Does Agape Really Mean
What You Think it Means?

The Restoration Movement:
The Christian Connexion

Obstacles to Evangelism

The Rising Force that is
the Occult

The Magnitude of the Step

Walking in a Manner
Worthy

They Called Him
'Blondie'

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE
PASSION
of Jesus Christ

The Quarterly

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Depends on How You Look at It

I've had writers ask me, "What's the theme of the next issue?" so that they have an idea what topic to write on. And I always answer the same way: "We don't have themes, because if someone isn't interested in that specific theme, then the issue is boring to them." Well, I changed my mind for this issue, because this "theme," the Passion [suffering] of Jesus Christ is something all Christians should focus on regularly. As Bob Myhan, one of the writers in this issue, states, "*To more fully appreciate the Passion of Christ ourselves, we must view it from as many perspectives as possible.*"

Additionally, since this is officially the largest issue we've ever produced, we have a multitude of other topics covered, which we know will pique your interest. Gerald Cowan takes on the question of baptism replacing circumcision. John Krivak invites us to bring people to "robust baptism." Ryan Manning jumps right into a controversial fire by asking if we've been mis-defining *agape* love. Edwin Walker shows why we should view the Lord's Supper as a covenant meal of peace. Joseph McWhorter writes on the Christian's response to abortion. Richard Mansel digs into the history of Nineveh and why Jonah had it out for the people who lived there. And Kyle Frank gives insight on the occult.

By special request, your editor is beginning a series of articles on the Restoration Movement. This issue's article gives a brief overview of the Christian Connexion. Let us know what you think of it.

In addition to all this, we've also got several other articles for your reading pleasure.

And if you don't read anything else, please read about the man known as "Blondie," starting on page 4. It would mean a lot to me.

The articles contained in each issue represent the research and conclusions of the authors, and may not reflect the views of the other authors (or even the editor). But they are presented for contemplation by Christians who are dedicated to living for the one true God of heaven

WHAT TO FIND AND WHERE TO FIND IT

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WE CALLED HIM 'BLONDIE'

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

This isn't going to be easy for me to write. I'll just tell you that from the get-go.

Though I first met him in Pell City, Alabama in 1994, I don't remember any specific interac-



tion with him until three years later at Roundhouse '97. Our discussion wasn't a long one, but it was memorable. I had brought my razor, and began shaving in the men's bathroom at the campsite. He looked at me in shock, and bel-lowed to me, "What are you doing?" I responded, "I'm shaving." He said (with a note of terror in his voice), "Where's your shaving cream?" I told him that I tended to shave without any, and proceeded to continue my whisker-shortening. Next thing I knew, his hands were smacking my face, covering it with *his* shaving cream. "There," he said, "that's better. My face was hurting just watching you!"

The next time I saw Bill Roderick was in 2000, when I drove 6 hours to take his beautiful daughter, Jesse, out on our first date. Two months later, by virtue of marrying that sweet Christian woman, I inherited him as a father-in-law.

We didn't always see eye-to-eye, especially at first. Af-

ter all, who wants some guy from Illinois to take your daughter 7 hours away in an era when long-distance charges and cell phone roaming fees made communication expensive? I am pretty sure that he really didn't like me for a long time...but either he was really good at not showing it, or I was just clueless (it was probably a mixture of both). But time went on, and I guess he decided he was stuck with me in the family.

Before I get too much further into this, I should tell you that Bill Roderick, according to the records I've seen, first filled in for the Gravel Hill church of Christ in 1968. He became their regular preacher sometime around 1971 (or thereabouts), and served in that role until earlier this year. He was also an elder there for as long as I've known him, and by all accounts showed true love and care for the members there.

Unlike some preachers I've met, Bill Roderick (known to his friends and family as "Blondie") wasn't interested in becoming a big-name preacher. He wasn't in it for fame, for notoriety, or for the opportunity to move on to a bigger and better local work. He worked full-time for the power company as a lineman, and preached—not for the pay (he took what the church paid him and put it back in the collection plate), but because he loved the Lord and he loved people.

I think those two facts are the reason why he was so longsuffering with me. When we moved



back to Arkansas, within a week he was out in the hot July sun, trying to teach this ignorant city boy how to change his alternator in the parking lot of Auto Zone. He kept saying, “You can do this.” He put up with my ego, and let me talk about all the things I ‘knew’ better than anyone else, when I know inside he really wanted to drop a truth bomb on me and leave me a shocked smoldering ruin. His love for me, along with his humility, kept him from doing that.

After I expressed an interest in going to preaching school, he encouraged me—even though he wasn’t fond of me taking away his daughter again—this time with his four grandchildren. We had ever-increasing Bible conversations. I would share some of my newly-discovered genius insights, only to find that he’d figured them out before I was born. He loved seeing my shocked expression, and he would clap his hands and laugh his unique laugh.

From that point on, it became an ongoing joke: whenever we would go visit them on a weekend, the first thing he would say to me is, “You got a sermon ready?” I know part of that was that he wanted me to always be prepared to share the word of God with people, but the main part was because he knew that when we came, he could talk me into filling in for him—letting him have a Sunday off.

Now, before I go any further, I should probably explain why he was called “Blondie.” After all, his hair was brown and grey, and prior to that it was just brown. But according to a highly credible source, he used to live in California, and was a “surfer dude” with sun-bleached blond hair. Two sisters took a liking to him, and started referring to him as “that blond-headed boy,” and later just “Blondie.” One of those sisters (my reliable source/mother-in-law) married him.



Blondie went from being an incidental part of my life (as my father-in-law) to being a friend, mentor, encourager, and example. He was a big fan of *The Quarterly*, and was proud to have an article published in it (I think it was his first article in a brotherhood paper) back in 2017.

You know, there’s a lot he did for me, a thousand little things here and there that I never took thought of on their own. I don’t know

how many of those were conscious decisions that he made, trying to steer me in the right way, and how many of them were just Blondie being Blondie. But I like to think that they had their desired impact.

At his funeral, just a couple months ago, the men from Gravel Hill did the service, and everything they did and said made me cry. The first prayer. The obituary. The songs. The eulogy. The closing prayer. The military salute and ‘Taps.’ And as I look back on the words they said, it was all so much better than I could say it. I don’t feel like I’ve even come close to doing him justice in this short editorial.

I just know I miss him.



Climbing to the Summit

Brent Green

The Himalayan Mountains are some of the tallest and most majestic mountains in the world. They actually contain the highest peaks of any mountain range on earth, including over 100 that exceed 23,000 feet. Among this unique range is the mountain of mountains—Mount Everest. The summit of Everest is the highest point above the surface of the earth, a daunting 29,035 feet above sea level. Many dream about reaching the summit and breathing in the beauty of the Himalayas, to reach the highest point on earth. Only a few, however, have ever seen the majesty of the summit.

Most will never start the climb. Climbing Everest requires planning, tremendous effort, and sacrifice. When most consider all of the emotional, physical, and financial costs involved in climbing Everest, they quickly dismiss the enormous challenge as impossible.

Most look at the idea of becoming a Christian in the same way.

They look at God's plan and believe there is no way it would work for them. They consider the effort it is going to take to stay the course and think that it is impossible for them to succeed. They count the cost and feel the sacrifice required is just too much. The sadness of this

reality is heard in the words of King Agrippa. He said, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Indeed, most will echo these words and never begin their Christian climb.

Some will climb halfway. Of the billions of people who have lived on earth throughout time, only a small percentage has ever attempted to scale the face of Everest. They counted the cost and had enough courage to begin the trek. However, because of weaknesses, trials, lack of planning, and a slew of other reasons, they failed to climb all the way to the summit. Although most would not describe such attempts as mediocrity, the word does fit. Mediocrity literally means halfway up the mountain. Those who become Christians but fail to make it to the summit can also be described by such mediocrity. They indeed count the cost to begin, but when the trials, difficulties, and sicknesses of life come, they quit their journey to the top. How many have failed to reach the summit because they slid off into the abyss of sin? How many have failed to summit because they were content with mediocrity? Far too many Christians do not feel the need to worship regularly (He-

brews 10:25), to keep their bodies pure (Colossians 3:5), to continue walking the straight and narrow path that leads to heaven (Luke 13:24). Indeed, some will begin the Christian climb but will fail to reach the summit.

Only a few climb to the summit. Of those who have attempted to climb to the summit of Everest, only a few over 8000 have successfully made it. Their stories of perseverance, commitment, and sacrifice are amazing. Many have lost fingers and toes to frostbite. Others have lost friends along the way. Yet, those who have made it to the summit all have this in common: They never stopped climbing! They trudged through the snow, scaled the icy bluffs, traversed the rocky cliffs, and tight-rope the narrow ridges. They endured everything for the majesty on high. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate ... because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Only a few of the billions who have lived will stay the course to the summit. Those who have the faith to reach the summit will have persevered through persecutions, shown themselves to be truly committed (Galatians 2:20), and sacrificed all of their being to daily

take up the cross of Christ (Matthew 16:24). Indeed, only a few will climb to the heavenly summit to dwell forever in the presence of the Majesty on high.

Although climbing Everest may only be a dream for most, making it to that heavenly home is a hope that can be realized. God has not asked anyone to scale to the summit of Everest. However, He has promised salvation to those who will follow His plan of salvation. Hear the saving message of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:17; Ephesians 1:13). Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross, and that He resurrected (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24). Be full of godly sorrow and turn from the lifestyle of sin (2 Corinthians 7:10; Luke 13:3). Confess the name of Christ (Romans 10:10) and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). Then, live faithfully unto to the point of death (Revelation 2:10; Matthew 10:22). This is God's plan to climb to the heavenly summit. Count the cost and "press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Climb to the summit!

Barton W. Stone

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The Magnitude of the Step

John Krivak

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it.

But each man must be careful how he builds on it.”

1 Corinthians 3:10, NASB

Everyone takes a step to complete their conversion. For some it's a small step. For others, it is a step of greatest magnitude. The magnitude required depends largely on the demands set forth by the evangelist—some make it tough to become a Christian; other ministers make it as easy as possible. There is great variability and that raises the question: what magnitude of step does the Lord Jesus require for one to enter a saving relationship?

True story. During a gospel-meeting campaign, a teenage girl asked to be baptized. The preaching-school student who attended to her conversion asked about her sins because part of the “step” requires repentance. She stated she had no awareness of any sins. Then why, he asked, did she want to be baptized at all? She replied, *“There is so much love in this church that I want to be part of this family!”* He shared the story and explained his decision to baptize her: *“I can't see how God could ob-*

ject to that, so neither do I.” That is a very small step to take.

My failure. When I worked my earliest evangelisms, I knew baptism resulted in salvation. So I would set before my converts the “five-finger checklist” of salvation requirements: hear, believe, confess, repent, and be baptized. *“Do that,”* I said confidently, *“and salvation is yours!”* When the resulting baptisms were done and over, I had not yet spoken a single word about the Cross. I had not shared the gospel. Small wonder I was able to find some willing to take such a tiny step for such a spectacular prize. My bad!

A cartoon. In a single frame, we see two couples sitting on living room furniture with Bibles open on their laps. Their facial expressions display an incredulous lack of words adequate to respond to the woman who blurts out: *“Well, I never actually DIED to sin—but I did feel kind of faint once!”* Ouch! You are with me if you wonder if that poor woman's conversion was deficient.

It is not my interest here to be the one who judges between true and false Christians based on the adequacy of their conversions. That role belongs only to the Lord Jesus. But, if you will bear with me, I would like to speak in a cautionary way to readers who will work conversions and want to do that work competently.

The Magnitude Jesus Demands

Total Surrender.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:44-46).

Those admitted to the kingdom sacrifice all self-interest for Jesus—He is the treasure, the pearl worth any sacrifice. I remember reading Juan Carlos Ortiz years ago. He imagined Jesus and a convert/follower coming to terms. Jesus asked what he owned, and to every possession named, Jesus declared, "I'll take that now!"—wealth, home, even family members. Is that price too steep? Is the magnitude too great? Jesus does not think so. He demands everything from those who want Him!

Some might prefer an easier and smaller step. Listen to Wilbur Rees:

"I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of God to make me love my enemies or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please."

No Competition Between Relationships.

"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). We may soften this a bit by admitting that He-

brew idiom uses "hate," not literally, but to express lower priority among relationships. Jacob was said to "hate" Leah—but look how many children he fathered by her! We need not hate our families to be Christians. However, Jesus demands that relationship with Him wins against competing interests in any other relationship!

A Second Cross. "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross **daily** and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). The gospel that saves does not have a single Cross; it has two. One of them belongs to you. Everyone in that day knew that taking up your cross meant just one thing: you are going to die! That may actually mean the physical death of a martyr (Rev. 2:10). That would not be an unreasonable sacrifice for a Savior who takes a Cross himself for you.

But the word "daily" tips us off to another possible meaning (cf. 1 Cor. 15:31). It means a self-sacrifice so thorough that it virtually is a death: "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Strange concept indeed, but there is such a thing as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1).

None of these huge steps are optional. None are presented as long-range goals for a Christian to reach after steady spiritual growth and maturation. They are conversionary prerequisites, or one is not accepted by Jesus.

Towards Robust Baptism

Not only is the magnitude of the step often eased as a requirement. Baptism likewise gets the stuffing pulled out, until only a shadow of itself remains.

Baptism is the conversionary act of getting-wet-all-over plus a stuffing of many inherent meanings: remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21);

enrollment in church membership (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:13), reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:2-3), and dying with Jesus (Rom. 6:3-4). I am sure this list is not exhaustive.

The question arises: what if someone gets-wet-all-over while ignorant of some or all of these meanings? Is the baptism still valid? Will God fulfill all such meanings and allow the convert to learn of them later? What if someone had no awareness of dying with Jesus; would that happen regardless?

I have heard hypotheticals played out until the only essential requirement left to a stripped-down baptism was obeying the act of getting-wet-all-over in response to God's command. The "obedience" itself yielded efficacy—apart from any attached meaning(s). Listen, I am not getting cheeky or being flip-pant when I refer to baptism as getting-wet-all-over. But getting-wet-all-over is all that remains if the stuffing is all pulled out of this conversionary act. And that is precisely the aspect of baptism marked out by 1 Peter 3:21 as inconsequential for achieving salvation—"not the removal of dirt from the flesh." Yes, immersion in water is essential, but the real action takes place in the "*conscience*"—and for that to be possible we need a more robust understanding of what baptism means.

It is not my intent to spell out what the essential meanings of baptism are. It is not my intent to deny the validity of any baptism that has some ignorance of theological meaning. Perhaps some meaning can be learned after the fact, after the act. That may be possible. But I do know that Paul asked, "*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?*" And he asked this in such way that indicates confidence that the Roman church had at least that much stuffing in their baptisms. But the point that I wish to make is this: some of the stuffing needs to be inside of baptism for the act to function as a conversionary

requirement—and the more the better. Let's move toward robust baptism!

Be a Wise Master Builder!

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are" (1 Cor. 3:10-17).

This Scripture is concerned with the quality of convert brought into our circle of fellowship through evangelistic process. Two factors are determinative. Each one baptized launches into one of four trajectories set forth in the Parable of the Sower. Three of these fall to failure. The quality and competence of the evangelist's work will show, but even the best workmanship cannot prevent all failure. Some work will be "*burned up*" anyway. The convert also has responsibility for his own success, for the length of his trajectory.

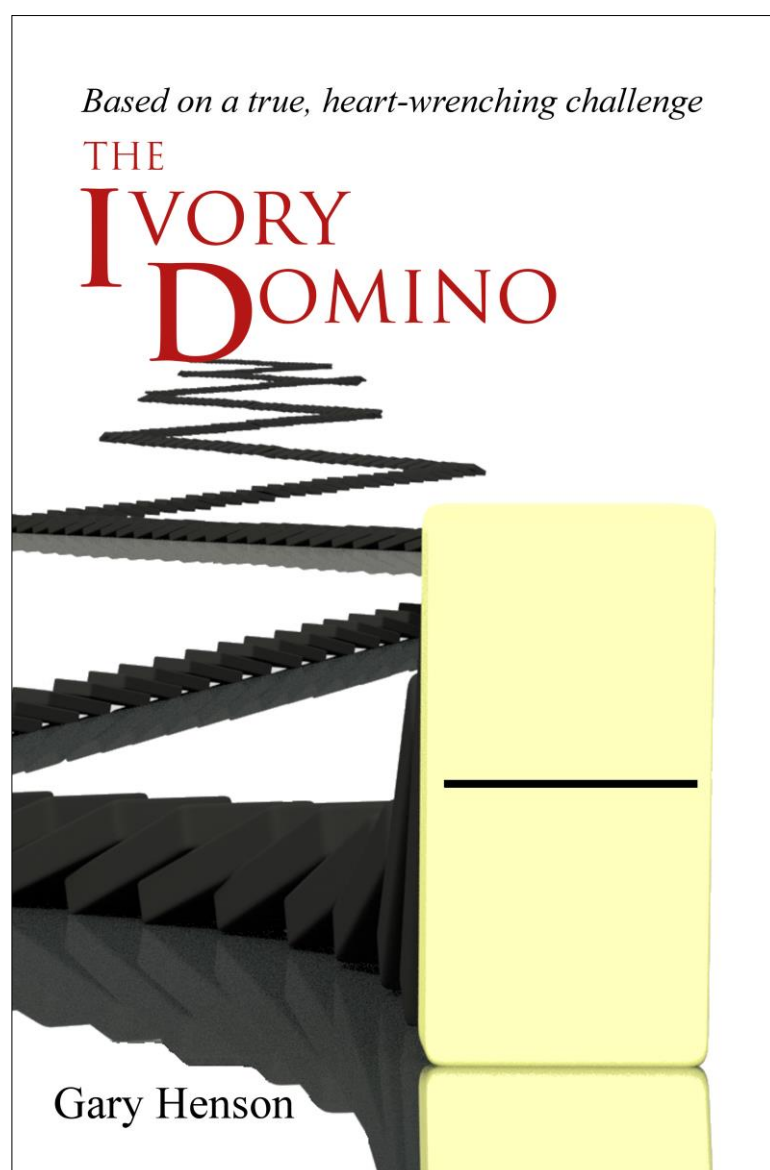
The evangelist, however, is largely responsible. If his convert is lost and has himself to blame, all that the preacher has worked for with that particular person will be lost forever. But the preacher will survive spiritually—apparently because some matters were out of

his hands. Yet, he—based on the quality of his workmanship—also will have to pass through the fires of Divine judgment. If he is to be saved, God will have to sort out responsibility between converter and convert.

What is critical is that conversionary building rests upon the one foundation: Jesus Christ. And again I ask: what magnitude of step lands one atop that foundation? How ro-

bustly full of Scriptural meaning must baptism be to launch a trajectory that takes seed to harvest? Be careful how you build!

I can show you how to do this, and intend soon to publish a book on evangelistic method that is good and short. The method is simple and undemanding on you; but your converts will need to take a step of greatest magnitude!



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Lord's Supper

Covenant Meal of Peace

Edwin Walker

Food is important. It is one of the basic necessities of life. Most people eat to live, but some of us live to eat! Food has been essential from the beginning.

God provided food for mankind:

Genesis 1:27-29 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

Food also had its part in the beginning of sin:

Genesis 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband

who was with her, and he ate.

Food was provided for in Noah's ark:

Genesis 6:21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them."

Food is more than just for nutritional purposes. It has historically served a ceremonial or symbolic function as well. The first time we find food in this kind of setting is when Abram returns from rescuing Lot:

*Genesis 14:17-20 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem **brought out bread and wine**. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

The first time we find food in a social set-

ting is when the Lord appears to Abraham in the form of three men:

Genesis 18:1-8 Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes." Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

Another time we find food in a social setting is when Abraham's servant went to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac:

Genesis 24:33 Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."

A specific aspect of the ceremonial use of food is in the covenant meal. We first see this when Jacob decides to leave his father-in-law, Laban. Jacob takes his family and leaves without telling Laban. He gets a three day head start and it takes Laban 7 days to catch up with him. After some intervention by God, they decide to part peacefully and establish a covenant between them:

*Genesis 31:44-54 "So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, **and they ate there by the heap.** Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed, and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. "If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. "This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. **Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain.***

The eating of the meal together sealed the covenant between them ... they were then at peace with each other. We find this a consistent theme throughout the Old Testament.

During the process of God giving Moses the Law, the Covenant between God and the people of Israel, God calls Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 of the elders to Mt Sinai where they saw God ... and they ate and drank.

Exodus 24:7-11 Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses

took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

God made a covenant of peace with this nation, and before anything had been done to break it, they had perfect fellowship with God -- they could eat and drink in His presence. Because of the covenantal bond made through the blood of the sacrifices, God had accepted them into his presence. Not only could they be there, but they even could eat a meal, demonstrating their peaceful relationship with him. This was the beginning of God's answer to the break in fellowship that occurred in the Garden of Eden, when humanity was cast out of God's presence because of sin.

Some interesting considerations about the sacrifices under the Law. The Israelites were to make four kinds of offerings or sacrifices to God. The most important were the burnt offerings. They symbolized the total consecration of the person to God. The second were the grain and drink offerings which symbolized the consecration of a person's possessions to God. The third were the sin offerings, or atonement sacrifices and trespass offerings. These reestablished peace with God and one who had sinned. The fourth were peace offerings, sometimes called thank offerings. These were joyous celebrations of peace and fellowship between a person and his God. These sacrifices were not burnt up, but were eaten by the person or family in the presence of God.

Deuteronomy 14:23-26 "You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God,

at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you, then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. "You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.

Eating in the presence of the Lord is an obvious indication of being at peace with Him! We find an interesting reference with a connection with food and the presence of the Lord:

Isaiah 23:17-18 It will come about at the end of seventy years that the LORD will visit Tyre. Then she will go back to her harlot's wages and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. Her gain and her harlot's wages will be set apart to the LORD; it will not be stored up or hoarded, but her gain will become sufficient food and choice attire for those who dwell in the presence of the LORD.

The Passover is a special example of the whole nation participating in a Peace offering. The animal is sacrificed to God, but is eaten by the worshipper.

Deuteronomy 16:1-7 Observe the month of Aviv and celebrate the Passover of the LORD your God, because in the month of Aviv he brought you

out of Egypt by night. Sacrifice as the Passover to the LORD your God an animal from your flock or herd at the place the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his Name. Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste--so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt. Let no yeast be found in your possession in all your land for seven days. Do not let any of the meat you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain until morning. You must not sacrifice the Passover in any town the LORD your God gives you except in the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name. There you must sacrifice the Passover in the evening, when the sun goes down, on the anniversary of your departure from Egypt. Roast it and eat it at the place the LORD your God will choose. Then in the morning return to your tents.

Some other scriptures show the connection between eating a meal together and establishing a covenant of peace:

Exodus 34:15 otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice,

Deuteronomy 27:7 and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God.

Ezekiel 39:17 As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, "Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, 'Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.'"

Ezekiel 39:19 "So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you."

Psalms 23 refers to God preparing a table (food) in the presence of our enemies. Was this a feast with God where the enemies were observing, or was it a covenant meal where peace was made with those enemies?

Consider Luke 15, the penitent Prodigal returns and immediately the father prepares a meal. To celebrate his coming home ... and to confirm that he is forgiven, they are at peace with one another.

An example of this concept is found in the example of Peter. Just moments after establishing the Lord's Supper at the Passover meal, Jesus says that one of the 12 will betray him. Peter, in his usual impetuous way, declared he would always be faithful:

Luke 22:33-34 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

We know this happened that night. As Jesus is on trial by Annas we find his first temptation:

John 18:17-18 Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

Following this, Peter denies Jesus two more times. He failed in his commitment to his Lord. His self-esteem has just taken the biggest hit possible. He goes out and weeps bitterly.

After the resurrection, Jesus appears to them in the upper room, then Peter with six

other disciples went fishing. Jesus appears on the shore after they have fished all night and tells them where to catch fish. They realize it is Jesus and Peter jumps in and swims to shore.

Jesus is there waiting:

John 21:9-13 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.

Jesus declares to them all that they are in covenant relationship with Him, that their failure to remain with Him during the trial is forgiven, and especially that Peter's three denials are forgiven. They are at peace with each other. (Note that John 18:18 and John 21:9 are the only two times in the New Testament that this particular word, *anthrakia* = charcoal fire, is used, possibly to draw our attention to the connection between these verses.)

It is on this basis that Jesus then asks Peter to reconfirm a commitment through the three questions: Do you love (*agapao*) me, do you love (*agapao*) me, are you my friend (*phileo*)? Peter has learned his lesson, his arrogance is gone. He refuses to make more commitment than he feels he can live up to. And even with Peter's rather weak commitment at that time, Jesus gives him work to do and expresses confidence that Peter will be so faithful that he will suffer death for Jesus.

This concept shows why it is important not to eat with those who continue to indulge in sin because that would show them

that we are at peace with them:

1 Corinthians 5:9-11 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

Isaiah prophecies of a covenant meal of peace with not only the Israelites, but also with people of all nations:

Isaiah 25:6-9 The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

Jesus confirms this picture of the peace meal with all nations:

Matthew 8:10-11 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;

John's vision also refers to this meal of peace with those who are faithful to Jesus:

Revelation 3:20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.'

Because of this background, it is not surprising that the Pharisees were perplexed when Jesus ate with Publicans and Sinners!

Also because of this background, the Jews were not at all surprised when Jesus establishes a covenantal meal of peace as the singular memorial His people were to observe.

Luke 22:19-20 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

Our participation in the Lord's Supper is not only a way to remind us of Jesus, it is a regular renewal of our covenant with Him. It is a constant statement that we are at peace with

Him and a commitment to live in a way that He will be at peace with us.

That's why it is significant that Jesus says He will be eating the covenant meal **WITH us** in the kingdom:

Matthew 26:26-29 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

As we gather to participate in the Lord's Supper we should also remember that it is a meal of peace which is afforded to us because of the covenant that Jesus has made with us and to which we have committed ourselves. This meal signifies both our commitment to Him and His commitment to be at peace with us.



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DOES

Christian Baptism

REPLACE

Jewish Circumcision

AS THE SIGN AND SEAL OF GOD'S COVENANT?
(COLOSSIANS 2:9-12)

Gerald Cowan

There exists a long-standing controversy over whether baptism is God's intended replacement for physical circumcision, serving the same purpose as circumcision, and leaving no need or place for circumcision now. It is used by paedobaptists (those who believe in and practice baptism of infants) to justify and validate their practice, even though infant baptism is based upon a false theological premise of inherited original sin, a doctrine which is itself both non-biblical and anti-biblical. The purpose of the present essay is to clarify the reasons for both circumcision and baptism, to show dissimilarities of both the action and the purposes of each, to show that each stands alone and neither is related to the other in either purpose or results. Although there are some significant parallels, neither is the counterpart of the other, neither can substitute or replace the other. One can no more substitute baptism for circumcision than one can substitute pouring or sprinkling for baptism (immersion). There is a further note on this below.

Definition, Method, and Purpose of Circumcision as a Sign and Seal

A sign or seal can be a mark or identifying symbol – like a tattoo or brand or symbolic act – serving to indicate identity, ownership, affiliation, or relationship. It could be a signature to attest acceptance and agreement, as signatories to a contract or covenant. It can be a certification of genuineness and authenticity, as of a document or even of a person (the idea of an identification card, license, passport, etc.). Paul signed his letters by hand (Galatians 6:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:17). He certified his gospel message as being from Christ (Galatians 1:11

[Circumcision] was called a sign by God...but it was never called a seal of or from God.

KJV) – not only by word but by works, *the signs of an apostle* (2 Corinthians 12:12). Even Jesus was identified and certified by words and works, given and done through him by God (John 5:36, 10:38).

Circumcision was not just a mark or a cut or partial removal but the complete cutting

away and removal of the foreskin of the stipulated body part of the male – there was no equivalent part and no physical application to females. This mark in the flesh was a *sign* of God's covenant with Abraham. Those who did not receive it, including those to whom it had not been done and who did not correct the omission by their own choice later, were cut off from the people of God (Genesis 17:10-15).

Requisites for circumcision in the flesh.

For the infant it was required that he be of the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – an Israelite by birth. Certification of blood would be given by the parents or other knowledgeable witnesses. The child would be presented to the proper priestly authorities who would then perform the surgery. Non-Jewish males who were joined to, adopted by, or were “property” of Jews could be (forcibly, if necessary) circumcised (Genesis 17:1-15). The mark in the flesh was called a *sign* by God, specifically a sign of the covenant he made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11), but it was never called a *seal* of or from God. A Jew who had not been circumcised could present himself for it or could be required to submit to it, to receive the mark/sign. For example, males born during the wilderness wandering after the exodus from Egypt were not circumcised, but when crossing into Canaan, Joshua was instructed to circumcise all those men (Joshua 5:2-8). When it was received by desire and request – as with Abraham himself and those willing to be identified with him – it could be taken as a *sign* and also a tangible *seal* – one sealed himself to God. It was like a signature and certification of one's covenant status, a pledge of acceptance and personal commitment to the covenant. Abraham, just as an example, was accepted, blessed, and promised that Messiah would come from him. Then, fourteen years later, he

was circumcised, not only to receive the sign but also to seal himself to God – it could be called “believer's circumcision.” As a kind of parallel, children are born justified but are baptized only when they become believers who pledge themselves to personal faith and obedience, so a “believer's baptism.” Abraham's circumcision was not the *sign* of his acceptance by God – which he actually had before his circumcision and while he was not yet circumcised. It was his personal testimony, the sign and seal, of his acceptance of the relationship and mission and covenant God offered to him (see Romans 4:11-12). Having thus, by obedience and fidelity, been established as faithful in God's covenant, Abraham became metaphorical father of all – circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or non-Jew – who by obedient faith become heirs of the promise of God (Galatians 3:26-27, 29).

Results of circumcision. It marks one as a Jew by blood and birth or, in the case of one not a Jew by birth and blood, as a Jew by adoption, a proselyte, convert to Jewish reli-

In the case of infant baptism, there are no effects, no benefits, no change in relationship either to the parents and family, or to the church, or to God and Christ.

gion. When chosen by a convert to Judaism (received physically by males, implied for females but not a physical mark or reality), it was and is a pledge to keep the covenant and law of Moses perfectly.

