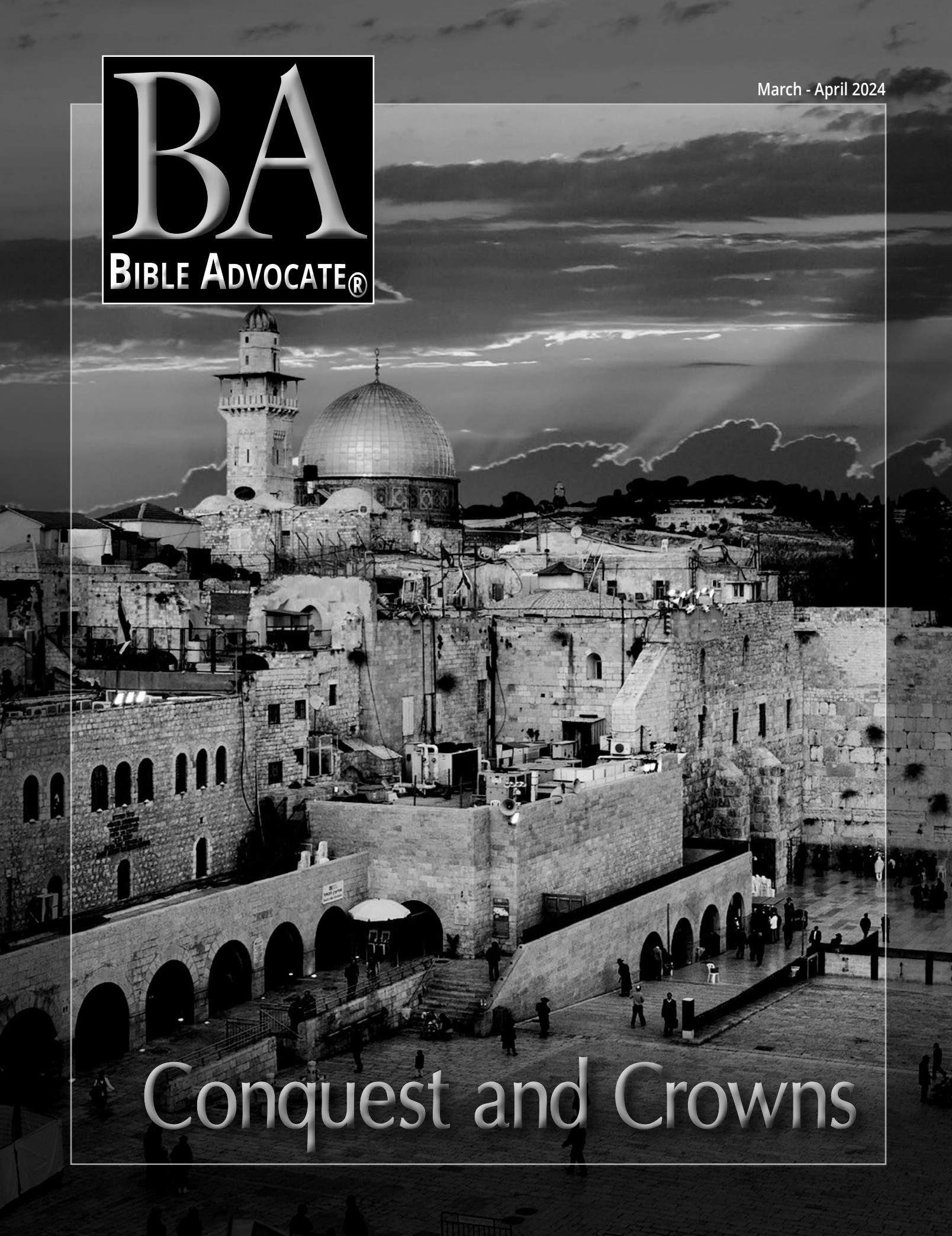


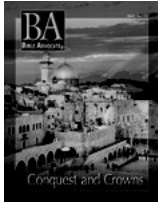
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2024: Meeting God in Scripture



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The Strength of Joy

We continue our journey through the Bible with the twelve books of history. That's a lot of ground to cover. Joshua to Esther spans nearly one thousand years (1400s-400s BC), so we can hit only some highlights and then challenge you to dig deeper.

This stretch of Scripture is full of familiar figures who left a legacy of faith in their experience of God: Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Samson, Ruth, Samuel, David, Elijah, and Esther — to name a few. The theme that emerged as I reflected on these heroes of faith brackets these books.

“Be strong and of good courage,” God instructs Joshua at the beginning. And at the end of Esther we read, “Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Joshua 1:6; Esther 4:14). Then as now, God calls His people to be strong in the face of history and its challenges. We meet God in the process.

My favorite verse in these books is Nehemiah 8:10: “The joy of the LORD is your strength.” Joy is the result of meeting God, and it's the source of spiritual strength and courage. Israel knew joy best in times of God's deliverance (cf. 1 Chronicles 12:40; 15:16, 25; 29:17; 2 Chronicles 7:10; 20:27; 30:26). We must possess joy if we're to be strong and courageous in our kingdom work for Jesus.

I'm happy to report that the joy of the Lord is alive and well in the Church of God (Seventh Day)! I was blessed to experience it in November 2023 while attending the IMC gathering in Nigeria. Delegates from thirty nations were present to do Church business (see report and photos on pages 27-30), but it was the joyous hospitality of our Nigerian brethren that left the biggest impression.

The Church in Nigeria is strong, and it comes from divine joy. It was a wonder to behold, and I thank them for their happy smiles, songs, and service. May that same joy be our strength too — for such a time as this.

— Jason Overman



Surviving Spiritual Conflict

What Jehoshaphat teaches
us about enemy attack.

by **Bob Hostetler**

The new Little League baseball player had just struck out. He ran to his father in tears. “He won’t let me hit it, Daddy!”

The father, although moved by his son’s tears, didn’t complain to the umpire or scream at the opposing pitcher. He gripped his son’s shoulders and faced him squarely. “He’s not supposed to let you hit it. His job is to pitch the ball. Your job is to hit it. *That’s baseball.*”

We may smile at the child’s complaint. But we are not much different when we experience spiritual attacks, when temptations arise and circumstances conspire against us “just when things were going well.” If we are followers of Jesus, we should learn to expect spiritual warfare to come our way.

We should also learn to recognize spiritual conflicts. Not every mishap or misfortune is a spiritual attack. An unusual string of disappointments or setbacks is not necessarily a sign of spiritual warfare.

So what is? And, more to the point, once we recognize a spiritual attack, how should we respond?

Beware of spiritual warfare

There once was a king named Jehoshaphat. Part of his story is recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar” (vv. 1, 2).

The Bible doesn’t say straight out that this was a spiritual attack coming against Jehoshaphat. Biblical authors sometimes revealed that a particular attack came from an evil spirit. But not always.

However, notice that the verses above started with the

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words “After this.” These refer to chapter 19, which describes Jehoshaphat getting his spiritual house in order, starting to make spiritual reforms, and obeying God in a way he hadn’t done before.

