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# Faithful Promises



## 2021: Faithful



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## Standing on the Promises

We have come to the end of our 2021 Faithful series. I hope you've been as blessed as I have been by this Bible theme. Next year's is "Living the Gospel" (see p. 27 for more info), but what better way to conclude this year than by looking at the promises of our faithful Father.

The word *promise* is found about 100 times in the Bible, but in *All the Promises of the Bible*, Herbert Lockyer reports a staggering 8,810 promises. Incredible! In his "Last Word" (p. 31), President Stacy gives good reasons why we may not want to claim all these promises for ourselves. But whether it be for judgment or grace, every last promise witnesses to the faithfulness of God. And all the thousands of promises already kept heartens us to trust God to keep those that remain. We're a people of promise.

That's what Russell Kelso Carter meant when he wrote "Standing on the Promises" in 1886. When he was afflicted with a critical illness at age 30, his doctors gave up hope of healing, but Carter turned to Jesus. Whether healed or not, Carter committed his remaining days to the Lord's service. From that moment on, the Bible's promises came alive, inspiring the hymn for which he is remembered:

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
By the living word of God I shall prevail,  
Standing on the promises of God.

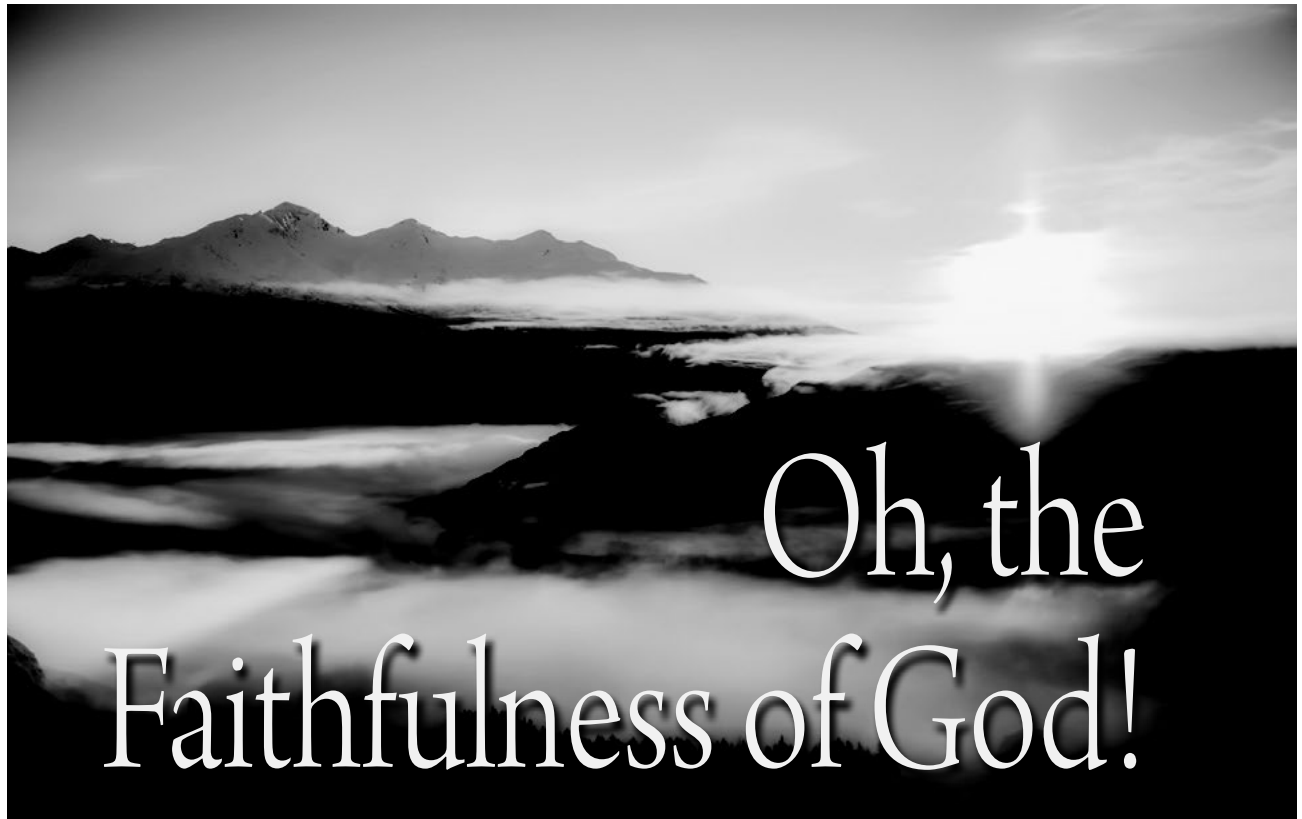
Standing on the promises I cannot fall,  
Listening every moment to the Spirit's call,  
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Carter lived another 49 years, serving as professor, physician, and pastor. God was faithful; Carter kept his promises too.

That's been our theme all year: God is faithful, so let's be faithful too. Here is just one promise of Jesus: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28). He is faithful to bless; may we be faithful to keep His Word. That's how people of promise stand on the promises.

— Jason Overman





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How the Father watches  
over His Word and over us.

by **Stephen Whitwell**

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How can anyone as finite, definable, and limited as we humans describe something as infinite, unmeasurable, and unlimited as God and His faithfulness? It's impossible.

That's the position I find myself in.

The best we can do is the best we can do. We have available to us a repertoire of fine words in the English language that are amazing at conjuring pictures in our minds of what is being written about. However, when the human attempts to measure or describe or quantify the Divine, we come horribly short. Yet we've been touched with a degree of the Divine: *God*.

The prophet Jeremiah, lamenting about the demise of his beloved Jerusalem, pens these well-known words:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22, 23, RSV).

In the midst of his pain and sorrow, Jeremiah still speaks of God as being faithful. In fact, he says, "Great is Your faithfulness."

### Our story

In recent times, my wife and I have also come to experience the faithfulness of God. I, too, can say, "Great is Your faithfulness."

Loss of work and health issues put us in a position that can be described as *humongous horribilis*! I'd lost my job and couldn't secure any employment. I'd had a couple of heart attacks to add

to the growing number I'd had in the last few years. Furthermore, there was a confirmed diagnosis of Parkinson's. For a long time I couldn't work. Our finances were under severe pressure, to say the least.

But something else happened. God's Word was alive to me, and in the regular rhythm of my morning devotions, the Divine was revealing something amazing. Promises were deposited into my heart. Things I'd never seen before were uncovered. The curtain was rolled back just a little, so that I saw something of the wonder, the glory, and the dependability of the faithfulness of God.

I came to the book of Jeremiah and read these words: "Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word'" (1:12).

This truth was being refreshed to me, that God watches over His Word to bring it into being. Of this passage, the *NIV Bible Commentary* states:

Two visions were granted Jeremiah, evidently to authenticate his call. The first vision was that of an almond tree, which blossoms in January when other trees are still dormant. It is a harbinger of spring, as though it watches over the beginning of the season. So the Lord was watching to bring judgment on Israel's sins. What former prophets had said would come was about to happen. God was prepared to act because of world conditions. . . . God keeps his word promptly and works toward an early fulfillment.

## Finding hope

This greatly encouraged me. God watches over His Word to see that it is fulfilled. I found this truth exciting. About a year before, I read the words of Psalm 107, and the Holy Spirit quickened them to me. They lodged in my heart and became a source of comfort and hope in the months that followed:

Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven (Psalm 107:28-30).

My wife and I were crying out to the Lord in our trouble. We were in distress. There was a storm! *But!* God would bring us out so that He could bring us into a desired haven, so that He would bring us out of our distress and calm the storm. He would, in fact, guide us to this haven.

Now we were excited. Though nothing had changed, everything had changed. Nothing in the physical realm had noticeably altered, but everything in the unseen spiritual realm had. We knew God was with us; we

knew that He knew where we were and was doing something about it, which we would see in due course.

## God's will

Again and again in my morning Bible readings I came across this theme that when God declares something — a promise, a commitment to act in a certain way (one of God's "I will" statements) — then the whole of God's creative power, the whole of His authority, His ability, His omnipotence, and divine supremacy, is brought to bear on earthly human affairs so that it happens. Nothing will stop God's Word from coming to pass. No

“ We knew that God knew where we were and was doing something about it. ”

human kingdom, no event, no circumstance is beyond the ability of God to change, lift up, put down, move out of the way so that the Word of the Lord comes to pass.

Here are a couple of examples.

And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely

visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here” (Genesis 50:24, 25).

Joseph knew the promise God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now he reiterates promises to the future generations: “God will surely visit you and bring you out.” God will fulfill His promises. In other words, God watches over His Word to perform it. God guards His promise. Here’s Joseph, now the fourth generation from the first mention of the promise, and God is still on its case. God is faithful.