Circumcision, as a sign or mark indicating one is a member the covenant and bloodline of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was not only a requirement but a privilege for those born Jewish. When Paul had the half-Jew Timothy circumcised, it was not only to placate the Jews who knew of his Jewish blood (Acts 16:1-4), but was also to acknowledge and honor his ancestry and his

Jewish heritage – it was not about religious but only racial or national Judaism. Jews, whether in infancy or later, could be circumcised without jeopardizing the spiritual identity as Christians. As a Jew, Timothy was permitted and even encouraged to honor his blood line and it did not affect his Christianity. Titus, on the other hand, a Gentile and not a Jew, was forbidden to be circumcised because, in his case, it could have been only religious, a concession to those who insisted one must become a Jew before he could become a Christian. Non-Jews seeking and receiving circumcision indicated acceptance and commitment to the covenant of Abraham and the Law of Moses. As Paul said to non-Jewish Christians in Galatia, if they accepted circumcision they would be obligated to observe every part of the then and now defunct Old Law and Covenant. But if they did so, Christ would be of no benefit to them. One must cease being a religious Jew in order to be a Christian (Galatians 5:1-6).

Definition, Method, and Purpose of Baptism as a Sign and Seal

Baptism, specifically baptism as commanded by Christ and his apostles (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, Acts 2:38, 10:47-48) is immersion in the water. Not a ritual pouring (*CHEO*) or sprinkling (*RANTIDZO*) or partial immersion, but complete burial, a full immersion (*BAPTIDZO*) of the body of the person. Unlike circumcision, which was only for men, baptism is for both men and women (Acts 8:12). Unlike circumcision, baptism changes only one's spiritual status, not one's physical, national, racial, or social status. It affects one's spiritual relationship to God, not one's relationship to Abraham.

Requisites for efficacious scriptural baptism: Personal faith, repentance, request, and volitional reception. Belief in Jesus as the son

of God is not enough to justify or validate one's baptism. It also requires personal commitment to and continuing identification with Jesus Christ, with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19, Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:11-12, Acts 19:5, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:26-27, etc.).

Results of baptism. In the case of infant baptism, there are no effects, no benefits, no change in relationship either to the parents and family, or to the church, or to God and Christ. Having it done might be a sin for the parents,

Some professing Christianity are baptized in water but not in heart – the water baptism is then essentially a historical memo, a meaningless pretense.

also for the person who does the actual baptism – it is at best an addition to the requirements and stipulations of God; at worst it is a substitution for and eventual omission of something required by God.

In the case of one being baptized through discretionary choice and commitment, there are many benefits and blessings. When predicated upon faith, repentance, and submission to the Lord and His gospel it brings spiritual cleansing, remission and removal of the guilt of acknowledged sins – thus the salvation of the soul and spirit – the Holy Spirit of God given and received (Acts 2:38-39), identification with Christ as Lord and Savior (Romans 6:4-5 and Galatians 3:26-27), a place in the spiritual body of Christ, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13), adoption into the spiritual family of God as children – sons and daughters of God (Ephesians 1:3-7, Romans 8:14), the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15), the temple in which God dwells (2 Corinthians 6:16b-18, 1 Peter 2:5).

The “seal” of or from the Holy Spirit is not a visible mark or sign, it is confirmation in the mind of the obedient person that he or she is redeemed and belongs to God in the fellowship of His Son and His Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13), sealed in their

foreheads/minds (Revelation 7:3).

Circumcision of the Heart

Not all of national Israel was also of spiritual/covenant Israel (Rom. 2:28-29). Physical circumcision without faith and personal commitment was ineffective for making one a spiritual Jew, even though he was a blood Jew. The bar-mitzvah was one's confirmation and acceptance of his right to become a child of the law, a child of God. Infant circumcision could not accomplish that. In some sense the baptism of a willing and committed believer is a bar-mitzvah (applicable to females as well as males) under the new covenant in Christ. Circumcision of the heart was also commanded of those who became covenant members – OT as well as NT, under Moses and under Christ.

Circumcision of the heart is involved in both requested voluntary circumcision and baptism.

Deuteronomy 10:16 (NKJV) “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”

Jeremiah 4:4 “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.”

Circumcision must also be a spiritual thing. In the conscious mind and heart, not merely as a mark on the body. Keeping the outward physical symbol but not realizing the inward spiritual significance of it leaves the symbol meaning nothing – the reality is in the heart. One can be circumcised on the outside but not the inside. Some professing Christianity are baptized in water but not in heart – the water baptism is then essentially a historical memo, a meaningless pretense. Seeking and accepting circumcision is the external symbol depicting the need for a total cleansing from

sin and identification with God. In practice, Israel had reduced circumcision to a physical mark, a tribal tattoo. They could feel that as long as they were circumcised they had God's blessing. Christians may make baptism the equivalent of a once-done ritual that leaves no mark but can be certified as having happened — “Have you been baptized?” “Yes, I've been baptized.” — a tribal tattoo, a mark of identity but not necessarily the mark of conscious inward spiritual conversion and commitment to God, about as effective as “making the sign of the cross” to ward off evil and secure God's blessings. As faith without requisite works is dead (James 2:17), cannot we not also say works, marks, signs, and symbolic acts without requisite faith are also dead?

Neither circumcision alone nor baptism alone can accomplish and validate one's relationship to God. Circumcision alone did not make one a true spiritual Jew (see Romans 2:24 and 9:6). Just so, baptism alone does not make one a true Christian. Baptism is permitted only when faith and understanding, submission and commitment are verified. It is a step in the process of conversion and salvation but does not constitute the complete process (1 Peter 3:21), must not be taken as a one-step plan of salvation.

Neither circumcision nor baptism is permanent and irrevocable. The benefits of both can be lost. Proper after-circumcision attitudes and actions were essential for maintaining a right relationship with God under the Old Law and Covenant. Proper after-baptism attitudes and actions are essential for maintaining a saving relationship with God in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). In both cases one can lapse and lose salvation, lose his place and fellowship with God and His people, lose his promise and prospect of heaven (Galatians 5:4, 2 Peter 1:3-11, Philippians 2:12-13), which is why faithfulness is required for the eventual reward promised by the Lord (Revelation 2:10).

Putting off the sins, etc. is the act of obedient faith one must make on his own – not something God does for him but something he requests and cooperates with God in doing. See Colossians 2:10-11, compare 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 and other “put away or put off” passages. This was also required of Jews, not at birth but when capable of personal discretion. By receiving and being in Christ – because one's heart is circumcised whether one's flesh is circumcised or remains uncircumcised (Colossians 2:13) – the condemnation against one is removed, not the Old Testament law but the record of one's own sin, transgression, and disobedience (Colossians 2:14).

Abraham's circumcision) and baptism in Romans 4, or anywhere else in scripture. There is an evident intentional disanalogy. First, it is improper to have *sign* and *seal* modify the same word – *circumcision* – in the context. Paul makes it clear that Abraham was accepted and covenanted with God because of his faith, and was intended to be metaphorical father of all those who were or would become faithful to God – not by genetic input but as prototypical of those (non-Jewish Gentiles are in mind here) who, though not circumcised and not subject to circumcision, would be justified by obedient faith in the seed of Abraham designated by God as their Savior (Galatians 3:26-29). Circumcision was to be a sign of God's

Romans 4:11-12 is not about circumcision in general but about Abraham's circumcision in particular.

Baptism was Never Designated as a Replacement for Circumcision. Neither was It Intended to Be a Substitute for Personal Faith.

Baptism is postulated by some as a replacement for circumcision, especially by those who advocate infant baptism, suggesting that as circumcision was received on the eighth day of life to mark one as God's property, sanctified to Him as His spiritual child, so one should be baptized in infancy to achieve the same purpose and result. The proposition and assignment are too readily accepted, with more assumption than thoughtful consideration, by those whose religion is more formality and groupism than rationalized and individualized personal covenant. Circumcision is assumed to have been a sign and seal of the covenant of God with Abraham, based upon a misreading and separation from its context of Romans 4:11 concerning Abraham, that *he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness he had while yet uncircumcised*. But there is no analogy of circumcision (even

covenant of blood with Abraham that from him nations of people would come, including (but not limited to) the nation of Israel. All males in Abraham's bloodline were to be circumcised to mark them as his descendants, not as God's spiritual property. Abraham complied, and the ritual marking continues for those who are of Abraham's blood. Romans 4:11-12 is not about circumcision in general but about Abraham's circumcision in particular. Though he had been accepted and justified by God for his faith, for fourteen years before his circumcision, he accepted the procedure and the mark for himself as a seal of his faith and commitment to God. He was not circumcised to become righteous by faith; he was circumcised because of and to signify and seal his righteousness of faith. He was not circumcised to become justified; he was circumcised because he was justified – by his faith and his faithful response to God's requests.

Circumcision and baptism are not for the same purpose, nor do they indicate or provide the same result. Circumcision was not a mark or sign or seal of salvation, but only of blood. Infant circumcision was something done to the

child. Forgiveness, salvation, and sanctification required the personal faith and request of a knowledgeable person for himself. The personally-requested circumcision of one able to speak his own mind and will was a pledge of obedient faith and commitment, which is of course not possible for infants. There is a parallel here: infant baptism would be of no spiritual benefit to the child because it could not entail personal faith, repentance, submission, and obedience from the heart. Baptism marks the personal entrance and commitment to the new covenant – it cannot be the mark of one's becoming a member of a group denominated as a “church” without or apart from expressed will. Baptism to be placed into the spiritual body/church of the Lord as a work in, of, and by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) must be by personal choice accompanied by prior faith and repentance. Infant baptism is without faith and repentance of the baptized individual, and therefore is invalid. A later “confirmation” or acceptance of what was done to one before is invalid because the baptism itself was invalid. There is no parallel or analogy here of (infant) circumcision and later *bar mitzvah* (becoming a “son of the law/covenant”) with (infant) baptism and later *confirmation* (becoming a confirmed child of God in the body/church of Christ).

How and by Whom Circumcision of the Heart is Accomplished

We cited earlier the plea and command to Israelites (from Deuteronomy and Jeremiah) to circumcise their hearts. But in Colossians 2:11-12 we read:

In whom [Christ] you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God.

Does this imply that the circumcision of the heart is done by Christ or by God and not by the person himself? *The circumcision made without hands* simply means it is not something physical done by physical means. The *circumcision of Christ* can mean something done by Christ but can also mean something commanded by Christ or identified with Christ. *Risen (raised) ... through faith in/of the operation of God* seems to imply that the whole transaction is a work of God, not of the person being circumcised in heart, baptized into Christ.

The question of who does it is really answered by saying it is the joint work, the cooperative effort of God and the person, done in Christ. We are told to *put off the old man* with his flaws, blemishes, faults, and sins and *put on the new man* renewed and recreated in the image of the Creator (Colossians 3:8-10, Ephesians 2:22-24). Repent of sin, stop it, and correct whatever you are doing. But it is God who forgives, who removes the guilt, cleanses and restores the soul, renews and recreates and gives new life to the spiritual person (Colossians 2:13) – only God can do that, nobody can do it for himself. It is not our work alone or God's work alone but rather a cooperative effort. We, like apostles and others, are *workers together with God* (2 Corinthians 6:1a). We are to work out our salvation by obeying God who works in us (Philippians 2:12-13). The record of our sins and transgressions (not “the Old Testament Law” but our sins against any and all laws of God) is, by the Lord himself, nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14). This cooperative operation is set forth clearly in Ephesians 2:8-10. God has graciously given all needed information and instructions for salvation (v. 8). Man responds obediently in faith (v. 9). God again in grace receives and accepts man's response and gives salvation and a new life of continuing works, which He specifies. Salvation and life in Christ is by God's grace and one's own faith (v. 10). Cir-

cumcision of a believer's heart is then in two parts: The believer's part is faith, repentance, and obedience. It is accomplished by action of the believer, prior to and continuing after baptism. God's part is removal of guilt and spiritual consequences, in and continuing after baptism as long as faith is maintained.

There is one final part of the disanalogy of circumcision and baptism. As we have already said, circumcision was to identify one as in and of Abraham, but not for salvation of the spirit of the circumcised. But baptism into Christ is not only for identity but also a re-

quirement for salvation *He who believes and is baptized shall be saved* (Mark 16:15-16). *Repent and be baptized for (in order to receive) the remission of your sins* (Acts 2:38). Circumcision is an appropriate privilege for descendants of Abraham – genetic: blood, not religion. Baptism is required of all who would enter into Christ – religious faith and salvation; not genetic. Even blood descendants of Abraham must enter into Christ to receive any spiritual benefits, and all who do so become children of God in him (Galatians 3:26-29).



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What Did Jonah See in Nineveh?

Richard Mansel

Introduction

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and “cry out against it,”¹ because “their wickedness” was great. Jonah didn’t think this was a good idea and he fled the other way to avoid God’s command (Jonah 1:1-3). He rejected the wisdom of God and sought his own answers instead.

As a result, judgment came upon him (Jonah 1:4-15) and he found himself in the sea, resting in the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1:17).

Why did Jonah reject God’s command? Was it simple rebellion or fear?

The City

The first capital of the Assyrians was Ashur. Yet, kings, in time, built a temple to the

goddess Ishtar in Nineveh and installed their capital there.² Sennacherib enlarged the city and made it one of the greatest cities of the world.³ His palace covered five acres and he constructed the marble House of Tributes to store the gold and wealth taken from conquered cities.⁴

Sennacherib built canals to ensure lush foliage and to enhance the beauty of the city.⁵ Kings had the power, wealth and security to have whatever they desired in their showplace city.

“This metropolis was resplendent

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

² Charles Seignobos, “The World Of Babylon.” Translated by David Macrae. (New York: Leon Amiel, 1975). 39.

³Ibid, 40.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

with terraces and storied palaces, arsenals and barracks, libraries and temples. Although Jonah could have walked past the temples and palaces in an hour, he would have had to tramp for days through endless warrens and mazes where the common people lived in order to cover the whole city with his message of doom.”⁶

It's estimated that the population of Nineveh was 100,000.⁷ The perimeter of the city was about 50 miles and the “fortifications were 50 feet thick and 160 feet high.”⁸ It's said that three chariots could run side by side on the top of the walls.⁹

The Fear

When soldiers find themselves in combat, firefighters face the hungry flames or the police face a meth-head with a gun, fear is ever present. Even among the bravest, fear is common.

When we consider the barbarous nature of the Assyrians, we're on safe ground to suppose that Jonah may have simply been afraid. Reputation is a powerful stimulus in fear.

At the end of World War 2 in Europe, there were two branches of Allied armies storming to Berlin. They had the same purpose but dramatically different attitudes.

The branch of the Allies containing the Americans, British, French and Canadians was focused on the task at hand while the Soviets were racing across the German countryside destroying, looting and raping everywhere they went. Gang-rapes so terrified everyone that word spread and German citizens were praying that the Americans would win the race to Berlin instead of the Red Army.

The reputation of the Soviets spread terror in its wake. Assyria in their own time became one of the most feared armies in the history of the world. They were master record keepers and we have extensive accounts of their behavior and, yes, their savagery.

“The Assyrians were the first to make extensive use of iron weaponry and not only were iron weapons superior to bronze, but could be mass-produced, allowing the equipping of very large armies indeed.”¹⁰

“More than anything else, the Assyrian army excelled at siege warfare, and was probably the first force to carry a separate corps of engineers...Assault was their principal tactic against the heavily fortified cities of the Near East. They developed a great variety of methods for breaching enemy walls: sappers were employed to undermine walls or to light fires underneath wooden gates, and ramps were thrown up to allow men to go over the ramparts or to attempt a breach on the upper section of wall where it was the least thick. Mobile ladders allowed attackers to cross moats and quickly assault any point in defences [sic]. These operations were covered by masses of archers, who were the core of the infantry. But the pride of the Assyrian siege train were their engines. These were multistoried [sic] wooden towers with four wheels and a turret on top and one, or at times two, battering rams at the base.”¹¹

They chose regions to attack every spring.

“When the battle was over, they chopped the heads off the dead and

⁶ John Phillips, “Exploring the Minor Prophets” in the John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 138.

⁷Ibid, 140.

⁸Seignobos, 39.

⁹Phillips, 184.

¹⁰<https://www.ancient.eu/assyria/>

¹¹ Seignobos, 42

put the prisoners in chains, often killing them, too. Then they laid siege to the capital city, looting everything within, if they succeeded in taking it; statues and sacred vases from the temples, furniture, clothes and carpets from private houses. They then set fire to the whole city and withdrew with their loot, leaving behind them an empty, shattered landscape”¹²

“With his warriors and chariots, he set out from Nineveh and headed north up the Tigris, as far as the mountains of Armenia. The inhabitants fled to the mountain tops, which were 'as sharp as the tip of a dagger, and which only the birds of the sky could reach.' The Assyrians scaled the mountains, took 200 prisoners whom they then proceeded to massacre, and seized all the livestock. 'The corpses were strewn, like autumn leaves, all over the mountains.' The horrified peoples from neighboring regions hastened to prostrate themselves before the king and offer him gifts of horses, cattle, and sheep. The army then took a dozen cities and sacked them. The Assyrians took the one fortress which did try to resist, and on the king's orders, massacred all the defenders, chopped off their heads and hung their bodies on stakes; their chief was taken back in chains to Arbela where he was flayed alive and displayed on the ramparts”¹³

Many more gruesome examples could be given. The fear they provoked would give anyone pause. No one wants to be murdered or to have their bodies massacred after their death.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid, 44.

Jonah would go to them defenseless and point out their sins and threaten destruction. The mind reels at what could have happened to him. He obviously lacked faith in God's ability to keep him safe (Proverbs 3:5-6). His human side overrode his spiritual learning.

Conclusion

We don't know Jonah's motivations for running from God. But the fear factor is certainly a strong candidate. The Assyrians were capable of more than violence. Aššurbanipal built a huge library and sought out all the books he could find.¹⁴

Yet, their reputation was well-earned and the role it played in Jonah's mind will forever remain a mystery. But it certainly helps the reader understand the cultural context.

“So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5).

God knows what He's doing and we need to trust Him every day (Psalm 9:10).

¹⁴ <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/assyria/>

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James

the Son of Alphaeus

Bradley S. Cobb

Our information regarding this James is very scant indeed. Most of what we know with certainty comes from general statements about the apostles in the gospels and Acts. There is little more than this.

James, the Brother of a Tax Collector

As seen in the last chapter, Matthew (Levi) was also called “the son of Alphaeus.” Mark is the only one who mentions this fact, and within one chapter, mentions someone else who is “the son of Alphaeus.”¹ There is no reason at all to mention Matthew’s father if it wasn’t the same Alphaeus.² It is possible that James, too, worked with his brother and that they were both tax collectors. If this is the case, then James may have become a disciple of Jesus the

same day.³

Regardless of his occupation, James, like his brother Matthew, was a man from Galilee, like the rest of the apostles⁴ (except, perhaps, for Judas Iscariot).⁵

James, the Wee Little Man?

Most writers identify James, the son of Alphaeus, with a man known as “James the less” in Mark 15:40. The word translated “less” is the Greek word *mikro* (where we get “micro”). It’s the same word that was used to describe Zacchaeus, the “wee little man” who was “short of stature.”⁶ This word can also mean *younger*, as in the younger brother. The main reasons given for connecting the son of Alphaeus with James the less are:

1. There are three men named “James” who Mark mentions prior to this point, and it would make very little sense to mention—near the end of the gospel—someone being related to a “James” who has nothing to do with the story,

¹ Compare Mark 2:14 with 3:18.

² Most Bible dictionaries seem to ignore this common sense explanation and say that there were two different men named “Alphaeus.” The question then arises: If this is the case, why did Mark mention Matthew’s father at all? Certainly the Roman readers would have had no idea who this Alphaeus was, so it wasn’t as though Mark was appealing to their existing knowledge. Alphaeus doesn’t appear in the gospel narratives at all, so it wasn’t because Mark was introducing a new character that would appear later. The only reasonable conclusion is that Matthew (the son of Alphaeus) is the brother of James (the son of Alphaeus).

³ This possibility is mentioned by David Smith in James’ Hastings *Dictionary of the Bible*, “James, the son of Alphaeus.”

⁴ Acts 1:11, 2:7.

⁵ Judas was probably from a small town in Judah. See the chapter on Judas for more details.

⁶ Luke 19:2-3. The phrase “wee little man” is not in the text, but is found in a children’s song about Zacchaeus the tax collector.

and who hasn't been mentioned at all. Thus, it must be one of the three men mentioned previously in the book.

2. James, the son of Zebedee, is always described as such, and is almost always connected with John. Since neither John nor Zebedee are mentioned in Mark 15:40, it cannot be *that* James.⁷
3. James, the brother of the Lord is mentioned only in passing by Mark, so (it is claimed) it cannot be him.⁸
4. Therefore (the conclusion goes), it must be James, the son of Alphaeus.⁹

This sounds good on the surface, but it is based on guesswork. The evidence is actually more in favor of “James the less” being the brother of Jesus instead of one of the apostles.¹⁰

James, the son of Alphaeus

The man known as Alphaeus is said by



many to be the same man as Cleophas,¹¹ Cleopas,¹² or Clopas,¹³ due to a similarity in the pronunciation in Hebrew,¹⁴ though this is a matter of speculation.¹⁵ If indeed Alphaeus is

to be identified with one of these men (or both, if Cleophas and Cleopas are the same man), then that would make for quite an impressive family: two apostles, whose parents were both disciples of Jesus—the mother being at the cross, and the father meeting with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

False Ideas about James, the Son of Alphaeus

Because of the insistence that Mary remained a virgin her entire life, the Catholic Church goes through some crazy hermeneutical gymnastics that include this James. Their argument goes like this:

1. Mary remained a virgin her entire life, with Jesus being her only child.
2. Therefore, the “brothers” of Jesus (James, Joses, Simon, and Judas) were actually cousins.

⁷ Matthew 27:56 also confirms this, by identifying the mother of Zebedee's children as a different woman from “Mary, the mother of James and Joses.”

⁸ The same thing can be said about James, the son of Alphaeus, as well. Both he and the brother of the Lord are mentioned just once in Mark's gospel account.

⁹ This is compelling to an extent, but it must be pointed out that Mark mentions that the “Mary” who was the mother of “James the less” is also the mother of “Joses.” The only “Joses” mentioned in Mark is the brother of Jesus (and the brother of James), whose mother is named “Mary” (see Mark 6:3). So, if we accept this argument, then instead of proving this to be James, the son of Alphaeus, the evidence would actually prove it to be James, the brother of the Lord.

¹⁰ See the previous footnote, as well as the section “James the Less” in the chapter on James, the Brother of Jesus.

¹¹ John 19:25

¹² Luke 24:18

¹³ John 19:25, ASV

¹⁴ The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (“Clopas; Cleophas”) says “Upon the philological ground of a variety in pronunciation of the Hebrew root, [Clopas is] sometimes identified with Alpheus, the father of James the Less.”

¹⁵ James Hastings', *Dictionary of the Bible* (“Cleopas”) says it is “a matter of dispute.” Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ in the Gospels* (“Clopas,” “Cleophas,” and “Cleopas”) shows that there's not even agreement on whether Cleophas and Cleopas are the same individual, let alone that Alphaeus is another name for one or both of them. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (“Cleopas”) says “Some think that this [Cleopas] is the same Cleophas as in John 19:25. But, they are probably two different persons. Cleopas is a Greek name, contracted from Cleopater, while Cleophas, or Clopas as in the Revised Version, is an Aramaic name.”

3. The woman named “Mary” who was the mother of James and Joses¹⁶ was not the mother of Jesus, but the sister of the Virgin Mary.¹⁷
4. The mother of James and Joses is the wife of Cleopas.
5. Therefore, Cleopas (who is to be identified with Alphaeus) was the Virgin Mary’s brother-in-law, and the father of four of the apostles: James the less, Judas [the brother] of James, Simon the zealot, and Matthew.¹⁸

This whole line of argumentation starts with a false premise, and continues to make false claims and assumptions to try to back it up. This whole idea is proven false by the following:

1. Matthew 1:25 says that Joseph didn’t “know” (have sexual relations with) Mary until after Jesus was born. This means that *after* Jesus was born, they *did*. Thus, she was not a perpetual virgin.
2. The “brethren” of the Lord are mentioned repeatedly as being with Mary, the mother of Jesus.¹⁹ So, instead of these adult males being with their own mother (who was still alive), they went everywhere with their aunt?!? Such an idea is ridiculous.
3. Those who knew Jesus said He was the “son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and Judah, and Simon” and that his sisters also lived there.²⁰
4. No rational parent would name two daughters with the same name—Mary

¹⁶ Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40.

¹⁷ This is based on a misreading of John 19:25, which lists four women. The Catholic Church claims there is only three: Mary, her sister (also named Mary), and Mary Magdalene.

¹⁸ Bishop Lightfoot argues this, though it goes against the evidence given in John 7:5, and the fact that Matthew is never mentioned in the listing of Jesus’ “brothers.”

¹⁹ Matthew 12:46-50; 13:55.

²⁰ Mark 6:3.

did not have a sister named Mary.

5. There were four women mentioned in John 19:25, not three: Mary, her sister (Salome), Mary the mother of Cleopas’ children, and Mary Magdalene.
6. After Jesus selected the twelve apostles, his “brethren” still did not believe in Him.²¹ Therefore, neither James, nor Judas, nor Joses, nor Simon (all named as “brethren” of the Lord) could have been among the apostles.²² Nor could Matthew have been a brother of the Lord, for he was one of the twelve that had already been chosen.

In short, James, the son of Alphaeus, was not the brother of the Lord, nor were any others among the twelve.

Traditions About James, the Son of Alphaeus

The *Genealogies of the Twelve Apostles* claims that James was of the tribe of Gad.²³

One tradition says that James was preaching in Jerusalem, which angered the Jews greatly, and they drug him before Claudius,²⁴ making accusations against him, and Claudius commanded him to be stoned to death.²⁵

Most of the traditions surrounding James come from the Catholic Church, which wrongfully identifies him as James, the brother of the Lord.²⁶

²¹ John 6:70-71 shows that Jesus had already selected the twelve apostles; and just five verses later, John informs us that His brethren still didn’t believe in Him. Thus, James the son of Alphaeus cannot be one of the “brethren” of the Lord.

²² See also John 7:3, where the brethren of Jesus distinguish between themselves and the disciples of Jesus; showing that they did not consider themselves to be among that group.

²³ See Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, vol. 2, page 50.

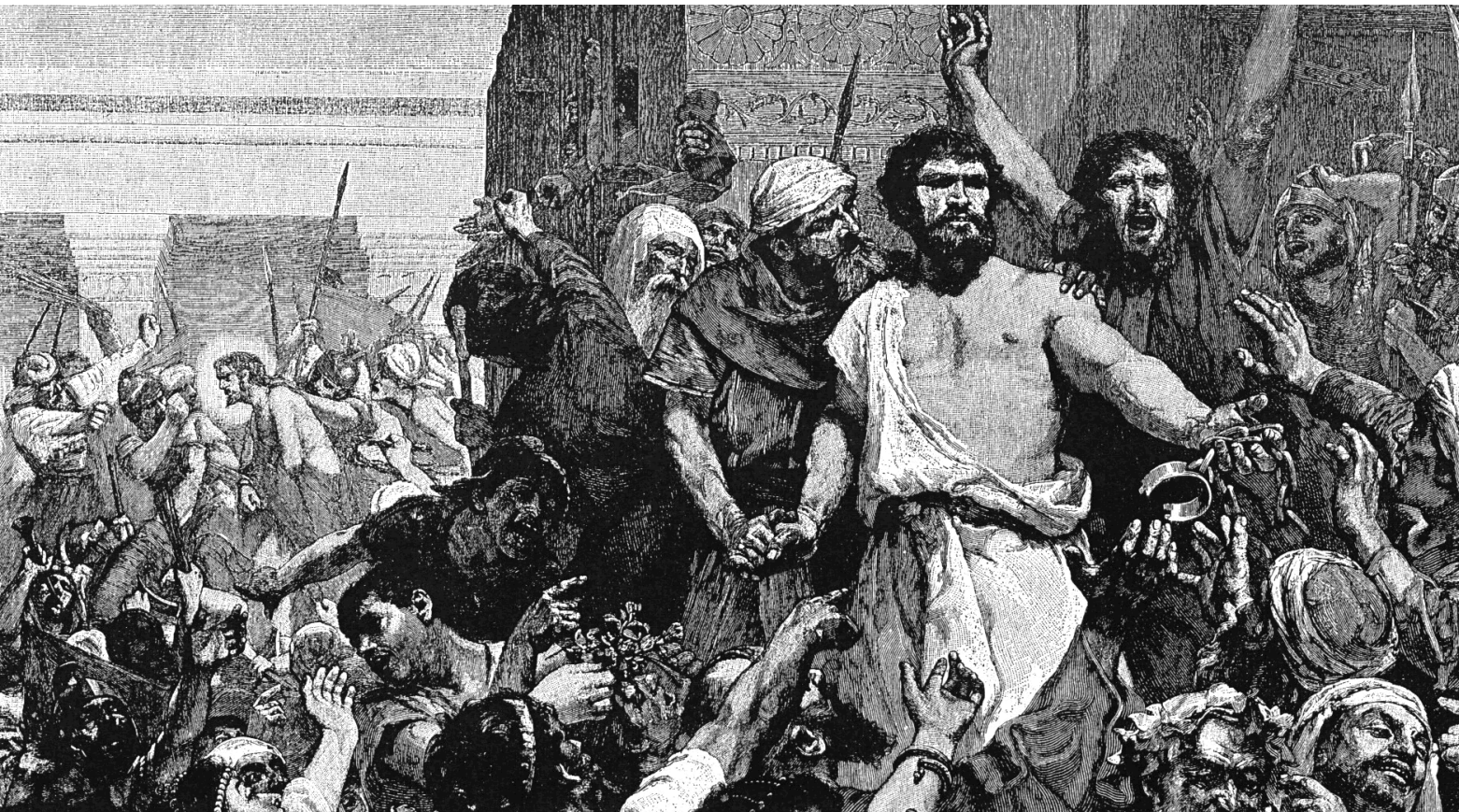
²⁴ Whether this is supposed to be the Roman Emperor, or some local ruler (like Herod), isn’t stated in the text from which this legend comes.