That is one key to recognizing spiritual warfare. If you are just loping along, spiritually stagnant, not passionately pursuing God, wholeheartedly obeying Him, or reaching out and sharing your faith with others, you’re not likely to experience a spiritual attack. You might be a pawn in a spiritual attack on someone else. You might have plenty of problems. But if you are not posing any particular threat to influence the devil in this world, then your Enemy will probably leave you alone.

But when you or your church starts to make inroads — perhaps in new or adventurous ways — into the Enemy’s kingdom, you should beware of spiritual attacks. Just because things go wrong is no guarantee that you’re on the right track. But if you’re on the right track, you will be under attack.

So how do we survive spiritual conflict? Jehoshaphat’s example when he had to face an approaching army of Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites also provides a helpful guide for how we’re supposed to respond to spiritual attacks. In fact, he did four things that we can emulate.

Seek the Lord

Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed,

they came from every town in Judah to seek him (vv. 3, 4).

Jehoshaphat sought God’s guidance. He proclaimed a fast, uniting God’s people in humility, submission, and concentration on their need for God and His help. And he prayed. The Bible says Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah came together “to seek [God].”

If we want to overcome a spiritual attack, we must seek the Lord, listen to Him, engage in a fast, and focus our prayer efforts. We must humble ourselves and confess our sins. And we must pray, perhaps like never before.

Acknowledge your weakness and God’s strength

The second key to overcoming spiritual attacks is to acknowledge your weakness

withstand you. . . . But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (vv. 6, 10-12).

God longs to deliver us from the devil, but He will not do so until we let go of the reins of our own lives. As long as we think we can get through with our own cleverness or good looks — or even on our own “spiritual-

“If we want to overcome a spiritual attack, we must seek the Lord.”

— and God’s strength. The story continues:

“LORD, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can

ity” — we cannot survive spiritual conflict.

We must come to terms with our own helplessness, or we won’t be prepared to survive spiritual conflict. And we must acknowledge God’s strength, reminding ourselves that nothing is too difficult for Him, including

anything our Enemy may throw at us.

Acknowledge that the battle is not yours

When under spiritual attack, we must remember that we cannot engineer, manipulate, or strategize a victory in our own strength, as the biblical account makes clear:

All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD. Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the

Jehoshaphat did nothing. He still had to assemble his army and march them to a certain place and take up positions. But when Jehoshaphat had done all God told him to do, God did what Jehoshaphat could not do.

It's the same when we face spiritual attacks. We *have* a role to play. We *have* weapons. It's just that, as 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4 says, we live in this world, but we don't fight our battles as the world does. Our weapons are empowered by God "to demolish strongholds." Letting God fight for you can be a tough position to take, especially if you like to be in control. But for us, as

19, when Jehoshaphat revived the worship of the Lord, restoring righteousness to Judah — obeying God in new and exciting ways. But then he received the news that the sky was falling, and enemies were throwing everything they had at him.

So when Jehoshaphat and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord, they had come full circle. The enemy was defeated already, even before the cavalry left the stables, because they refused to give the enemy a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Thus, when the people arrived at the battlefield, "they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped" (2 Chronicles 20:24).

Our tendency when the Enemy attacks is to panic. We may start arguing among ourselves. We may let little irritations become major conflagrations. We may be distracted from the things that invited the attack — which may be exactly what our Enemy wants.

But we must be wiser than that. We must stay focused on God, keep our eyes on Jesus, concentrate on worshipping Him, obeying Him, serving Him, and leading others to Him, whatever anyone else may do. We must use the weapons God gives us: submission, trust, worship, prayer, and fasting. And then we may not only stand but may see the Enemy run. **BA**

“We live in this world,
but we don't fight our battles
as the world does.”

son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's'" (vv. 13-15).

Jehoshaphat didn't even have to fight that battle; God did it for him. That doesn't mean

with Jehoshaphat, surrender and trust mark the line between victory and defeat.

Renew your commitment

The episode continues: "Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20:18).

Take a moment to think back: What started the attack? The catalyst seems to be in chapter

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



Spotlight on 1 Samuel

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But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (16:7).

This book connects eras in the history of Israel. The time of judges was nearly over, the time of the kings set to begin. The year was about 1000 before Christ.

Aide to a priest, faithful judge, courageous prophet, and anointer of kings, Samuel was the human link between Judges and Kings. Like Christ — the prophet, priest, and king — he was miraculously conceived, dedicated from his mother's womb, and grew in stature and favor with God and man (1; 2:26). He is among the most noble and consistent of God's servants in Scripture (Jeremiah 15:1; Hebrews 11:32).

Mostly historical, the two books of Samuel also contain lofty moral and spiritual teachings. In them are the successes and sins of King Saul and King David.

Samuel's résumé

- As a lad, he served Eli the priest in God's house and heard God's call (chs. 2, 3).
- He spoke the word of the

- Lord to all Israel (4:1; 7:3ff; 12:1-35).
- He judged Israel as a circuit rider from his home (7:6, 15-17).
- He prayed without ceasing for Israel (7:5-9; 12:17-23).
- He warned the people who clamored for a king (8:1-22).
- He anointed Saul as Israel's first king (chs. 9, 10).
- He served with King Saul, confronting his failures (chs. 11-15).
- He anointed the boy David to succeed Saul and mentored both (16; 19:18-24).
- He died and was later "recalled" in a séance between Saul and the witch of Endor (25:1; 28:3ff).

Memorable words: "Speak [LORD], for Your servant hears" and "To obey is better than sacrifice" (3:10; 15:22).

Saul's résumé

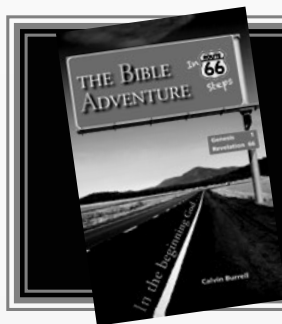
- Tall and handsome, seeking his father's lost livestock, he was anointed by Samuel, received the Spirit, was acclaimed king, and led Israel's

- armies to victory (chs. 9-11).
- His unlawful sacrifice, foolish oath, and refusal to obey grieved Samuel and brought his downfall (chs. 13-15).
- Plagued by evil, he requested a musician to refresh his spirit. Jesse's son David came to play his harp and be his aide (ch. 16).
- David's popularity increased, as did Saul's jealousy. He tried often to kill David (chs. 17-27).
- With God departed, he sought counsel from a spiritist and was slain (with his four sons) by the Philistines (chs. 28, 31).

1 Samuel in a sentence:

Israel's era of judges ended with righteous Samuel, and its kingdom era began with disappointing King Saul, whose envy of the promising young David drove him to irrational behavior and premature death.