Another example is back in Jeremiah:

“When God wants to move things here and there, even unruly circumstances will be a pawn in His hand.”

“And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. . . . and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will send and bring Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will set his throne above these stones that I have hidden. And he will spread his royal pavilion over them”’ (27:6; 43:10).

God can use anyone anywhere at any time for anything. Even the ungodly king Nebuchadnezzar was simply God’s servant to fulfill God’s purposes. His purposes will not be stopped by anyone. God can and will use anyone to ensure His Word comes to pass.

### Great assurance

When God is up to something in a nation, when He wants to move things here and there, even an ungodly king is a pawn in His hand to accomplish His purposes. That’s how big God

is, that He can and does at times use whomever to accomplish His promises. Nothing will stand in His way. Nothing will block the passage of God’s will.

When God is up to something in an individual, when He wants to move things here and there, even unruly circumstances will be a pawn in His hand to accomplish His purposes and promises. Nothing will stand in His way. Nothing will block the passage of God’s will.

This gives us great assurance that God will defend the will of God and the promises of God in

our lives and use whomever and whatever in His purposes.

Great is Your faithfulness!

### Desired haven

Our story has a good ending. Through a series of events that can be explained only as the hand of God, our house sold. We then spent the lockdown in 2020 with family. During this time, our house sale settled. When we as a nation (New Zealand) were at the highest emergency level (four) during the COVID pandemic and everyone was confined to their homes, our house sale settled. Amazing!

But then, another incredible event took place. The purchase of our next place settled — and all during level four of the lockdown. So when the lockdown level was reduced sufficiently, we moved into our *haven*. We are now living in the fulfillment of the Word of the Lord: “so He guides them to their desired haven.”

And it is exactly that. The peace and quiet here is deafening. The Word of the Lord has come to pass. God watched over His Word, protected it, and brought it into being in our lives.

Oh, the faithfulness of God! How can you describe it? The best we can do is tell the stories, relating what happened in our world. Then hopefully, the human will catch a glimpse of the Divine. **BA**

**Stephen Whitwell** writes from Tauranga, New Zealand.





# Still Waiting

by Grace Carpenter

Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, I developed the impression that Jesus Christ would return before I reached the age of thirty — let alone fifty! In sermons and old hymns, the imminent return of Christ was used as a warning to repent and be ready. Here we are well into the next century, and we're still waiting.

We're often warned in earthquake-prone California to be ready for the Big One. Depending on your geographical location, you may be advised to prepare for a hurricane, blizzard, tornado, or other natural disaster. Besides these issues, increasing concern that we should all prepare in case of a terrorist attack or mass shooting has resulted in new workplace drills and heightened awareness of surroundings. Homeowners have long taken security measures to ward off a possible robbery. Preparing and waiting for one event or another is a part of this life.

Disbelief typically follows the actual occurrence of tragedy. We hear "I can't believe it!" or "I never thought that would happen here."

Will we react in similar fashion when the wait ends and we see our King descending in the sky? Do we believe more in the possibility of a catastrophic quake or mass shooting than in the second coming of Christ? At a time when we are faced with two choices — wait longer or give up — some have chosen the latter.

The apostle Peter encouraged his readers to not be deceived by doubters who questioned the promise of Christ's return. Peter wrote that in the last days, scoffers will say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

If any in our day have given up hope, perhaps they were disillusioned when others attempted to pinpoint a time schedule for the Second Coming. As much as we want to see the signs and know that Christ's coming is imminent, several verses in the New Testament caution that He will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; Revelation 16:15). To turn away because He hasn't come yet is a form of following Christ conditionally. We say, in essence, "I will follow You, but don't take too long in coming to set up Your kingdom. And be sure to come in my lifetime!"

Those of us who continue to watch and wait might also wonder why Jesus Christ has taken so long. The truth is, delays are part of life. We wait to see the doctor and then wait longer for the doctor to enter the examining room. We wait for our wedding day to come or a new baby to arrive. We wait until we are finally finished with school. When we look back on them, each long wait seemed forever but did end eventually, as will the wait for the Second Coming.

Through parables, Jesus Christ expressed the importance of watching faithfully (Luke 12:35-48). These two stories contrast watchful, faithful stewards with doubtful, unprepared, and irresponsible ones as they await their master's return. It is as if Christ hinted at a long wait when He said, "And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants" (v. 38).

The blessed servants were those who continued their master's work because they esteemed the master, no matter how long he was gone. Both the Old and New Testaments provide insight into God's perspective on the passing of

*continued on page 24*



# Find Us Faithful

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Reflections on how we'll  
be remembered for our  
witness.

by **Marcia Sanders**

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Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1, KJV).

As I reach the age where I find myself one of the senior members of our local church and of my family, I'm wondering how my life is seen by that "so great a cloud of witnesses" around me.

I've learned that a good witness is developed within the body of Christ. Several members of our congregation made a real impact on me while I was growing up.

Brother Fouts, with his pockets full of candy for the children after church, made us feel loved.

Brother Kilgore loved to tease the kids and make us feel special.

My aunt Imy, as my Sabbath school teacher, made sure I learned the books of the Bible, and lived a life of generosity to her family, church, and friends alike.

Thinking on these memories, my mind wanders to the more

personal part: my own Christian witness. How obvious is my love for the Lord, my desire to serve Him? Will I be remembered for the love I show to others? I've always felt challenged by the question that used to float around quite a lot: If I were on trial for being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to convict me?

Other older church members always seemed to be frowning, always complaining — especially about the children. These people didn't influence my path nearly so much as those who made me feel loved.

I certainly don't want to be remembered as a negative person, inside or outside the church. I think that's why I love the lyrics in Steve Green's song "Find Us Faithful" so much. He talks about our lives lighting the way for those who come after us, of



leading them to believe, inspiring them to obey. I want my life to be one that inspires others to *want* to live for the Lord.

## Biblical examples

Scripture describes men and women of great faith who have served as examples in my life and influenced my witness. I'm especially struck by these references from Hebrews 11.

**Noah.** Verse 7 says that Noah "in holy fear built an ark to save his family."

I am amazed by this man whose faith was so strong that he dedicated decades to building an ark to protect his family from a flood, when no one had ever even seen rain. I can only imagine how much ridicule he endured for his beliefs, but still he continued to build and to trust. We have visited the replica of the ark in Kentucky, and the size alone is incredible. What faith to simply follow God's directions when told to complete this seemingly impossible task! Noah's faith serves as an incredible example of doing what God says regardless of how it looks. As in Noah's case, I must be dedicated to God in order to have an impact on others.

**Abraham.** When he was called, Abraham "obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (v. 8).

This one really hits home for me. I love to travel, but I like to plan ahead, look up places to see and things to do — at least know what to pack! It's hard to imagine taking off with my family to a place no one knows anything about. In my lifetime, even the astronauts who went to the

moon had seen pictures of it and knew quite a bit about its atmosphere and terrain. But Abraham "blindly" followed God's command, trusting totally in his God to lead him, and then he lived as a stranger in that land.

Of course, this isn't the only example of Abraham's trusting God in what seemed like impossible situations. Genesis 15:6 tells us that after God promised heirs to Abraham, despite his old age, "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteous-

ness" (KJV). As I reflect on my own life, I must think about how strongly I've trusted the Lord in difficult situations and then follow Abraham's example so my faith will speak to others.

**Moses.** "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24, 25).

I'm particularly fond of verse 25 that says Moses *chose* to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. How easy it would have been for him to tell himself that he could

help God's people as the ruler of Egypt or that God had placed him in that position. Rather, Moses sought God's direction and allowed himself to be used.

In our day, we have an overabundance of evil all around us (abortions, sexual immorality, lack of respect for God, etc.). Worse, these sins are accepted, and those who oppose them are made to feel out of step with the times. This makes my witness even more vital.

“Do others see God when they talk with me or watch my behavior?”

## Reflecting God

Two verses stand out to me when I consider my impact on others' lives:

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, KJV).

Does my light shine in such a way that glorifies God? Do others see Him when they talk with me or watch my behavior? Does my life inspire others to want to know the Lord, to serve Him better?

May those who fear You see me and be glad (Psalm 119:74, NASB).

“I want to reflect God’s love  
and faithfulness and inspire  
others to follow the Lord.”

When I step through the doors of my local church, are others glad to see me? Do I bring joy into the room — especially to the children? Do I make the little ones feel special and encourage them to want to be in church? Do they want to spend time around me because it blesses them and causes them to draw nearer to God?

I recently rediscovered a poem entitled “Indwelt” (author unknown), which I carried in my Bible for many years:

Not merely in the words you say,  
Not only in the deeds confessed,  
But in the most unconscious way  
Is Christ expressed.