²⁵ See “the Martyrdom of Saint James,” in Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, pages 264-266.

²⁶ See the article on that James for more information regarding the traditions surrounding him.

THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF

BARABBAS



Perry Hall

The time is the Jim Crow South. The KKK is about to lynch an innocent Black man after a rigged trial. The Governor, knowing the corruption within the trial, but not caring, steps in to stop a gathering riot. “Lynch him” came the cry and chant. The Governor, no friend to Blacks, was in charge of peace and didn’t want the National Guard to restore order. To him, peace was more important than justice. “Blood” was what the crowd wanted.

Now at that same time, there was a White man who, because he was so openly blatant in his crime, was found guilty of killing a Black

woman who had rebuffed him. That rightful and truthful judicial decision almost started another riot.

Scheming, what if the Governor could make a trade: set free the innocent but convicted Black man for the guilty White man? Before all, he offered a pardon to the Black man, telling everyone he was innocent; but the crowd kept chanting “lynch him.” They threatened to get the President involved. The Governor backed down from doing the honorable thing, and cowardly let the innocent man hang on a tree.

The above event is set in the period of the Jim Crow laws. That would be between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 through the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950-60's. While the above recreated event about the Black man is fictional, it is sadly reminiscent of historical events wherein an innocent man dies.

Now go back 2000 plus years. A Jewish man thinks he is destined to bring peace through violence. After being caught then convicted, this criminal is unexpectedly set free from his *lex talionis* death: violent crime usually results in violent punishment. What happened?

The law of retribution is set aside by Rome...and unknown to all the same thing is done by God (Acts 2:23):

- the latter by mercy, grace, and peace;
- the former by a small example of Pax Romana – Roman Peace.

Ironically both Rome and Israel's God desired peace. One by the death *of* their enemy. The other by the death *for* their enemy. Barabbas is caught in between these two worlds and set free. Jesus is hung on a cross. We know who Jesus is; but who is this Barabbas?

I. Who is Barabbas Historically?

According to inspiration:

- He is called a “notorious prisoner” (Matthew 27:16). Notorious means well-known.
- He is in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection against the occupying Roman forces. As an aside note, Jesus had one of these revolutionaries as an apostle – Simon the Zealot. It reminds me people can change if we give them the gospel (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19).
- He is described as a bandit, robber, or revolutionary (John 18:40). Here's what “NET Notes” noted: “It is possible that Barabbas was merely a robber

or highwayman, but more likely, given the use of the term ληστής (lestes) in Josephus and other early sources, that he was a guerrilla warrior or revolutionary leader....The word ληστής was used a number of times by Josephus (J. W. 2.13.2-3 [2.253-254]) to describe the revolutionaries or guerrilla fighters who, from mixed motives of nationalism and greed, kept the rural districts of Judea in constant turmoil.”

Barabbas could be, in the eyes of many Jews, a reminder of the glorious Maccabean people. The Maccabean Revolt was a Jewish rebellion, lasting from 167 to 160 BC. It was against the Seleucid Empire and the Hellenistic influence on Jewish life. Unexpectedly, when they revolted against their Hellenistic rulers, they won; and for a brief time, the Jews enjoyed their only period of self-rule since Babylon sacked and burned Jerusalem 600 years earlier. Barabbas is not a good person according to Roman standards, but for some Jews he represents freedom.

These Zealots' intentions were good, even godly, since the Romans would periodically impose their will on the people against their monotheistic ways. For example, just a few years before Barabbas is captured, Pilate and his wife arrive in Caesarea (26 AD). Almost immediately, troubles start: Roman soldiers are bringing statues of the emperor Tiberius into Jerusalem. Almost the entire population of Jerusalem marched to Caesarea, imploring the new governor to remove the effigies.¹ Barabbas would be considered a hero in the eyes of many, despite or because of his violent ways.

II. Who is Barabbas Spiritually?

As much as Barabbas represents freedom historically for the Jews of that time, he stands for so much more: hypocrisy, sinners, and irony.

¹ <https://www.livius.org/articles/person/pontius-pilate/pontius-pilate-4/>

Morally – You remember the story. Pilate offers the guilty Barabbas and the innocent Jesus to the people to choose which one to free. Never has there been a more obvious contrast. Coaxed by the Jewish leaders, the crowd chooses the guilty one. This can be seen as hatred for Jesus; but also, one who represented nationalistic freedom for their nation. None knew (Acts 3:17) by this choice they unwittingly were being providentially used by God to provide spiritual freedom for both Jews and Romans, including all Gentiles (Acts 2:23). Morally the Jews and Romans make the hypocritical choice.

Typologically – In a twisted way, the Barabbas and Jesus narrative reminds me of “The Binding of Isaac” (Genesis 22). Without rehashing that whole typological story, in the end the ram is substituted for the son. Correctly, we make the analogy that Jesus was substituted for us, like the ram was for Isaac. But with Barabbas, the twist is the Son is substituted for the revolutionary “ram.” The Jews had accepted the wrong kind of revolution. Metaphorically, Barabbas represents the guilty of the world for whom Christ was crucified; and not just the “elect” or “world” as defined by Reform Theology. Because of Jesus we too can be set free.

Ironically – Have you ever taken the time to look at the name “Barabbas”? Remember, God often providentially has names given to people, even at birth, to foreshadow and describe their place within God’s yet-to-be-written-history. Naomi’s sons who died in Moab were named Mahlon and Chilion. Their names respectively mean “sickly” and “weak or failing.” The prophets had meaningful names too such as Elijah, which means “My God is Yahweh.”

Now back to Barabbas. First, compare his name to Peter’s name Bar-Jonah (Matthew 16:17). For Peter it means “son of Jonah”. Now look more closely at Barabbas:

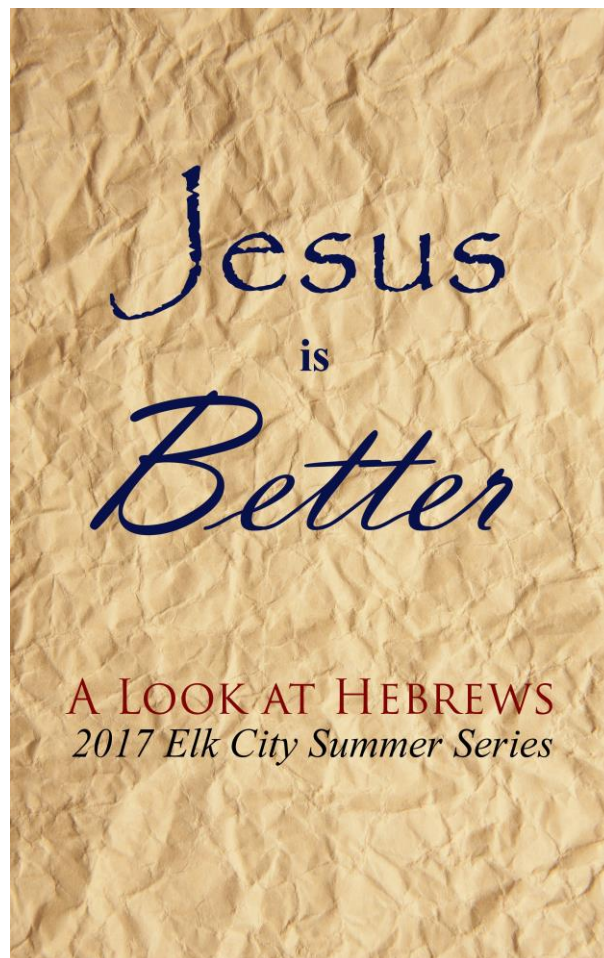
- “Bar” means “son of”.

- “Abbas” means “a father.”

Barabbas is Bar-Abbas. When Pilate offers Barabbas and Jesus to the Jews, he is offering “a son of a father” and “the Son of the Father.” Don’t you think God’s hand was in this play on words and meaning?

All of history is sadly filled with innocent people dying. There are even historical records of one person substituting themselves for another out of love. Only Jesus represents true freedom; freedom from sin, and from our own hypocritical ways. Through Jesus’ blood we get to call God, Abba, because we also gain a meaningful name – “sons of God” (Romans 8:14-17). All this because an innocent man was hung on a tree.

Acts 5:30 (CSB) The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had murdered by hanging him on a tree.



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THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF

NICODEMUS AND JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA



Bob Myhan

The Passion of Christ is the watershed moment in the history of God's dealings with mankind.

"... the **Passion** (from Late Latin: *passionem* "suffering, enduring") is the short final period in the life of **Jesus** covering his entrance visit to Jerusalem and leading to his crucifixion on Mount Calvary" (*Wik-*

ipedia).

From God's perspective, or point of view, the Passion of Christ is the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, which was to provide redemption for fallen mankind. Countless characters are involved in His Story. Among them were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. How did they view the Passion? Were they aware of what was going on? Were they aware of their

particular roles in bringing it to pass? These are the main questions this writer is seeking to answer based on what was written by inspired men. But why should their perspectives even matter? To more fully appreciate the Passion of Christ ourselves, we must view it from as many perspectives as possible.

Very little is said of Nicodemus and Joseph. The former is mentioned only by John, while the latter is mentioned in all four gospels but only at the scene of the cross. However, from what little is specifically revealed we can learn a great deal. To appreciate the perspective of these two men on the Passion of Christ, one must first know as much as we can about them.

Nicodemus

Nicodemus is mentioned only in the gospel of John, who did not intend to write a biography but a series of vignettes. He described only a few of the miracles of Jesus and several conversations He had with a variety of individuals, Nicodemus being one of these. The scenes in which he appears are included by John because they advance his agenda.

His Name

The name “Nicodemus” means “conqueror of the people” or “victor over the people” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition – Volume Three: K-P*). The giving of this name by his parents indicates great expectations of their child. Perhaps they hoped he would have a part in the establishment of the coming kingdom of God. If they lived long enough, they saw their hopes realized.

His Background

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. As such, he was atypical. These leaders were severely criticized by the Lord, in part because they elevated traditions above the requirements of God; they emphasized externals while neglecting “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23; cf Mic. 6:8). It is often said that they neglected the

spirit (intent) of the law while overemphasizing the letter (specific wording) of the Law. They, like many chief rulers, were hypocrites, doing things for the praise of men rather than for the praise of God (see John 12:42-43).

Nicodemus represented the best of the Pharisees. In the first of three scenes, Nicodemus came by night to see Jesus, who instructed him in spiritual matters (John 3:1-15). Most of the Pharisees would not have come to Him at all. They were too blinded by their misconceptions of the Messiah to see anything worthwhile in Jesus.

“That Nicodemus came to Jesus ‘by night’ is less likely to be due to fear than to desire for uninterrupted conversation.” (*Beasley-Murray, p. 47*)

There were many half-hearted believers present when Jesus was at the temple during the Passover Feast just prior to the visit of Nicodemus, “[b]ut Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:23-25). But He entrusted Himself to Nicodemus; He knew this was a good man who was ‘head and shoulders’ above his peers.

Jesus knew what needed to be said and done with Nicodemus’s life, but Nicodemus knew nothing at all that could change his life or future—or ours also. A certain aura of mystery seems to penetrate the entire third chapter of John. The themes treated contribute to this atmosphere: the new birth, the Son of Man, and testimony that is borne without saying to whom it is directed (*The College Press NIV Commentary – John*).

His Psychology

Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus was “a teacher come from God.” This certainty was based on the miracles he had seen Jesus

perform. He eagerly anticipated the coming of the kingdom but thought his natural birth was sufficient to guarantee him a place therein. The truth of the matter is that from the time of Samuel, the Israelites had wanted nothing more than a geopolitical kingdom with a powerful king who would keep them safe from the nations around them. This is all they were anticipating. Jesus knew that Nicodemus had the coming kingdom of God on his mind and, like so many others, had misconceived its nature. Jesus questions his claim to be “the teacher of Israel” while remaining obtuse regarding spiritual matters. Nicodemus seemed to have no idea of the need to be spiritually-minded. Jesus immediately dealt with this inadequate concept. A man needed to be born a second time if he wanted to enter the kingdom of God which was about to be established.

Nicodemus had never heard such teaching before. (John 3:9-12) But the spiritual change that was necessary for a sinful Israel was described by the prophet Ezekiel (18:31; 36:26). This is precisely what Jesus meant when He said, “You must be born again” (v. 7). As Wiersbe has said, Nicodemus “wanted to learn more about Jesus, but he ended up learning more about himself!” (page 46).

The “new birth” is an “earthly” thing because it takes place on earth. In baptism, we allow God to operate on us in “putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11-14). This is “the working of God” not the working of man.

Jesus then uses the raising up of the brazen serpent by Moses in the wilderness (Deut. 21:4-9) as a prophetic type of His coming crucifixion. Jesus also connects His future death to the availability of eternal life. It is doubtful that Nicodemus understood this at the time but how could he help thinking back on this moment when he later witnessed Jesus “lifted up” on the cross?

“Nicodemus did not fully comprehend all that was said to him, but the

teaching must have lingered with him and challenged his thoughts for years to come.” (Thurman, page 43)

His Character

Nicodemus was an honest Pharisee, which (but for him and perhaps a few others) would have been an oxymoron. He did not allow any prejudice he might have had to stand in the way of an honest evaluation of the teaching and character of Jesus. We see this in the second scene in which he appears, “the Jews’ Feast of Booths” in the seventh chapter of John. Here we see Jesus making such an impression on the Jewish rulers that they asked one another, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” Jesus did not appear outwardly to be “a man of letters,” and they would have known if He had been a scholar, but what He said was so clearly the truth that they could not argue against it. They were amazed at His teaching. Of course, His teaching was not His own but came from the One who had sent Him. He told them if they really wanted to do God’s will, they would know whether He was teaching God’s will or not. (John 7:1, 14-19) Some of the people wondered whether Jesus could be the Messiah. Some asked, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?” (John 7:31).

The Pharisees, as they mingle with the crowd, become aware of the widespread discussions that are taking place concerning Jesus. As usual they take the initiative in action against Jesus, and they persuade the priestly authorities, who were in charge of the temple, to have Jesus arrested (the ὑπηρέται are “servants” at the disposal of the Sanhedrin.... Whether these police officers were instructed to arrest Jesus at once we are not told; it is feasible that they were ordered to watch for a favora-

ble opportunity to arrest him without creating an uproar. (Beasley-Murray, page 112)

Having decided months earlier to kill Christ, they were here spurred to action by the growing sentiment of the people that would have hailed him as the Christ. Their strategy of meeting such an event was to attempt his arrest; but the power of God restrained them until his "hour" had come. (Coffman)

"On the last day of the feast", the officers returned to "the chief priests and Pharisees, who said, 'Why did you not bring him?' The officers answered, 'No one ever spoke like this man!' The Pharisees responded, 'Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed'" (7:43-49). The only strategy the Pharisees knew in dealing with rational opposition was, "If you cannot reason, ridicule."

Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." (John 7:50-52)

Nicodemus, as "one of them," was a member of the Sanhedrin and was acutely aware of their prejudices against Jesus. However, being a fair man, he was "demanding both the rule of law (not elitist power politics) and due process (not mob lynching or secret judgments)." (Bryant).

"You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it."

(Deut. 1:17; see also Deut. 17:1-5)

Rather than answer his question, the council members ridiculed Nicodemus as well. Then they asserted that there were no prophecies concerning a prophet coming out of Galilee. However, Isaiah 9:2 was just such a prophecy, which Matthew quoted and applied to Jesus. (4:12-16)

Those who were unbiased saw something unique in Jesus, and they couldn't help but be affected (vv. 45-46). I love their response: "You ask why didn't we arrest him? Have you heard him speak? There's no one like him" (my paraphrase). But the Pharisees had decided, and no amount of evidence would change it. They had chosen not to believe, so they came up with excuses to make their unbelief seem reasonable (vv. 47-52). They didn't believe Jesus because they did not want to believe Jesus. Their unbelief was rooted in an unwillingness to discern the truth. (Carter and Wredberg, page 181)

While Nicodemus showed little understanding of spiritual matters at the time of his nighttime meeting with Jesus, he must have given a great deal of thought to those things in the years that followed. While he is never called a disciple, he next appears at the cross with one who was a disciple.

Joseph of Arimathea

Even less information is directly revealed about Joseph. As mentioned, Joseph only appears at the cross, taking down the body of Jesus with the help of Nicodemus and placing it in a tomb that he had newly hewn out of the rock. This alone says a lot about him, but let us consider a few other facts.

His Name

Several men in the Bible were given this name, the first of which seems to be the firstborn and favored son of Jacob by Rachel. According to Nelson's Biblical Cyclopedic

Index, the name “Joseph” means “may He (Yahweh) add.”

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” And she called his name Joseph, saying, “May the LORD add to me another son!” (Gen. 30:22-24)

Previously barren, Rachel had long prayed that she might give Jacob a son. When God allowed her to conceive and give birth, this gave her hope that she might bear another. Thus, his name was a prayer in itself, which God also answered in the affirmative when she gave birth to Benjamin. However, she died giving birth to this twelfth and final son of Jacob (Gen. 35:16-20). Rachel’s firstborn made his name a proud one. It was through this man that God orchestrated the relocation of the people of Israel from Canaan to Egypt (Gen. 45:4-8; 50:15-20).

At least ten others bore this name, but only one more will be considered to add to the honor God bestowed upon it. A descendant of David, through Solomon, was chosen to be the legal father of Jesus, the Messiah (Matt 1:6-16). This Joseph’s birth and espousal to a young virgin named Mary helped to bring about the fullness of the time (Gal. 4:4-5). Here was a godly man of the tribe of Judah and family of David espoused to a godly woman who was also of the same tribe and family, though from David’s son Nathan rather than Solomon. We can see that Joseph is a proud and honorable name among the Israelites.

His Background

Matthew tells us only that he was “a rich man from Arimathea..., who also was a disciple of Jesus” (27:57). Mark says he was “a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God” (15:43). Luke adds, he was “a good and righteous man, who had not consented to [the] de-

cision and action” of the council to seek the death penalty for Jesus from the Romans. Only John relates that Joseph had kept his discipleship a secret (19:38). There is no indication that he ever came into close contact with Jesus, as Nicodemus had. However, it is possible that he was included in the “we” of Nicodemus (John 3:1). How could he have become a disciple of Jesus without hearing His teaching and knowing something about His character? A disciple is a learner and a follower, after all. This means he had put into practice what he had heard from and seen in Jesus. Jesus had said, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). Since both Matthew and John identify him as a disciple, he must have been bearing “his own cross.” Coffman observes, “Along with Barnabas, Joseph of Arimathea ranks with a very select few who, in the Scriptures, are called good men.”

His Psychology

Whatever was true of him earlier, he is no longer a “secret disciple, for fear of the Jews.” He no longer cares who knows it. As with Nicodemus, he was “looking for the kingdom of God.” This means that he was not merely anticipating it but eagerly watching for it. All of those who knew the prophets understood that the Roman Empire was the fulfillment of the “legs and feet of iron” on the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In addition, almost all of the Jews had heard John the Baptist announce the coming of the Messiah. John had even publicly pointed Him out as such. Also, Jesus had performed so many miracles in public that many “had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” (Luke 24:21). And, while the hopes of the apostles seemed to be dashed by the crucifixion, those of Nicodemus and Joseph still seemed to burn bright.

His Character

This writer would define Joseph’s character by his courage. While he may have lacked the

courage to reveal himself for a while, his courage has increased exponentially. Each disciple is to “supplement [his] faith with virtue” (2 Peter 1:5), which commentators have defined as “Moral courage, the natural fruit of a trusting faith in God” (Johnson) or “the courage of one’s convictions” (Coffman). Wesley’s New Testament renders verse five, “For this very reason giving all diligence, add to your faith courage.” Estes rendered it, “And for this very reason, also, using all diligence, superadd to your belief fortitude, and to fortitude knowledge” (page 274). It took real courage for two lone members of the council to take down the body of Jesus and prepare it for entombment. From all that is revealed, it certainly seems that Joseph of Arimathea lived up to his name by performing this generous act of service for Jesus. Whether he knew he was fulfilling prophecy by doing so is impossible to know.

John then tells us, “Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight” (19:39). This might indicate that he, like Joseph, was a wealthy man.

The myrrh and the aloe wood were reduced to powder, and inserted between the bandages, which were wound fold upon fold round the body. The enormous quantity (about 75 lb. avoirdupois) of spices, though surprising, is credible as the offering of two wealthy men. (*Dummelow*)

Self-evidently Nicodemus would not normally have on hand the amount of spices here mentioned. There must have been an urgent collaboration with Joseph while Jesus was dying, and so Joseph procured the grave clothes and Nicodemus the spices. “Thus,” commented Hoskyns, “the two timorous believers are publicly

and courageously drawn to the Christ after his exaltation upon the cross (12:32)” (536). (*Beasley-Murray*, page 359)

The temporary darkness had passed; they were now in the twilight of early evening, secret disciples no longer. They might not be allowed back into the synagogue for Sabbath worship, but this did not concern them. In addition, they had the courage to go to Pilate and request to remove the body for burial. In contrast, the only concern of the Pharisees was that the bodies of Jesus and the two thieves “not remain on the cross on the Sabbath,” in accordance with the letter of the Law (John 19:31; Deut. 21:23).

Their Perspective

So what perspective did they have on the Passion of Christ? How did they view the Passion? Were they aware of what was going on? Were they aware of their particular roles in bringing it to pass? Can we answer these questions with any degree of certainty from the material presented? Probably not, but we can infer an answer to some of them.

Perhaps no one, not even the apostles, could fully appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus prior to Pentecost (Acts 2). None of His closest disciples did. Why should Nicodemus and Joseph? We never see them again in scripture, so we do not know whether they were ever baptized into Christ. However, it is hard to imagine that they would not have received Peter’s word gladly, had they been in attendance during that first gospel sermon. But, again, we do not know.

However, they seem to have had a clearer perspective on the events of that week than most others. What else can explain their courage? McGarvey and Pendleton wrote, “It is strange that those who were not afraid to be disciples were afraid to ask for our Lord’s body, yet he who was afraid to be a disciple feared not to do this thing” (page 734), and “We find, therefore, these Jewish rulers full of

active interest in the dead Christ while his apostles and friends are listless in despair.” (page 738)

Nicodemus must have realized that Jesus was more than a mere man as he observes Jesus being “lifted up” as He had said He would be. He may have been thinking:

“There must have been more to the analogy than both being physically lifted up. The serpent had been lifted up that the people could look at it and be cured of snakebite. For what purpose was Jesus to be lifted up and why ‘must’ it be so? What was it Jesus said? Oh yes. ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life’ (John 3:14-15). It was imperative that He be lifted up to impart eternal life just as it had been imperative to look at the brass serpent to continue to have temporal life.” (bjm)

This fulfillment of the prophetic type would confirm Jesus’ statement that He had indeed “descended from heaven.” Again, we know that Nicodemus had witnessed Jesus’ miracles and heard His teaching (John 3:1). Many things Nicodemus had not understood now begin to make sense. Jesus was and is the unique “Son of God” as well as “the Son of Man.”

Even if Joseph never came into personal contact with Jesus, he could not have been even a secret disciple without being aware of His teaching, miracles, and character. Perhaps Nicodemus had shared with him his conversation with the teacher who was “sent from God.” He may have told him of Jesus using the brazen serpent to prefigure the event the two of them had just witnessed. But, again, we do not know; such is not recorded. Did they even witness the “lifting up” or did they come upon

the scene afterward? The fact that they went to Pilate for permission to take down the body before Pilate knew Jesus was dead suggests that they came to the cross sooner rather than later.

Whether they anticipated a resurrection is unclear. But they would surely have seen through the later report of the soldiers who guarded the tomb of Jesus during the time He was in the sepulcher. How then would they have interpreted the empty tomb? Could they believe the disciples had stolen the body from the sepulcher when they had shown no interest in taking it down from the cross?

It is difficult to believe that any human being understood whatever role he was playing in the events of that week but these two were honest and good men. Would they not have listened thoughtfully to the message of the apostles when the twelve finally crawled out of hiding to boldly proclaim the gospel? It is difficult for this writer to imagine otherwise.

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THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

James Pasley

The crucifixion of Christ and his subsequent resurrection is without a doubt the pivotal point of all Earth's history. It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of this astonishing event. We often talk about what Jesus went through leading up to the cross and dying on it. We talk about his Father looking down and how difficult it was for him to see his Son dying. We talk about the wicked men who orchestrated it and the righteous who mourned as they watched. We talk about so many different perspectives, but I have never heard anyone address this subject from the Holy Spirit's point of view. I intend to do just that because I believe we far too often overlook the Holy Spirit. The great irony is that if it weren't for the Spirit inspiring the four accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that we call the Gospels then we would be unable to look at the crucifixion from any of these different perspectives, and, in fact, would likely know nothing at all or perhaps many wrong things about the events surrounding the death of our Lord and Savior.

We should remember that though we often focus on the Father giving his Son or the Son giving his life, The Spirit also experienced a change when the Word became Flesh. The limiting and redefining and restoring of an eternal relationship is no simple matter. Because the Holy Spirit is God, his view of the sacrifice of Jesus is an eternal one. He knew the facts before they happened and could also see the results fully understanding the cost of the sacrifice and the value in it as well. Throughout the Old Testament he shared little portions of this timeless vision. Shadows of what was to come, prophecies, if you prefer. Because he inspired those who wrote the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms he was able to leave us reminders of what he saw before our world experienced this powerful event.

In the Spirit's own words notice how he describes the event centuries before it occurred. He saw it important to record it as part of the curse of God against the Serpent, "you shall bruise his heel." He shows us the image of a father sacrificing his son in the case of Abra-

ham and Isaac, and though both Abraham and Isaac were spared the completion of the act, Abraham unwittingly uttered the chilling explanation, “God will provide for himself the lamb...” and he did on that occasion, but how much more so when he gave his Son as the lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world. The Spirit continues the foreshadowing of the cross in recorded promises from God about the seed of Abraham and in the blessings passed down to Isaac, Jacob, and finally Judah who is told that Shiloh will come. The difficulties of King David are often turned into prophecies about his descendant who will reign forever, but who like David faces attacks from all around. These images and words are so powerful that Jesus even quotes David’s words as he is dying on the cross, all planned out and recorded by the Spirit as important aspects of this story.

There are dozens of these mentions about what would come that the Spirit saw and had men write down. And with each one we must realize that as the Spirit inspired these men to write things like “cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree” or “by his stripes we are healed” or “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered,” He was experiencing the betrayal, crucifixion, and death, and seeing it as it would happen to be sure that each prophecy was accurate in its description of those future historical events. The Spirit gave Matthew, perhaps more than the other three, the task of drawing our attention to many of those snippets from the law and the prophets and the psalms that were his prevision of the passion.

The writing of two gospels by men who most likely were not eyewitnesses should impress on us even more the perspective that the Spirit had of this phenomenal execution. The Spirit, like a great movie director who has the important action scene covered by multiple camera angles so that it can be seen in all its glory, used four men and their own perspectives to shine the light on different significant

details. Think for just a minute about the things that are only revealed in one of the gospels. All of those things, as well as the things in multiple accounts, are important details that the Spirit saw clearly and wanted us to see. The Spirit also lets us see things that none of the disciples, not even John, witnessed. He takes us into the secret kangaroo court of the elders of the Jews. He makes it possible to know what thoughts are in people’s minds at various points as well.

Matthew’s record of the dream and warning that involved Pilate’s wife was certainly not known to others, but the Spirit knew it, may even have been instrumental in it. We learn that Pilate’s desire was to set Jesus free, but he gave in to the will of the mob in Luke even though Luke certainly could not have known that on his own. Mark’s camera shows us the path to the crucifixion and is the only one who mentions the two sons of Simon the Cyrene, Rufus and Alexander, who may have been known to Mark’s readers. John’s account even lets us be the fly on the wall as Pilate questions Jesus privately. The Spirit also recorded the sayings of Jesus on the cross and how they fulfilled prophecy. We can almost imagine the Spirit considering each of the statements and actions and events as he determines which parts can be seen best from which angle and which will be viewed by all four and which things are not worthy of inclusion and wind up on the editor’s floor. All of these things are a testimony to the wisdom of the Spirit and his ability to move beyond his connection to the murder of the one he had been so instrumental in bringing into the world (Mt. 1:18-20), enduing with immeasurable power (John 3:34), and raising from the dead (Romans 8:11); and to look objectively at all the knowledge that generation as well as future generations would need to have to gain the fullest benefits from Christ’s sacrifice. None but God would be able to think so clearly and act so perfectly during such a time.

THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SOLDIER AT THE CROSS



David Dean

I stood watching the crowd as it grew larger by the minute. My name is Atticus and I have served the prefect of Judaea since his rise to power. My hand drifted down to my sword as I noticed the eyes of the people, so very angry. It had all started the night before, and the streets were filled with the news. The leaders of the Jewish people had stirred up the people, and a mob had carried off one Jesus of Nazareth. He had been dragged away, tried for reasons under their law. Of course, for me this simply meant more work. The Jewish people were a constant source of trouble for us soldiers and now they had attempted to dump the

entire mess in the lap of Pontius Pilate. He had already made several attempts to calm the crowd, even going so far as to scourge this Jesus, "King of the Jews." But, it seemed the crowd wanted blood, loudly demanding, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Fearful of the ever-encroaching Greek kingdom, Judas Maccabeus, made a decision that would alter the balance of power in the Judean realm for years. He heard how the Roman armies had defeated Antiochus the Great, and how, "they were very strong and were well-disposed toward all who made an alliance with them, that they pledged friendship to

those who came to them” (1 Maccabees 8:1, NRSV). With this knowledge in hand Judas wrote a letter to the leaders of Rome proposing a treaty. With this treaty Rome had its first fingerhold into Israel, and soldiers like the one in our story above would become commonplace on the streets of Jerusalem.