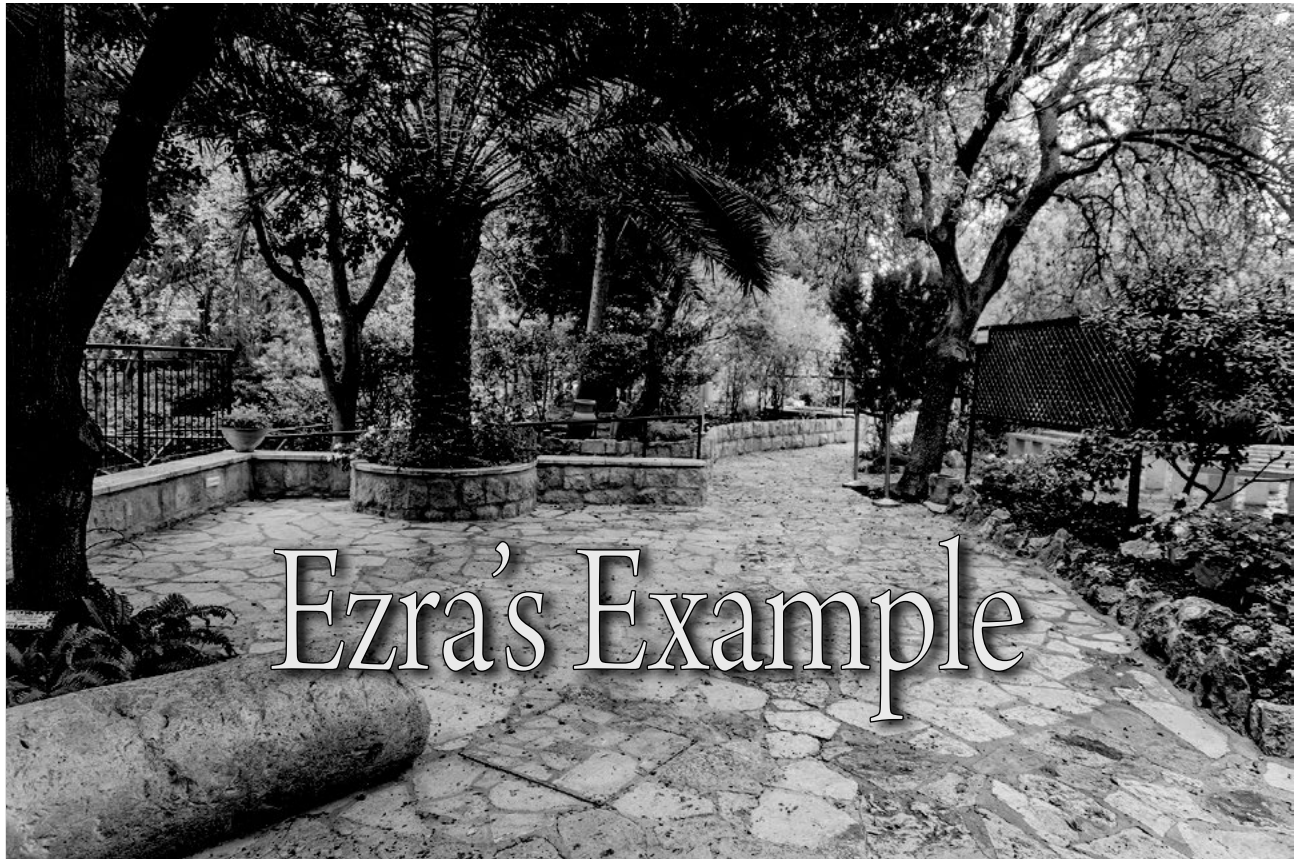
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Studying, obeying, and
teaching God's Word.
by **Caroline S. Cooper**

God is patient and kind, holy and righteous. We see these attributes in the way He responded to His people after calling them out of Egypt. They witnessed God's power through the plagues He brought on the Egyptians and the parting of the Red Sea. Yet a short time later, the people who had been delivered by God bowed down to a golden calf as Moses received the Ten Commandments on the mountain above. The new nation continued to exhibit

a pattern of faithful obedience followed by idolatry and rebellion throughout their wilderness journey and settlement of the Promised Land. They sinned, experienced judgment, repented, and sinned again. God forgave them and delivered them, time after time after time.

When the people finally asked God to appoint a king to reign over them like the nations around them, He agreed. He does not force His rule on anyone. Only Saul, David, and Solomon served as kings of Israel before the people's disobedience and disagreements became so severe that the nation split. After the people ignored God's pleas through the prophets, judgment fell on the Northern Kingdom (Israel) when the Assyrians took them captive in 722 BC.

God sent Jeremiah and others to warn the Southern Kingdom (Judah) that desolation would come to them as well, and the people would be taken to Babylon if they did not return to the Lord (Jeremiah 25:11-13). In the same breath, God revealed His plan for restoration.

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive (29:13, 14).

Captivity

God is true to His word. The Southern Kingdom survived until 586 BC, when the Babylonians stormed Jerusalem. Many people were taken captive, while others were left in Israel to fend for themselves or die. Those taken to Babylon were expected to leave their way of life and assimilate into the culture of that land.

Fifty years later, the Babylonian Empire had given way to Persia, which reigned over the still-captive Israelites. Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire. It included Persia, Media, Babylonia, and Chaldea, as well as smaller countries.

During this time, Ezra served as a priest and scribe in Babylon. Although the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, Ezra, a man intimately acquainted with the law, had undoubtedly kept up with his task of reading and studying God's Word — the Law, or Pentateuch. It is possible Ezra brought scrolls with him when he was taken captive.

Proclamation

In the first year of his reign, Cyrus felt the prompting of God's Spirit and issued a proclamation that represented the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy: "All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:2).

The first six chapters of Ezra tell the story of the remnant of Israel (men from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with the Levites) returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under

the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (6:15).

Chapter 7 begins the second part of the book of Ezra and describes Ezra's journey to Jerusalem, with permission and provision from King Artaxerxes. Throughout his life, Ezra lived in captivity, had limited opportunities to teach the Bible, and encountered trials and threats while physically rebuilding city walls. But through it all, he stayed faithful to the Lord. His relationship withstood the tests and trials because of his preparation and

“Ezra served
as an instrument
in fulfilling
God's promise of
restoration.”

practice: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (7:10).

These spiritual disciplines weren't just interesting facts about Ezra. We can glean three lessons from them if we desire to grow in our relationship with the Lord.

Study God's Word

Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD.

As a scribe, Ezra performed the hard, tedious task of pouring over scrolls, comparing passages, scribbling notes, and prayerfully asking God to reveal the truth of His Word. Ezra did not open his laptop and search for interesting Bible facts in his favorite search engine. He couldn't compare Bible translations, consult commentaries, or discover the number of times a specific word appeared in the text. The *New King James Version* says Ezra "prepared his heart" to seek God's Word. Other translations say he had "determined to study" (NLT), "set his heart to study" (NASB), "committed himself to study" (NIRV), and "devoted his life" to study (GNT). Scripture was Ezra's passion.