Is it a beatific smile,  
A holy light upon the brow?  
Oh no, I felt His presence when  
You laughed just now.

For me, ‘twas not the truth you taught,  
To you so clear to me so dim.

But when you came to me  
you brought  
A sense of Him.

And from your life He beckons me,  
And from your heart His love is shed.  
Till I lose sight of you and see  
The Christ instead.

Truth is clearly important when I witness to others, but do I also bring a “sense of Him” by how I show His work in my life? How I speak, act, relate to those around me should lead others to not only see Christ in me but also to want to know Him more and follow Him. For instance, does my social media presence reflect a faithful witness and bring glory to Him?

When our sons were small, a friend of ours used to tease them by saying, “Your dad is a *decent* human being” — but in an insulting tone.

Sometimes I wonder if I do something similar when I share my faith. Do I say the right words, but in the wrong spirit? Do I turn people away or discourage them by how I treat

them? Do I bring a true sense of Christ to those around me?

As I’ve heard so many times, “You may be the only Bible some people ever read.” I must consider how clearly my faith is expressed in my words and actions. I want to reflect God’s love and faithfulness and inspire others to follow the Lord.

Reflection is a powerful tool, especially when coupled with God’s Word and much prayer. However, that reflection must be an honest look at our actions, words, and motivation.

### Looking to Jesus

So, back to that earlier question I’ve asked myself: If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to convict you? How many witnesses could provide testimony about your faithfulness? And what might that testimony sound like?

May we follow the instructions in Hebrews 12:1, 2: “let’s run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith” (NASB) — and faithfully reflect His love to all around us. **BA**

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#### Marcia Sanders

writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.





by Susan Barnes

Prior to a study trip to Israel in 2014, I understood it was the Promised Land, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” I was not expecting there to be so much desert, so much desolate country, or so many rocks. I’d read the story of the twelve spies coming home with a single cluster of grapes carried between two poles, and I imagined the whole country was extremely fertile. But in fact, these grapes came from a fairly small area: the Valley of Eshkol.

Since my visit, I have read prophecies that speak about the deserts and wastelands in Israel being transformed, and there are lots of them. Like this one from Isaiah 51:3: “For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in it.” Parts of Israel are so desolate, I long to see them as God intends.

When these “fertility” prophecies were given, they were believed to refer to when the Jews would return from the Babylonian exile. But we are still waiting for their fulfillment. In modern Israel, as in ancient times, the authorities use amazing engineering feats to correct the lack of water. They store huge amounts of water underground and divert water sources to ensure adequate supplies for crops and homes. Yet God still longs to bless His people with rain that would turn the wastelands into gardens.

But we are not there.

In Isaiah 2:4, we find this prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war

anymore.” Isaiah 11:6, 8 also tells of a time when

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together . . . The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.

These prophecies refer to a future time on earth. But we’re not there yet.

We live by faith because we don’t see the wolf and the lamb lying down together or children playing near snakes or nations beating their swords into plowshares. We don’t see people being Christlike, but we have hope: “Beloved, *now* we are children of God; and it has *not* yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2, emphasis added).

The *now* in this verse tells me God has restored my relationship with Him through Jesus’ death, so I’m currently God’s child. The *not* yet tells me we’ve not gained all that was lost as a consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin. Therefore, no matter how spiritually mature I become, my garden will still produce weeds, and annoying things will still happen in my daily life.

God’s kingdom is both a present reality and a future one. We have faith because God has more in mind than we presently see. We have hope because we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him. **BA**

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**Susan Barnes** writes from Albury, Australia.





## Questions & Answers

**Has** the church replaced Israel in the promises of God?

**This** important question requires more space than we usually dedicate to a Q&A, so we're taking two pages to address it.

The question probes an obvious difference between the Bible's testaments: the Old is mostly about God's people, the children of Israel, while Jesus Christ and His church are the main focus of the New. Put another way, God's words and promises in the Old Testament were written and directed primarily, but not exclusively, to the Hebrew nation — the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The New Testament's words and promises of Jesus Christ and His apostles, on the other hand, are directed not only to the nation of Israel but also to whosoever will believe and receive them among all nations of the world — i.e., the church.

This question has specific reference to the Old Testament promises of God that were made to national Israel. Many of those promises came to pass in Bible times. But what about the promises in the Pentateuch and the Prophets that never met their fulfillment in Hebrew history? Do we look for their completion in a present or future state of Israel or, instead, in the church of God, of which Jesus Christ is head?

Scripture does not provide a single, clear-cut "yes and no" answer that fits all the many and varied promises found from Genesis through Malachi. So we will need to work at a generalized answer that may not be the same for every single Hebrew promise in question.

Several New Testament texts either imply or speak plainly of Messiah and His people as the new "Israel of God" — i.e., spiritual Israel. These

scriptures tell us that Yahweh's relationship to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Messianic era is not exactly the same as it was in the pre-Christian era. God's promises to Abraham, after all, were not only to the great nation He would make of Abraham's seed but also to all "families of the earth" (Genesis 12:1-3). The book of Hebrews, especially chapters 7-12, affirms that in God's salvation plan, the new covenant in Christ has replaced the old made through Moses at Sinai. Thus the followers of Jesus — both Jews and Gentiles — are now the new covenant people of God, fulfilling the promises of God to Abraham. This truth is echoed in Romans 2:28, 29; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:29; 4:28; 6:16; Philippians 3:3; and Colossians 2:11.

It follows, then, that the thought of Christ and the church "replacing" Israel in the promises of God has strong New Testament support. Second Corinthians 1:20 condenses this conviction into a single verse: "For all the promises of God in Him [Jesus Christ] are Yes and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."

On the other hand, other Bible texts suggest that some promises to national Israel do not fully transfer to the New Testament church. These include Old Testament prophecies of Israel's return to her Promised Land that have apparently been fulfilled in recent years (Isaiah 11:11, 12; Jeremiah 30:8-10; 31:7-12; 32:37-44; 33:14-16; Ezekiel 37:21-28; 38:8-16; 39:25-29; Amos 9:11-15; Zechariah 12-14). They also include the New Testament words of Christ to His disciples regarding a future for national Israel: "You may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30; cf. 21:24ff; Acts 1:6, 7).

Perhaps Paul explains this “yes and no” dynamic between Israel and the church best. Romans 9-11 is his extended discussion about “my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain . . . the promises” (9:3, 4). In this section, Paul earnestly defends God’s faithfulness to His promises made to Israel, while grieving for his unbelieving countrymen, who remain “beloved for the sake of the fathers” (11:28). Paul explores the tension with the rhetorical question “Has God cast away His people?” He answers, “Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite” (v. 1ff).

Paul’s answer unpacks a truth found in the Old Testament itself. “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (9:6). Israel’s story has always been more than biology or nationality. God’s promises have always been tied to His election and a response of faith. Paul insists that God’s promises to Abraham and Israel find their fulfillment in Christ, and that a remnant of Israel has believed and obtained those promises. Paul is living proof (15:8; 9:27; 11:1-7).

In Christ, Israel’s promises (and the promise of Israel) expand and embrace all of the nations, adopting even Gentiles into Abraham’s family through faith (Galatians 3:26-29). Paul goes on to illustrate that, like an olive tree, membership in Israel, with branches grafted in and grafted out, has always been on the basis of faith (Romans 11:11-24).

In Christ, the covenant story of the olive tree and Israel of God continues in the church, containing elect and believing Jews and Gentiles. And though Paul believes unbelieving Israel is presently grafted out, he cannot count her out. Like Jesus, he looks ahead to the fullness and a future

for his beloved, if unbelieving, brethren according to the unsearchable mercy and judgment of God: “Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.” To be sure, the “gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (vv. 25-36).

So, yes! God’s Abrahamic covenant and promises do continue in the church through Christ — for believing Jews and Gentiles, the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). Has God “cast away His people,” Israel? No! (See Romans 11:1.) We watch God’s inscrutable plan unfold with prophetic interest for even unbelieving Israel today.