In the years to come the Jewish people were obviously no strangers to the Roman soldier. The gospels record various interactions between the Jewish people and the soldiers. John would issue instructions to those soldiers who would seek his council (Luke 3:14). Jesus would interact with one centurion who demonstrated a great faith (Matt 8:5-13). Of course, other less-than-civil exchanges took place as well. We will examine the soldiers who interacted with Christ during the time of the crucifixion. After all, these soldiers would be among the last to see our Savior before His death.

John in his Gospel account gives an incredible glimpse of that dark day. Starting in the nineteenth chapter we see Pilate taking Jesus and scourging him. The soldiers “twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head” (John 19:2). These soldiers mocked the Savior; they would later come up to him offering soured wine and ridiculing him for being the King of the Jews, yet unable to save himself (Luke 23:36). It was a Roman soldier who forced Jesus to carry the cross to Golgotha, or The Place of a Skull. They drove the nails into his flesh, then divided his garments like spoils of war (John 19:23-24). This same group of soldiers followed the command of Pilate as he caved once more to the Jews. They went to the thieves and broke their legs, rapidly speeding up the process of death, but when they came to our Savior, they found him already dead (John 19:32).

It is easy to sit back in the comfort of our homes and judge the soldiers at the cross. After all, the Bible itself declares that they crucified the son of God. However, to be fair, we

need to consider the historical context of this event. The second century *Histories of Appian* details the slave revolt under the leadership of Spartacus. History records that over 6,000 slaves were crucified along the road leading to Rome.¹ While this event took place around one hundred years before the time of Christ, it does provide an interesting glimpse into the mind of the Roman soldier. Each one of these soldiers would have viewed the cross of Jesus slightly differently, but ultimately, they would come to the same conclusion. To them he was a criminal, one who was dying at the hand of the mighty Roman Empire. With each thrust of the hammer, they were carrying out their duty as legionaries. It must also be noted that Pilate had already been threatened by the Jewish people when he attempted to show any lenience. As he attempted to persuade them to release Jesus, they called into question his loyalty to Caesar, saying, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar” (John 19:12). All these illustrations provide insight into the mind of the Roman soldiers, explaining what we may view as “bad behavior,” though it does not justify it.

The problem with the mindset of the Roman soldier is that it is based on commonly on things were simply not true. Jesus was not a criminal. He was not even a sinner (1 John 3:5)! He did not deserve the horrific fate inflicted upon his body. He deserved praise and worship, not torment and mocking. But it would only vaguely be given to him at the end by a handful of soldiers. In Mathew’s account of the Gospel we read of a centurion that would be witness to the death of Jesus. This centurion along with others was keeping watch, and they saw, “the earthquake and what took place,” at the death of Christ (Matt

¹ Appian. n.d. The Histories of Appian. Reproduced on Bill Thayer’s Web Site. Viewed on June 21, 2019.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Appian/Civil_Wars/1*.html/.

27:45). Matthew goes into detail describing how at the death of Christ, the veil in the temple was torn in two, the tombs of the righteous were opened, and the dead walked once more. The rocks of the earth were split, and during it all these soldiers trembled as the very earth shook.

It was a terrible sight to behold, for three hours the sun was darkened in the sky. Now the very earth shook. I reached for my sword and searched for my centurion, looking for

guidance. I am a soldier. I have seen the horrors of war, but this day made all I have seen pale in comparison. The very rocks of the earth were being ripped in two. People all around were screaming. And I was there. I witnessed that it started at the moment this Jesus died. He cried out with a loud voice, then suddenly chaos descended upon the city. I was unsure of what it all meant, but I did know one thing, "Truly this was the Son of God."

THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CAIAPHAS, THE HIGH PRIEST

Gantt Carter

It's the beginning of a new week. Finally. It is over...he is dead and buried. I doubt he would have received any kind of burial, but some made it their mission to take care of his corpse. Of course, I'm thinking of those traitors to our cause, Joseph and Nicodemus. Regardless, the rogue Rabbi is dead and the threat to our place is ended. The danger is avoided, and the populace, along with the Romans, seems satisfied with the conclusion. Are you unaware of what has occurred? It started a few years ago...

I had heard rumors of a King being born in Bethlehem during the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus. King Herod consulted with members of my family (the chief priests) and some of our scribes about this child. I was a boy of about 10 years-old at that time. However, he seemed to disappear...

Ever since the Romans came, our lives and worship have been different. They stripped us of much of our power, and even started deposing and appointed high priests at their pagan digression. My father-in-law, Annas, was high

priest for a few years, then one of his sons, and then I was made high priest by Valerius Gratus. My father-in-law is a shrewd man and still rather wealthy and a powerful influence within our community.

It's been 12 years since the governor appointed me to this position. Pontius Pilate succeeded Valerius and kept me in the role of high priest. I have become adept at the ways of walking the often thin line between pleasing our people and keeping Rome happy.

As the high priest of God's people, I oversee the offering of sacrifices. I alone can enter the most holy place on the Day of Atonement each year. The sacrifices and other Temple activities are very important for our nation and our service to our God. I'm a man of significant impact on the affairs of our nation. I may be the single most powerful Jew in the world.

About 3 years ago, a young man from Galilee named Joshua began wandering around the Galilean and Judean countryside, teaching a strange version of the Law and making some outlandish claims about the kingdom of heav-

en and about himself. He even traveled through Samaria and interacted with the inhabitants... Anyway, he was from the little village of Nazareth, of all places, and a mere carpenter by trade. He was not selected by the council as a teacher, but some started calling him a Rabbi...some applying even greater titles to this troublemaker. Some claimed he was our Davidic King, the same one born in David's village that Herod tried to kill. But some also had the idea that he was the Son of God, as well as the Messiah.

In contrast to my authority, he even appeared to be laying claim to the Temple. He would waltz in like he owned the place and teach for hours in the Temple courts. He even chased the moneychangers out of the Temple! Who did he think he was? I guess he really did have the disillusion of being some type of Messiah figure. Earlier this week, we asked him about the source of his authority. He replied with some question about another rogue named John and then had the audacity to declare tax collectors and prostitutes entering the kingdom of God instead of us!

Not very long ago, some among our people informed the Pharisees that this Galilean "Rabbi" raised someone from the dead. Our priestly house and the Pharisees convened with the council to discuss these matters. We asked each other, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." I typically consider the Pharisees to be enemies, but we put aside our differences for the greater good of our people.

As we discussed this man and the dangers we feared, I observed, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." So, it was at that point that we truly started making plans to stop this madness by any means required.

The Passover was at hand, and we instruct-

ed everyone to let us know if they knew of his location, so that we might arrest the rabble-rouser. Two days before the Passover, a group of us met in my house. We decided on a plan to arrest Joshua of Nazareth by stealth and kill him. We did agree, "not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people." The last thing we wanted was a riot...the Roman soldiers would show up and it wouldn't end well.

Not long after our meeting in my palace, Judas Iscariot, one of the man's own disciples, came to us (the chief priests) and asked, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" We paid him 30 pieces of silver to betray his teacher.

It was the evening of the first day of Unleavened Bread when Judas came back to us. We sent him with a group of soldiers to arrest this troubling man. I sent Malchus, one of my servants, with them, and below are some highlights that my servant shared with me:

"He led us to an olive garden outside Jerusalem. He had told us, 'The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.' As we made our way through the groves of trees, we came near a small group of men (about a dozen, I'd say). Judas walked up to one of them and kissed him, saying, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' As we arrested him, one of his adherents pulled out a sword and struck me on my head, cutting my ear clean off. Then the oddest thing happened. The man we were arresting told his follower to put away his sword, and then he bent down to the ground near me. He picked up my ear and then somehow reattached it!"

Malchus is still fairly traumatized by it all. He did inform me that his disciples all fled from the scene of the arrest. We had their Master; thus, the end had begun.

They took him by my father-in-law's house

first. He questioned him, and then sent him to my house. As high priest, I am chairman of the high court, the council. I organized an informal hearing that night and interrogated this man about his blasphemy. All didn't go as we'd hoped, for the witnesses we managed to find had conflicts in their testimony about him.

Finally, 2 witnesses agreed that he had said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days." As he stood before me, I inquired of him, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" He refused to answer me. I followed up by putting him under oath, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Under oath, he broke his silence and said, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." I ripped my clothes and explained, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."

That was a busy night, but as the sun came up, we bound him again and took him to Pilate. About that time, Judas came to us again. He had changed his mind and wanted us to take the money back. He even said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." We replied, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." But he threw down the money in the temple and then went out and hanged himself. We noted that, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." We decided to use it to purchase the potter's field as a burial place for strangers.

Pilate had a custom of releasing one prisoner around the time of the feast. He was going to offer the people the choice of Joshua or Barabbas. Even though Barabbas was a rough character, we had already convinced the people to ask for his release and to ask for the execution of Joshua. Our plan worked just as we

had hoped.

Pilate had him flogged and then his soldiers crucified him outside the city walls. We all stayed to watch him, and we continued to express our views about him as we yelled out, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

As he hung there on the cross, there were some odd happenings. An earthquake, darkness during the middle of the day, and more. Some took this as sign that he was someone great, but I doubt that... it was interesting that I overheard one of the Roman soldiers say, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

That evening, Joseph and Nicodemus managed to get Pilate to release his body to them. Joseph actually buried in him is own new tomb, and then they rolled a large stone over the entrance to the cave.

The day after his death and burial, my fellow chief priests and I, along with some Pharisees, went to Pilate with a concern. We said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to us, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So, we went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Well, it has all been over for 3 days now. Hopefully, things will stay calm and no one will threaten our authority again for a long while (maybe never, now that they see how we take care of our problems). Hmm. Looks like some of the soldiers that we stationed at the tomb are here. I wonder what they want from us...

~Joseph ben Caiaphas

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THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF

THE PHARISEES



Dewayne Bryant

A man hangs on a Roman cross. Beaten and bloodied, positioned between two thieves, he is the latest victim of the brutal Roman system of jurisprudence. As is typical, a small crowd gathers near the site of execution. Some of the man's friends and family come to lend support in his last few hours on earth. Others have come to heckle him in his misery.

The victim is more than a man. He was a great teacher, whom many had called "rabbi." People from far and wide sought his advice – and his wonder-working power. The teacher had put together an incredible following, but almost all of them had left at the end. He required too much of them. The crowds swarmed around him as long as he offered

food for their bellies and cures for their ills. But the moment he began to teach them about the difficulties of the kingdom of heaven—which weren't all that difficult (Matthew 11:28-30)—many left his side to return to a less challenging life.

Now the man hangs broken. His body trembles in agony, with each movement unleashing searing bolts of pain throughout his body. Each time he tries to take a breath, he pushes up against the cross, its rough wood raking the flesh and muscle of a back shredded under a Roman scourge. The Romans did their level best to ensure that a crucifixion victim's last, tortured hours on earth were filled with indescribable suffering. Once again, they had suc-

ceeded.

In the distance, a group of Pharisees stands. They look on with satisfaction at the death of a man who had taught others the word of God, who fed the poor and healed the sick, and who had done everything to fulfill the prophetic expectations of the Messiah. Why so pleased? How did they get here?

A Furious Rage

To understand the Pharisees' desperation, we must know something about the political climate of first-century Judea. Thanks to events of the Intertestamental Period, tensions always ran high. The Jews had provided particularly stiff resistance against the Roman military in the past and would do so again in the future.

Ancient historians remember Pontius Pilate as anything but a saint. Philo of Alexandria recorded that Pilate's corrupt administration took bribes, executed offenders without trial, and committed acts of grievous cruelty. Josephus records a story in which Pilate seems to have intentionally offended the Jews by ordering troops to carry military standards bearing the likeness of the emperor into Jerusalem, a grave offense considering the Jewish prohibitions on graven images. In a separate incident, Pilate had some Jews beaten to death by plain-clothed soldiers who had infiltrated a crowd of protestors.

Knowing that the Romans prized order, and fearing the social and political upheaval a popular figure like Jesus could create, the Pharisees wondered about the future of their nation. If this Jesus claimed to be a king, his popularity might lead to a movement that could catch the Romans' notice. The mighty Roman Empire had defeated world powers like Carthage and razed magnificent cities like Corinth. They feared Judea and its capital city of Jerusalem might be next.

A Growing Desperation

We can see the increasing frustration with

Jesus in the Gospel accounts. Jesus vexed the Pharisees and other leaders in the Jewish faith, and they grew from merely annoyed to a state of indignant fury. He always defeated them in debate and exposed their hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-39). His straightforward teaching about the kingdom of God challenged the theologically bloated religious system of the Pharisees with its baffling number of rules and regulations. They would not have their power and authority challenged by a simple preacher from Nazareth.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to discuss the matter of Jesus' influence (John 11:47-48). Caiaphas, a wily leader who was equal parts politician and villain, knew what they would need to do. He told his colleagues, "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation would perish" (John 11:50; cf. 18:14). Perhaps the rest of the men nodded in solemn agreement, sealing Jesus' fate. They had tried to kill him before, but now nothing would stop them. They would go so far as to expand their efforts not only to kill Jesus but Lazarus as well (John 12:9-11). Jesus knew to conceal his movements so that he could evade his opponents for the time being (v. 54).

John highlights the desperation of Jesus' enemies, reporting that they despaired of his popularity (John 12:19). Seeing Jesus ride triumphantly into Jerusalem no doubt filled them with anxiety. Tensions usually ran high around the time of the Passover. The Romans watched more closely than usual as thousands of Jewish pilgrims filled Jerusalem. With Jesus making such a bold visual statement about his kingship, the Pharisees must have been especially desperate to end the influence of a man they saw as a messianic pretender and blasphemer.

The Sigh of Relief

The Jewish religious elite must have been puzzled when Judas approached them. For reasons of his own not clearly stated in the New

Testament, one wayward disciple betrayed his master for thirty silver coins. The leaders must have been almost giddy with delight. They finally had what they needed to spring the trap on their hated foe.

Judas—the man whose name history remembers as a synonym for betrayal—led the group of soldiers and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees to the Mount of Olives. After a brief scuffle in which Peter attacks one of the men in the group, Jesus surrenders to the authorities. They bind him and take him to see Annas, then to Caiaphas, and finally to Pilate. With each step, the anxious Pharisees sense that Jesus' time in the limelight has come to an end. In reading through the Gospels, we can almost sense their anticipation as their machinations bring Jesus closer to his fate.

Pilate seems unwilling to condemn Jesus. Their plan threatens to come undone. After a rousing chant from the crowd for Pilate to release Barabbas—very likely a murderer and insurrectionist that some of the Jews secretly thought a hero—the Roman governor finally condemns Jesus to death. The Pharisees and the rest of the Jewish religious elite breathe a collective sigh of relief. Tensions with Rome would remain, but now things could return to the status quo.

The Dawn of a New Day

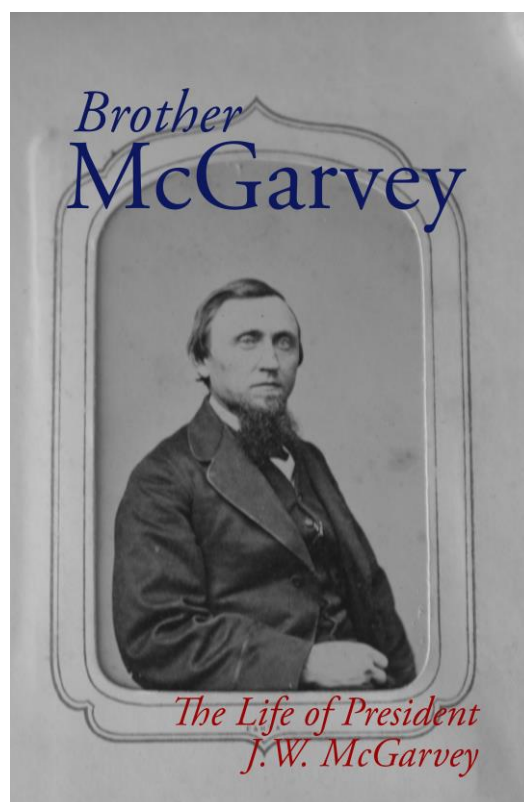
No doubt the Pharisees believed the tensions Jesus had created would now ease with his death. Their co-existence with Rome would remain an uneasy one, but at least there would be no messianic instigator filling the people's heads with dreams of Jewish liberation, or getting unwanted attention from the Roman authorities. The Messiah would come in time, they figure. They would have peace for now.

The little group of smug religious leaders looks on as the world's most remarkable man dies. Above his head is fixed the customary plaque identifying the crime of the crucified. It reads, "King of the Jews." Pilate had insisted

that the notice be put there, no doubt to irritate the Jews even more than usual (John 19:20-22). Crucifixion was unpleasant business, so much so that the Roman orator Cicero said that its barbarism should never be mentioned by Roman lips. Nevertheless, this blasphemer before them was getting his comeuppance.

The sky darkens suddenly. The leaders gaze around, bewildered. This was not the time of year for an eclipse. After three more hours, the man finally cries out aloud and yields his spirit. Nervously, the group makes its way to the Temple Mount. As they do so, the earth shakes beneath their feet (Matthew 27:51). They go a little further and hear cries that the dead walk the streets of Jerusalem (v.52). Getting closer to the Temple, a servant brings a report that something bizarre has happened—the curtain in front of the Most Holy Place had been torn in two, from top to bottom (v.51). Mouths agape, the men look at each other in silent bewilderment.

What just happened? They would soon find out. And the world would never be the same.



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THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF

PETER



Josh Vires

“Not even God Himself could sink this ship.”

This is a quote made popular by the blockbuster hit, *Titanic*, and while there is no factual evidence that proves that anyone ever said this, there is plenty of historical documentation that illustrates that this was a common belief among architects, engineers and ship captains. The *Titanic* was truly believed to be unsinkable. In the months leading up to the launching of the *Titanic*, William Pirrie, a shipbuilder and the man responsible for overseeing the design of the ship, was asked about the lack of lifeboats on the Olympic class cruise ships, which *Titanic* belonged to. He responded that the great ships were unsinkable and the rafts were to save others. Mr. Pirrie was not on the *Titanic* on April 2, 1912. Can you imagine the

feeling he got in his stomach when he heard the news that not only did the ship sink, but over 1500 people lost their lives?

Have you ever failed in the midst of one of your proudest moments, a project for work, a special moment with your family, an athletic feat, or something of great significance and meaning to you? If you have, you can remember the sinking feeling in your stomach when you became aware of your failure.

Peter's journey with Jesus begins early one morning when Jesus arrives at a fishing dock and asks Peter and his coworkers to take their boat back onto the sea so that he may speak from it. After they return to shore, Jesus says to Peter and his fellow fishermen, “follow me,” (Luke 5:1-11).

They walked with Jesus from village to vil-

lage, house to house. They watched and listened as He presented himself to others. They witnessed as He healed and forgave the untouchables in each community. They observed as He dealt with the doubters such as the Pharisees and the Scribes. They stood by His side as He heard of the death of His cousin, John. They watched as He, instead of mourning, taught and then fed thousands of people.

Then Jesus sends His apostles back out on a boat. He says He will meet them on the other side of the sea. He retreats to the mountain to pray and probably to mourn. A storm rises on the sea. The apostles are afraid. Jesus walks to them on the water. The apostles, unable to see their savior in the midst of the storm, continue to fear. Peter tells Jesus to command him out onto the water if He really is the Messiah. Jesus says to Peter, “Come to me...” (Matthew 14:22-29).

Did you know that from the time a baseball player is drafted by a major league organization, it typically takes that player four to six years to actually make a major league team? Can you imagine walking up to the plate or out onto the field for the first time, having reached the highest level of your career? This is the moment that someone would say, “I have made it. I have reached the peak. I have succeeded.”

Peter steps out of the boat onto the rough seas and in the fierce wind. He does it. He walks, step by step, on the water. “I have made it,” Peter probably thinks to himself, “I am a disciple. I am His favorite. I am walking on the water. What else could be greater?”

In that same moment, amidst this overwhelming feeling of success, Peter notices the winds and the waves, and he sinks. Jesus reaches out and saves him. The situation quickly went from being the crowning moment of Peter’s faith to being catastrophic (Matthew 14:30-33).

Fast forward in Peter’s journey with Jesus. Jesus asks Peter in Matthew 16:13, “Who do

people say the Son of Man is?”¹

The conversation continues in verses 16-18,

Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Peter again might be thinking, “Okay, I am finally here. Did you hear that guys? Something I said is what the church of Christ will be built on!”

However, just a few moments later, it says in Matthew 16:21-23,

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Again, Peter quickly goes from a moment of pride to moment of public shame, but he stays with Jesus. In fact, he is one of few witnesses to the transfiguration, a moment that only two others witnessed.

The days and the months and the ministry of Jesus go on. Peter, along with the rest of the disciples, witnesses healing and teaching and correcting and loving. The time of Jesus’ death is drawing near. It is obvious in the things Jesus has said concerning Judgment and the end of days and the responsibility of the disciples. They all head to Jerusalem. It is the feast of

¹ All scripture quotes are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

the Passover. During this celebration, this “holy convocation,” (Leviticus 23:7), we read the following interaction.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover (Matthew 26:17-19).

This was undoubtedly a holy moment, a moment filled with beauty, peace, hope, and great value among this group of Jewish men, sitting around their rabbi, who would in just a few days serve as the Passover lamb for all the world. There was not a moment like this before and there would not be another moment like it afterward.

Matthew 26:30-35 says,

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

Peter’s motivation to answer Jesus this way came from the same place as his motivation on that night when he said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water,” (Matthew 14:28). Even in the midst of Jesus last days, Peter makes it about Peter and not Jesus, but Jesus has had enough. Peter says, “I

will not fail you.” Jesus says to Peter, “You will fail me three times.”

If you are Peter, how do you respond? You probably would respond in a way similar to what he did. However, Peter is still only thinking about what he can and cannot do or what he does or does not want to do. Peter is thinking about self when he needs to be thinking about Jesus. It is in these moments of Peter’s life that opportunities for a crown become catastrophes.

The passion of Jesus continues. He is arrested. Matthew 26:57-58 says,

Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.”

Peter is standing there the whole time, but he maintains a distance between himself and the One he said he would never fail.

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:69-75).

Peter does not just deny Jesus at three ran-

dom moments. He denies Him at the same time that Jesus is suffering. If Peter had the faith to step out of the boat onto the water, why would he deny the One that rescued him when he lost that faith in the storm? If Peter was willing to rebuke Jesus for foretelling His death, why would he distance himself and deny Him as it happened? If Peter was willing to lift himself up as better than the rest of the disciples as they sat down together during that pivotal moment in which Jesus says they will all fail him, and Peter says, “I won’t do that!” why would he deny him?

This was the moment. This was the moment to do something nobody else was willing to do. This was the moment to say, “Yes, I was with Him. I have walked with Him. I have talked with Him. I have taught with Him. I will stand by and suffer with Him.”

This was the moment for Peter to earn his

crown! However, it becomes a moment nearly catastrophic to his faith.

There is no conclusive evidence that Peter was near the cross as Jesus died. It is difficult to imagine he did since he had placed so much distance between himself and Jesus after His arrest. Peter certainly had opportunity to stand with the Messiah throughout His last moments. He probably had opportunity to die next to him on that day. However, he chose, during the closing hours of the Passion of Jesus, to view it from afar, if he viewed it at all. Just a few days earlier Peter was standing tall saying, “I will not fail. Even God himself cannot accurately predict my failure.”

However, he does fail. He sinks. Again. And again, this time in the resurrection, Jesus would be there to extend a hand, to rescue him.

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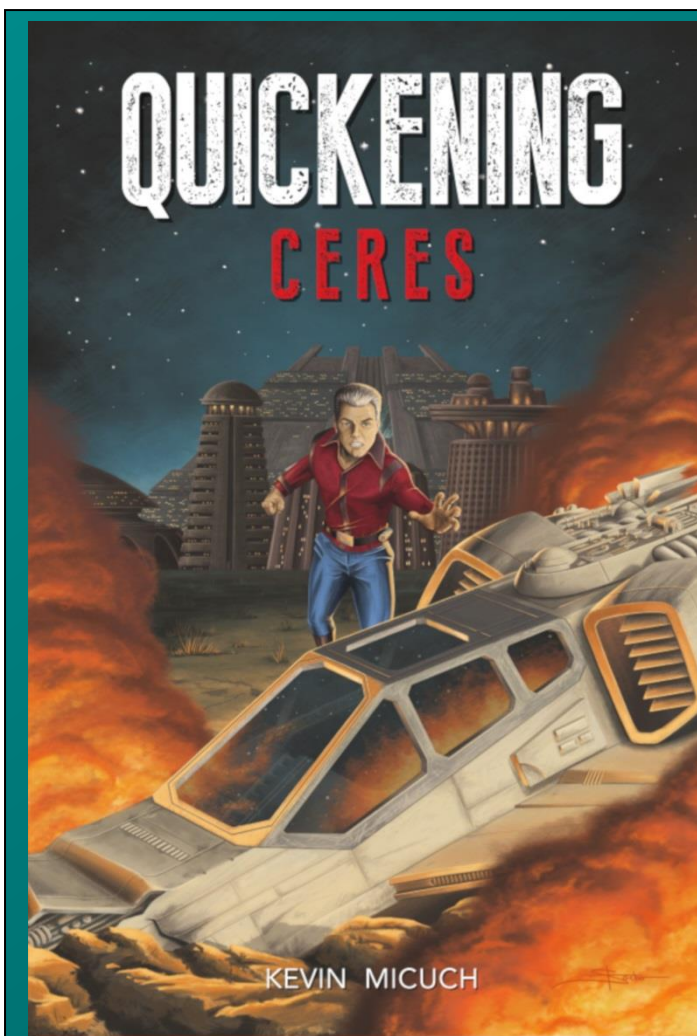
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THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF

PONTIUS PILATE



Kenny Taylor

What would have gone through Pontius Pilate's mind when JESUS was brought to him for trial? Scripture reveals that he knew that Jesus was innocent, and that it was "out of envy that [the Jews] had delivered [Jesus] up" (Matthew 27:18). Scripture also tells us that Pilate's wife had a dream about these events and warned him to "have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream" (Matthew 27:19). And yet, Pilate washed his hands of it and permitted Jesus to be scourged and crucified (Matthew 27:24-26). But why?

What do we know about Pontius Pilate separate from this night? According to newadvent.org, Marcus Pontius Pilatus or Pontius Pilate came to his position in A.D. 26. He had greater authority than most procurators or gov-

ernors under the Roman Empire, "for in addition to the ordinary duty of financial administration, he had supreme power judicially." This is significant because God had ordained through many prophets that Jesus would be crucified at the chosen time (Gal. 4:4-5).

While other events during his rule are not of importance, "Philo (Ad Gaium, 38) said that Pilate was inflexible, merciless, and obstinate." The Jews certainly hated Pilate, not only for his severity, but also for his complete lack of regard for their religion and culture. Pilate had sent standards bearing the image of Tiberius Caesar to be set up in Jerusalem. This caused an outbreak that would have ended in massacre had Pilate not relented. And Luke mentions an incident in which Pilate mingles the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices

(Luke 13:1). This correlates well with secular accounts of his rule, as he was known to provoke Jews and Samaritans to riot. Yet by the time of Jesus' trial, Pontius was "anxious that no further hostile reports should be sent to the emperor concerning him."

So on the night that Jesus is betrayed, He is sent before the High Priest before going back and forth from Herod to Pilate (Luke 23:7-11). Although Herod seemed to find Jesus an amusing curiosity, he would have been more than willing to please the Jews in their bloodthirsty ambition. This did not get the Jews what they wanted, however, because Herod could not condemn Jesus to the death that they sought. Pilate, on the other hand, had the authority, yet knew Jesus was innocent and wanted no part in this mockery of justice, as we have already mentioned. So how did Pilate come to condemn Jesus to be crucified? Let's see what we can learn from their conversations together.

When Jesus is first brought to Pilate, he asks the Jews what accusation they bring against Jesus. The Jews reply, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." When Pilate demands that they judge Him themselves, they answer that they are not permitted by Roman law to execute individuals. Incidentally, this shows that prophecy was correct in predicting how Jesus was to die...by crucifixion (John 18:29-32; Matthew 20:17-19; John 12:32-33; Psalm 22:16).

Then Pilate asks Jesus if He is King of the Jews. Some details are left out of Scripture, but likely the Jews had elaborated on this. They wanted Jesus convicted for treason against Rome because that would guarantee crucifixion. Jesus responds by asking if Pilate asks this of his own accord. Pilate replies that, as he is not a Jew himself, he knows nothing about Jesus' situation and wants to know why His own people have turned Him in and are demanding His execution. At this point Jesus

speaks a very powerful statement: He says that yes, He is a King, but not a King of this world. He explains that, if He *were* a King of this world, then His servants would fight for Him. This, in fact, is exactly what Peter had tried to do when he cut off Malchus' ear (John 18:10). Yet Jesus had stopped him; no one was to fight to try to prevent Jesus' death—it was for this reason that Jesus had come in the first place (Matthew 26:52-54)! Jesus states to Pilate that His entire purpose for coming to earth is to bear witness of the truth; to which Pilate asks, "What is truth?" (John 18:33-38).

No doubt, Pilate is frustrated. He knows why Jesus is before him. He knows the envy the Jews have concerning Him. He knows the warnings his own wife has given him concerning the dreams she'd just had the night before about Jesus. He knows in his heart of hearts that Jesus is innocent of any actual crimes. He even attempts to give Jesus a way out by reminding the Jews that it was customary to pardon a man at the Passover and then offering them the choice of either Jesus or Barabbas. But they choose Barabbas and demand that Jesus be crucified. Pilate is now left with has two choices. His first choice is to release Jesus. This is clearly his preference, because he knows Jesus is innocent. But by doing so, he risks the Jewish leaders stirring the people—who already hate Pilate—to violence and riot. His other choice is to give in and permit Jesus to be crucified. He chooses to cave to the Jewish leaders' desire and crucify Jesus rather than deal with a likely riot.