Paul gives us insight into why it is essential to continue studying these ancient writings:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

In addition to these practical benefits, we are blessed when we study God's Word because we grow in a more intimate relationship with the Lord. We get to know our Father, the King and Creator of the universe. We discover the humility, kindness, courage, and power of our Savior. And we experience the

presence, guidance, and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

But knowing God's Word and its Author is only the beginning.

Obey God's Word

[Ezra had prepared his heart] to do it.

Once we know God's Word, it's time to follow it. Ezra knew his position as a priest demanded a commitment not only to studying God's Word but to carrying it out in his life, bringing glory to God as a spiritual leader. This must have been difficult while residing in a foreign land. The Israelites could not follow God's commands for sacrifices, offerings, and festivals. But they could live out the moral laws that set them apart from their captors. Again, a difficult task while being assimilated into the Babylonian culture.

Daniel, however, had proven in the early years in Babylon that this could be done (1:8-16). After being tested by eating only foods God considered clean, Daniel and his friends proved that following God's way would not diminish their work for the king. Ezra might have followed their example.

As Christians, we too must obey God's Word. Because Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17), we are not commanded to follow every sacrificial law in the Old Testament but to bring glory to God as we obey His laws, teachings, and commands. As James says, we must do the Word, not just hear it (1:22).

To be a doer is to commit your entire life to Christ. In fact, Jesus connected obeying Him

with loving Him: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15; cf. vv. 21-24).

Teach God's Word

[Ezra had prepared his heart] to teach statutes and ordinances.

The final chapters of Ezra (8-10) give details on who returned with Ezra and some of their attempts to be faithful to the Lord's commands. In the book of Nehemiah, we read about Ezra's God-



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ordained assignment to bring God's Word to the people. Nehemiah 8-10 records the impact on the people when they heard Ezra read it.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their

hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground (8:5, 6).

It is possible many of the people listening were hearing Scripture for the first time, yet they responded in awe before Ezra read one word.

God fulfilled His prophecy, delivered through Jeremiah: judgment and restoration. The captives taken to Babylon experienced the consequences that came with sin and disobedience. But the next generation — a remnant of Israel — was restored to their home with a new appreciation for God's words.

Ezra served as an instrument in fulfilling God's promise of restoration. As he opened God's Word, the people were reminded that God is patient and kind, holy and righteous. He keeps His promises. When we obey His Word, we will be blessed. And when we teach His ways to future generations, as Ezra did, we will witness God's saving and restoring power for all who believe in His Son.

Modern Ezras

We can learn so much from Ezra, beginning with setting our hearts to seek God. We can be assured that if we truly seek Him, we will find Him — right in the pages of His Word. **BA**

Caroline S. Cooper
writes from Harrisonville, MO.



Questions & Answers



In the conquest of Canaan, did God command genocide? If so, does that justify national aggression today?

No, God did not command genocide, nor does the conquest of Canaan justify national aggression and war today. God's overarching command was to "drive out" the inhabitants of Canaan. The biblical emphasis is not on Israel driving them out by their own strength or determination, but on God driving them out Himself (cf. Exodus 23:28-31; 33:2; Deuteronomy 7:22; 11:23; 18:12; Joshua 3:10; 13:6; 14:12; 23:9).

God gave two reasons to remove the Canaanites from the land: "because of the wickedness of these nations . . . that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Deuteronomy 9:5).

In other words, Joshua's conquest of Canaan reflects two divine attributes: God's judgment on evil and His faithfulness to His promises. Both reasons originated in God's promise of the land to Abraham when "the iniquity of the Amorites [was] not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). So the conquest of Canaan is not a pattern for human warfare but reflects the unique prerogative and power of Almighty God alone.

That said, like the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah stories, some examples in the conquest describe the destruction of every living soul. I assume that the question is directed to these verses:

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep . . . with the edge of the sword. . . . And they struck all the people . . . with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing (Joshua 6:21; 11:11).

Again, divine judgment on gross wickedness is in view. Still, the question reveals our struggle to accept and submit to the awesome sovereignty of God. Romans 9 says:

But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? (vv. 20, 21; cf. Job 33:13; 36:23; 42:2-6; 1 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Timothy 6:5).

Jesus says the same: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?" (Matthew 20:15).

God is good and righteous. Yes, He commanded Israel to drive out and destroy the Canaanites, but only after delaying judgment for four hundred years (Genesis 15:16). Plus, only those who resisted were destroyed. Others, like Rahab and the Gibeonites, were spared. In the end, Israel failed to drive out many of the inhabitants (Joshua 13:13; 15:63; 17:13).

Sometimes people judge God for His mercy. They see evil and say, "Why doesn't God do anything?" But when God acts, as He did in Canaan for abominations like child sacrifice, people judge God for that too!

These stories of terrifying judgment point to the final judgment. God gives us time to repent, but judgment is coming. Second Peter 3:9-12 says that the promised day of the Lord's wrath will come upon all evil. Why is it taking so long when the world is so evil? Because God is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But judgment will come, just as it did on the evil Canaanites.

— Elder Chip Hinds



Seeing God in the book of
Ruth.

by R. Herbert

Many people who read Ruth think of it as a simple love story, but in reality, it is far from simple. And it is not really a “love story” in the modern sense of romantic love either. Nevertheless, this short Old Testament book is a richly meaningful biblical story that can repay a great deal for a little background study.

The first thing we should realize is that the central character is not really Ruth but her mother-in-law, Naomi. In reality, the book tells us far more about Naomi than it does about Ruth. The book begins and ends with Naomi, and when we look

carefully, we find that the narrative revolves around this woman throughout most of the story. Every event leads back to her. We can see how central Naomi is to the story when we realize that, of the words spoken by all the characters in the book, 120 are spoken by Ruth, while 225 — almost twice as many — are spoken by Naomi. It might be hard to find another story in which the supposed heroine speaks half as much as one of the supporting characters!

Foreshadow and fulfillment

For some, the story holds allegorical meanings, with Ruth representing humanity, Boaz representing Christ, and Naomi the Christian church that brings the two together. While this kind of symbolic interpretation may

seem attractive, almost endless variations exist regarding the symbolism that is supposedly involved. For some, Naomi represents the old covenant and Ruth the new covenant. Others see yet different meanings. When we consider all the possibilities, we realize it would be difficult to discern which, if any, allegory might properly explain the book.

On the other hand, when we look closely at it, the book does contain an underlying theme — within the story itself — that undeniably foreshadows the gospel. At the beginning of the story, Naomi first loses physical sustenance in the time of famine and then loses her husband and sons. But when she hears that the Lord has restored food (literally, “bread”) to Israel (1:6), she leaves the region of Moab to travel back to Bethlehem

(meaning “house of bread” or “house of food”) in the region of Judah, called Ephrathah (meaning “fruitfulness”).

Naomi’s words to her daughters-in-law at that time reflect her emptiness. She tells them, “Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?” (v. 11). Having lost her original home, her husband, and her sons, Naomi is figuratively empty. When she arrives in Bethlehem, she summarizes this: “I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty” (v. 21).