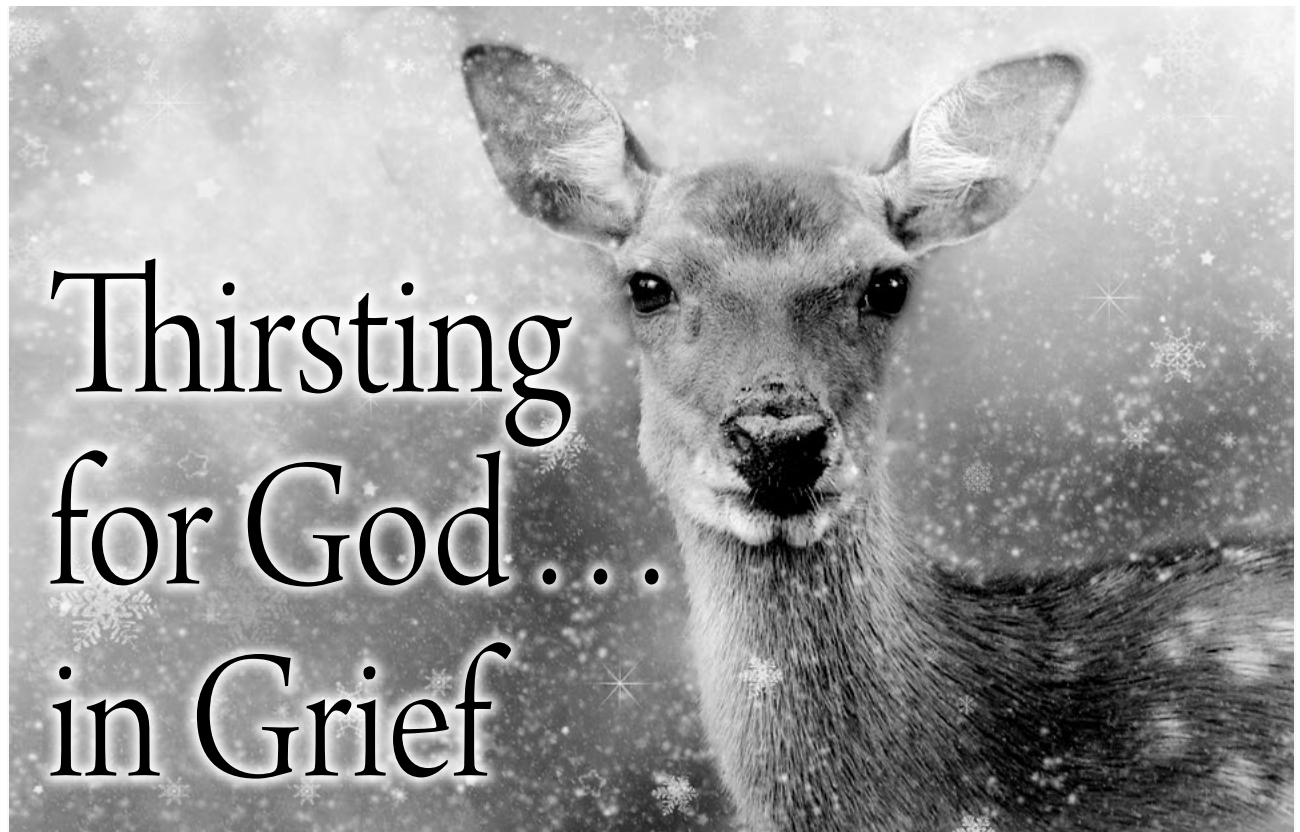
— Elders Calvin Burrell and Jason Overman

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# Thirsting for God... in Grief

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Finding hope for the past,  
present, and future in  
Psalm 42.

by Shirley Brosius

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“We know what’s best for you,” the nurse insisted. She denied my request to see my baby daughter, who had returned to her heavenly Father just hours after her birth. Yes, my husband could see her. But not me.

That set my feet on a road of grief that stretched across years. Few of my family and friends spoke of Christy. And I could barely hear the murmured condolences that came my way. Pregnancy had aggravated a condition known as otosclerosis, and I had lost much of my hearing.

My head felt as though it were encased in a fishbowl.

Most people assumed that since Christy had not been part of our household that I would “get over” my grief and life would go on. But grief denied is grief multiplied. My husband, Bill, held me night after night as I cried.

I held off for a year on the surgery needed to treat my hearing loss. Then a year after that, just as I felt my life as a mother to two young boys was getting back on track, I received the phone call we all dread.

“Early cancer,” the doctor said.

I needed a hysterectomy, and in those days, they put you in the maternity ward to recover. More tears. Would life ever get better?

Yes, God had whispered to my heart through a song, it would.

The week following our daughter’s burial, Bill and the boys went off to church while I recuperated. On the radio I heard the chorus “As the Deer.” The lyrics stirred something within my heart. I recognized the line from Scripture, and I discovered the passage in Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.”

The psalmist felt depressed, yet he remembered what God had done in the past. That gave him hope for the future.

If there was anything I needed, it was hope. I memorized the psalm, and that scripture became my lifeline through the years of grief that lay ahead.

## Deep longing

The psalmist longed to know God better: “My soul thirsts for

God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (v. 2). That became my heart's cry as well. As I lay in my hospital bed, my Bible open before me, the pages at first rattled like dry leaves. Nothing made sense to me.

My congregation had prayed me through a difficult pregnancy. Why would God allow this to happen? How could an infant die in this day and age? Why had God not answered our prayers for a healthy baby?

But that was the very condition I needed to be in when I found this psalm, because I could identify with the psalmist: I truly thirsted for God. I wanted to know Him better, to understand His ways in the world, to experience His comfort and strength.

### Remember the past

The psalmist reflected on the past:

When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast (v. 4).

The Jewish people journeyed to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate three annual feasts: Passover/Unleavened Bread, Weeks or Pentecost, and Tabernacles. They celebrated these pilgrimage festivals with joy and thanksgiving. Even though the psalmist now cried, he treasured fond memories of those special occasions.

The psalmist also remembered particular sites in Israel — from the banks of the Jordan River to

mountain heights. Perhaps those places reminded him of God's faithfulness to the Israelites as they settled in the Promised Land.

Like the psalmist, I reflected on experiences where God had helped me in the past: a serious childhood disease I recovered from; my marriage to a faithful husband; a specific prayer answered when I looked to God for childrearing advice.

While sadness now filled my heart as I passed Christy's tiny grave in the church cemetery, I remembered joyously attending church and volunteering to serve there. These precious memories nurtured hope that life again might be good.

“Just because we know  
God is faithful does not mean  
we do not grieve.”

### Grieve the present

Although the psalmist remembered better days, he still felt depressed: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?” (v. 5).

Just because we know God is faithful does not mean we do not grieve. In fact, expressing grief is essential to bring healing. If we stuff our feelings and refuse to acknowledge them, it prolongs our grief.

I did just that because I felt

guilty verbalizing my emotions. I thought I didn't deserve to mourn. It wasn't as though I had lost a child I had held and nurtured. And after all, I was a Christian. We Christians know that children who die will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, all is well.

But it wasn't well with me. Christy's brief life and death occupied my thoughts.

Years later, I spoke at a women's retreat and shared how much Psalm 42 had come to mean to me. And I cried. Afterward, two women came up and asked to pray with me. I don't remember their words, but their kind gesture brought closure to my soul. I took comfort that I

will see Christy one day in God's eternal kingdom.

### Hope for the future

The psalmist ends the psalm on an upbeat: “Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (v. 11).

I, too, clung to hope that things would get better. A couple years after Christy's death, I enrolled in a seminary to better

*continued on page 24*

## ■ [Focus on the Faithful]



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by Jason Overman

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It is fitting to end our Focus on the Faithful series with John, the beloved disciple and author of the last book of the Bible. In the stories of the Gospels and Acts, we usually find John in Peter's shadow. But as a writer, only Paul was more prolific. And as for distinctiveness (his Gospel, epistles, and apocalypse), John had no peer.

### Love and believe

We learn a lot about a life of faithfulness from the apostle John. Called by Jesus from his fishing boat, John had a relationship with the Master that was the most intimate of all the disciples. We see it when he leans on Jesus' breast the evening of the Lord's Supper. We see it the next morning when he alone of the twelve disciples is at the cross. In these personal moments, the Lord speaks a private word to John, and he shares it with us.

That's the way of things with

John. When we read his Gospel and epistles, so unique among the rest, we sense that we are as close as he was, and hearing from Jesus' own lips. What do we hear from John? That we must love and believe. In fact, no one writes of *love* or tells us to *believe* more than John does. No one comes close. Of all he had to say, these two pivotal Christian words stand out as most meaningful for a faithful life.

### Patience

But the last, and most unusual, book of the Bible is our focus here, and a third word is found therein. As if magnified from the private occasions John shared with Jesus, Revelation is a whole book whispered from Jesus to John and given to us:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John (Revelation 1:1, KJV throughout).

To His beloved disciple and

faithful servant, John, Jesus reveals Himself and the future that will climax in His full revelation, where "every eye shall see him" (v. 7). But many trials and troubles lay between the servants of God and that good future. Thankfully, John tells what's needed to reach that destination as one who possesses it already:

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (v. 9, emphasis added throughout).

Even Paul said that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Like his fellow Christians, John is no stranger to tribulation; he writes from exile on the Isle of Patmos, after all. But John also possesses a virtue essential to faithfulness in turbulent times: the "patience of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9).