After Jesus is scourged and beaten by the soldiers, Pilate brings Him before the Jewish leaders again and suggests that Jesus has been punished enough and should now be released. But the Jews refuse, telling him that Jesus had declared Himself to be the Son of God and therefore *must* die. Pilate, however, doesn't share their outrage; instead, he is now thoroughly spooked (John 19:1-8)! No doubt this revelation causes his wife's warning to ring

even louder in his ears. Still, no matter how hard he argues with the Jews that they should release Jesus, they refuse to yield and threaten to instigate violence. Finally, Pilate calls for water and literally washes his hands of it (Matthew 27:24). Yet there is one thing that is very telling: Pilate has an inscription placed over the cross declaring that Jesus is indeed King of the Jews! The Jewish leaders don't like the inscription and demand it be changed to say, "This man *said*, I am King of the Jews." But Pilate refuses to change the sign (John 19:19-22).

So, what do we know about Pilate? We know that he was afraid of any involvement with Jesus because he knew that He was called the Son of God, a claim that he may have felt was substantiated by his wife's dream. She had called Jesus a just and righteous man, and Pilate himself knew Jesus to be innocent. We

also know that Pilate was afraid because he knew that the Jews would not hesitate to instigate violence in order to get what they wanted. He understood that the riot with which they threatened him would most likely cost him his position. But what Pilate didn't know was that Jesus was destined to die from before the foundations of the world by Yahweh in order to save wretched man from himself and from Satan (Eph. 1:3, 4). Unbeknownst to Pilate, he himself, by means of his own difficult and reluctant choices, was an unwilling—and unwitting!—participant in the fulfillment of Divine prophecy.

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THE PASSION OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SAVIOR

Andrew Patterson

“Hoshana!” “Save us, Son of David!” Jesus turns his head. He sees the young mothers smiling, whispering to their ecstatic children—“Look! Mashiach! Remember the Psalms? Remember the Prophet’s words? Remember Daniel’s prophecy? That’s him! He’s here to save us! Hoshana!”

Jesus thinks about the peoples’ words as he rides along the cobbled pathway. He knows that although their understanding is right, their understanding is wrong. He is the Messiah, yet they seem to have forgotten that Messiah shall be “cut off”.¹ He was prophesied in the Psalms—in fact, as he and the disciples entered the city, they had sung the fifteen songs of ascent. The thirteenth called him *the horn of David*.² Yet the people didn’t seem to make the connection with the last words of the last song: “The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion!”³ He had made the very rocks upon which he walked. He knows the names of everyone around him. He knows their joys and sorrows. And he knows that the same happy, smiling families—to whom he had given the beautiful flowers and trees surrounding them—and life itself—will in five days clamor for his execution.

Yet Jesus isn’t concerned about his own suffering right now. The famous city of peace⁴ will be burned in just a few decades and noth-

ing of peace will remain. Jesus glances back at the children beaming up at him, trying to touch him. Some of them will be here in Jerusalem in 35 years. He looks into their eyes and sees them and their own children, dying. Suffering. He turns again to the city. “If only you knew! Enemies will surround you and kill you and your children. The entire city will be turned upside down!”⁵ No one seems to care much.

Dismounting, he begins to enter the temple and is swarmed by blind and lame men, seeking to be healed. Most of the locals are apparently unfamiliar with this rugged carpenter.

“Who is this man?” they ask. Fortunately, there are plenty of followers ready to give an answer: “This is the Prophet from Nazareth!”

The children follow him into the temple. The scribes and priests come to examine the commotion. They see the little boys and girls filled with joy.

“Hoshana! Hoshana! The Son of David!” Jesus smiles. The scribes and priests do not. “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings You have perfected praise,” he reminds them.⁶ Disgruntled, they turn away. They do not seem bothered by the merchants, however. Jesus will return tomorrow to deal with them—again.⁷ He and the apostles are staying in Bethany for the night and need to get back.

The next day, after kicking out the greedy moneychangers, Jesus began to teach in the

¹ Dan 9.26-27

² Psa 132.10-18

³ Psa 134.3

⁴ Heb 7.2

⁵ Luk 19.41-44

⁶ Matt 21.10-16

⁷ Mk 11.15-18; c.f., Jno 2.13-17

Temple.⁸ He only has four days to teach the people and to prepare them for his death. After some time, Philip and Andrew come up to him.

Some Greeks, who have heard of Jesus' powerful teaching, have approached Philip and asked if they can meet Jesus. Jesus goes outside the temple and takes the opportunity to teach them. He decides to cut to the chase. "He who loves his life shall lose it and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. The time is come for me to be glorified. Father, glorify thy name." A thunder-crack booms out the words: *I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.* Jesus then tells the listeners of his imminent crucifixion, but they don't understand and don't believe. In fact, some of the Jews in the crowd tell him matter-of-factly that actually, according to the law, he won't die. Jesus continues, but he knows they won't listen. He gets up and leaves, hiding from the naysayers.⁹

Returning the next day, Jesus continues teaching in the Temple. After some time, he stops and turns around. Several members of the Sanhedrin have entered and are waiting to ask him a question. They wish to prove Jesus wrong in front of all the people. Everyone's eyes are on Jesus as he waits.

"By what authority do you do these things?" Their famous query is quickly snuffed by Jesus' own, and the most educated scholars in the nation, on the highest court in the nation, concede to ignorance. Jesus poses another question.

"But what do you think?" he asks. He tells them three stories and allows them to implicate their own hypocrisy in front of the very people they sought to convince. Angrily, they storm away.¹⁰ Throughout the day, he is questioned again and again. The Pharisees team up

with their old adversaries the Herodians.¹¹ The Sadducees come.¹² The Pharisees come again.¹³ Wearied with their clear desire to turn away the people, Jesus changes themes. He is sick of the Jews' faith being stamped out by those who ought to know the law better than any else.

"Beware of the Sanhedrin," he warns the people.¹⁴ Turning to the scribes and Pharisees themselves, he declares, "Woe to you! Hypocrites!" He does not hold back. He wants the crowd to know the difference in being holy and being haughty. He is angry with the Sanhedrin, yet he fills with emotion. He wants them to be saved. "Look, I send you prophets and wise men and scribes—and some of them you will scourge and persecute. Upon you is the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth—from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah ben Berechiah!" In tears, he weeps, "Oh Jerusalem! Jerusalem! who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her.... How often I wanted to gather your children together like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling!"¹⁵ Why, he wonders, won't they accept God's mercy? He wipes away some of his tears. They are not his first and certainly not his last.

As his disciples follow him back to Bethany, they admire the beautiful structure of the Temple. Jesus pauses for a moment and talks with them about its destruction. This is his third time this week to bring it up. Perhaps they'll listen this time. The apostles are starting to ask him questions about it. He patiently answers them and tells them when they must flee. As they walk, Jesus continues telling them parables and teaching them until they

⁸ Luk 19 47-48

⁹ Jno 12.20-36

¹⁰ Matt 21.23-22.14

¹¹ Mk 12.13-17

¹² Luk 20.27-40

¹³ Matt 22.34-40

¹⁴ Matt 23.2-12

¹⁵ Matt 23.34-37

arrive back in Bethany.¹⁶ Jesus tells them again about his execution.

“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and I will be handed over for crucifixion?” he asks.¹⁷ As they enjoy supper with Lazarus and his family, Mary begins to anoint Jesus’ feet. “This is for my burial.” Judas scoffs and leaves the house.¹⁸ Jesus knows where he’s going; his friend is traveling to meet the priests and arrange a scheme to assist them in their plot.¹⁹

Two days later, Jesus tells the apostles to meet a friend in Jerusalem who has prepared a room for their use that evening. The rest of the day they work on preparing the Paschal meal.²⁰ As they slaughter and sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus thinks about his own slaughter.²¹ No one seems to realize that after this, only one lamb will ever be slaughtered again.²² In fact, the one that just died is no more than an emblem of Jesus himself.²³

As they dine, Jesus is filled with emotion. He loves his disciples and he knows how much pain and confusion they are soon to endure.²⁴ “I have *earnestly* desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”²⁵ He can’t hold it in. “One of you will betray me,” he reminds them. The dolor in his voice is heartbreaking.²⁶ He had just finished washing their feet. He has for three years taken care of them and guided them, yet his friend Judas has chosen to betray him.

“What you do—do quickly,” Jesus says as he hands him the bread. He takes it and leaves.²⁷ Jesus knows, too, that in a matter of

hours, nearly every single one of his disciples will display infidelity in some way. He even warns Peter. He can’t stand the thought of his dear friend denying him.

Jesus then presents the disciples with another piece of bread and another cup, telling them, “Do this in my memory.”²⁸ The air is palpable and somber. Jesus wants to encourage the apostles. He will pray about and deal with his own pain and sorrow later. The needs of the disciples are greater than his own.²⁹

“Let not your heart be troubled. I will come again and receive you to myself. I will not leave you comfortless—I will come to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’—If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. These things I have spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage—I have overcome the world!”³⁰

With these words, he stops and begins to pray for the disciples. He prays for their encouragement and unity throughout the imminent distress. He knows that his death will mean many, many things. At the forefront of his mind is the glorification of the Father and the subsequent glorification by the Father of him, Jesus, the Son.³¹ He prays about this, too. Before they conclude the Passover ceremony, Jesus and the apostles sing a psalm.

As he rises, he takes his closest friends and they go into the garden. Jesus pauses for a moment. He remembers the last time Judas

¹⁶ Matt 24-25

¹⁷ Matt 26.1-2

¹⁸ Jno 12.2-8; Mk 12.3-11

¹⁹ Psa 41.9

²⁰ Mk 14.12-16

²¹ Rev 5.6

²² Heb 9.23-10.14

²³ I Cor 5.7; Heb 9.8-22; I Pet 1.19

²⁴ Jno 13.1

²⁵ Luk 22.15

²⁶ Jno 13.21-22

²⁷ Jno 13.27, 30

²⁸ I Cor 11.24

²⁹ Phil 2.3-7

³⁰ Jno 14.1, 3, 18, 27-29; 16.33

³¹ Jno 12.23-28; 13.31-32; 17.1-5; Phil 2.9; Heb 5.5

was with him here.³² Judas will certainly arrive, but it won't be the same at all. Jesus' eyes fill with tears. He is scared and in pain.³³

"My soul is deeply grieved—to the point of death! Wait, watch, and pray." As he prays, he feels torn by pain and devotion.³⁴ "Father, if it is possible...let this cup pass from me. Yet—not as I will, but as You will. If this cannot pass away unless I drink it—Your will be done!"³⁵

Despite his prayer, Jesus knows there is no other way, because he knows that this is the reason for his manifestation upon the earth.³⁶ When he concludes and finds the disciples still sleeping, he is disappointed at their lack of friendship and support, but he is most concerned by their own spiritual condition. He warns them to be careful and wary of temptation.³⁷ He bids them arise and, with a heavy but determined heart, resolutely heads to meet Judas and the amassed horde of soldiers and priests.³⁸

Meeting them, Jesus' first concern is the safety of his apostles:

"If you seek *me*, let these go their way," he says to the virulent mob, pointing to his disciples.³⁹ Before they can flee, Judas comes down and eagerly greets Jesus.

"My Lord!" he cries, as he plants an empty kiss on Jesus' cheek. Brokenhearted, Jesus whispers, "Friend, do what you have come for."⁴⁰ The captors quickly bind him and a frightened and confused Simon draws his sword and lashes out to kill one of the mob, missing all but his ear.

"Stop—No more of this! Put your sword back in its place, for all those who take up the

sword shall perish by the sword." In his last act of healing, Jesus touches Malchus' ear and compassionately restores it.⁴¹ Yet his own pain will soon be much greater. With that, his disciples all flee. Jesus is now alone.⁴² Dragged away to his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus faces the same crowd he had humbled just a few days ago. As they attempt to procure witnesses against him, he remains silent, surely astounded at the hatred they have for the one who made them. Jesus gave them every blessing they have. He gave them their lives, their families, their happiness. Yet they are illegally trying him and lying about him. Despite their wicked plot, they cannot seem to indict him. Without saying a word, Jesus embarrasses the Sanhedrin yet again. Angrily, Caiaphas demands to know if he claims to be the Christ.

"*I am.*"⁴³

As the raucous and enthused lawyers re-engage in their debate, Jesus turns around. There, just within earshot, he sees his dear friend Simon and hears his angry and bitter words, "I swear it—I do not know *this man* you are talking about!" The rooster crows and Simon makes eye contact with Jesus. Peter's eyes fill with tears as he runs away.⁴⁴ Jesus reminds himself of his mission to glorify God and to bring salvation to all. He thinks of the prophecy of Daniel: a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.⁴⁵ His death will establish that kingdom. He thinks of the promise made to David.⁴⁶ And the promise made to Abraham.⁴⁷ And the promise made before Adam.⁴⁸ "My death is needful to bring salvation to my brethren," he thinks to himself, as his Jewish brethren blindfold him and begin to beat him

³² Jno 18.1-2

³³ Isa 53.3; Mk 14.33-34; Matt 26.37-38; Heb 5.7

³⁴ Phil 2.8; Heb 5.8

³⁵ Matt 26.39, 42

³⁶ Heb 2.9-15

³⁷ Luk 22.45

³⁸ Mk 14.42

³⁹ Jno 18.8-9

⁴⁰ Matt 26.49-50

⁴¹ Jno 18.10-11; Matt 26.51-54

⁴² Matt 26.56; Mk 14.50-52

⁴³ Mk 14.62; Exo 3.14

⁴⁴ Mk 14.71; Luk 22.61

⁴⁵ Dan 2.44

⁴⁶ II Sam 7.11-16

⁴⁷ Gen 12.3

⁴⁸ Gen 3.15

and spit on him.^{49 50}

He is carried away again before the Roman court. The drowsy governor is attempting to understand the ridiculous claim the Jews are making.

“I find no crime in him,” he concludes.⁵¹ “Perhaps Herod will.” Jesus is again transported, this time to the regional court of Herod Antipas, who is not interested in the accusation, but desires only to see a magic trick. Jesus stands silently and demonstrates perfect meekness as the tetrarch and his soldiers continue to mock him.⁵²

Having had Jesus returned to him, Pilate is growing impatient. He attempts what he sees as an obviously fool-proof method of convincing the people to release Jesus.

“Which man?”

“Barabbas!”

“But your king—?”

“Crucify him!”

“Why? What evil has he done?”

“Crucify him.”

Pilate submits Jesus to the lictors⁵³ in an attempt to pacify the mob, but they refuse to relent. The Praetorian guard gleefully laps up the opportunity. After ripping off his back with the scourge, they toss on a robe. A twisted briar is beaten onto his head. They spit on him again. They beat his head. They mock his holy kingship. After they have had their amusement, they rip off the robe. Jesus grimaces as the wounds in his back are fully reopened. They are quickly re-covered with his own clothes. He collapses under the pain of trying to carry the cross. A man from Libya is recruited to help him.⁵⁴ Trying to catch his breath, Jesus turns and sees the multitude weeping.

“Daughters of Jerusalem.” He tries one last

time. “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.” His own suffering is somehow not what bothers him. “The days are coming.”⁵⁵

While upon the cross itself, Jesus again thinks—not of himself, but of others. As he struggles to breathe, he is only able to let out a few words that can be heard.

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” Perhaps he is thinking of a day when they shall repent.⁵⁶

“Today you shall be with me in paradise.” More forgiveness.

“Woman!” he called to his mother. “Look—your son. And John, look—your mother.” When he cannot even provide for his own physical needs, Jesus takes care of his mother’s.

“It is finished.” By his death, and with this breath, he will destroy he who has power of death—Satan.⁵⁷

(Disclaimer: I have taken a few authorial liberties in order to help the narrative and to display certain thoughts I do believe went through His mind during the week. The Scripture is true and my words are simply to help convey their meaning in a new light.)

⁵⁵ Luk 23.27-31

⁵⁶ Luk 23.34; Act 2.36-41

⁵⁷ Heb 2.14

⁴⁹ Heb 2.10-11

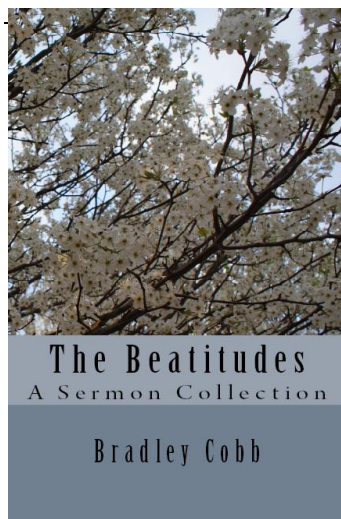
⁵⁰ Mk 14.65; Luk 22.64

⁵¹ Jno 18.28-38

⁵² Luk 23.6-11

⁵³ Roman bodyguards. It was they who were charged with scourging criminals.

⁵⁴ Mk 15.6-21



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A Christian Response TO THE Abortion Crisis

Joseph McWhorter

The dictionary defines “crisis” as “a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger.” It is no exaggeration to state that the worldwide trend of abortion is a crisis. According to the latest statistics, nearly 20% of pregnancies end in elective abortion.¹ In the cities of New York and Washington, D.C., more than one third of all pregnancies are spontaneously aborted. This is not merely an American problem. The WHO (World Health Organization) reported that from 2010-2014, an average of 56 million abortions were carried out across the globe each year.² Since the systematic legalization of abortion by the Roe versus Wade Supreme Court case in 1973, more than 61 million abortions have occurred in the United States.³ That

is enough lives to populate Canada nearly twice over. Globally, since 1980, enough babies have been aborted, 1.5 billion, to populate China, the most populous nation on earth.

My purpose here is not to prove to you that abortion is murder. On that fact we must agree. Neither is it to prove to you that it should be constitutionally illegal. On that point Christians and Americans may debate. My purpose is to help come to a consensus on how we should respond to the crisis at hand. Some have acquiesced to the inevitability of preborn infanticide. Some paint hateful signs and campaign outside abortion clinics. Both claim Christianity. Neither extreme champions the cause of Christ to defend the innocent and forgive the fallen.

Outrage

I submit that the first response we ought to have towards the abortion crisis is outrage. Proverbs 6:16 teaches us that hands that shed innocent blood are an abomination to God. He hates the slaughter of the innocent. We are re-

¹

https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/ Accessed 6-20-2019

²

<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/news/440KeyAbortionFactsFinal.pdf> Accessed 6-20-2019.

³

<http://www.numberofabortions.com/> Accessed 6-20-2019

mindful that abortion is such slaughter. Godliness requires that our response be consistent with God's. A specific example of God's outrage is found in Psalm 106: 37-40

They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they became unclean by their acts, and played the whore in their deeds. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage...

Because of the idolatrous and murderous worship of Molech, God's anger was deeply kindled against his people. Our contemporary situation isn't all that different.

Over 50,000,000 babies are killed each year. Is that not enough to outrage us? They cannot defend themselves. Many cannot even cry out. The root of most of these murders is selfishness. In 2004, the Guttmacher Institute carried out a survey of 1,209 abortion patients across 11 different providers. They asked the participants their reasons for carrying out an abortion. Seventy-four percent stated that having a child would dramatically change their life.⁴ Because a child would interfere with education or a career, or because the mother already had children, these mothers decided to snuff out a life. Righteous indignation ought to seethe out of us as we consider those innocent lives.

Intolerance

On November 11, 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke to the UN on the issue of tolerance in preparation for the International Day of Tolerance. He said, "Tolerance can, and must, be learned. We need to

teach girls and boys not just how to live together but how to act together as global citizens. We need to nurture tolerance by promoting cultural understanding and respect — from parliaments to the playground."⁵ In many ways, these words are true. We do need an understanding of other peoples, perspectives, and cultures. But an understanding of people does not equal a tolerance of all actions.

"Tolerance" had become a buzzword in modern society. "To tolerate" is "to allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one does not necessarily like or agree with) without interference." While this sounds noble, it is characteristically unsustainable. No sane individual would allow the practice of rape in the name of tolerance. Most would not tolerate someone punching their spouse in the face or kidnapping their children. Of certain things, we must be intolerant. Abortion is one of those things.

In Numbers 25:6-9, the Lord records the account of Phinehas dealing with gross immorality. The people of Israel had been led astray from faithfulness to both Moabite prostitution and Moabite idolatry. While Moses was leading an assembly of elders in the camp of Israel, a man brought his Moabite prostitute through the camp and to his tent to engage in an immoral sortie. Phinehas, a priest and nephew of Moses took a spear and immediately dealt with the rebellion. He did not tolerate sin in the camp. God does not tolerate sin in the camp.

We cannot roll over and say abortion is here to stay. We cannot acquiesce to being a part of a sinful world. A sinful world we do live in. We are promised by God that it will always be sinful. We should not be surprised that so many believe abortion to be an acceptable practice. Yet, we must not tolerate it.

⁴ Finer, Lawrence B.; Frohwirth, Loi F.; Dauphinee, Lindsay A.; Singh, Susheela; Moore, Ann M. "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 2005. Pp. 110-118.

⁵ Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General Ban, "Message for the International Day for Tolerance." November 11, 2013.

Forgiveness

The Bible is clear that only one kind of sin is unforgivable. First John 5:16-17 teaches us about the sin unto death. It is a sin that is committed that is held onto until death. It is never repented of and atonement has never been enacted. All others sins can be forgiven! That means the murder of abortion is, as a sin, is always a potentially forgivable offence.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:7-10 that our forgiveness comes through the sacrifice of Christ. It is the lavish gift of grace. We receive forgiveness IN Christ. Our greatest aim for all of mankind should be that they know the same forgiveness from our loving God. That includes those who have murdered the innocent. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Acts 2:38 teaches that repentance and baptism are for the purpose of forgiveness of sins. Thus, if we truly confess our wrongs, turn from them, and are figuratively and spiritually cleansed in the waters of baptism, then we have the depths of God's forgiveness into which we pour all past wrongs. When we commit a sin after that, we have only to confess and turn. God is faithful to forgive. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Peter wrote that God "...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus reminded us in Mark 11:25 that if we expect forgiveness from God, we must show forgiveness to our fellow man as well. No one has done worse to us than what we have done to God. The parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 illustrates this point. We need to be willing to extend the hand of forgiveness to all who have gotten wrapped up in the lies of the abortion crisis. Whether an abortion has been committed out of ignorance or it was a willful murder, it can and should be forgiven.

We should reach out to those who have done this, not with harshly furrowed brows, but with arms of forgiveness open wide.

Some say that we must wait until forgiveness is sought before we can extend it. Did Jesus wait until we asked for forgiveness to extend it at Calvary? "...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..." (Romans 5:8-10).

Forgiveness might be especially hard when an abortion is committed in the life of a loved one. Can we forgive a wife, a sister, a daughter, or a best friend who has terminated a child's life in this way? We must. Through the betrayal, we are tasked with finding trust. Through the hurt, we search for forgiveness.

Love and Acceptance

While no tolerance can be had for the sin of abortion, a double portion of acceptance needs to be given towards those who have been through this ordeal. If we will forgive, we must also let the sin stay in the past. This is God's promise to us. In Acts 22:16, Ananias described the process of salvation as washing away sins. That is a very distinct picture. Like chalk on a white board, God erases the record of our sins. If God leaves it in the past, so must we. If a woman or a couple has made the decision to abort and then realized their wrong, there may be a great deal of guilt or even depression that follows. If those individuals have repented from their decision, we do not need to add to their guilt. What they need most is to be shown what God's forgiveness and unconditional love look like. Not even the most heinous murder could separate us from God's love (Romans 8:31-39). We must not let the wrongs in anyone's past separate them from our love. We are God's hands and feet in this world. We are tasked to perpetuate His love in

God's family. Let's help them see that forgiveness means all the past wrongs don't matter. We are all sinners and we all need forgiveness.

Another group that needs our love and acceptance is those who have become pregnant with unwanted children. There are a number of reasons this could be the case. In cases of incest or rape, the innocent life inside a mother is often perceived as a remnant of the trauma experienced. We understand that this is righteous anger and sadness. But it is projected onto the wrong person. The baby did nothing wrong. A baby is incapable of wrong and bears no guilt for those evil actions. We need to be there for the mother to show love to her and to her baby. We must help her learn to love that child as a gift of God. Like a phoenix, God sometimes gives new life out of the ashes of past pain. If she is unable to do this, we have a responsibility to help her make the decision to let another family take responsibility for that child. Is it possible that God would want us to offer our own family as a haven for the unborn child?

In some instances, a mother or couple determines it is not the right time in their life for a baby. Perhaps they already have a family or are not ready to start a family. Perhaps we can use this as an opportunity to teach about the consequences of actions. The modern age has brought the advent of many forms of safe and morally neutral birth control. We have come to a point where we can plan our family timelines nearly to the day. However, this gives us no right to murder the innocent to keep our timetable. We can reach out to those who are in this position to help them cherish the gift of God given them.

At times, when teens engage in sexual activity, the result is abortion. While both teen pregnancy and teen abortion are on the decline, the rate of abortion in teen pregnancies

is still estimated at about 25%.⁶ Young girls are often shamed and guilted when it is discovered that they are pregnant. Pregnancy often requires girls to leave high school during pregnancy and to care for the newborn. Some families utterly shun their daughters after conception. At worst, some girls are mentally or physically abused or forced into abortion procedures because of their impregnation. Young women who are pregnant need to see God's love in their lives. They need to know that "children are a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). We need to show them that, while they may have made a bad decision that led to this child's formation, the baby growing within them has no inkling of evil within it. It is precious.

Conclusion

We are at war. Satan and his wiles are at work in the world around us. One of the greatest tools he is using to divide us and hurt us today is the crisis of abortion. Some Christians respond with hate. Some respond with tolerance. How will you respond? I pray that we all respond with intolerance of abortion, but forgiveness, love, and acceptance of the one who recognizes their sin. Perhaps through us, a soul or two can be snatched by God from the path of sin to see the beauty of a God-led life.

⁶ <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/teen-abortions> Accessed 6-20-2019.

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DOES AGAPE

REALLY MEAN WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS?

Ryan Manning

Every now and then I will come across a few things that bother me when it comes to biblical interpretation. Now, I do not know if I would call them the most common mistakes or the most serious—I believe that taking passages out of context wins that distinction. However, I do notice well-meaning people doing some things that I would call mistakes.

First, people misrepresent the meanings of the words in the original language. I see this done in several ways. Recently, I studied with someone who inquired about a word in Ephesians 5:19, “psallo.” He

cited Strong’s definition and asked, since the definition included instruments, does that mean that we can use instruments in our worship? Strong’s definition: “to *twitch* or *twang*, that is, to *play* on a stringed instrument (*celebrate* the divine worship *with music* and accompanying odes): – make melody, sing (psalms).” This word, “psallo,” means to make melody. You can make melody by twanging the string on a harp, by blowing into a horn, by singing with your voice. The word itself seems not to care about the method of making the melody over the actual act of creating a tune.

For some reason, when people look into their lexicon at the meaning of a word, they bring every possible usage of a certain word into the texts they interpret. Therefore, because

one can “psallo” with a voice or a harp, Ephesians must have allowed for the use of instruments. However, Ephesians 5:19 specifies how we make the melody. It says “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” It also specifies that we psallo, make melody, not on an instrument, but *in our hearts*.

αγαπη

Agape

I also see the word “agape” misrepresented. I have heard repeatedly by good preachers that agape represents a noble, selfless, emotionless love that puts the other’s well-being as the highest priority. This seems to make sense, because God loves (agape) us in a perfect, caring, sacrificial way. However, the word, “agape” has a much broader, less noble range of meaning.

When we learn a Greek word, we should try to understand its full range of meaning and usage, and avoid romanticizing it. When a Koine Greek speaker used the word “agape,” that speaker did not necessarily want to portray a self-sacrificial love that prioritizes the other’s well-being. Even in the Bible, the Pharisees loved (agape) to have the uppermost seats in the synagogues (Luke 11:43). Certainly they did not feel anything self-sacrificial, concerned for well-being, or even sacred with their twisted “agape.” I also do not feel con-

vinced that a Greek speaker would even always understand this word to mean something emotionless like I have heard preached. To this end, I have heard people say that you have to love someone, but you do not have to like them, to which I would respond by pointing out that we get our emotions from God who feels great grief, for example, when we go astray (cf. Genesis 6:6).

As I have looked at the usage of “agape,” I have begun to realize that it has the broadest range of meaning, or semantic domain, of the Greek words for love. Sometimes you will see other words used interchangeably with agape. For example, scripture calls John the disciple whom Jesus loved, but sometimes uses the verb “agapao” (John 19:26), and sometimes “phileo” (John 20:2), which indicates a love of friendship. “Agapao” and its noun form, “agape” include the love of friendship in its range of meaning.

One might also make an argument that other words for love fall into agape’s broad range of meaning. If you look at how the Septuagint handles the Song of Songs, for example, you will find “agape” used often to describe the feelings that spouses have for each other, possibly the semantic domain of another word for love, “eros.” The usage of “agape” in the Song of Songs does indicate to me that “agape” involves more than simply an emotionless, sterile love. In any event, I think that people should try to see words from the original language, like “psallo” and “agape,” for what they truly mean.

Tenses

I have seen a second thing that bothers me when people use the Greek to make a point. Often, well-meaning preachers will make a claim about a tense in the Greek without understanding the reasoning behind that claim. For example, I hear almost endlessly that the present tense in Greek means continuous action. Often this assertion will come with a point about a specific text that contains a pre-

sent tense verb that says it should continue because of the present tense.

But the necessity of the present tense containing a continuous action comes because of the nature of the present tense. With a past tense verb, one could either focus on the entire action as a whole (for example, “I wrote an article”) or the action as a process (for example, “I began writing an article”). Looking at an action as a whole sees it as something that began and ended, while looking at the process sees action continuing, puts the reader in the action. With the present tense, you cannot look at an action as a whole because the present always continues. You can only look at an action as a whole if you look into the future at the action or into the past.

Yet people use the continuous action of the present to claim that something somehow endures, or should endure for some period of time. However, the duration of an action does not come from the tense of the Greek word describing the action. In English, for example, one could say, “I am hitting the table” (present tense, continuous action) as he brought his hand down to strike the table once, a punctiliar action. Or he could say the same thing as he hit the table repeatedly, iterative action.