In Bethlehem the narrative turns to describing the change from emptiness to fullness, both physically and figuratively. Verse 22 says that the barley harvest was beginning and that Ruth goes to the fields to pick up the leftover grain with Naomi’s blessing (2:2). As the story progresses, we see Ruth moving from simply gleaning in the poorest parts of the field to receiving more and more in the better areas from the hand of Boaz (vv. 14-18).

This “filling” of Naomi with physical bread precedes the figurative filling that occurs with the redemption of her property and the birth of “her” new son, who comes as a result of the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. The filling of the empty, through God’s grace, underlies the whole book, which begins with stressing emptiness and concludes with stressing the fulfillment of good things.

When we see the centrality of this message in the story of Ruth, we realize the importance of the list of names that concludes the book. Humanly, it is easy to see it as just an appendix that functions like the credits at the end of a film. Some even suggest

this closing genealogy may have been added later. But if the book was composed by Samuel, as many scholars believe, there is no reason the genealogy could not date to that time. In any case, the genealogy forms the ending of the book as it was accepted into the canon of Scripture. It leads, of course, to David, the king who became the ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Bread of Life

In that sense, the book of Ruth prefigures a double fulfillment, found first in David and then in his descendant, Jesus. This is because David was a messianic (“anointed”) king in ancient Israel (2 Samuel 23:1), but he also foreshadowed a much greater Messiah (Isaiah 9:1-7).

The parallels between the messianic David, mentioned at the end of Ruth, and the later messianic figure of Jesus Christ are many and obvious. Both David and Jesus were born in Bethlehem, the city of bread that is the setting of most of Ruth. Just as David was prophesied to become king from Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1), so was the greater King who descended from him (Micah 5:2). David, who provided bread for his people (2 Samuel 6:19; 1 Chronicles

16:3), foreshadowed the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and who would provide that spiritual bread for the salvation of His people (Mark 14:22).

Perhaps we can see a reference to this ultimate fulfillment, described in Ruth, in the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the annunciation of His conception. She exclaims that God fills “the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:53). This is, in fact, a perfect summary of Ruth’s message and what it foreshadows — a message about the God who provides not only physical bread for those who walk with Him but also, through Ruth’s eventual descendant born in the “house of bread,” the sustenance of salvation. In fact, we meet the God who provides for both Naomi and all His people, physically and spiritually, as clearly in the book of Ruth as in any place in Scripture.

Next time you’re feeling empty, read Ruth and remember whom it points to: Jesus, who satisfies our deepest hunger. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds an earned doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



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**Remember:
Lord’s Supper
Sunday, April
21, after
sunset**

When God Speaks



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by **Emily Acker**

Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10).

I remember hearing a song when I was a child, where God calls out to Samuel and Samuel responds, "Here I am." At the time, I didn't know that Samuel's response in the song was the same as that actually recorded in the Bible (vv. 4-8). I imagined it had been changed somehow to make it child friendly and an easy story to remember. Reading through 1 Samuel 3 as an adult, I am in awe of the whole story of Samuel's life. And I see that his response was real. He said those words when he heard a voice call out to him in the night.

Born because his mother begged for a child, Samuel was brought to stay with Eli, the priest, when he was young. His mother had promised God she would do this, and she followed through on her promise. She released him from her home and care and handed him over to the One who had given him to her in the first place. Samuel was already living a life vastly different from most children when God called out to him personally and shared a message with him.

I think of how I respond when I hear God's voice or feel His nudging. Do I automatically tell Him to speak and then take the time to listen as Samuel did, even at a young age? Or do I continue with my life, not really paying attention to what He is sharing and not giving His words the

chance to sink in and affect what I believe and the way I am living?

Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And [Eli] said, "It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him" (v. 18).

Eli's response after Samuel shared God's message with him is something to take note of, just as Samuel's response to God's voice is important. Eli knew that anything God said, He would do. He had witnessed God working before and understood that God keeps His promises. Eli was open to God doing what He was planning to do. He trusted that what he did would end up working out for the best for him, for Samuel, and for their land. He wasn't going to fight God or try to get Him to act differently.

When God speaks in our lives, even if we hear Him clearly and try to obey Him, we are tempted to either doubt Him or argue with Him. Sometimes I struggle to believe He will actually do what He says, and other times I want Him to work differently than how He plans to work.

God knows best, though, both in Samuel's day and in ours. He is ultimately in control. He is going to keep all of His promises, and He has a plan for my life. I can trust Him as Eli did, listen to Him as Samuel did, and know that He is both promise keeper and king. What God says goes — and that is for the best. **BA**

Emily Acker writes from Plover, WI.



David Discovers

Real Courage



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by **Marcia Sanders**

“Why so glum, David?” Papa asked. “You look like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders.”

“Ahhh . . . it sounds silly to talk about,” David answered.

“Try me.”

“I want to be courageous,” David explained, “but it seems that when I get into scary situations, I freeze up. When do you get to the place where you’re no longer afraid of anything?”

“Not silly at all,” Papa responded. “And I’m afraid the answer to your question is ‘never.’ You never reach a point in life when you no longer know or feel fear. But with God’s help, you can stop letting fear control you.”

David frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“Well, let me see if I can explain it.” Papa thought for a moment. “Do you remember the story of Queen Esther in the Bible?”

“Yeah, I think so. She helped save the Jews in her country when a bad guy wanted to destroy them all.”

“That’s right. But did you know she was scared? Terrified, in fact! She did not want to be the one to go to the king.”

“Why not?” David asked. “She was his wife. Surely it was safe for her to talk to her husband.”

“Not when her husband was the king,” Papa explained. “If someone approached the king without being sent for, they would be put to death unless he reached out his scepter to them. And he had not asked to speak to Esther for over thirty days.”

“Wow! No wonder Queen Esther was scared.”

“But her uncle Mordecai told Esther that she may have been put in the palace just so she could help save her people. Even though she was frightened, Esther told him to have all of the people pray for her. Then she put on her royal robe and went to the king. Can you imagine how scared she must have felt? But the king reached out his royal scepter to her, sparing her life.”

Papa went on. “I’m sure her fear didn’t end there, though, because she had to tell the king that his most trusted aid was up to no good. This man wanted to kill all of the Jews, and Queen Esther was a Jew. She was careful in how she explained it to her husband. Plus, God impressed on the king to re-read some historical accounts, and he learned that Mordecai had never been rewarded for the time he’d saved the king’s life.

“When the king learned that, he wanted to make it right with Mordecai. Then he found out that the evil Haman was planning to hang Mordecai, so the king ordered Haman hung instead.”

“Wow!” David exclaimed. “I see what you mean. Being brave isn’t about not being scared. It’s being scared and still doing the right thing and depending on God to help you do it.”

Papa smiled. “Yep! Now let’s go read the whole story.” **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



The God Who Would be Known

The Lord is a warrior. He will fight for you.

It has been said that history is written by the victors. Nations tell stories of wars and the great men who won them. But the Bible's books of history are different. Joshua to Esther do tell of many great battles and heroes, but the record is more interested in theological truths than national glories.