In keeping with the significance of the number seven in Revelation, this is the first of



# John

seven times the Greek word *hupomone* is seen in the book. It's rendered "patient endurance" or "perseverance" in other translations. It speaks of a steadfast, unswerving constancy. The remaining six occurrences of the word show how this patient disposition is characteristic not only of John but of the whole apocalyptic church.

To the church of Ephesus:

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy *patience*, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil . . . And hast borne, and hast *patience*, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted (2:2, 3).

To the church of Thyatira:

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy *patience*, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first (v. 19).

To the church of Philadelphia:

Because thou hast kept the word of my *patience*, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which

shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (3:10).

To all the churches:

He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the *patience* and the faith of the saints (13:10).

Here is the *patience* of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (14:12).

Revelation shows how this persevering patience safeguards every area of faith, including works of love, service, and obedience to God's commandments and, in spite of circumstances, enduring all temptation and tribulation.

From John it is easy to see why a patience like this is necessary for a faithful life. But this is not a patience we just muster by our own determination. John calls it the "patience of Jesus." Jesus calls it "My patience." Like

loving and believing, this is a gift of God by the Spirit (the fourth "fruit . . . longsuffering," Galatians 5:22). By it, we endure as Christ did:

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

Between here and the kingdom is tribulation. Between now and resurrection is a cross. Patience is the long bridge, a sister of hope. We endure as John did, on our own Patmoses, because in His patience we are closest to Jesus. We lean in close and listen.

Have you ever prayed for patience? It's maybe the most frequent personal prayer I hear. Patience is essential: "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (10:36). I am praying for it because we are going to need patience to face the future and be found faithful. **BA**



# Feed My

by Whaid Rose

*Editor's note: This article has been adapted from the 2021 virtual graduation commencement message for Artios Christian College on August 7.*

To the class of 2021: You've worked hard. You've earned this moment in the spotlight. You are "class unique," graduating in the midst of a global pandemic! Congratulations!

It's been observed that the eleven disciples who were left to carry on following Jesus' crucifixion aren't given nearly enough credit for all they must have faced in that time of crisis. Even after they knew that Jesus had risen from the dead, they still grappled with what to do next now that the comfort zone they'd so enjoyed for three-plus years was suddenly pulled out from under them. Their sense of community and identity were stripped away; their feeling of vulnerability was at an all-time high.

Seeing it from this perspective, we're better able to sympathize with their plight and identify with Peter, the self-appointed

spokesperson for the group, who promptly suggested that they face reality and return to their old fishing trade. But that first night, they caught nothing. So early the next morning when a Stranger suggested that they cast their net on the other side of the boat, they obliged — and caught so many fish that they struggled to drag the nets back to shore. A flashback to an identical scene three years earlier (Luke 5:6-11) prompted John to recognize the Stranger and tell Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7).

What Jesus does next is touching, to say the least. He cooks and serves breakfast to the motley crew! A fish 'n' chips, you think? Then, as if the others were no longer around, Jesus turns the spotlight on one disciple. The one who, when Jesus asked, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" came up with the right answer: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:13, 16, KJV). The one who, when many of Jesus' followers walked away, declared, "To whom shall we go? You have

the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The disciple who, when Jesus warned of His impending crucifixion, boldly asserted that, unlike his fellow disciples, he would love and defend Jesus even to the point of death (Mark 8:31-33).

To this disciple, named Peter, Jesus turns and asks, "Do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15). Some read "more than these" as a reference to the fresh catch; some believe Jesus is referring to the other disciples. Either way, the point is the same. And when asked a third time, it elicits this visceral response from Peter: "Lord, you know all things" (v. 17). That is to say, "Jesus, You know full well the audacious claims and commitments I've made and how I blew them, every one. You know how fragile my faith is, how my convictions are often eclipsed by my contradictions. So, Lord, what do You want me to say now?"

Here's why this story is so heartwarming. To a disciple struggling with shame over the brokenness of his life, Jesus

# Sheep

comes and lovingly says, “Feed My sheep.” Artios graduates who are pursuing pastoral ministry should give close attention to the shepherding imagery Jesus uses. There has never been a time in modern history when shepherding God’s flock has been more important.

To a world in constant crisis, now compounded by a global pandemic, you are called to love, guide, and protect God’s people. You have the assurance that no matter what, even if you falter and fail, Jesus will never give up on you! And should times get so tough that you feel like quitting, Jesus will come looking for you, give you individual attention, and may even cook you breakfast!

John doesn’t tell us this, but at some point during that exchange Jesus may have challenged Peter along these lines: “What are you doing here? What’s this thing about going fishing? Did you think My death would bring an end to the kingdom I came to die for? Peter, don’t you get it?”

By God’s grace, Peter eventually does. He discovers that the call to follow Jesus involves both suffering and glory in an unstoppable kingdom of love, accep-

tance, and forgiveness. Our only appropriate response is humility and service, traits that mark the remainder of Peter’s life and ministry.

Humility is the outworking of love. Without it, ministry becomes all about us, which betrays Him who said, “I am among you as one who serves” and “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Luke 22:27; Matthew 20:28).

Humility is also the way of the cross, the path on which this fragile disciple matured into a solid rock — so much so that when faced with a second chance to put his life on the line for Jesus, to match words with actions, Peter did so not only willingly, but with much humility. He asked, as tradition says, to be crucified upside down.

“As leaders, we teach what we know, but we reproduce what we are,” says John Maxwell. So the most important thing about us is what we are becoming each day in our walk with Jesus. Therefore, let’s truly “be becoming” Jesus’ disciples, like Peter: called, broken, restored, rock solid, feeding His sheep — all for love’s sake. That’s the aim of our Chris-

tian calling, the goal of spiritual leadership, the passion of Artios College, and the charge to the Class of 2021.

One poet captures it well:

I saw a human life ablaze  
with God,

I felt a power divine,

As through an empty ves-  
sel of frail clay

I saw God’s glory shine.

Then woke I from a dream  
and cried aloud,

“My Father, give to me

The blessings of a life con-  
sumed by God

That I may live for Thee.”

Amen!

BA

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**Whaid Rose**, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership, and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7 congregation. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC.





## Fractured Yet Faithful

The fact that her sister-in-law was with her had made leaving all she had known much easier, especially now that their husbands had died. And poor Naomi had lost not only her husband but also both of her sons.

The easing of the famine in Bethlehem had spurred Naomi to action. "I'm going home!" she announced.

"We'll go along!" Orpah and Ruth spoke as one. Now they were on the road. Adventure!

Orpah nearly bumped into Naomi as she stopped and turned to face them: "I've been selfish to expect you to come. When Elimelech and I first arrived in Moab, it was hard to start over amid strangers, knowing Israel's history with Moab and all." Though they descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew, the Moabites had been considered Gentile — outside the bounds of God's will.

"Moab's your home," Naomi continued. "I've nothing to offer you. Go back to your mothers."

With Naomi's convincing speech, Orpah turned back, beckoning Ruth to follow. But Ruth threw her arms around Naomi: "Oh, please, don't ask me to leave! Where you go, I go. Wherever you live will be my home. You've taught me about the God of Israel! Your people will be mine; your God, my God. The land where you'll be buried will be my grave too. May the Lord God punish me hard if I decide otherwise!"



The village women had much to say. "The famine is over. Naomi's back!"

"She says call her Marah [bitter]! She left full, with her man and sons, and she's come back empty. Lost 'em all."

"Cept for that Moabite's daughter-in-law."

"There she is now. Name's Ruth."

"Heard she's been gleaning in the fields of Boaz."

"My Deborah's been working the same fields. Says Ruth gets special favors."

"He's some kind of relative to Elimelech, her father-in-law." The speaker nodded toward Ruth.

"Reapers drop extra grain, so she carries more home than my Deborah at day's end!"

Ruth worked in the fields of Boaz throughout the barley harvest and in the wheat harvest that followed. *Naomi is getting older*, she said to herself. *What will happen to me once she dies? Naomi taught me to trust God. And that's what I shall do!*

Naomi's thinking was similar. At the end of harvest, Ruth did as Naomi instructed and asked Boaz to take responsibility as the closest relative and redeem Elimelech's property. Under this custom, Ruth, Mahlon's widow, was part of the agreement. A closer relative had refused his right, and Ruth soon found herself married to Boaz. Her security was assured, and the family name continued (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Ruth's thoughts were full of gratitude. *Praise God I didn't turn back to Moab with Orpah.*

The village women were abuzz:

"No more gleaning the fields for the likes of her."

"My Deb says she's very kind to the reapers."

"Naomi's nursing the child."