When looking to see if something continues, and how long it continues, consider the context of the action as well as the tense. 1 John 1:7 says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” I have heard people say that the word “cleanses” indicates a continuous action because they identify it as a present tense verb. However, the tense of the verb does not indicate the duration of the cleansing, the conditional statement “if we walk in the light” does. The condition tells me that as long as I walk in the light I have fellowship with God. This may not seem like a very serious offense, as both interpreters come to the same conclusion, but such treatment of the present

tense may lead to pitfalls in other texts.

I recently heard a statement made about 1 Corinthians 13:13, which says, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.” The one making the statement identified the word, “abideth,” as a present tense verb in the Greek and, therefore, indicating a continuous action. Faith, hope, and love continue to remain, he claimed. However, this statement misunderstands the idea of continuous action in the present tense. Faith, hope and love remain and they continue to remain. Because the present tense must continue by nature, anything in the present tense must continue. Even the act of stopping in the present tense shows a continuing action. You could say, “I am stopping” in the present tense, even in the Greek, and the present tense would indicate the act of stopping continuing. It ceases to exist as continuous action once it goes to the past, then you can say “I stopped.”

So faith, hope, and love remain in the in the present tense. That means that at the time Paul wrote the words, they continued to remain. But the present tense says nothing about how long they will continue to remain, and I think we get in trouble by not acknowledging this point. In reality shows, often an episode will begin by saying “only four contestants remain.” True, four contestants do remain when you say that, but one could leave the show two minutes after someone announced that. With faith, hope, and love, we know that faith and hope actually will not continue forever. Faith and hope involve things that we do not see and that we expect in the future (Hebrews 11:1). When we get to heaven, we will have no more need of those things (Romans 8:24-25; 1 Peter 1:9).

We should take care when we invoke the Greek, or Hebrew for that matter, to make a point. As a disclaimer, I write as a student of the biblical languages, and I acknowledge that I still have a lot to learn. I may have gotten it wrong, and I invite any criticism indicating if I have. We should all approach the study of

scripture with humility so that we can hear the things that God has spoken to us.

QUOTES

“I do not mean to say that there are two different human natures, but all humanity is made the same, sometimes belonging to God and sometimes to the devil. If anyone is truly spiritual they are a person of God; but if they are irreligious and not spiritual then they are a person of the devil, made such not by nature, but by their own choice”

—*Ignatius*

“[W]e are not a body with a spirit, but a spirit with a body.”

—*Kevin Micuch*

If I am to preach the faith in Christ to a man who is regenerated, then the man, being regenerated, is saved already, and it is an unnecessary and ridiculous thing for me to preach Christ to him, and bid him to believe in order to be saved when he is saved already, being regenerate. Am I only to preach faith to those who have it? Absurd, indeed! Is not this waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him the medicine? This is preaching Christ to the righteous and not to sinners.

—*Charles Spurgeon*

Blessed are those who go down into the water with their hopes set on the Cross.

—*The Epistle of Barnabas*

(a very early apocryphal writing)

Let your closest fellowship be with other Christians. Visit their homes and invite them to your home. Such fellowship is rich and blessed and will be a great strength for you in resisting temptation and growing spiritually.

—*John T. Odle*

Church Member Handbook

The Christian Connexion

Bradley S. Cobb

A Brief Background

Catholicism had grown large and influential to the point that for most people, it was the only church in existence. There were still pockets of New Testament Christianity in various places, but the Catholic Church marked them as heretics (see Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom*, for some of these groups). In the 15th and 16th century, what is historically known as the *Reformation Movement* began. Initially, it was an attempt by many different men in different places to *reform* the Catholic Church into something closer to what they saw in Scripture. Met with anger, hatred, and persecution from the Catholic hierarchy (Martin Luther is still declared to be the “man of sin” in some recent Catholic Bibles), these men began to break away and start their own churches, teaching and worshiping as they believed the Bible taught—but they had been so indoctrinated in Catholicism that they brought much of it with them.

The Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Episcopalians, the Methodists—all these denominations began as a rejection of the power and corruption of Catholicism. But instead of going to the Bible to see how the church should be in doctrine, practice, name, and organization, these groups all began as Catholicism-lite, rejecting the authority of the pope and some of the practices/teachings of the Catholics, but also keeping many of the things that Catholicism had introduced. For example, the Lutherans to this day still “baptize” babies; the Methodists still sprinkle and call it “baptism”—and both still have a hierar-

chy structure that gives orders to the individual congregations.

In short, each of these groups (and there are several others which broke off from Catholicism or from one of these groups) tried to take something that was completely corrupt—the Catholic Church—and make it *less* corrupt. The problem is, the Catholic Church wasn’t—and isn’t—the church of the Bible, so they were operating from the wrong basis to begin with.

James O’Kelly

In the 1700s, the Methodist Church was still considered part of the Church of England (also called the Episcopal Church), but the British



hierarchy refused to ordain anyone in the Methodist branch to offer the Lord’s Supper, perform baptisms or marriages, or even perform burial rites—for that, they said, the people must go to an authorized Episcopal

priest.¹ The Methodists didn’t view themselves as a separate entity, but instead as a group of Episcopalians who were calling people to a more holy life. However, during the Revolutionary War, all but one of the English preachers (at least in Virginia) for the Episcopal Church fled to England out of fear for their lives. The one who remained was a man named Francis Asbury—a Methodist who remained staunchly allied with the British “mother church.” It is

¹ MacClenny, W.E., *The Life of James O’Kelly*, page 27.

through his actions (though he didn't intend it) that we see the first light of the Restoration in America.

In 1779, Francis Asbury was the top Methodist (and about the only Episcopal) in the United States. At a conference that year, the Methodist preachers of Virginia—including a man named James O'Kelly²—demanded the right to perform baptisms (which they said could be immersion or sprinkling), marriages, and the Lord's Supper. They also said that the Bible did not authorize an "episcopacy" (a hierarchy) but a "presbytery," and they began to ordain elders in the congregations. This resulted in Asbury calling a conference and marking the Virginia Methodists as heretics who had no right to administer the ordinances. Later the same year, O'Kelly met with Asbury, and some of the animosity was smoothed over for a time. However, O'Kelly's influence among the Methodists grew until only Asbury could boast of more.

At a conference on Christmas day, 1784, Asbury, O'Kelly, and many other Methodists met in conference, and voted to separate from the Church of England. Asbury and others "agreed to submit to John [Wesley] of England in matters of Church Government but we [O'Kelly and his followers] did not."³ Asbury was voted head of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, and O'Kelly began to expose the sinfulness of such an organization as he preached through Virginia.

By 1792, the two men had butted heads several times—Asbury only concerned with

power, and O'Kelly concerned with bringing the Methodist Church to the biblical pattern. At a final conference, O'Kelly stood and said, "Brethren, hearken unto me, put away all other books, and forms, and let this [the New Testament] be the only criterion and that will satisfy me," but Asbury convinced his followers to oppose the motion. One of them said, "The Scripture is by no means a sufficient form of government."

The next morning, O'Kelly and several others delivered a letter announcing that they no longer recognized themselves as part of the official Methodist body, believing that the hierarchy government of the church, which Asbury demanded to maintain his power, was completely opposed to Scripture. O'Kelly and those who left with him began to call themselves "Republican Methodists." However, a man named Rice Haggard, one of the Methodist preachers who left with O'Kelly, appealed to the Bible, and soon thereafter, they dropped that name and simply called themselves "Christians." According to V. Glenn McCoy's research, by 1809, there were 20,000 people aligned with the movement of James O'Kelly.

They had abandoned the creeds of man and sought to go with only what they could find in the New Testament—they did not do it perfectly (O'Kelly still thought at this time that sprinkling was permissible), but they were attempting to restore the New Testament pattern. And they influenced others to go to the Bible for their beliefs and practices—which is what should have been done ever since the New Testament was completed!

Abner Jones

In Vermont, without any knowledge of what had happened in Virginia, another part of the Restoration Movement was taking place. Abner Jones, raised by strict Calvinistic Baptist parents, was brought up to believe that he had no say in the matter of his salvation—that if he was one of the "elect," he would have to wait for God to directly act on his heart; oth-

² Much more could be given of biographical detail on O'Kelly, but as he is not the singular focus of this article, this footnote will have to suffice. He was probably born in 1735 (though some sources date it as late as 1757). In either southern Virginia, North Carolina, or Ireland (again, sources are not in agreement here). W.E. MacClenny, *The Life of James O'Kelly*, pages 11-12. O'Kelly was, for ten years, an unordained preacher among the Methodists until he was ordained as both a "deacon" and an "elder" by the noted Methodist preacher Thomas Coke in 1784.

³ *Life of James O'Kelly*, page 52.

erwise he was doomed to hell, regardless of his tears and his desires to be saved. After reading the Bible on his own, he began to reject the horrible teaching that is Calvinism. He knew he believed in Jesus Christ; he agonized



over his sins and repented; and one day in a Baptist meeting, he confessed Jesus Christ. They took him into membership, and he began to be an active Baptist, even though he

still had issues with their Calvinistic teachings.

Upon more reading of the Scriptures, he saw the importance placed upon baptism, and wasted no time in submitting to this divine command, being immersed for the forgiveness of his sins. Soon thereafter, he felt that he must begin to preach. He took the opportunity whenever it came, and presented to the people the evils of Calvinism. Because of his opposition to this doctrine of Satan, he was embraced by the Free-Will Baptists, who desired to ordain him as a minister. He assented to this on the grounds that (1) they had absolutely no authority over him to tell him what to preach, where to go, or what to believe, and (2) that he would never wear the name Baptist—as it was not found in the Bible as a description of the followers of Jesus. Surprisingly, they were fine with that. This ordination, during that time, gave him much more influence and opportunity to preach.

In 1801, after having preached to people in Lyndon, VT., Abner organized a congregation of people who simply wanted to be Christians, and who wanted only to follow the Bible. They called themselves the “Christian Church,” and it consisted of 25 people. The next year, he organized another such congregation, then another the year after that. All of these congregations were in agreement that they would have no creed but the Bible, and no name but that of “Christian.” They used no instruments; they rejected women preachers;

they insisted on baptism by immersion; they refused to acknowledge any governmental body above the local congregation.

Elias Smith

Elias Smith is an interesting character. Growing up within earshot of the cannon blasts during the Revolutionary War, Elias was injected early on with a heart that sought liberty.



His first religious experiences were not very positive. His father was a Baptist, but his mother a Congregationalist. When his father was away preaching, his mother took the children

to a Congregationalist meeting and forced them all to be “baptized”—which to Congregationalists meant *sprinkling*. Elias wanted nothing to do with it, and tried to run. However, his uncle (also a Congregationalist) forcibly brought him back and Elias was sprinkled. From that point onward, Elias Smith began to develop thoughts about *religious* liberty.

Years later, Elias began pondering the issue of baptism. After studying the Bible for himself, he became convinced that the only acceptable baptism is immersion of believers in Christ—and he submitted to the divine ordinance. He joined his father and became a Baptist preacher; but over the next several years, he began to privately have doubts about many of their doctrines—specifically Calvinism. He was so opposed to the idea of a complete lack of choice (Calvinism teaches that you have no say in whether or not you are saved) that he embraced Universalism for a very short time (a week, to be exact) before studying himself out of it.

By 1802, he dared to start affirming that followers of Jesus should not call themselves by any name other than *Christian*. He also began to speak out against the creeds and catechisms as “invention[s] of men.” In early 1803, he was working with a group of like-minded believers and they decided to organize

themselves into “a church of Christ.” Within a year, that congregation numbered 150.

It was in 1803 that Elias Smith met Abner Jones, and called him “the first free man I had ever seen.” As a result of this meeting, the two men joined forces and began planting churches comprised of “Christians” throughout New England.

Elias Smith was a prolific writer, publishing several books, sermons, tracts, and even song-books (the hymnals were done with Abner Jones) before establishing what was perhaps his biggest contribution: a religious journal called *The Herald of Gospel Liberty*. Through this paper, which he claimed was the first of its kind in the world, the various “Christian churches” or “churches of Christ” could be encouraged, taught, and kept informed about the goings-on in other congregations.

Barton W. Stone

Born in 1772, Barton Stone grew up religiously confused. He had heard preachers from several denominations, and though some of it he found interesting, he was without hope because of the teachings of Calvinism. At age 21, he heard a sermon on “God is love,” and it hit home to him, and he joined the Presbyterian Church and decided he wanted to preach. While waiting to be ordained, his opposition to their Calvinistic doctrines led him to postpone his preaching aspirations for three more years.

After he was finally ordained, he moved to Kentucky and began to work with the Cane Ridge and Concord churches. His opposition to the Westminster Confession of Faith almost got his preaching license revoked, but surprisingly, when he told the presbytery that he would accept it “as far as I see it consistent with the Word of God,” they were satisfied.

It was in Cane Ridge, 1801, that the famous “Cane Ridge Revival” took place. Stone was



one of the primary speakers in this extended gospel meeting which brought thousands of people to hear preaching from God’s word. Many people were convicted of their sins and began to ask him “what shall we do.” The Calvinistic doctrine would say “Do nothing. If God wants to save you, He will do it on His own.” But Stone had been reading his Bible and began to tell people, “repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins.”

This proclamation of the gospel in biblical terms, showing people that faith, repentance, and baptism had to come to receive salvation, got Barton Stone branded as a heretic by the regular Presbyterians. As a result, Stone and a handful of others withdrew from the official synods of the Presbyterian Church and created their own group, the Springfield Presbytery. However, in less a year, they realized that what they had done was simply create another denomination with man-made rules and a man-made name. They put together a document which they called “The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery,” in which they called for the death of their new creation, as it was unscriptural and was a hindrance to the unity of true Christians. This document is one of the most significant in the history of the Restoration Movement.

Instead of creating a new denomination, Barton Stone and some others called people back to the Bible, encouraging them to simply be “Christians” and nothing else.

The Union of Christians

Abner Jones and Elias Smith, being in the same general area, quickly joined forces and the congregations that they planted were frequently referred to as a “Christian Connexion” or “The Christian Church.” In the first issue of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Elias Smith printed the “Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery,” endorsing and applauding the actions taken by Barton W. Stone and his co-workers.

Through the efforts of Smith, Jones, and an

elder named Elias Cobb,⁴ letters were written to the people aligned with James O’Kelly as well as to those associated with Barton W. Stone. As a result, these three groups whose aim was to get back to following only the Bible became a loosely affiliated body, working together to come to a fuller knowledge of the truth, but agreeing that there was no body above the local congregation.

There were still differences between the groups. The ‘Christians’ in the west (you have to remember that back then the United States didn’t stretch as far west as it does today) taught baptism by immersion for salvation. The ‘Christians’ in New England taught baptism by immersion, but many were hesitant to make it a line of fellowship. The ‘Christians’ in the south still accepted sprinkling as valid.

The Fate of the Christian Connexion

In 1817, the Christian Connexion was shaken as Elias Smith, for a decade the publisher, editor, and head writer for the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* announced that he had embraced Universalism again, and stopped publishing the paper. The next year, a new paper called *The Gospel Herald* began, and the members were determined to press on without their most visible leader.

As we will discuss in future article, there was a union of the ‘Christians’ in the west with Alexander Campbell and those who were associated with him. But not everyone was happy with this union. The ‘Christians’ in New England refused to join with Campbell, and the ones in the south were divided on the issue.

In 1844, William Miller (an Adventist) led close to half of the members of the New England group into believing that Jesus would come that year. After it didn’t happen (which in history books is known as “the Great Disap-

pointment”), many of those who were led astray never went back, devastating their numbers.

Eventually, especially after the death of Abner Jones, the Christian Connexion (which by this point had become known as “The Christian Church”) had drifted away from the principles that brought them into being in the first place. They began to use instruments in almost all of their congregations, had women preachers, denied that the mode of baptism was of any importance, and eventually merged with the Congregational Church in the early 1900s. Since that time, the Congregational Christian Church merged with another group and now goes by the name “The United Church of Christ.”

Though a large part of the ‘Christians’ left the Bible, we should be thankful for their efforts which led to the rejection of Calvinism, the rejection of denominational names and creeds, and the exclusive use of the name “Christian” and “church of Christ” to describe the followers of Jesus.

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⁴ Elias Cobb (no relation to the author of this article) was a Baptist deacon, and records indicate that he was instrumental in dissolving the Baptist Church in Woodstock, VT, and starting the Christian Church, where he became an elder—both in the same year.

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Too Short to be a Preacher or Teacher

TOO SHORT TO BE A CHRISTIAN

(2 TIMOTHY 2:15, 4:1-5)

Gerald Cowan

INTRODUCTION

The “great commission” given by Jesus applies to all Christians. Read all three accounts in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:47. The requirements of faith, repentance, baptism, and continued teaching are imposed upon all disciples of Christ. They are not optional. They are commanded. The only one of the four that is in any sense conditional or dependent upon personal circumstances is the matter of teaching others.

The first reaction or response to a command, request, or assigned task is often a list of reasons why it cannot be done – why one cannot do it, cannot give it, and will not even try. “I/we don’t have what it takes to get the job done.” Of course there are some goals that are beyond our reach, some tasks or requests that are beyond our abilities or resources. We do need to be realistic and accept our limitations. But there are many goals within our reach, goals that we are not striving for because we do not evaluate, accept, and acknowledge our abilities, resources, and opportunities realistically. Success is directly related to personal effort and not just personal ability. Efforts and attitudes must be in harmony with the goal that one strives to achieve. Let us look at “the great commission” that Jesus left with his disciples to “preach the gospel” – individually and collectively – throughout the whole world, for all time.

Do we have what it takes to be preachers and teachers of the gospel of Christ? Do *you*

have what it takes? Do *I*? Are *we* **too short to be preachers?** If one is too short to be a preacher/teacher/disciple-maker (we include women in this) he or she may be **too short to be a Christian.**

PHYSICAL SIZE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ONE’S ABILITY TO PREACH AND TEACH THE WORD OF GOD.

I once thought physical size, height in particular, was important for preachers. Being short was a handicap. A professor long ago at what was then Freed-Hardeman College, made a comment about “ineffectual little pipsqueaks pounding the pulpits.” (Maybe that is why I have never been a pulpit-pounder). A rather large woman would not be baptized because she thought I was too small, and therefore not strong enough, to get the job done in her case. An elder who was impressed by physical size (he said he himself measured six feet, four and three-eighths inches tall) used to seek out tall men and stretch himself alongside them, comparing height and feeling good whenever he found he was taller than another. He often found an excuse to comment on my size – he “looked down” both literally and figuratively on people in my category (short and small – I’m still short but not as small as I once was). There were times when I actually considered giving up preaching because I knew I could never be “an imposing presence” in the pulpit.

Then I saw and heard Foy Wallace, Jr. He stood a stocky five feet two inches, and often stood alongside the lectern rather than behind

it. He was the first one I heard remind his audience that faith comes by *hearing* the word of God (Romans 10:17), and that we should walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). He then added, “I don’t really care whether you can see me or not, just so long as you can hear me.” And he had the power to hold an audience two or three hours, with few wanting to leave. I read somewhere that the apostle Paul may have been less than average stature. *Paul* may have been his Roman name. As a Roman citizen he was entitled to one. But it may have been a nickname given to Saul of Tarsus. It is from Latin *paulus*, meaning little or small, so maybe “Shorty” or “Little Guy.” Some said he wrote powerful letters but his *bodily presence was weak* and his speech contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10).

Then I thought about some of the tall men – big men – in the Bible. King Saul stood head and shoulders above others (1 Samuel 9:2), but he turned out to be less than honorable – a rather “small man” spiritually and socially. Goliath and other giants, sons of Anak, etc. – not one righteous man in the lot. Even the “super-hero show-off playboy” Samson was not godly, righteous, or even very religious (Judges 13-16). His final heroic act showed his (flawed) faith in God (Hebrews 11:32).

A compassionate and godly man who knew my feelings changed my mind. He said, “Your feet reach all the way to the ground and I think your head is with the Lord in heaven. The space between your feet and your head is irrelevant.” I finally concluded that **physical size – big or small, short or tall – has no bearing on one’s ability to serve God in sharing the gospel of Christ with others.** Being short is not a vice, and not always a serious handicap. Being tall is not a virtue, and not always an advantage. Wishing will not increase or decrease one’s physical stature and size. Jesus asked: Can anybody add to his height just by thinking about it, wishing or praying for it? No way! (Matthew 6:27).

However – this is the reason for presenting this lesson – there are some significant ways to be “short” figuratively and these will certainly decrease or nullify one’s effectiveness. We must learn to avoid them if we expect or desire to be effective in preaching and sharing the word of God with others.

TO BE “SHORT” MEANS TO BE DEFICIENT, TO BE LACKING SOMETHING – TO HAVE A SHORTAGE OF SOMETHING.

One can be short (lacking, deficient) in many critical matters, such as:

KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING. *If you lack wisdom, seek it from God* (James 1:5). Many who should be and could, by reason of time in service, be teachers are hampered and condemned by lack of exercise of their mental faculties (Hebrews 5:12-14).

One can be short in **PREPARATION**, as in the case of the wise (prepared) and foolish (unprepared) bridesmaids in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 25:1-13).

There is a common shortage of **PERSONAL EFFORT**, as in Jesus’ parable of the “talents” (Matthew 25:14-30).

The fault in these and other things may be due, in part, to a shortage in **VISION AND PERCEPTION**. Jesus and the apostle Peter both speak to this. Jesus applies it to evangelism (John 4:3). Peter applies it to one’s assessment of his own condition and responsibilities (2 Peter 1:9-10).

Many are short in **APPETITE AND DESIRE** – they do not hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

There is a world-wide and church-wide shortage of true **LOVE AND GENUINE CONCERN**, for God, for self, and for others (John 14:15, John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13). Lack of love and concern and desire to see others saved in Christ certainly impedes evangelistic efforts.

The underlying fault may be a shortage of

FAITH, a lack of **RESPONSIVENESS TO GOD** (Matthew 17:20-21, compare also verse 17 where Jesus rebuked his own disciples for their lack of faith and his having to endure it).

The shortage of **APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE** is a common failing (Luke 17:11-19, Philippians 4:6-7, Colossians 3:17).

Two important results of being “short” in any of the matters just mentioned, or in other similar matters:

- The *immediate result* is to **fall short of the glory of God**, the requirements, mark, and standard set for us by God (Romans 3:10, 23; Philippians 3:14).
- The *ultimate result* if the shortage continues uncorrected is that one will **fall short of the promised rest, heaven** (Hebrews 4:1).

EVEN THOSE WHO THINK THEY ARE FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS SOMETIMES SEE THEMSELVES AS “TOO SHORT” TO PREACH OR TEACH OTHERS, BUT MAY NOT BE EVALUATING THEMSELVES HONESTLY AND PROPERLY

Is there a **SHORTAGE OF MESSAGE**? “I just don’t know what to say,” they say. To which we are tempted to respond, “You’d better be learning what to say, and quickly.” There is no shortage of information or message from God.

- Preach **CHRIST** – the good news about Jesus, his death and resurrection, and his present position at the right hand of God in heaven (2 Corinthians 4:5, 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 2:2; see also Acts 4:12).
- Preach the **GOSPEL** of Christ – the will and commandments, the “plan of salvation” (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 1:17-21, Romans 1:15-16, 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15).
- Preach the **SALVATION** that is available and enjoyed only in Christ (Luke 19:10, Romans 5:8, 1 Timothy 1:15,

Acts 4:12).

- Preach the **CHURCH** of Christ, which contains all the saved in Christ (Acts 2:40-41 and 47, Matthew 16:16-18, Ephesians 3:10-11).

Is there a **SHORTAGE OF ABILITY**? “I have trouble saying what I want to say. I’m just not good with putting words together.”

- The best cure for that is **PRACTICE**. Repeat it often. It will help you to **IMPROVE WHAT YOU HAVE**. Constant exercise will increase your present abilities.
- **DEVELOP A PROPER ATTITUDE**. If your attitude is one of genuine concern for others and a desire to see them saved in Christ, and if you demonstrate a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for what Christ has done for you and what he is able to do with you and through you, perhaps for others, it will bridge many of the gaps in your presentation skills.

Is there a **SHORTAGE OF OPPORTUNITY**? “It just never seems to be the right time to speak up.”

- You don’t have to wait until “the pulpit is vacant” in the church’s meeting place.
- Let your **READINESS** be known and you will have as many opportunities as you can manage – more than you thought possible, and maybe more than you want. People will ask questions if they know you are ready and willing to answer (1 Peter 3:15-16).
- Be opportunistic – plan and create your own opportunities, then use them.

Is there a **SHORTAGE OF MOTIVATION**? “We have a full time preacher and lots of teachers. Lots of others are doing personal evangelism. I’m not needed personally.”

- No one man or group of persons can do all the teaching that needs to be done.
- No matter what others are doing, it does not free anyone else from respon-

sibility for sharing the good news of the Lord with others if and when they have opportunity (2 Timothy 2:2, 25).

- Some may be unsaved because *you* did not use *your* opportunities, resources, and abilities to lead them to Christ (Romans 10:12-17). Learn to love, to be concerned.
- The basic motivation for every Christian is expressed by the apostle Paul: *The love of Christ constrains (compels) us* (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Is there a **SHORTAGE OF DESIRE?** “I just don’t want to do it.”

- You can’t teach someone who doesn’t want to learn.
- You can’t motivate someone who doesn’t want to be moved.
- If you have no desire to teach others, you’d better be glad all others do not feel that same way. Otherwise you yourself might never have heard the

truth and might never have been saved – those who are still unsaved might never be saved if nobody wanted to teach them.

CONCLUSION:

I really do not mind being physically short. My feet reach all the way to the ground and “on Christ, the solid Rock, I stand.” If my mind, affections, and desires are set above with him (Colossians 3:1-2), my physical stature – the distance between my feet and my head – is truly irrelevant.

But I am concerned about coming up short in any of the things God requires for my salvation, for continued acceptance and approval of the Lord.

If you are short in any required thing, let God stretch you to the size He wants you to be. If you are coming up “short” in any promised or available blessing of God you should correct the situation without further delay.

WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY – PART 2E

Allocate Our Gifts

A STUDY OF EPHESIANS 4:7-16

Jake Schotter

Introduction

Ephesians 4:11 says, “*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.*” In previous articles, we have noted this verse has two divisions based on the function’s duration. The first two listed (apostles and prophets) are functions that have ceased and the remaining three continue to this day.

It is important to note the way Paul lists

these roles. The New American Standard Bible (quoted above) repeats the phrase, “*and some as*” to separate these functions. There is a notable difference, though, in the last phrase combining “*pastors and teachers*” that will be discussed later.

In a prior article, there was a whole discussion on spiritual gifts and how they help equip a person to serve in the Kingdom. The gifts themselves are not under discussion here, but

the “office” is.

“When the Bible speaks of spiritual gifts, it usually refers to special abilities granted to people by the Holy Spirit. Here it is the Lord who is depicted as giving the gifts. These men themselves, not just their special abilities, were what Paul envisioned as Jesus’ gifts to His body. Several groups who helped to build up the church are named.”¹

Functions in the Church that Have Ceased

The *apostles* and prophets were those who ushered in new revelation from God. Interestingly, an apostle literally means “one sent” (a very broad definition). The meaning in this context is very tailored. Paul had in mind the apostles whom Jesus had chosen to spread the Gospel message. An apostle was a person who was a witness of the life and resurrection of Jesus (as seen in the selection of Mathias to replace Judas in Acts 1:21-25). Participation in the ministry of Jesus was an important criterion because the life and resurrection of Jesus was the very message they were to proclaim to the world (Acts 1:8).

- The apostles were carriers of special revelation (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; John 14:26; 16:13-16).
- They were able to perform miraculous signs to confirm their revelation was from God (Matthew 10:1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 2:43; 8:6-7; Hebrews 2:3-4).
- They were appointed for the task by Christ Himself (Mark 3:14; John 15:16; Luke 6:13). Paul discussed his own calling in 1 Corinthians 1:1;

12:28; Galatians 1:1, 15-16.

- Their message, at first, was directed to the unbelieving house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6; Luke 24:47; Acts 13:46), then to all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; 2 Timothy 1:11).
- These apostles were devoted to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4; 20:27).
- Their authority was given by Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:6).
- This office has ceased to exist because there is no more laying on of hands to enable miraculous activity. Paul perhaps suggested he was the last one in 1 Corinthians 15:8.

The *prophets* were closely related to the apostles in the ushering in of the New Covenant. They were closely associated with the apostles being the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5) and proclaiming the same message. A major difference, however, was the tendency for prophets to be stationary, unlike the apostles (see 1 Corinthians 12 and 14). Most of the prophet’s work was to reveal the word of God. This was done so that the people would become taught the truth, made aware of their sin, compelled to live obediently (1 Corinthians 14:3) and be encouraged (Acts 15:32). It was vitally important for a prophet’s revelation to be authenticated. Everett Ferguson described how the prophets were verified in his book, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*, on pages 307-308. Like the function of apostleship, prophecy has ended as well. The work of the prophet was to reveal the will of God in a time where there was no written New Testament. Since their teaching is recorded in the New Testament record, there is no need for new prophecy today.

The importance of these two functions are evident as their place in “*God’s household*.”

¹ Lockhart, Jay and David L. Roper. **Ephesians and Philippians: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures**. Truth for Today Commentary. Searcy: Resource Publications, 2009: 221.

The “*apostles and prophets*” are “*the foundation*” of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Their importance was not from themselves, but the revelation they proclaimed to the world before the New Testament recorded their teaching permanently. Paul wrote, “*According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation and another is building on it... For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). As an apostle, Paul was part of the foundation of the church because of what He taught.

When Paul wrote Ephesians 2:20 and mentioned there were “*apostles and prophets*,” it is probably a reference to New Testament era “*apostles and prophets*.” We must note the possibility because “even with the range from the OT prophets to the apostles and NT prophets, there was continuity in their teaching.”² This continuity was noted in 1 Peter 1:10 when Peter wrote, “*As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you [the members of the early church] were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching.*” The foundation of the New Testament church is because of the apostles’ teaching and through the work and verification of the prophets in the churches of the first-century.