Unlike with any nation before or after, Yahweh entered into a covenant with the biblical nation of Israel, and her conquests and kings reflect this relationship. Her history records as many defeats as victories, as the first two battles of Joshua show. We all remember the miraculous battle of Jericho, but this is immediately followed by the disastrous defeat at Ai for the sin of Achan (Joshua 6 and 7).

These two battles establish a pattern that persists throughout the Bible's books of history. Judges tells the story over and over. When Israel is faithful to God, she wins wars. But when she is unfaithful to Him, she loses not only the battle but freedom itself.

However, woven within all these stories is a fundamental truth that Israel must not forget. Found first at the Red Sea, this truth will dominate her national history and identity:

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD . . . The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. . . . The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name" (Exodus 14:13, 14; 15:3, KJV).

Though always implicit, Joshua cites this extraordinary claim explicitly in the third great battle in the conquest of Canaan. After taking Jericho and Ai, he gains a huge victory in the battle against the five kings (10:42). At the end of his

life, Joshua frames the whole conquest of Canaan in this context:

"You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you" (Joshua 23:3).

Israel does not boast in armies or arms. As Gideon illustrates, God prefers to save by a few, rather than many (Judges 7:2). Israel should live by the prophet's maxim: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6, KJV). As young David told Goliath: *It's not by spears or swords but by the name of the Lord* (1 Samuel 17:45).

This truth bookends Israel's books of history. Second Chronicles 20 records her victory over Ammon and Moab. Israel is told, echoing Exodus:

"Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. . . . You will not need to fight in this battle. . . . stand still and see the salvation of the LORD . . . for the LORD is with you" (2 Chronicles 20:15, 17).

King Jehoshaphat leads the people out to battle, and they simply sing praises to the Lord. He does the rest. "And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms . . . when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel" (v. 29).

Israel's history tells who the true conquering King is: the Lord of Hosts. Her story is not a strategy, nor a justification, for nations and wars today, but it is good news for the church to know and trust that the Lord fights for us.

The Scarlet Thread of the Messiah

Anticipating Jesus in the Books of History

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Throughout the Torah, the scarlet thread wove its way intricately, revealing and pointing toward Messiah, but the weave becomes even clearer in the books of history. A seed is promised to Eve, the mother of all, and then to Abraham, the father of the family from whom the Messiah would come (Genesis 3 and 15). But in 2 Samuel 7, God enters into covenant with David, and the promised seed becomes the promised son of David, and of God:

“I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-14, 16).

We recognize Solomon as this son, but the “forever” throne and kingdom of David anticipates a Son, and King, to come.

God had promised Abraham and Sarah long before that kings would descend from them (Genesis 17:6, 16). In the books of history we meet them. Already in Ruth, the lineage to David is found (4:17). As a man after God’s own heart, David becomes the paradigmatic “good king” whom all the kings after are measured by: “And he did [or did not do] what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done” (cf. 2 Kings 18:3; 16:2, et al.).

The dynasty of David, through Solomon to Jehoiakim (Coniah), would end in exile and curse for gross wickedness (2 Chronicles 36:8-10; Jeremiah 22:24-30). But the promises of God to David are irrevocable, and as the ten royal

psalms foretell, the everlasting throne of David comes through a Son and King to come (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144). He will unite heaven and earth as Son of David and Son of God.

The New Testament begins with confirmation that Jesus Christ is the son of David (Matthew 1:1). He is the righteous King to which the scarlet thread stretches.

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

Remarkably, these early references to Jesus as David’s son are repeated throughout the New Testament (Matthew 9:27; Mark 11:10; Luke 20:41-44; John 7:42; Acts 15:16; Romans 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:8; Revelation 22:16).

We tend to jump over genealogies, but think of them as signposts of hope, showing God’s faithfulness to all generations to the coming of the Messiah! Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah all record a genealogy.

Prophet, Priest, and King: Second Samuel 7 also refers to Israel’s three anointed offices that populate the pages of the books of history. The Messiah (the “anointed one”) would fulfill all three anointed roles: the *prophet* to deliver God’s word, the *priest* to mediate God’s mercy, and the *king* to govern with God’s justice. **BA**

— Jason Overman



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Defining

by Loren Gjesdal

The nation Elijah lived in was ruled by corrupt leaders, and it had abandoned the worship of God. Sound familiar? Elijah alone was willing to risk his life to see his countrymen turn back to God. Yet just after his greatest triumph, when it seemed that success was finally at hand, we find Elijah calling himself a failure and asking God to end his life.

How did he get to this point? Is there something we need to learn from Elijah to persevere in God's work today?

Discouraged prophet

Recall Elijah's boldness to appear before King Ahab, despite having a bounty on his head, and his faith to initiate a showdown with the priests of Baal. Elijah's passion and heart motivation are revealed, however, in his simple prayer: "Answer me, LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that You, LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back" (1 Kings 18:37).

Not only did fire from heaven consume Elijah's sacrifice in response, it consumed the very

stones on which it was laid (v. 38)!

Now Elijah's mission would surely be fulfilled. And for a moment it seemed as if revival — a return to wholehearted devotion to Yahweh — would prevail in Israel. But just a couple of days later, we find Elijah hiding in the wilderness, sitting under a broom tree, and assessing the situation with these words: "Enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers" (19:4).

Our times are similar to Elijah's. There is no shortage of articles, podcasts, and messages decrying the corruption of our national leadership and moral decay of society. Often accompanying those observations are calls to rise up in outrage to oppose the prevalence of evil. There is an increasing frustration with what is perceived as declining Christian influence in our nation, both politically and morally.

Don't complain to Elijah, though.

Elijah expected regime change after what happened on Mount Carmel. The king was a personal witness to the power of God, and the people had taken up swords to kill the priests of Baal. But the very next day, Queen Jezebel, the true power behind

the king, gave this edict: "So may the gods do to me and more so, if by about this time tomorrow I do not make your life like the life of one of them" (v. 2).

There was no uprising to defend God's prophet or to purge the opposition to the living God from the throne of Israel. Nothing had changed. So bold Elijah fled for his life in profound despair. When God asked why he was in such a state of depression, Elijah answered:

"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of armies; for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life" (v. 10).

Elijah inferred from these events that his ministry was a failure, his efforts fruitless, his life's calling pointless, and he asked to be put out of his misery. But what was God's response?

"Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and powerful wind was tearing out the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces before the

Success

LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire, a sound of a gentle blowing (vv. 11, 12).

God granted Elijah time to lick his wounds, to rest and recover from his deep disappointment. God then gave him a gracious gift — the revelation of His most effective method of influence: gentle patience. Then He sent Elijah back into the fray, to continue serving Him as His prophet.

Lessons from Elijah

We are not in Elijah's shoes — yet. But we can learn things from him if we are to persevere in accomplishing God's will in a hostile culture.

- Define success by obedience, not results.
- Appreciate the wisdom of God's gentleness over man's anger.
- Praise God for His patience.