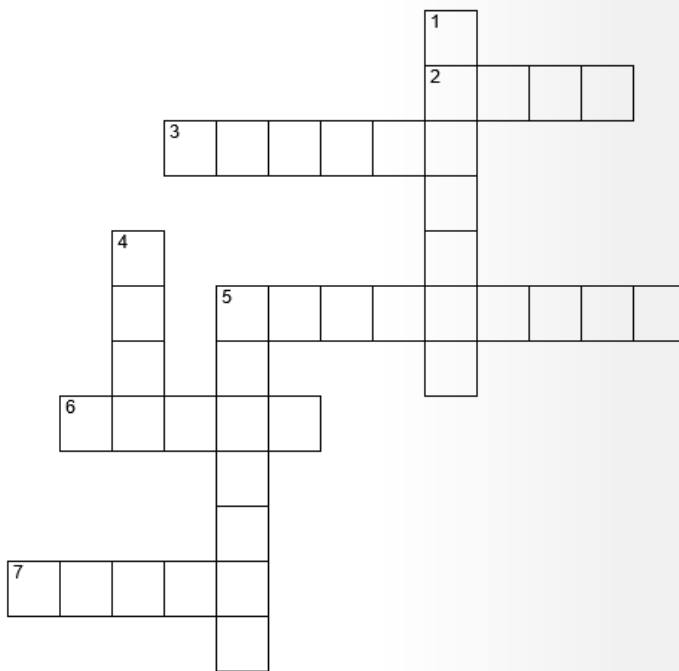
"Obed — a fitting name for a boy."

Ruth's heart was overflowing. *Oh, Father God. I came with Naomi to Bethlehem with nothing.*

*You've given us a faithful family. May you be praised!*

Elimelech's family continued through Obed, Jesse, and King David. And, many generations later, in this same Bethlehem, a Savior — Jesus — was born, fulfilling the promise God had made to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Jesus wants to be your Savior/Redeemer and to secure you for His *forever family* in the earth made new.



## Crossword Puzzle

Read Hebrews 6:13-20 (NIV). Then use words from this Bible selection to solve the crossword puzzle.

### Across

2. A vow, a pledge, a promise
3. This keeps a boat from drifting away
5. Quietly and steadily persevering
6. A man's \_\_\_\_\_ will inherit his fortune.
7. To request God's favor on someone

### Down

1. The redeemed will live with God \_\_\_\_\_.
4. We must not give up \_\_\_\_\_.
5. An intended or desired result

Solution is on page 26.



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# How to Hear from God



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Learning to listen  
as Samuel did.  
by **Bob Hostetler**

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Wouldn't it be nice to hear from God?

For students who are struggling to choose a school, a major, a career; for sweethearts contemplating marriage; for a parent who's worried sick for a child; for an entrepreneur considering a new risk; for nearly anyone who is hurting, floundering, or fearing, it would be so nice to hear from God and gain His perspective, His direction.

Happily, a story in the Bible may offer guidance for anyone hoping to hear from God in matters both large and small.

In the early days of Israel's

history, God's people had hit a rough patch. It seemed to them that God had gone silent. Rarely did anyone hope or claim to hear from God. But there was a young boy named Samuel who lived in the Jerusalem temple and helped the priest, Eli, in his work.

One night Samuel heard a voice calling him. He reported to Eli, but the priest said he hadn't called. After this happened two more times, Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Samuel went back to bed, heard the voice again, and answered as Eli had told him. The Lord spoke and gave the boy a specific, detailed message, which he eventually related to Eli. That story, told in 1 Samuel 3, may suggest seven things to the person who wants to learn to hear God's voice.

**1. Get humble.** God chose to speak to "the boy Samuel" (v. 1). That seems to be a key detail. God spoke not to the priest nor to the priest's haughty sons, but to "the boy Samuel." James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (ESV). It is a grace to hear God's voice — and God gives grace to the humble.

**2. Get quiet.** According to the account, God spoke when "Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:2-4, ESV). That's probably not coincidental. That is often when God speaks — when we get quiet, when we somehow step aside from the haste and noise of life, from the traffic and turmoil, and listen for the "still small voice" of God.

### 3. Get into God's presence.

The Bible says that "Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel" (vv. 3,4). If you would hear God's voice, you must get into God's presence. That's not the same as going to church. Certainly, worshiping with others can usher you into God's presence, but if you are worshiping only with others, you're likely to have a hard time hearing God's voice. The converse is also true: If you are worshiping only by yourself, you're likely to have a hard time hearing God's voice. If you want to hear from God, it helps if you are regularly in God's presence — alone *and* with others.

**4. Get counsel.** If you read the entire passage in 1 Samuel 3, you'll notice that God spoke repeatedly to Samuel. *And* God spoke to Samuel by name. *And* Samuel was slow to catch on at first. Samuel may never have caught on if Eli, though he was not the one hearing God's voice, hadn't given wise counsel to the boy. So it may be in your case. If you believe God is speaking but you're not sure, go to someone you respect, someone who knows God, someone who is spiritually mature. Of course, sometimes we seek counsel when we *know* God is speaking; we just don't like what He's saying. In that case, says Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest*, "Never ask the advice of another about anything God makes you decide before Him. If you ask advice, you will nearly always side with Satan."

**5. Get into the habit of saying, "Speak, Lord."** Every time

you face a decision, large or small: "Speak, Lord." When you lack wisdom: "Speak, Lord." Each time you open your mouth in prayer: "Speak, Lord." As you greet a new day: "Speak, Lord."

**6. Get into a listening attitude.** When God finally spoke, Samuel heard it because he was listening. He wasn't talking, he wasn't singing, he wasn't watching television, he wasn't reading. He was listening. And God spoke. Spurgeon said:

I remember being asked to see a person, and I thought that he wanted to learn something from me; but when I saw him for three-quarters of an hour, he spoke

**7. Get ready to act on what God says.** When God finally spoke to Samuel, it wasn't great news. God said:

"See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family — from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering'" (1 Samuel 3:11-14).

“If you want to hear from God, it helps if you are regularly in God's presence.”

the whole time, and afterwards he told a friend that I was a most delightful person to converse with! When I was told that, I said, "Oh, yes, that was because I did not interrupt the man! He was wound up, and I let him run down."

God is a gentleman. He doesn't like to interrupt, so He seldom speaks unless we are listening.

Samuel was unenthusiastic about relaying the message. But he did. If you want to hear from God, you must be prepared for the possibility that He might say something that doesn't align with your thoughts or preferences. He may reveal things you didn't want to know. But if you aren't prepared to act on what God says, either way, you're probably not ready to hear from God.

That's probably a big part of why God spoke to Samuel in the first place, and not to Eli. To quote Spurgeon again:

One may be a child of God, like Eli, and yet so live that God will not speak with him; and, on the other hand, one may be a child like Samuel, obedient, beautiful in character, and watchful to know God's will, praying, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth;" and then God will speak to you.

If you intend to hear God's voice and then decide whether or not you will heed it, you're not likely to hear God's voice. Hearing is always for heeding.

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). If God has said something to you — urging you to repentance, perhaps, or to surrender or obedience in some area — and you are still saying, "Not yet. . . . Not me. . . . Not that," then it's unlikely He'll say anything new to you until you follow Him in whatever it is.

To those who follow God, however, He will make Himself — and His directions — known, especially as we learn to make Samuel's words our prayer: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." **BA**

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**Bob Hostetler** writes from Las Vegas, NV. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



## Still Waiting

*continued from page 7*

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time, pointing out that "a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8).

People in the past saw signs of end times and the Second Coming in their current events as well. Certainly there are passages describing prophetic events, and we are tempted to match such scriptures to world developments. Rather than focus on signs (good advice in the case of natural or man-made disasters), God's Word urges us to be prepared in our daily lives for Christ's return by abiding in Him. This means to remain, persevere, and continue on as a follower of Christ. Our relationship with the One who is coming, with the One we will rise to meet in the air, is what prepares us "to have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). It may happen soon, or it may not. We are not even guaranteed another day of life.

I believe the Big One in California could happen, and I want to be ready for it. Even more important, I know the Second Coming will happen. It may or may not be in my lifetime. However, my focus is knowing Jesus Christ and following Him as a wise and faithful steward. **BA**

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**Grace Carpenter** lives in Covina, CA, with her husband, Jim. Together, they lead a Bible study in the Ontario, CA CoG7.



## Thirsting for God in Grief

*continued from page 15*

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prepare myself for ministry in Christian education, and my studies eased my mind off my grief.

Many years later, when my sons were grown, they brought wonderful daughters-in-law into my life and then granddaughters and grandsons as well. Twenty years after Christy's death, my son called early one morning and invited my husband and me to come to the hospital to witness the birth of our first granddaughter. Could I return to a hospital delivery room without breaking down?

Our Rachel entered the world kicking and screaming, and in that hospital delivery room, I once again felt God's healing hand. It felt good to be there.

### Key to survival

By clinging to the hope expressed by the psalmist, I survived the depression of my grief. There is no vaccine to guard against depression, but we find help and hope in the message of Psalm 42.