Functions in the Church that Continue Today

There were “*evangelists*” then and now. This term appears only three times in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 21:8; 1 Timothy 4:5) and generally means “a messenger of good” and is closely related to “preach the gospel.” The only evangelist mentioned in the Bible is Philip (Acts 21:8). We find infor-

mation regarding his work in the eighth chapter of Acts. In that chapter, we see five principles that we all should be able to recall.

- An evangelist must be submissive to the will of God (Acts 8:26-27a). By being willing and obedient to the command of God (to make a journey that would have been considered illogical), Philip became the means by which God saved the eunuch. Scriptures are clear that being saved is the foundation of obeying God’s will (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9)
- An evangelist needs to be aware of opportunities (Acts 8:28). By going on this road, Philip knew something very important was about to take place. God gave him an opportunity to evangelize and Philip recognized that and took it.
- An evangelist needs to know the Word of God (Acts 8:30-35). Acts 8 contains several synonyms of preaching and evangelizing. Also note what was discussed in verses 34 and 35 – prophecy that points to Jesus, who Jesus was, and how to be saved. Philip was able to answer the man’s question because he knew God’s Word.
- An evangelist needs to know the fundamentals of the faith. We need to know how to listen to the Word of the Lord and be obedient! Philip responded without any complaints to the angel of the Lord. Do we listen to God today? Before you answer too quickly, the church and the world is plagued by Biblical illiteracy.
- An evangelist does not quit after one encounter with a person (Acts 8:40). An evangelist is driven by love and fear (2 Corinthians 5:14) and obedience (John 14:15; Luke 6:46; 1 John 5:2-3).

² Merida, Tony. **Exalting Jesus in Ephesians.** Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary. Eds. David Platt and Daniel L. Akin. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014: 64.

Unlike the modern-day concept of an evangelist, the picture we have is that the evangelist worked with the congregation with whom they were located, instead of going all over and constantly moving on. Paul encouraged Timothy *“do the work of an evangelist”* (2 Timothy 4:5) where he was. This *“work”* included *“instruct[ing] certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God”* (1 Timothy 1:3-4). I agree with the conclusion John MacArthur made when he wrote,

“Timothy illustrates the fact that an evangelist can be identified with local churches in a prolonged ministry for the purposes of preaching and expounding the true gospel, in order to counter false teachers and their damning message and to establish sound doctrine and godliness.”³

Evangelists are important because they reach those inside of the church by encouraging and equipping them to help reach those outside of the church.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the notable Reformed minister of Westminster Chapel in the mid-twentieth century, wrote that evangelists were part of the functions that ended in the first century. His explanation was that:

“[An] Evangelist is a man who had been given a special ability and power to make known, and to expound, the facts of the Gospel. Generally he was a man appointed by the apostles themselves, and can be described as a kind of understudy to the apostles. He was one sent ahead of the apostles, as Philip was sent to Samaria,

but generally he followed the apostles.”⁴

With the shortage of knowledge we can ascertain from the New Testament, this *might* be the case.

In Ephesians 4:11, we now come to the last grouping of gifts that Christ has given to the church: *“And He gave... some as **pastors and teachers**.”* This last clause has been a source of uncertainty for some time, primarily revolving around whether this is to be taken as one function or two that simply have a lot in common. The Greek literally reads, “And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers.” There is a definite connection, but to what length? Let’s consider what some have written on the subject.

John Calvin:

“Pastors and Teachers are supposed by some to denote one office, because the apostle does not, as in other parts of the verse, say, ‘and some, pastors; and some teachers,’... but ‘and some, pastors and teachers...’ I partly agree with them, that Paul speaks indiscriminately of pastors and teachers as belonging to one and the same class, and the name ‘teacher’ does, to some extent, apply to all pastors. But this does not appear to me a sufficient reason why two offices, which I find to differ from each other, should be confounded. Teaching is, no doubt, the duty of all pastors; but to maintain sound doctrine requires a talent for interpreting Scripture, and a man may be a teacher who is not qualified to preach. Pastors, in my opinion, are those who have the charge of a particular

³ MacArthur, John. **Ephesians**. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, vol 19. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986: 142

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. **Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1 to 16**. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981:192

flock, though I have no objection to their receiving the name teachers, if it be understood that there is a distinct class of teachers, who preside both in the education of pastors and in the instruction of the whole church. It may sometimes happen, that the same person is both a pastor and a teacher, but the duties to be performed are entirely different.”⁵

Jay Lockhart:

“Unlike the Greek words for ‘apostles,’ ‘prophets,’ ‘evangelists,’ and ‘pastors,’ the Greek word for teachers is not preceded by an article. Some expositors believe that ‘pastors’ and ‘teachers’ are the same people and that the translation should be something like ‘pastor teachers.’ The two works are closely related in the local church, so that may be why there is only one article. All pastors were teachers (1 Tim. 3:2), but there is no indication that all teachers were pastors.”⁶

Peter O’Brien:

“The pastors and teachers are linked here by a single definite article in the Greek, which suggests a close association of functions between two kinds of ministers who operate within one congregation (cf. 2:20). Although it has often been held that the two groups are identical (i.e., ‘pastors who teach’), it is more likely that the terms describe overlapping functions (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Gal. 6:6, where ‘teachers’ are a distinct group). All pastors teach (since

teaching is an essential part of pastoral ministry), but not all teachers are also pastors. The latter exercise their leadership role by feeding God’s flock with his word.”⁷

John MacArthur wrote one of the most comprehensive examinations seeking to show why taking the “pastor-teacher” position is preferable, in his commentary.⁸ He wrote,

“Though teaching can be identified as a ministry on its own (1 Cor. 12:28), pastors and teachers are best understood as one office of leadership in the church... 1 Timothy 5:17 clearly puts the two functions together... Those two functions define the teaching shepherd.”

When you boil it all down, the term “*pastor*” is a combination of a person who serves as an elder and preacher. All pastors must be teachers but not all teachers are pastors. It is certainly not wrong for churches to have “pastors” in the Biblical sense. Indeed, many faithful congregations of the Lord’s people have preachers who are also elders. As Robert Woodward wrote, “the two are interchangeable and capable of both lines of service.”⁹

This discussion must not overlook what must be said as some have mentioned already. The connection given in the original Greek text forces us to consider the nature and relationship of these two functions.

First, there are “*pastors*.” The Greek word comes from the root “*poimen*” meaning “shepherd” and “emphasizes the care, protection, and leadership of the man of God for the flock.”¹⁰ This word is a beautiful description of the role and responsibility a shepherd has

⁵ Calvin, John. **Commentaries on the Epistles to the Galatians and Ephesians**. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979:279.

⁶ Lockhart, 210.

⁷ Peter O’Brien quoted in Merida, 99-100.

⁸ MacArthur, **Ephesians**, 143-149.

⁹ Woodward, Robert R. **A Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians**. New Testament Studies. Abilene: ACU Bookstore, 1986: 64.

¹⁰ MacArthur, **Ephesians**, 143

over their flock. An elder's most excellent example is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, "*the Chief Shepherd*" (1 Peter 5:4). We also see Jesus identifying Himself as "*the good shepherd*" (John 10:14).

Being chosen to serve as a shepherd over a flock of God's sheep is a great work worthy of great honor (1 Timothy 5:17). Shepherds have an important task in knowing who their flock is and what is going on because they will be giving an account to God (Hebrews 13:7 and 17). Therefore, it is imperative that these men are outstanding in their personal character so they may be an example to their sheep.

An elder is to be characterized by Christ-like humility and a desire to serve (Mark 10:43-45) and is not to be taken lightly (Luke 12:48). The responsibilities of elders are great, not just in scope but by their very nature.

- Elders are to care for God's church (1 Timothy 3:5)
- Elders are to have oversight over the church (Romans 12:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12; 5:17)
- Elders must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) because it demonstrates the ability to instruct in sound doctrine and refute error (Titus 1:9)
- Elders are to determine congregational practices (Acts 15:22)
- Elders are to ordain other elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14)
- Elders are to set an example for the sheep to follow (1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:7)
- Elders are to protect the flock from doctrinal error (Acts 20:28-30)

- Elders are to pray for the members of the church (James 5:14)

With great opportunity comes great responsibility. There are high expectations of a man who aspires to be an elder (1 Timothy 3:1). The overarching requirement in both passages (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) is that an elder is "*above reproach*" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) in all aspects of his life. A quick glance reveals this to be true: an elder must be "*above reproach*" in his marriage (one wife), family (manager of household), community (thought well of by outsiders), church (not a recent convert), and within himself (not a lover of self). Examining the qualifications of elders in these passages is not our primary focus, so we will not examine them comprehensively in this study.

Here is a chart of the qualities that qualify a man to be an elder:¹¹

1 Timothy 3:2-7	Titus 1:6-9
Above reproach (3:2)	Above reproach (1:6)
Husband of one wife (3:2)	Husband of one wife (1:6)
Sober-minded (3:2)	
Self-controlled (3:2)	Self-controlled and disciplined (1:8)
Respectable (3:2)	
Hospitable (3:2)	Hospitable (1:8)
Able to teach (3:2)	Holding firm to the Word, able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and to rebuke those who contradict it (1:9)
Not a drunkard (3:3)	Not a drunkard (1:7)
Not violent but gentle (3:3)	Not violent (1:7)
Not quarrelsome (3:3)	Not quick tempered (1:7)
Not a lover of money (3:3)	Not greedy for gain (1:7)
Skilled manager of his household (3:4)	Above reproach as God's steward (1:7)
Keeping his children submissive with all dignity (3:4)	Having faithful children not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination (1:6)
Not a recent convert lest he become conceited (3:6)	Not arrogant (1:7)
Well thought of by outsiders (3:7)	
	A lover of good (1:8)
	Upright (1:8)
	Holy (1:8)

¹¹ MacArthur, John and Richard Mayhue. **Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth.** Wheaton: Crossway, 2017:763.

There is no indication in the Biblical record that an eldership contains only one person serving on behalf of a congregation. Except for some authors applying the term to themselves (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1), the eldership is always a plurality (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14).

“A church that is governed by a plurality of godly elders enjoys all the divinely intended benefits, including their combined knowledge, wisdom, and experience. Such not only provides a wealth of council for shepherding the flock (Prov. 11:14; 15:22), it also safeguards the congregation from the self-serving preferences of a single individual.”¹²

Ezekiel 34:1-10 is a passage that gives an example for all shepherds to learn from.

“Ezekiel explains some of the reasons why Israel was in captivity. Part of the blame lay with the poor job of shepherding which Israel’s elders had provided. The mistakes which those shepherds made should give warning to shepherds of God’s people today not to make those same mistakes.”¹³

Wayne Burger goes on to share seven lessons about being a good shepherd:¹⁴

- First, feed the flock, not yourself (vs. 2-3). “Elders today can feed themselves by receiving the glory and honor which the flock bestows upon them without giving the sheep spiritual nourishment.”

¹² MacArthur, **Biblical Doctrine**, 767.

¹³ Burger, Wayne. “Shepherding: Lessons from a Bad Example.” **Working in the Word**. Vol. 2 No. 3. Ames: Printing Depot, 1998:1

¹⁴ Burger, “Shepherding: Lessons from a Bad Example,” 1-5.

- Second, strengthen the sick (v. 4). “Shepherds must be in touch with members because the sick will not often cry out for help... Shepherds must be able to read the symptoms and come with the medicine. The only way they can recognize the symptoms of the sheep is to spend time with the sheep while they are well. Then they can spot the signs of illness, maybe even before the sheep knows he is sick.”
- Third, heal the diseased (v. 4). “A disease is the invasion of a foreign substance... These are the brethren who have become contaminated by sin whether it is a moral sin or a doctrinal sin... Their work of healing the diseased may even extend to leading the congregation in withdrawing fellowship.”
- Fourth, bind up the broken (v. 4). “This has to do with dealing with those whose hearts and spirits have been broken.”
- Fifth, bring back those who have been scattered (vs. 4-6). “Often, the shepherds do not even know that they [the sheep of the congregation] are gone! Six [months] after they leave someone finally says, ‘I haven’t seen so-in-so in a long while, I guess we better take his name out of the directory...’ Flocks whose shepherds do not search for the wayward do not have shepherds.”
- Sixth, seek the lost (v. 4). “Even though the primary work of elders is to oversee the flock of God, it seems that they also have a responsibility to reach out to save the lost.”
- Seventh, lead with gentleness rather than drive with force (v. 4).

The eldership is a very important position in the church that Jesus Christ has gifted some to

be elders and to lead the flock. A very important responsibility mentioned earlier is the role of making sure the church is instructed in sound doctrine and refuting any error that comes across its path. The eldership is given the task to teach and has the right to choose who teaches. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul told Timothy to “*entrust these [sound teaching Paul taught Timothy and others] to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” The implication is clear: others can be charged to preach and teach the flock if they are educated in and faithful to the Bible. This allows the church to be fed, committed to sound doctrine, and experience future growth by means of developing future preachers, teachers, elders, and leaders in the church.

“In 1606, William Perkins wrote a book entitled *The Calling of the Ministry*. In it he has a chapter entitled ‘The Scarcity of True Ministers’ in which he says, ‘Good ministers are one in a thousand.’ He advises, ‘If ministers are few in number, then all you can do is increase their number... So let every minister both in his teaching and conversation work in such a way that he honors his calling, so that he may attract others to share his love for it’ (Perkins, *Art of Prophesying*, 96-98). We need a vision for multiplying the gospel beyond us!”¹⁵

Finally, there are “*teachers.*” This is a natural progression of mentioning “*pastors*” or elders. These men and women, depending on the context,¹⁶ have the gift of teaching (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28).

¹⁵ Merida, Tony. **Exalting Jesus in 1&2 Timothy and Titus.** Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary. Eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013: 163.

¹⁶ Women are not to be teachers in the assembly, but they can teach other women, or children, or teach non-Christians outside of the assembly.

A teacher is one who instructs others in “*the word of God*” (Acts 18:11). Teachers have replaced prophets in the modern-day church in that they impart revelation, but it is not new revelation since it has been written down. There are those who say we do have new revelation but they are liars and false teachers (Ezekiel 13:9; Jeremiah 23:16; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1-6; Matthew 7:15-20; Titus 1:10-11).

James 3:1 gives us a very clear and stern warning about the absolute importance of being careful about who the elders of a congregation allow to teach and those who teach to be sure they are proclaiming sound doctrine. The reason being is that teachers have a high standard lest they fall into condemnation. James wrote, “*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.*”

God’s attitude towards false teachers is very clear condemnation and rejection. The imagery is remarkable when you go through the Scriptures.

- False teachers are “*blind... know nothing... mute dogs unable to bark, dreamers lying down, who love to slumber*” (Isaiah 56:10)
- A false teacher is “*a fool... demented*” (Hosea 9:7)
- False teachers are “*reckless, treacherous men*” (Zechariah 3:4)
- False teachers are “*ravenous wolves*” (Matthew 7:15)
- False teachers are “*blind guides of the blind*” (Matthew 15:14; 23:16)
- False teachers are “*hypocrites... fools... whitewashed tombs... full of dead men’s bones... serpents... brood of vipers*” (Matthew 23:13, 17, 27, 33)
- False teachers are “*thieves and robbers*” (John 10:8)
- False teachers are “*savage wolves*” (Acts 20:29)

- False teachers are “*slaves... of their own appetites*” (Romans 16:18)
- False teachers are guilty of “*peddling the word of God*” (2 Corinthians 2:17)
- False teachers are “*false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ... servants [of Satan]*” (2 Corinthians 11:13, 15)
- False teachers “*distort the gospel of Christ*” (Galatians 1:7)
- False teachers are “*dogs... evil workers*” (Philippians 3:2)
- A false teacher is “*conceited and understands nothing... [of] depraved mind and deprived of the truth*” (1 Timothy 6:4-5)
- False teachers are “*men who have gone astray from the truth... held captive by [Satan]*” (2 Timothy 2:18, 26)
- False teachers are “*deceivers*” (2 John 7)
- False teachers are “*ungodly persons... unreasoning animals*” (Jude 4, 10)

Thus, the Bible gives severe judgment on false teachers (Deuteronomy 13:5; 18:20; Jeremiah 14:15; Galatians 1:8-9; Revelation 2:20-23). Their punishment is rightly deserved considering they lead people away from God’s Word, the source of truth (Isaiah 3:12; 9:16; Jeremiah 14:13; 23:26-27, 32; 50:6; Matthew 23:13, 15; 24:4-5, 24; Luke 11:46, 52; Romans 16:17-18; Colossians 2:4, 8, 18; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; 2 Timothy 3:13; Titus 1:10; 2 John 7). False teachers also cause people to no longer feel the need to be repentant of their sin (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11; 23:21-22; Lamentations 2:14; Ezekiel 13:10, 16, 22).

The role of teaching God’s Word is not an easy task.

“That is the way it should be if we are true to our call. ‘Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Matt. 28:20) is a summons to

serve controversy. Everything, says Jesus. All the hard bits, the faith-demanding bits, the costly bits, the this-world-will-hate-you-if-you-live-like-this bits. The whole thing.”¹⁷

Conclusion

Christ gave gifts to the church in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The church has a solid foundation and will continue to as we remain true to Christ and His Word through specific people doing their God-given responsibilities in the church and the faithful proclamation of His Word.

One preacher was once criticized for having

“‘too much preaching and teaching... and not enough of other things’ [He said] I don’t see how there could ever be too much preaching and teaching! The reason we put so much emphasis on preaching and teaching is that they help everything else [in the church] to happen. We have to know what the Bible says about something before we know how to act. We won’t know how to worship, pray, evangelize, discipline, shepherd, train, or serve unless we know what the Word of God says.”¹⁸

We are thankful for these servants of Christ, in the past and in the present. We will see why when we examine Ephesians 4:12-16.

¹⁷ Allen, Lewis. **The Preacher’s Catechism**. Wheaton: Crossway, 2018: 176.

¹⁸ MacArthur, John. **The Master’s Plan for the Church**. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991: 58-59.

TWO OBSTACLES OF EVANGELISM

Michael Shank

Toward the end of the Matthew 9, we find Jesus going about in the different cities and synagogues, preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and v.36 says that He had compassion on those being brought to Him. Then he says to His disciples the words in vv.37-38:

The harvest is indeed great, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech of the Lord of the harvest, that he should put out workers into his harvest.

Evangelism

There's no doubt that we need to educate and re-educate ourselves in our fundamental mission, which is carrying the soul-saving message to the lost.

But our mission is hindered by two obstacles:

- 1) Apathy
- 2) And conflict

Many years ago, Brother Clayton Pepper said regarding apathy: "Church growth begins with a knowledge of the subject, and ends with a loss of evangelistic zeal."

We just get too comfortable. As long as no one takes our parking spot or pew... As long as we're bringing in enough money to pay the bills and keep the lights on, we say "We're doin' okay."

But brethren, are we really doin' okay? Are we doin' okay in God's eyes?

You see, when we're praying and reading and thinking about our mission, we're motivated to bring visitors to church to "come and see" (John 1:46). And the opposite is just as true; when we're **not** praying, reading, and thinking about our mission, we stop inviting.

And when we stop bringing new people through the doors, future growth doesn't have a chance.

Then apathy sets in;

Growth Brings on the Second Obstacle: Conflict

Now, when there *is* growth, Satan goes to work using "conflict." When you see what I'm talking about, it's like removing blinders. Let me show you.

The church is established in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost with 3,000 people added to it by the Lord. Acts 3 – Peter and John go to Solomon's Porch; Peter begins his sermon in v.11 and it continues throughout chapter 3. Acts 4:1 – watch this –

Now as they were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees confronted them, because they were provoked that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in the person of Jesus the resurrection from the dead. So they seized them and put them in custody until the next day, since it was already evening.

They throw them in jail so that they can drag them before the Sanhedrin Court.

There's *external* conflict: Satan is using external conflict to try to destroy the preaching and the faith of those New Testament Christians. Think about it...Satan's goal was to destroy the church and the mission of the church, the pillar and ground of the truth, which is to spread of the gospel. Did Satan succeed?

But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about 5,000 (Acts 4:4).

He didn't succeed at all – the church grew!

Well, did Satan negatively affect their attitudes?

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions

was his own, but instead they held everything in common (Acts 4:32).

Terrorism didn't work against the church!

Alright, Peter and John go before the Sanhedrin Council. The council commands them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, (Acts 4:18); and let them go (4:21).

So we've just seen a perfect example of how Satan used an "external" conflict in his attempt to destroy the cause of Christ. In Acts chapter 5, we're about to see Satan change strategies.

In Acts 5, brethren are engaged in voluntary contributions to the church. Ananias and Sapphira conspire to hold something back and conceal it with a lie.

This here is "internal conflict." Satan failed previously, so this time he's going to try to destroy the church from the inside, tempting Christians to lie and deceive and conspire. Verses 1-11 tell the story, and we find that Satan's efforts fail again. God takes care of ole Ananias and Sapphira...I call it "addition by subtraction." And look at what happened to the church:

The number of believers continued to grow, with large numbers of both men and women being added to the Lord (Acts 5:14).

The church grew even more!

So Satan used external conflict, then internal conflict – both failed.

Then in verses 17-18, Satan switched back to external conflict – see how he changes tactics? He never grows weary in evil doing. Look at what happens [read 19-26]

However, during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, led them out, and said, "Go into the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." On hearing this, at day-break they entered the temple and began teaching. Then the high priest and those with him called the council together (that is, the full council of the

elders of the children of Israel), and sent to the prison to have the apostles brought. But the officers who went returned, reporting, "We found the prison absolutely secure, and the guards standing at the doors. But when we opened the doors, no one was inside." As they heard these words, both the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were much perplexed. Then someone arrived and announced, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are in the temple teaching the people." Then the captain left with the officers, and began leading the apostles, but not with force. They were afraid that the people might stone them (Acts 5:19-26).

Satan worked from the outside, externally; from the inside, internally; back to the outside using external conflict again here in the verses we've just read together – can you see it?

The apostles were brought in, made to stand before the council, and the high priest asked them, "Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? But you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and you wish to bring this man's blood on us." Peter and the apostles replied, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men."

What a compliment! Brethren, are we filling our home towns with our doctrine?

Let's look a bit further. Acts 6:1 shows that Satan is at it again, and he has switched back to...internal conflict—a problem between the two widow-groups within the church. And notice the tactic Satan is using... "there arose a murmuring."

Paul said in Phil. 2:14 and 15, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless."

Did internal conflict work for Satan *this* time? Nope! They took care of the problem and look at v.7.

The message of God continued to

spread. The number of the disciples in Jerusalem was multiplying. A large crowd of the priests were obedient to the faith.

In Acts 7:60, Satan switches back to external conflict. Stephen is stoned and murdered by the Jews for his faith.

Now brethren, you would think that once people started to be murdered for their faith in Christ, that would have been the end of it. I mean if anything was going to scare people away from a cause, certainly being publically murdered for that cause would do it. So did it work?

Absolutely not; the church began to scatter and grew even stronger in number. As a matter of fact, let's look at the condition of the church of Christ, regarding their number, long after Stephen's murder.

When we came to Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul went with us to James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them, and related in order what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. After they had heard these things, they praised God, and then said to Paul, Brother, you know that many thousands of the Jews have believed, and all are zealous for the law.

Conclusion

Here is the heart of this lesson. Two obstacles stand between us and growth; apathy and conflicts. Our first century brethren are shining examples to us today. In the good times they were faithful and grew. In the bad times, they were steadfast and immovable, and they grew even more. They did not allow external or internal problems to weaken their faith in Christ, nor did they allow them to be an obstacle for evangelism.

This brings us to this question...are we truly being instant in season and out of season, or are we just content telling ourselves that we're

doing okay?

When we get down and discouraged, we have three options: (1) We can quit; (2) We can become apathetic, (3) Or we can use our challenges for opportunities to strengthen our faith and spread the message.

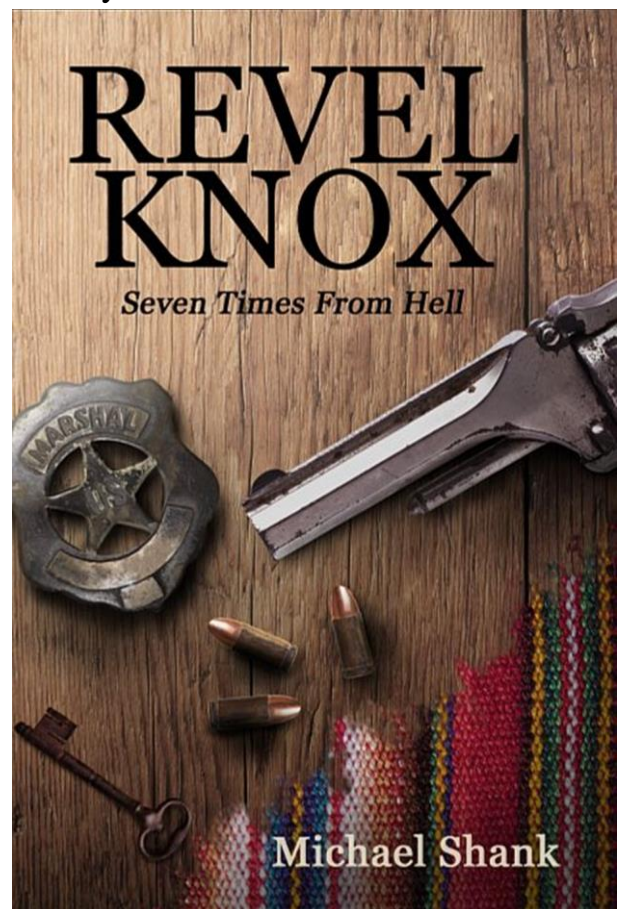
Think about this...the many thousands of believers who made up the church of Christ in Acts 21:20 started with 120 people back in Acts 1:5.

And today, we've got an entire generation that needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Are you ready?

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The background of the page is a dramatic painting depicting a stormy sea. A wooden boat is tilted precariously, with several men inside struggling against the waves. The sky is dark and turbulent, with a bright light source breaking through the clouds, creating a dramatic contrast. The overall mood is one of peril and divine intervention.

LORD SAVE US, WE PERISH

(MATTHEW 8:25)

Bill Howard

These were the words of the terrified disciples aboard a vessel in which Jesus was making his way across the Sea of Galilee. They witnessed Jesus' teaching, healing, and even restoring health to Peter's mother-in-law who was "sick of a fever." Multitudes followed him, and he desired to depart from that place.

This story in Matthew tells us there arose a mighty storm, and the ship was awash from the waves and in danger of sinking. Fearing the worst, the disciples awakened Jesus and made him aware of the danger. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith and calmed the sea. While there are several lessons to be discussed from this account, we will not deal with all those at this time. Instead, we will dwell on the five words of the distressed followers: 'Lord save us; we perish'.

Whether or not we recognize it, choose to deal with it, or dismiss it out of hand, these words are truly worthy of our consideration from the standpoint of circumstances at that time and, more importantly, in the context of our needs today.

There are five elements in this record to be considered. They are: The sea (Galilee), People (we/us), Danger (we perish), Need (save us), and Power (the Lord).

The Sea of Galilee is usually thought of as being placid and calm, which it often is. However, because of its geographical location, it is not always so. "It is surrounded by hills and, because of this, is often subjected to atmospheric downdrafts and sudden storms" (G.A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy*

Land). Matthew states:

And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves (Matthew 8:24).

Mark recorded it:

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full (Mark 4:37).

We can easily visualize the fury of the storm. The tempest was such that we see the ship covered by the towering, raging waves that beat against the vessel and filled it with sea water. So we know the wind was howling, the seas were in frenzy; the ship had to be tossed about by this ferocious storm. It is reasonable that these conditions would strike fear into the heart of the disciples because of the likelihood of the ship capsizing and sinking.

We do not know how many people were in the ship. The accounts simply state that the disciples followed Jesus into the ship. Without a doubt, there would be some or all of those who were to be named as the anointed Apostles and maybe others who were following Jesus as he was teaching. We just do not have the information on the mix of people, but we do know that there were those who had witnessed some or all of the miracles that Jesus was performing. It is most likely that as many as could board before sailing did so, and there was a shipload of people who were terrorized and fearful of dying. They were in danger and realized there was a dire need for intervention that was beyond their capabilities. Their vessel was in great danger; their lives were likely on the line, and a catastrophe was imminent.

It was at this point that reasoning evidently came into play. We have to believe that in the midst of this pandemonium somebody had the presence of mind to remember who was asleep in the “hinder part,” the stern of the ship. Jesus, their teacher, Jesus, the miracle worker: Jesus, the healer was asleep, undisturbed by

the storm.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them (Matthew 4:23-24).

They were present when these miracles were performed; they had witnessed with their own eyes the power of the Lord. Their hope had to be placed with the one who had proven his power. They said, “we perish.” They had not yet perished but believed it inevitable they would die unless they could draw upon a power far greater than that they possessed. We can only attempt to imagine the thoughts that were going through their minds at that time, but we know they felt helpless; they were fearful, distressed, anxious, just to offer a few suggestions. Fortunately for them, they had the presence of mind to awaken Jesus with their plea for help. “Lord save us, we perish.” Mark records it as: “Teacher, carest thou not that we perish?”

From the text we can know that Jesus was, at the least, somewhat disappointed with the disciples. “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” *You have walked with me and listened to my teaching; you have witnessed my miracles but did not trust me to care for you*—these would likely be his thoughts. “He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Matthew 8:26). We are told “they marveled, even the winds and the sea obey him.”

What a beautiful and poignant story has been revealed to us in this history we have just contemplated. There was a great need for the power to save, and there was only one who

could supply the need, Jesus Christ the Son of God. They knew to whom they could turn.

In this biblical account we perceive a likeness, an analogy, for what we witness in the world today. We could very well use the same plea as those aboard the ship. Lord Save Us, We Perish. Their cry was sincere; they had a serious situation to deal with and no means of their own with which to overcome the danger. We too, today, have more than a few serious situations facing us. In and of ourselves, we do not have the means to overcome the dangers we face. There is only one source of help, only one with the power to right the ships of our lives and calm the waters of life: Jesus Christ the Son of God gave his life to be our Savior. It is in Him and Him alone that we can be rescued from perishing.