Even though Elijah was willing to call his life a failure and die, God was not finished trying to reach wicked Israel. In fact, God

doubled down and performed twice as many signs and wonders through Elijah's designated successor, Elisha. But the signs and wonders, even fire from heaven, didn't bring lasting revival. Expressions of power alone don't change hearts.

We have another simple lesson to learn from Elijah: Trust and obey. If we are to persevere even when we seem to stand alone, even when we cannot see the possibility of making a difference, we must define success by being faithful. Let God produce the results in His time and His way.

Peter shared a similar message with the early Christians living under wicked rulers in a hostile culture. He told them to appreciate God's gentle patience, remembering that the gentle move of God's Spirit first wooed us to Him: "and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you" (2 Peter 3:15).

As much passion as Elijah had for seeing his nation and people turn to God, he could not match God's compassion for His people. God granted him a re-fresher, gave him a re-orientation

in methodology, and recommissioned him to pick up his mantle and resume the work.

We, too, are called to pick up our cross and follow our Savior, to obediently, compassionately call a rebellious generation back to God with gentle patience. Let His example be our definition of success. **BA**

Loren Gjesdal is co-director of Artios Christian College and co-pastor of the Marion Church of God (Seventh Day) in Oregon. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



**Online
Extras for
March-April**



What's in a Name?

by Lydia Harris

What Makes a Hero?

by Bob Hostetler

Visit baonline.org.

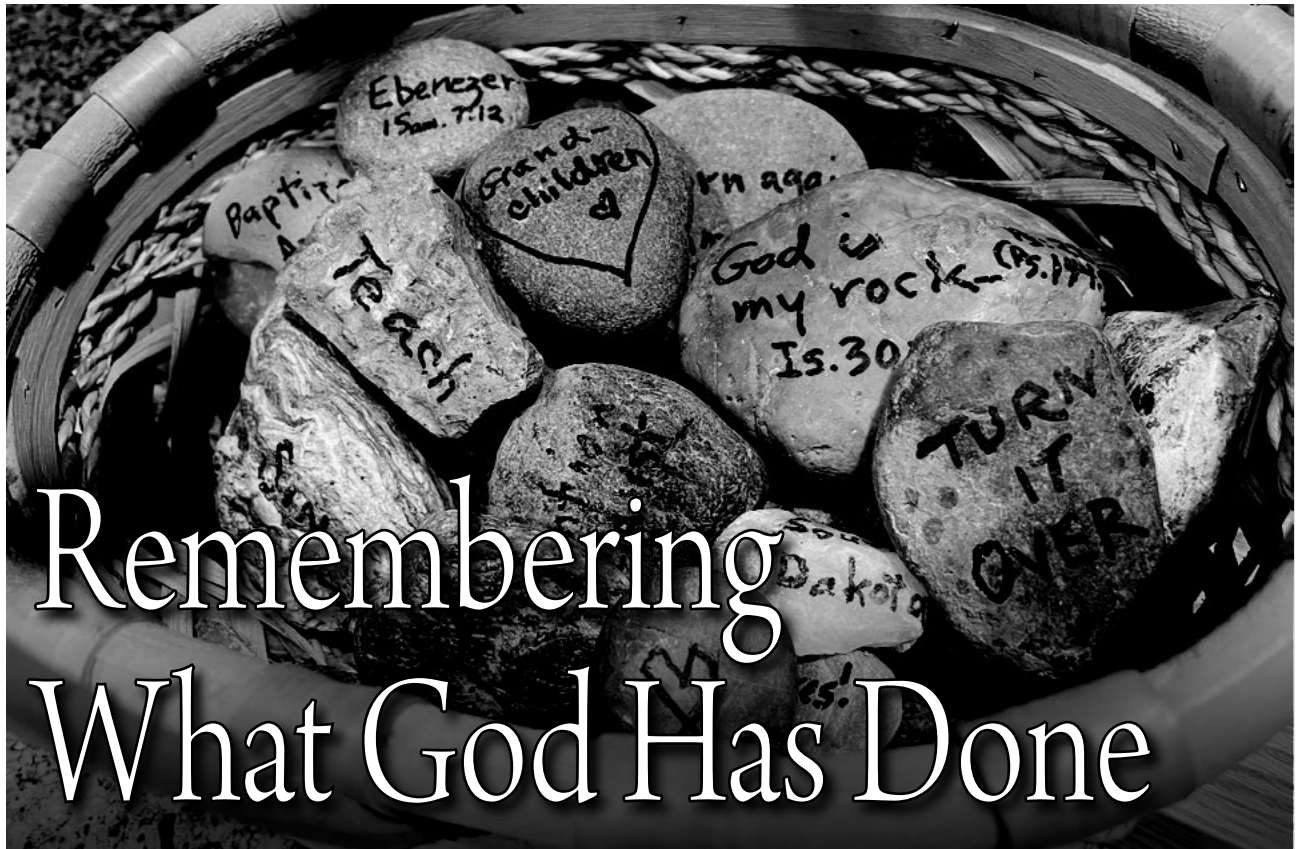


Photo courtesy of Yvonne Kays

Remembering What God Has Done

Ways to commemorate our
'Stone of help.'
by Yvonne Kays

He has caused his wonders
to be remembered (Psalm
111:4, NIV).

When we are going through hard times, dark times, the Lord tells us to remember — that nothing is impossible with Him and that He is with us. Comfort can come if we recall times in the past when He has come to our aid. God's miracles and promises bring hope and courage to help us face our tribulations.

Bible monuments

The Old Testament has many examples of God instructing the Israelites to use stones to remember.

In Exodus, God instructed Moses to inscribe the names of the sons of Jacob on two onyx stones, six names on each, to be worn on the shoulders of the high priest above the breastplate. The breastplate itself was set with twelve precious stones, each inscribed with a name of one of the twelve tribes, and it covered the high priest's chest. All of Israel was represented before the Lord, a reminder of the Lord's promise to always be with them and care for them (Exodus 28:12; 16-21).

In Joshua, before the Lord stopped the flow of the mighty

Jordan River in flood season, He instructed Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe. After the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the water, the river stopped flowing, and all of Israel safely walked on dry ground into the Promised Land (3:14-17).

Joshua then instructed each of the twelve men to pick up a large stone from where the priests still stood in the riverbed and carry it on their shoulders to where they encamped for the night (4:1-5). There in Gilgal, Joshua formed a monument to remember God's mighty miracle, and declared, "These stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever" (v. 7).

Samuel also used a stone to help the people remember God's

faithfulness. When the powerful Philistine army was coming to attack the Israelites, fear ran rampant and the people begged Samuel to pray for them. Samuel sacrificed a perfect lamb, and, while he was still praying, the Lord scattered their enemies. The Israelites pursued them and were victorious (1 Samuel 7:7-13), so Samuel set up a large stone and called it *Ebenezer*, which means “stone of help.” He then declared, “Thus far the LORD has helped us” (v. 12).

The theme of stones continues in the New Testament. Jesus is called the Cornerstone and Peter calls believers “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5, 6). And some day, the Lord tells us, He will give us a white stone with a new name written on it (Revelation 2:17).