We may need professional help in coping with grief or other situations that cause us to feel depressed. But this psalm and others are available to us day or night, whenever needs arise. **BA**

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**Shirley Brosius** writes from Millersburg, PA.







## Master Artist

The canvas must be silent  
as the artist paints the scene.  
The paper, too, waits anxiously  
while the author shares his dream.

The many lines surrender  
to the architect's keen plan.  
The clay must yield to form  
and shape . . .

in the gentle potter's hand.  
And we, the most unyielding  
of the universal tools,  
must learn to be compliant  
in the way we will be used.  
God works on us throughout  
our lives.

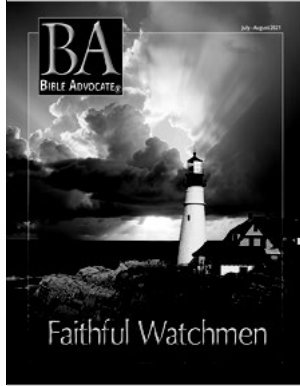
For only He's aware . . .  
behind our masks of make  
believe

A wounded soul lies bare.

Marcia K. Leaser



## Readers Write



### Focusing on the Cross

Let me first state what a superb and valuable Church of God 7th day organization this is that has much to offer the world. You are worthy of my donations as I am able to contribute. For those that don't know, this Church of God 7th day was one of the original pioneering Church of God groups in North America and is still going steady and strong today.

My only concern with the July-August 2021 issue of the *Bible Advocate* would be a statement in Marcia Sanders' article "The Cross-Eyed Watchman" (p. 4): "We can . . . keep the rottenness of sin out only when we focus on the Cross. . . ." However, if we take this statement literally, we would be committing/breaking the first and second of the Ten Commandments: I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.

My conclusion as a perfectionist: Our only focus should be on our Savior, Jesus Christ! Not the instrument of His death.

K. S. R.  
Kenosha, WI

*Editor's note: Thank you for writing. A "literal" reading isn't always the right reading. Marcia Sanders' reference to "the Cross" is much like the apostle Paul's in his epistles. It refers not to the object or instrument, in general, but to what it came to represent specifically in Jesus Christ. Here are three examples:*

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).*

*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14).*

*That He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity (Ephesians 2:16).*

*Paul is not making an idol of the cross in these verses. God forbid! His focus on the cross, and his boast in its message, is for what it signifies: that is, all that God has done in the death of Jesus Christ to condemn sin and bring salvation. In short, to focus on the cross is to focus on Christ himself.*

### Where's the Warning?

After receiving the *Bible Advocate* for many years, I have noticed a number of changes as far as content of the articles and

the focus more on what I would call "feel good" articles. There is nothing wrong with "feel good" articles, but with the situation in this nation deteriorating morally very rapidly, I just don't see many "warning" type articles.

Not that everything has to be a warning, but somewhere I would think that one should "cry aloud and show the people their sins."

I also realize that addressing some issues could easily be branded as "hate speech." But somewhere a stand needs to be made.

W. K. T.  
Tucson, AZ

*Editor's note: Thank you for sharing this critique. I think it is a fair observation. I believe I recently quoted Apostle Paul's line to the Colossians in these pages: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (1:28). I welcome Bible-based "warnings" for the edification of the church. Submit your article to jason.overman@cog7.org.*

### Puzzle Solution (p. 21)

Across	Down
2. oath	1. forever
3. anchor	4. hope
5. patiently	5. purpose
6. heirs	
7. bless	



## New Artios Team Member

We are grateful to announce that Brian Franks will serve as dean of Academic Affairs. He will also continue as pastor of the Tulsa, Oklahoma Church of God (Seventh Day).



Brian is a graduate of LifeSpring School of Ministry (predecessor to Artios) and has served as an instructor for Artios. He holds a master's in Education in Online Curriculum and Instruction, and is scheduled to complete a master's in Divinity in 2022.

Brian brings valuable experience in developing online programs and curriculum, but most importantly, he brings a passion for the gospel and ministry.

— Loren Gjesdal, Co-Director  
Artios Christian College

## Coming in 2022: “Living the Gospel”

Our world has no shortage of bad news today. We do not need to list here all the examples we've seen the last few years; we've experienced them! But for all the bad news, there is good news as well, and Christians are ambassadors of it. Indeed, the bad and the worst have a way of making the good sound all the better.

With this in mind, the *Bible Advocate* is dedicating our six issues of 2022 to what must be the

heart of our faith: the gospel. The Greek word *evangelion* translates to *gospel* in English, and both mean “good news.” What is the good news that we are heralds of? In a single word, *Jesus!* We want to spend the year focused on “the gospel of God . . . concerning His Son” (Romans 1:1-4) and why “the gospel of Jesus . . . [and] the kingdom” (Mark 1:1, 14) is the good news we need right now.

As “Living the Gospel” indicates, believers are heralds of the gospel not only in word but also in deed. We must proclaim the gospel, and we must live it. The word of the gospel is more powerful and persuasive as it flows from a life formed by the good news — *a life that is good news!*

So join our 2022 journey as we explore the gospel. In addition to instructive Bible-focused articles, we welcome your testimonies about witnessing, outreach, and discipleship. Please visit [baonline.org](http://baonline.org) (About/Write for Us) for a breakdown of topics for each issue.

Church of God members can send articles in a Word document, with contact name and submission information, to [jason.overman@cog7.org](mailto:jason.overman@cog7.org). Be sure to review our writer's guidelines on our website for submission details.



**Living the Gospel • 2022 Adult Bible Study Series**

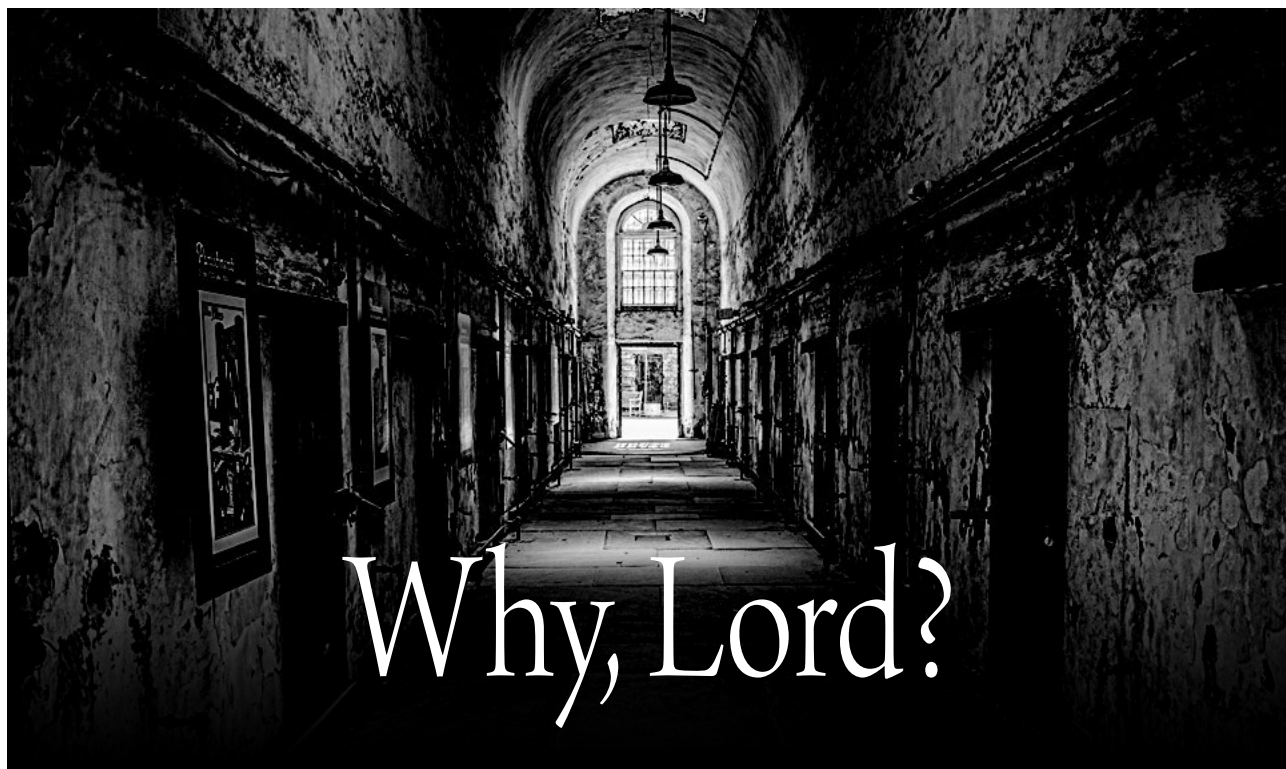
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## Online Extra

Need a new spark in your prayer life? Read “Praying Your Temperament,” this issue's Online Extra.