Since we've had recorded history, from the fall of Adam and Eve to the present time, man has been failing and in dire need of help from a higher power. That higher power is the one and only God in heaven. Mankind has always managed to circumvent God's desires and create turbulent times, and continues to do so today. We are desperately in need of help because we have created a tumultuous and morally declining world about us.

Do you believe this is an exaggeration? Consider the murder of innocent babies. The World Health Organization estimates there is between forty and fifty million abortions worldwide each year. In the United States alone, there have been some fifty four million since 1973. W.H.O. estimates there were eight hundred twenty seven thousand in 2015 (latest figures available). It is difficult to get exact figures as some states no longer report abortions to the federal agency CDC (Center for Disease Control). The organization, Carnet, says the estimated total economic cost of this is nine trillion a year. However, economic cost is not the issue; the issue is runaway first degree murder happening daily world-wide with little concern for right and wrong.

Think about the carnage to human life, other than abortion, we witness today. Again, exact figures are difficult to obtain because of the lack of reporting. However, the latest figures available are from 2016, and there were over eleven thousand murders committed in the United States. Figures reflect those murders recognized as first degree.

Thirty eight states have legalized gambling. In the US, there are almost nine hundred legal casinos, and the figures for 2017 show just short of one hundred fifty nine *billion* dollars were spent in just these known casinos. No accounting for illegal gambling. This is money that was lost to the wives, husbands, and children by those gamblers looking for that one big hit. The big hit that rarely ever happens. We are not even able to guess at the damage caused to marriage and family relationships by those gambling.

The consumption of alcoholic beverages is at an all-time high worldwide. In 2010 (latest data writer could find) the cost of alcohol abuse in the US was two hundred forty nine *billion* dollars. The CDC states that on the average eighty eight thousand people die annually from alcohol related causes. In 2015 nearly forty thousand people died from alcohol related liver disease. Twenty eight percent of fatal accidents are alcohol related. It is estimated that approximately thirty seven percent of college students are alcoholic. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse estimates that on average, the cost of alcohol is in excess of one hundred sixty two billion dollars a year.

Figures are not available for the cause of divorce in the US, but the divorce rate is fifty percent. That simply means that half of the people getting married will sooner or later divorce. There is no doubt that the aforementioned problems contribute heavily to this breakdown of the marriage institution and the number of broken homes and children being raised by one parent or by grandparents: worse yet, those that are homeless and those being

abused and misused because of a lack of someone to care for them and protect them.

It is not pleasant to dwell on the negatives, but we must be realistic and recognize truth. We, indeed, are awash on the stormy seas of hatred, division, addiction, abuse, indolence, intemperance, selfishness and unconcern for others, and on and on, we could enumerate. Man has created all of this and more. There must come an awakening; we need to comprehend the disastrous path upon which too many people travel. We, like the disciples aboard the ship on the Sea of Galilee, must cry out: “Lord Save Us, We Perish.”

Fortunately, all is not bad, everything is not a negative. There are many wonderful blessings that God has designed for us; the greatest of which is our Savior, Jesus Christ. While we struggle in this quagmire of ungodliness that man has created, there is a shining ray of hope. We must recognize this source of help and hope, and grasp onto it and cling tightly, never letting it slip away. As the fearful occupants of

the boat knew to call on the one source of power that could save them, we also have that one and only source upon which we can rely: we call him our God.

He gave his Son as a sacrifice to make a way for our salvation, and Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Peter said: “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). John said: “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Take heed and think on these things. We cannot play fast and loose with God’s word. We dare not water down and diminish from His teaching nor add to it to please ourselves or others. We cannot participate in the evils of the world and be pleasing to God. Paul said to the Corinthians: “Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

THE RISING FORCE THAT IS

THE OCCULT

Kyle D. Frank

[Editor’s Note: Kyle Frank is in a better position to write on the effects and lure of the occult than perhaps anyone else in the brotherhood, as he was once an active participant in it. He is presently working on a book that describes his journey “to Satan and back,” along with several chapters of warning and instruction about various tools that Satan uses to draw people into this decidedly anti-Christian practice.]

The world in which we live is increasingly hostile to us and openly embraces the world of the occult. It is evident in the lives of those around us. The entertainment media is full of news from such motion pictures as the *Harry Potter* series or *The Exorcist*. Witchcraft and sorcery are “in” and those of us who oppose such acts are guilty of “hate crimes.” Things which God openly condemned in the Old Testament are embraced by today’s culture. It ap-

pears that the fine veneer of civility from earlier days is increasingly off of society as it rushes headlong to destruction. This was revealed in the scriptures about those who have such practices.

The Bible speaks of two kingdoms in Colossians 1:13-14 *“He has delivered us from the domain (power ASV) of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* Notice the difference between the domain of darkness and the kingdom of his dear Son. There are only two choices-(1) domain (or kingdom) of darkness (2) kingdom of God’s dear Son.

Without going into depth on how one enters, or rather, is added (Acts 2:41) to the kingdom by the Lord, we do know that when one enters the kingdom of God, he or she departs from the kingdom of darkness. This departure is against the will of the leader of that kingdom, Satan. It is Satan’s will to recapture this “escapee” and to stop any further “captures” by his enemy, God. With this in mind, let us look at the warfare which continues between the forces of God and the forces of Satan.

Those who have any familiarity with scripture are aware that we are told in Ephesians 6:10-18:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteous-

ness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.”

Paul the apostle likens the Christian soldier to that with which he was very familiar, the Roman soldier. The Roman soldier was a common sight throughout the empire of that day, and all were familiar with them. Using the figure of this earthly soldier, Paul was able to convey to his readers the complete coverage the (heavenly) soldier of God receives if he were to use the armor the Lord has provided.

A couple of things to note are that there is no coverage for the back, so the soldier always needed to face his adversary and not turn his back to the foe. Also, all the armor is defensive with one exception—the sword. The Roman soldiers carried a short, stabbing-type sword in which it was necessary to be close to the foe. There were no long-distance attacks, such as is common in our day. Back in those days, the soldier faced his foe face-to-face and fought in hand-to-hand combat.

We need to be close to those we oppose and to use God’s word (such as Jesus did) when facing our foe. Jesus dealt with Satan’s onslaught, recorded in Matthew chapter four, by saying “it is written.” This is how we are to deal with our opponents. We are to use God’s word in the same way that our Lord used it when Satan tempted him. As always, Jesus gave the perfect example of how we are to face the myriad of trials which we face in our day-to-day lives. If we make a study of how Jesus lived and how he faced his trials, then we have a perfect pattern to follow when we face ours.

As difficult as it is, it is vital that we keep our eyes upon him. He is our **good shepherd** (John 10:11, 14), our **yoke bearer** (Matt. 11:29), our **light** (John 8:12), our **Savior** (Phil. 3:20). And, if we look unto him and “*cast all [our] anxieties on him because he cares for [us]*” (1 Peter 5:7), we will be able to face any threat or attack which will come our way. This is how we face the Kingdom of Darkness as we confront it throughout our lives. Our simple manner of life will bring us into conflict with the forces of the evil one. We then can overcome them by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony (Rev. 12:11).

We need to be constantly reminded that we are at war, and in this war there are no “side-lines” or “noncombatants.” We **all** are involved, and we need to keep our eyes and ears open and our prayer life a busy one as our strength is from above. And **by faith**, we can walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh. We **can** be well-pleasing to our heavenly father, and a scourge to his (and our) enemies, provided we do things in his way and not our own. To God be the glory!!

It is our responsibility to be watchmen that are wide-awake and not “asleep at the wheel.” Let us go forth, preaching the word in any way that we can, and let us never forget that the enemy of our God is our enemy too.

We so often hear that “times are hard” and in hard times people do things that they would not normally do. Today there is a great curiosity to know things that really ought not to be known. We had known of times formerly when people sought this knowledge, like the Gnostics of the early second and third century. And so on throughout the ages, there were movements, and people who wanted to know things that man ought not to know and that hunger seems to have been growing to the point where people are fascinated with the secret—or more commonly called the Occult.

Today, there is an intense hunger for the things which God has told mankind that is for-

bidden. In Deuteronomy 18:9-12, we read: *When thou art come into the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found with thee any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that useth divination, one that practiseth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto Jehovah: and because of these abominations, Jehovah thy God doth drive them out from before thee.* Here God was speaking to Israel, but the principles are the same across the board when dealing with the gospel dispensation. When God commands something, it isn’t a suggestion or a “you ought to.” but a command.

In our present age, a terrible spiritual vacuum exists. Religion has declined as much as the occult has grown because people aren’t satisfied with spiritual things as they exist and they want to find out in other ways—the ways which God has forbidden. They also are interested in physical pleasure and finding satisfaction in any way that they can. Also, they are dissatisfied with science and technology because they haven’t brought the utopia that they have promised. We were raised to believe that the future held the answers, but whoever has those great answers isn’t forthcoming as fast as **we** desire. Lost in a spiritual void, our hearts long for some kind of reality apart from accountability to God and his word. Those are conditions nearly perfect for the growth of the occult, and have fueled its growth tremendously. People are acting in pure contrariness to plain and simple logic. They do the most horrible things for the **least** practical reason. They have no reason to the authorities who arrest them for child murder, etc. etc. It is horrible and reprehensible, to say the least.

Today, undeniable evidence of the cult explosion pervades every aspect of our society,

or rather, *world* society. Occultism is similar to a giant spider-web going from city to city, nation to nation. Some have resisted better some, not so much. Back in Bible times, in Revelation, Jesus told all the churches that some cities were some Satanic hosts.

Revelation 2:9: I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Revelation 2:13: I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is, and thou holdest fast my name, and does not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Here are two, but I know that there are more of

those type of descriptions.

Why has this happened? Many, including myself, have attempted to give a clear reason behind it. An obvious answer is that Satan and his cronies are behind it. Well, they **really are** behind it. They have found a way to cover the bait with some tasty treats that will make the “fish” take the bait, and when they do, it is over—**nearly**—because when they find out that they’ve been duped, it is too late to repent and be forgiven. Very slick but effective indeed. The reason I said “nearly” is because I am a really unusual “fish.” I got off the hook, and I have dedicated myself to teaching others about what these horrible creatures are that are prosecuting this war against my brothers and sisters of the human race. So, in the words of a television show. let’s “get it,” let’s get going at spoiling the day for “the god of this world.”

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UNSUNG HEROES: LYDIA

Travis Anderson

Continuing our series of articles on ‘unsung heroes,’ this time we will focus on two individuals. One you probably know, at least by name and occupation quite well (Lydia), and one you may not (Jason). Lydia I remember quite well because she makes for good material to teach in younger children’s Bible class, but Jason, well, not so much.

Lydia the Faithful Businesswoman

According to Acts 16:12-16, she was from the city of Thyatira which was located in the Roman Province of Lydia. She was a successful business woman. Thyatira was a city known for its purple dye, which could be extracted two different ways—either by the Murex root, or a sea snail. Regardless of which method was used, it was hard to extract, making it rare, and therefore expensive—meaning it was often worn exclusively by the royal or wealthy class.

The fact that she was selling her merchandise in a different city than she was from either meant she was a good salesperson with high quality work, or she was wealthy—or most likely, a little bit of both, which would have allowed her to move and have a home here in Philippi.

Some have suggested she was a slave, because in that culture it would have been hard for her to be successful on her own, but there is no evidence for that anywhere in the text and is purely unfounded speculation.

Our first lesson here is that her faith was not separate from her business life. Philippi was not a Jewish-run town, meaning there would have been no laws restricting the buying and selling of goods in the marketplace on the Sabbath. But on this day of business, Lydia was nowhere to be found in the places of commerce, for she was doing what a faithful Jewish worshiper of God would be doing: ob-

serving the Sabbath and serving her God, not her bottom line.

Not being open for business on a day of business would have been costing her on a personal level, but that did not matter to her. She didn’t divorce the two, her secular life and her spiritual life, and we shouldn’t either.

Lydia the Fearer of God

Luke notes that she was a worshiper of God. Her name is Greek, indicating she was possibly a proselyte, meaning she had been converted to Judaism, but didn’t enjoy all the blessing a natural born Jew would have. Thyatira, where she was from, had a sizeable Jewish population, so if she converted (instead of coming from a Jewish family heavily influenced by Greek culture) it’s likely that was where she was proselytized.

The Jewish community in Philippi, however, must have been relatively small, because it appears there was no synagogue. Jewish law stated that in order for a synagogue to be established, there needed to be at least 10 male heads of households to lead it. If such could not be established, a place of prayer under the open sky and near a body of water was adopted as a regular meeting place.

Verse 13 indicates Paul found this place during a Ladies Class, if you will. It was only women, and in such a case, they were allowed to do everything that would take place in a male-led worship minus offering sacrifices. So Paul probably came across them as they were praying, singing praises and worship, or reading OT Scriptures

When Paul arrived, he sought people who were followers of the Jewish faith. And here we find another lesson we might glean from this account: Paul sought those who already had some sort of faith in God to teach. He sought out the people who would already have

some similar points of faith. I think that is a problem with many in the church: we spend too much time focusing on what is different (which in most cases are minor things) and failing to find unity in the things we already agree on. I can't envision Paul sitting down with these faithful women and telling them everything they were doing wrong and everything they needed to change to be holy in the sight of God.

What did Paul do in Acts 19 when speaking to the Athenians in the midst of dozens of Greek god and goddess idols? He started with points of agreement: *I see that you are very religious, let me tell you about this one God that you worship without knowing how or why.*

When we talk to people about our faith, it shouldn't start with everything we believe they are doing wrong, but with everything they are doing right. Just as Paul did

But just because she had a faith in God did not make her in a right state with God, otherwise he wouldn't have said anything to her. Religious does not equal faithfulness. Jesus is the only way (John 14). He is the way and the truth and the life and without following him in the manner in which he has said, religion does not equal a home in heaven.

In Acts 16:14, the phrase "who heard us" might be better translated, "who had been hearing us," possibly referring to them listening to Luke, Paul, and the others with them since they arrived in the city, not just this one specific time.

Lydia the Obedient Convert

Verse 13 says Paul spoke. That word means more of a conversation and not preaching. Paul's discussion with Lydia and the other women there would have been personal, not just a lecture, a sermon, an address.

What did they discuss? What did Paul tell them? What questions did they ask? What had he been preaching for a few days in the town prior to finding these women by the river? Those details were not deemed important

enough by Luke, who was very detail oriented, or the Holy Spirit, but we can deduce from all the other recorded teachings by the apostles that it had to do with Jesus, and his death, burial and resurrection.

And the result of this main point was baptism. Every account of the preaching in the book of Acts contains Jesus, his death, his burial, and his resurrection, no matter who the audience was. The Sanhedrin, common Jews, Scribes, Gentiles, Greek god worshippers, barbarians on the island Paul was shipwrecked on, etc.

And every account of conversion, no matter what type of person they were, was completed with the act of baptism. You cannot separate the two! His death burial and resurrection is how salvation came to the world and is accessible by man. Baptism is the only way we can reach out and grab it. It's a free gift, we can't earn it, but we still have to take the free gift.

Lydia the Blessor

Afterwards, Lydia insists that Paul and his crew of missionaries come stay in her home so she can provide for them. The fact that Luke says "she urged us" means she asked and they refused, and she then kept at it. Notice she essentially says, 'if my faith is good enough for you to show me the way of salvation through baptism into our Savior, why isn't it good enough for me to be your hostess?'

Another lesson here is one the Holy Spirit wants us to get: turning down someone's offer to help is depriving them of blessing others and fulfilling the law of Christ of helping one another. Paul rarely accepted help from the town he was currently in because he didn't want to give his accusers any more ammo and claim he was preaching for the money. He had no problem accepting aid from a congregation once he was no longer in that town, but he rarely accepted it while he was there.

One of the examples used in some of my study materials was from a fellow minister who said that his grandma always had a phrase

she said when people refused her offer of a good deed: ‘Don’t take away my blessing.’ This is essentially what Lydia says: You have taught me about my Risen Savior and have baptized me into his blood and his salvation; at least let me bless you by giving you a place to stay.

By verse number 40 of Acts 16, the believers are meeting in Lydia’s house, the church that Paul planted in this town. Because of her obedience and hospitality. And in chapter four of the letter written to the Philippians, Paul mentions how their continued support has been a huge help to him, and you know Lydia was most likely a big contributor to the that effort.

How different might it have looked had he never given in and accepted her gift of hospitality? Of course the will of God would still be accomplished, but look at the ripples that were made by this one stone in the pond, the accepting of a good deed, and not depriving Lydia of her blessing of helping others.

Conclusion:

But in all of these small little lessons, there is one overarching all of it: God working through multiple people to bring them together at the right moment in the right time to accomplish what he had designed to accomplish. (1) Paul being in Philippi when he was. (2) The fact that there were not enough men for a synagogue. If there was, it’s doubtful he would have had such a meaningful personal conversation with these women, including Lydia. Had there been a synagogue, maybe the Jewish men there would not have been receptive of Paul and his teachings, which would not be a first. (3) Lydia living in this city. She wasn’t from there, yet at some point Philippi became her home. (4) Her talents. Her talents in working with purple dye had made her wealthy, wealthy enough to host missionaries and then later support the church meeting out of her home.

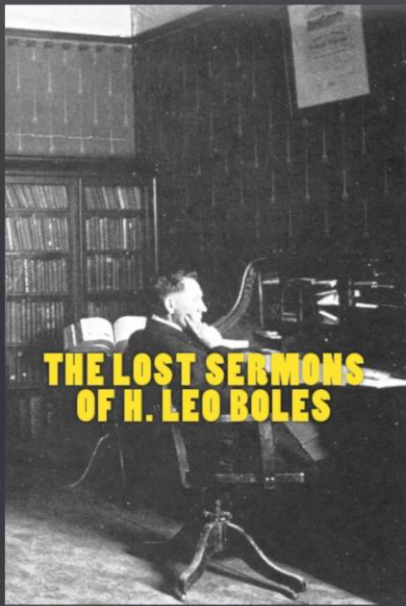
All of these elements had to come together to get these two people in the same town at the

same time by the river outside the city to have a meaningful conversation about the Good News of Jesus Christ leading to her putting her savior on in baptism.

We serve a Mighty God! He is working in all of our lives too! Who knows who you might be in a position to teach because of your skill set, your talents, your occupation, your social status, the location of your home, the leadership or lack thereof in your congregation 20 years ago, today, 20 years from now.

But all that working in our lives will yield nothing if we aren’t looking for the opportunities. Colossians 4:3—Paul looked for them, Paul prayed for them, and he asked others to pray for doors to be opened for him to teach the gospel, and he is a prime example.

Brethren, we have to be looking for these opportunities, or we will never find them.



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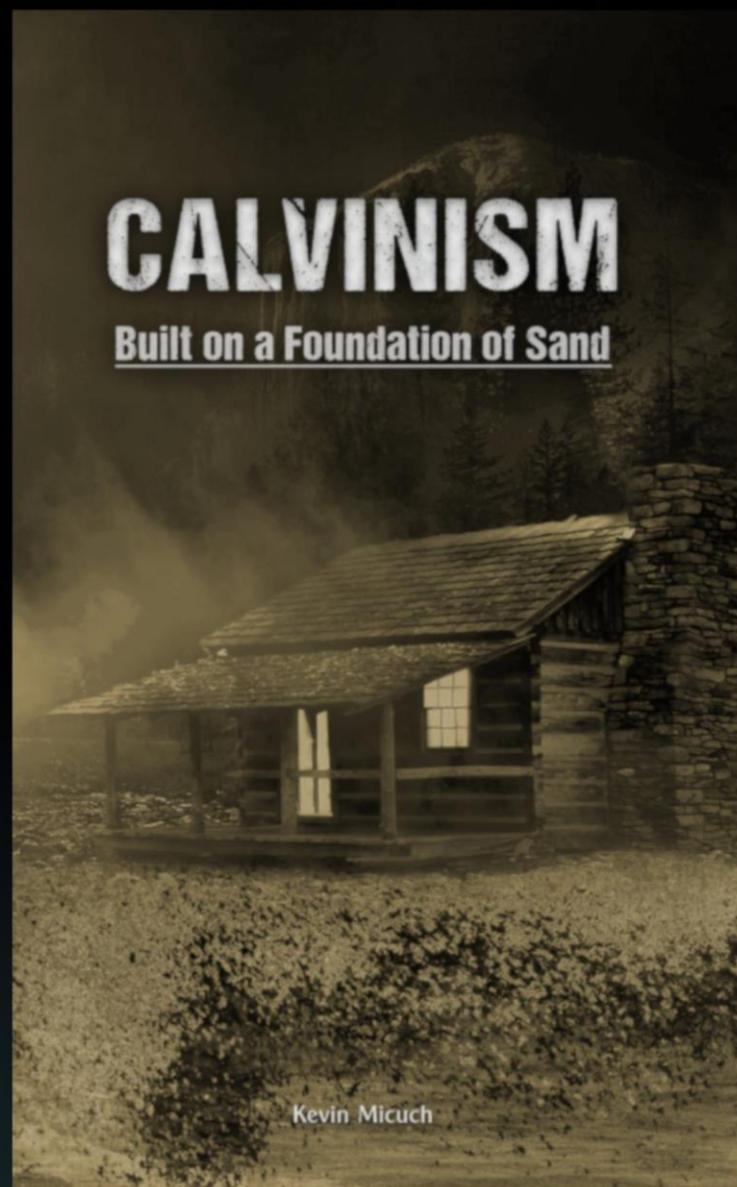
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About the Authors

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).

Dewayne Bryant is the minister for the New York Ave. church of Christ in Arlington, TX. He has served as a professor of Bible for four different schools and works as both a minister and as a Christian apologist for Apologetics Press and the Apologia Institute.

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 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 would love to be doing backflips and riding motorcycles, but until his back is fully healed, he will just have to content himself with reading about himself in the pages of the *Quarterly*.

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 Movement and Alexander Campbell. He studied Bible and Biblical Languages at Harding University. He can be contacted at jkrivak@zoominternet.net.

Ryan Manning is a piano-playing, home-schooling parent who also preaches and enjoys reading his Greek New Testament. He and his wife and children really like going to Roundhouse.

Richard Mansel is a preacher, writer, book-lover (whose passion lately is histories focused on World War II), and former editor of Forthright Magazine.

Joseph McWhorter is an Alabama native turned Texan. He is a graduate of the Southwest School of Biblical Studies in Austin, and preaches for the Canyon Lake church of Christ. He and his wife, Michelle, are currently raising two dogs, multiple chickens, and the occasional stray cat.

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 this issue of the Quarterly who are former residents of Marion, IL (and another still lives there).

Bob Myhan is one of those great guys who volunteered to write an article for this issue, and who the editor neglected to request a bio from...

James Pasley has worked full-time with churches in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia. He and his wife of 25 years, Dawn, and their 5 children (ages 7-18) live in Mineral Bluff, GA and he preaches for the Blue Ridge Church of Christ.

Andrew Patterson, like a few other authors this issue, turned in a great article, but someone (not saying who) didn't get back with him in time to request a bio from him. Sorry, Andrew!

Jake Schotter loves studying the Bible, reading books, preaching (since 2009), and writing about the Truth. He has been very fortunate to grow his library to over 2,500 books and loves ordering them cheaply. He is a freshman Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University.

Michael Shank wrote a book that went viral, *Muscle and a Shovel*. He has written two

other published books (not counting workbooks), and his wife, Jonetta, has written another. Their home is somewhere in Colorado.

Kenny Taylor is another one of those unfortunate souls who wasn't asked to provide his bio (someone fire the editor!). And though one could be made up, we thought we'd be nice and just leave it as-is.

Josh Vires was born and raised in Ada, Oklahoma. He attended Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Bible as well as a graduate degree in Ministry. While at FHU he met his wife Kimberly. Josh and Kimberly have three children, Baileigh (4), Canaan (1) and Janie (born in April 2019). He enjoys golfing, fishing and Oklahoma Sooners football. Josh currently serves as the preacher and minister for the Waynedale church of Christ in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Edwin Walker holds the distinction of being one of the very first subscribers to the *Quarterly*. He resides in Eclectic, AL (if the editor remembers correctly).

Bradley S. Cobb is a cheapskate, stubbornly refusing to turn on the air conditioning in the house, even though it's 90 degrees outside. He has recently been involved in a successful shock treatment (it's not what you think... honestly). He is married to his best friend, and is about to begin teaching the book of Revelation.

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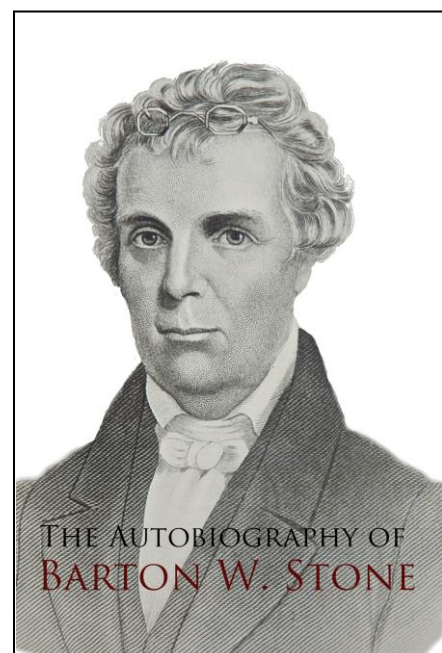
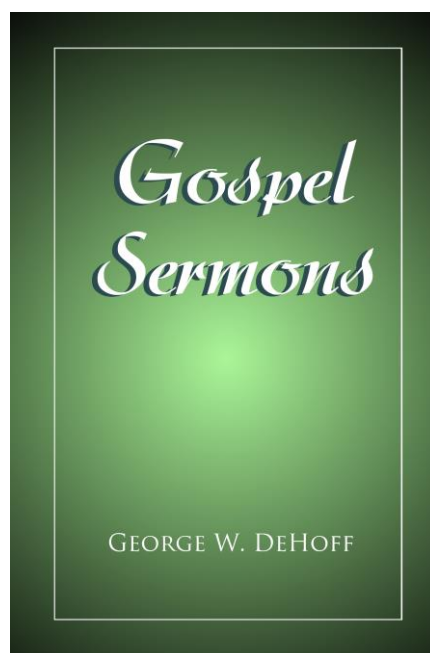
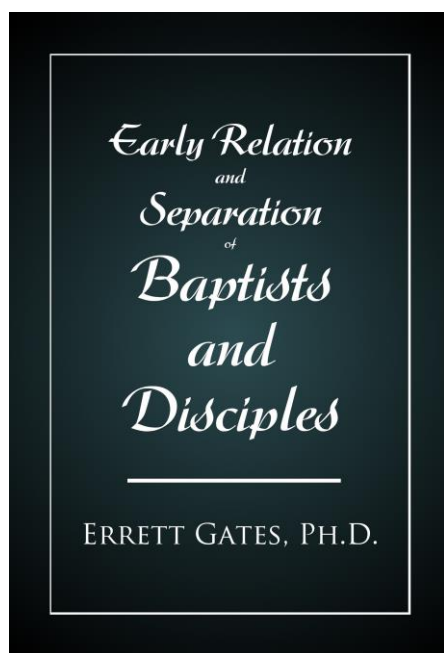
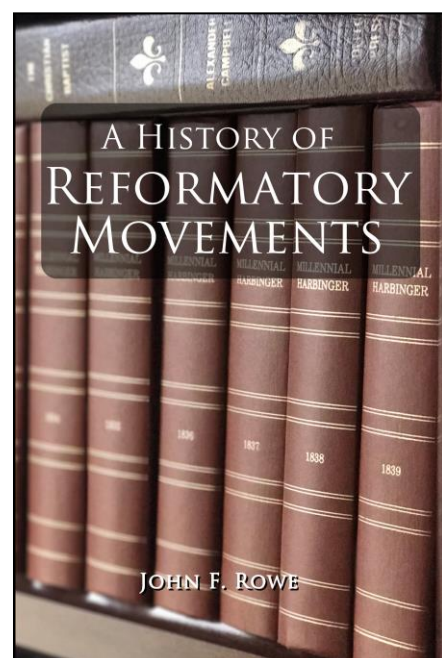
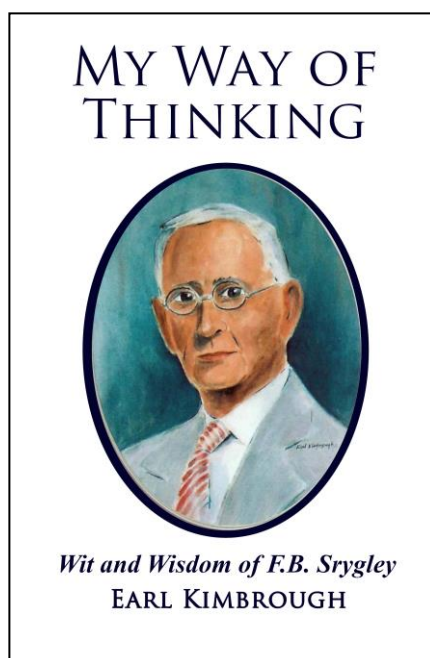
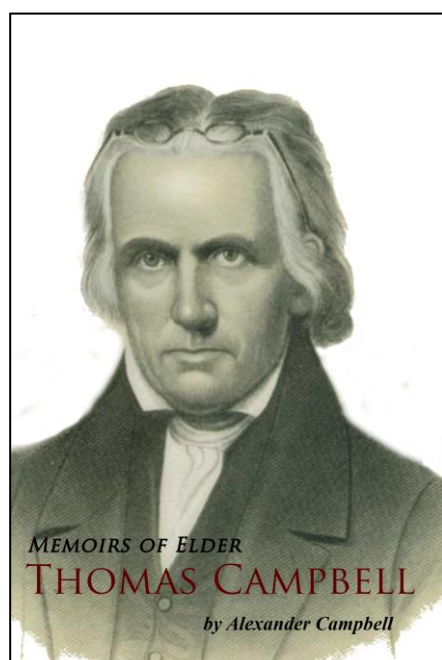
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