# Why, Lord?

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Finding my mission in a  
Philippine prison.  
by **Manasseh Mark Bombeo**

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**W**hat is the reason for the hardships we encounter? Why do we have to endure them in our day-to-day lives? Don't get me wrong. It should be a comfort knowing that as we go through trials, there is One who is aware and is always looking out for us. But when struck at that moment, our human nature will always think *Why?* or *Why this?*

## Falsely accused

Like everyone else, I was merely looking for permanent work, something that could sup-

port and build my future and possibly a family. After working for a construction firm for more than two years, I started to have issues with the company. After three months of unpaid salary, I decided to leave. Thinking they were behind me, I started looking forward to my next career opportunity. But I found out that the company was falling apart and that a lawsuit was filed against it. I was implicated in it.

This was no little problem. The company's clients filed a criminal case against it, and I was wrongfully implicated. The legal suit was for no bail and threatened life imprisonment if proven guilty. Though I was confident of my innocence, I was shocked by the threat of spending jail time while the case was run through court. At my age, I had no time for such a hard detour.

Here in the Philippines, "in-

nocent until proven guilty" isn't as it is in other countries. We don't have a jury to decide a verdict. The players of the court have always been the prosecution, defense, judge, and money. In many cases here, the accused was finally deemed innocent after spending years and years incarcerated as they awaited a determination of innocence. I could not accept that this was to be my fate.

## Jailed

In my great distress, I prayed to God, hoping for a rescue, for an intervention. But it didn't come. The law got to me, and I was put in jail. To make matters worse, the pandemic made life inside prison much harder. I was eating only twice a day — once in the morning and again in the evening. Water was limited to

one fifteen-liter container per day, both for drinking and bathing. I slept in a cramped space under the bed of a privileged inmate.

The first few weeks felt unreal — stuff that I only heard about in stories. Now I was really living it. A barrage of negative thoughts flooded my mind, corrupting my heart: *This is going to be my life now.*

The complainant was not budging in response to my poor mother's tearful pleas. This gave me the thought that humanity is hopeless because it doesn't care for truth or what is right, but only for its own interests. I was innocent, but the rest of my relatives were dubious and cynical. My mother suffered humiliation and pain.

Dark clouds built around me, and I sank into my dark corner. With a tired inner voice, I called to God: "Why, Lord?" Like Job, I started to account for my work with God's people — the church, the youth — but I couldn't get a hold of an answer that would make me understand why I was in prison. I spent most of my nights sleepless, tearful, and broken.

The hurt was worse on Saturdays. Sabbath seemed far from me. I tried to sing hymns in my head but always ended up hiding with tears. I sorely missed my fellowship, but it was gone.

In springtime the inmates were allowed to go outside. Although I could do a lot of things, I only stared at the trees beyond the walls of the prison compound, or at the clouds and birds above. The same question continued to ring in my head: *Why?*

## Bible verse

One day that spring, an elderly inmate found out that I used to serve in a church, so he started talking to me about Bible verses he could recall. He strained to remember them. At first I just responded out of respect (in prison, we have to show respect to elders, or we will be punished). He misquoted the verses, and I just ignored it. But then he uttered the words from Jeremiah 33:1-3:

The word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah . . . while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD is his name; call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not (KJV).

I froze, my heart pounding. I couldn't speak. As I stared at him, he continued his sincere effort to convey the meanings of the words in the verses. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was like a voice that I had not heard in a long time. Later that night I got my hands on an old *Good News Bible* and hur-

ried through the pages to the book of Jeremiah. When I got to chapter 33, my eyes caught the end of chapter 32: "For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought this disaster on these people, so I am going to give them all the good things that I have promised" (v. 42, GNT).

My eyes began to get misty, and I could not stop the tears from falling. My heart beat hard, but not from pain; it was warm and comforted. I had felt God despite still being in prison. And like a little boy in a scary place, I was OK because I was holding the hand of my Father.

## Renewal

During church time in prison, I always stayed away because I felt lost. But now I stepped inside and listened to old hymns being sung, and I remembered my Sabbath. I felt it again in my heart. I shut my very wet eyes, raised my hand to God, and asked for forgiveness because I had allowed myself to sink in the darkness and had forgotten His promises. I had forgotten how much He loved me. I asked the Lord to remove my anger for my accuser and my hatred for relatives who



abandoned me. I asked the Lord to give me forgiveness for my old employers, to give my mother a calm heart and comfort. And I asked the Lord to use me for His purpose, that I might serve Him and these people here in prison.

I felt as though a great weight was lifted off of me, and my eyes started to see the prison in a different way. I was renewed. I sent a letter to my mother asking to send her pocket-sized Bible to me. I even worked for a privilege to get a pen and a notebook for myself.

I was on a mission. I found myself preaching to more than seven hundred inmates twice a month. I prayed with them, and some asked for a prayer for them. It was no longer scary; it was a place full of lost souls.

On February 12, 2021 (my birthday), after spending ninety days incarcerated, the judge ruled out my implication as “unjust,” and an order was given for my immediate release. I went back to my family, to my happy mother.

## Righteous reaction

Human as we are, when we are ambushed by tribulations, we often focus, knowingly or unknowingly, on the distress. But we have to remind ourselves what Ephesians 6:12 says — that we are in a spiritual conflict — and then be challenged to walk beyond that. Our carnal nature will always be inclined to respond by the rules — the law of the flesh, our old self. But the Holy Spirit guides us to consider our old self as dead (Colossians 3:3; Romans 6:6) and to rise above it into a new life that is in Jesus Christ.

So what is the reason for the hardships we encounter? Why do we have to endure them? For me, they serve as an opportunity to discover and re-discover that I am holding my Father’s hand all the way through. I see that He has never left me nor abandoned me. He was always there and will always be there because that is who He is: loving and faithful.



**Manasseh Mark Bombeo** attends the local Church of God (Seventh Day) in Tipolohon District 4, the Philippines.

### STATEMENT

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## End the Year Right!

We’ve made it to the end of another tough year. Many families have reunited and churches have opened up despite the uptick in COVID cases. Though the virus lingers in many areas, we can depend on God’s unfailing compassions, renewing each day (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

The *Bible Advocate* continues to make up for financial ground we lost during 2020. As we close 2021 and our Faithful theme, we’re looking to our readers to be faithful stewards of what God has given them. We realize many have been hit hard as well with the pandemic, and times continue to be tough.

When you think of your year-end giving, would you consider a donation to the *Bible Advocate*? You can give safely and conveniently at [publications.cog7.org](http://publications.cog7.org); click on the Donate button. Or give with a check made out to Bible Advocate and mailed to P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233.

For those who have given in 2021, thank you! May God extend His blessings in this New Year!

— BA Staff



## Faithful Promises

Lyrics of a chorus sung among us say, “Every promise in the book is mine/Every chapter, every verse and every line/All are blessings of His love divine/Every promise in the Book is mine.” I sang that chorus with gusto until a friend pointed out some promises within the Bible we do not want to receive. For example, there are promises of punishment made to the disobedient and promises of destruction made to the unbelieving. I certainly don’t want to receive those promises! Every promise made by God will be kept because God is always faithful. But only those promises made to me and that apply to me are truly “mine.”

Even the most basic class in proper interpretation of the Bible will mention the importance of correctly observing any portion of Scripture to determine its context and the who, what, where, when, why, and how within it. Unfortunately, well-meaning people ignore that simple starting point and end up plucking statements of Scripture out of their context and using them to assert things that God hasn’t promised.

One example, as Pastor Andy Stanley points out, is the often misapplied statement of God in Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV): “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” Pastor Stanley points out that in context, this verse, often printed on Christian graduation cards as a promise of future success, is part of God’s statement to the disobedient people of Judah as He was sending them into at least seventy years of captivity. Most of the

individuals to whom this statement was directed died in Babylon! The promise was made to Jewish captives, not to Christian graduates.

Another example of misapplied Scripture is Jesus’ promise: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20, ESV). Prayer or worship leaders often quote this verse to assure us that Jesus is among us as we pray or worship. And no doubt, He is, even when we do so completely alone. But Jesus had been teaching about proper steps to discipline errant believers. It is a specific promise of His support when a church must discipline an unrepentant member.

Certain statements in God’s Word may be considered promises in the sense that God, through His written Word, is promising everyone that these statements are true. An outstanding example of this is Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (ESV). What faithful promises of God could be more important than these? God claims “1) Sin brings death; 2) I freely offer eternal life to those who will receive it; 3) You may receive it in Christ Jesus the Lord.”

God is faithful to fulfill His promises. But before we “name it and claim it,” we must carefully observe the context within which a promise is made and to whom it is made. Not every promise in the Book is mine.

— Loren Stacy



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# Standing Strong

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