Personal applications

One day in my Bible study group I understood the significance of these remembrance stones. A dear friend shared a story about the small basket of rocks she brought into the class. She had used the stones to share her testimony at a family reunion. On each stone, she had used a pen to write an event that celebrated God’s working in her life: being born into a Christian family, the day the Lord came into her heart, her baptism, her marriage, and other occasions.

I decided to create my own basket of remembrance to share my testimony with our grandchildren. As I found rocks to represent special gifts and moments from the Lord, I thought the grandchildren could begin to collect their own stones of remembrance as God did extraordinary things in their life.

My husband liked the idea and offered to make each child a denim drawstring bag with their name embroidered on it. They were all young then, and I decided to meet with them alone or with one other sibling. Putting the rocks I gathered into a large basket, I created an outline of what I would tell them and listed some stones they could start with:

- Share Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Choose a black-and-white-streaked rock and write *Sin* on it.

- Talk about the gifts and talents the Lord gives each of us, and see if they have a talent that they recognize. Write it on a rock, and encourage them to look for new talents.
- Add a heart-shaped rock and write *Loved*. Remind them that God loves them always, and so does their family.
- Ask if God has done something else special in their life that they want to remember. I was amazed when one of my grandsons shared that he had seen an angel as a young child.

“When we are going through hard times, dark times, the Lord tells us to remember.”

- Share John 3:16 and choose a red rock. Draw a cross on it to represent Jesus’ redeeming blood that paid our debt.
- Write *Family* on a rock and the date they were born. Mention the blessing of a Christian family surrounding them and going before them.
- Find a rock near their home. Write *Home*, their state, and the date.
- If they have prayed to ask Jesus into their heart, write *Saved* and the date.
- Write *Friends* on a rock and talk about those they see as good friends in their life.

We talked about adding a stone of remembrance every time God did something special in their life, as when the Lord answers a prayer or does something amazing. So when our grandchildren moved to Hawaii for a season, they all added a Hawaiian rock to their bag. As each got baptized, we added a *Baptism* rock.

Blessings

Recently, our oldest grandson, home from college in the summer, surprised me when he pulled out his denim bag and

continued on page 25



Esther and the Jews

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Peace, war, and anti-Semitism — then and now.
by Sarah Whitney

A few days after October 7, 2023, it became evident that the war in the Middle East was more than just another skirmish. The words “never again” ran through my head. I grew up reading stories about the Holocaust. Instead of having nightmares of a boogeyman, I dreamed of running from enemy soldiers or hiding people in my closet. I wondered how a Christian pacifist like me would react in a similar scenario. What if other people wanted to annihilate them and their people?

These thoughts led me to the story of a woman long ago who found herself in just such a situation.

Esther the orphan

We first find Esther, an orphan, in the home of her cousin Mordecai. As I reread her story, I noticed Kish was in her genealogy. I remembered he was Saul’s dad.

Esther was from the tribe of Benjamin and was called a Jew, referring to the kingdom of Judah. Here we find people who, a few generations ago, were at odds with each other (Saul, a Benjamite, and David of Judah), now identifying themselves as one people. Esther lived in the Persian Empire. It seems Mordecai felt vulnerable because when Esther was chosen to try out for queen, he counseled her to not reveal she was a Jew.

Sadly, some Jews are again feeling the need to conceal their Jewishness. My heart cries out: *Never again!* We say it, but history is proof that it is *again*. And again. There are times, then and

now, when hiding one’s identity is necessary for survival.

Esther the queen

The charming queen was careful to take advice and not make waves. The Persian King Ahasuerus loved her and threw a lavish party in her honor. But after that, he seemed to forget she existed. Esther was well cared for, with a whole staff to entertain her and perhaps a bit oblivious to the happenings outside the palace — or even within it.

When a man named Haman began to rise in authority, Esther was blissfully unaware. While Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, Esther was bathing in perfume. Mordecai sat at the king’s gate waiting for word on the girl he had tried to protect all her life. In time, he would need her to save him and their whole nation.

Esther the peacekeeper

When Esther's maids reported that Mordecai was wearing sackcloth, Esther sent him some clean clothes. He returned them. So she sent her eunuch, Hathach, to find out what was wrong (4:5). He returned with a shocking story, yet there was the proof right in front of her. Mordecai had sent a copy of the new law (v. 8). It was written in several languages to make sure everyone understood: The Jews must be killed!

Mordecai had a request: Esther, the queen, should talk to the king and beg for the life of her people.

But Esther was hiding her identity, being careful not to make waves. Besides, there was another law Mordecai should know about: No one was allowed to go before the king uninvited. That could mean death!

Mordecai replied with a reminder for her: The people of God will be delivered one way or another, but bad things happen to people who ignore the sufferings of others (v. 14).

Still today, some want the Jews destroyed. I don't want to believe it. I cry out: "No, never again!" But it seems every generation has a Haman, or a Hamas.

Esther the intercessor

Esther decided to try, knowing the risk. She first asked people to fast and pray. Then she went before the king — uninvited. Good news! He was happy to see her and told her whatever she wanted was hers. She invited the king and Haman to two banquets and, at the second one, begged for the lives of her people.

Esther went before King Ahasuerus a second time (8:3). Though Haman was dead by then, the law was still in effect. She pleaded with Ahasuerus to reverse the law, but that was impossible in Persia. Mordecai and Esther were given authority to do what they could to help their people.

When I heard about terrorists horrifically attacking unarmed people last October, the law Mordecai wrote finally made sense: Defend yourselves and your families (v. 11). Sadly, on October 7, 2023, many Jews, and other vulnerable people, did not have the means to defend themselves.

The Jews of Esther's time rejoiced because their children, pregnant women, and elderly people were not tortured and killed that day, or the next. Esther started a holiday called Purim, so that the people of God would remember the day they could have died — but lived! (Purim is Sunday, March 24, this year.)

Today some people think that the Jews shouldn't be allowed to defend themselves. I don't want war, but should they sit silently and watch the annihilation of their loved ones? I understand the impulse to fight back. "Never again!" I repeat the words as I

remember that time before I was born. And yet here we are again. Is there hope?

Esther and the Prince of Peace

I used to believe that everyone, deep down, wanted peace. If we could just invite both sides to dinner, they would come to a rational understanding and realize war doesn't accomplish anything. I wonder if that's what Esther was hoping when she prepared a banquet for the king and Haman. Sometimes our own efforts aren't enough. We need a miracle — divine intervention — to bring the peace we long for.

Jesus is the solution! He is the only one who can bring real peace. Jesus says in John 14:27, "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." Not only does Jesus give us peace in our lives today, someday He will bring peace to the whole world.

One day there will be no more war: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

continued on page 25

“It seems every generation has a Haman, or a Hamas.”

Traversing

Traversing the valley of the shadow of death,
Like David from our biblical past,
We are never alone in our suffering.

Life continues to exact its punishing toll,
Where a few missed breaths may mean eternity,
Traversing the valley of the shadow of death.

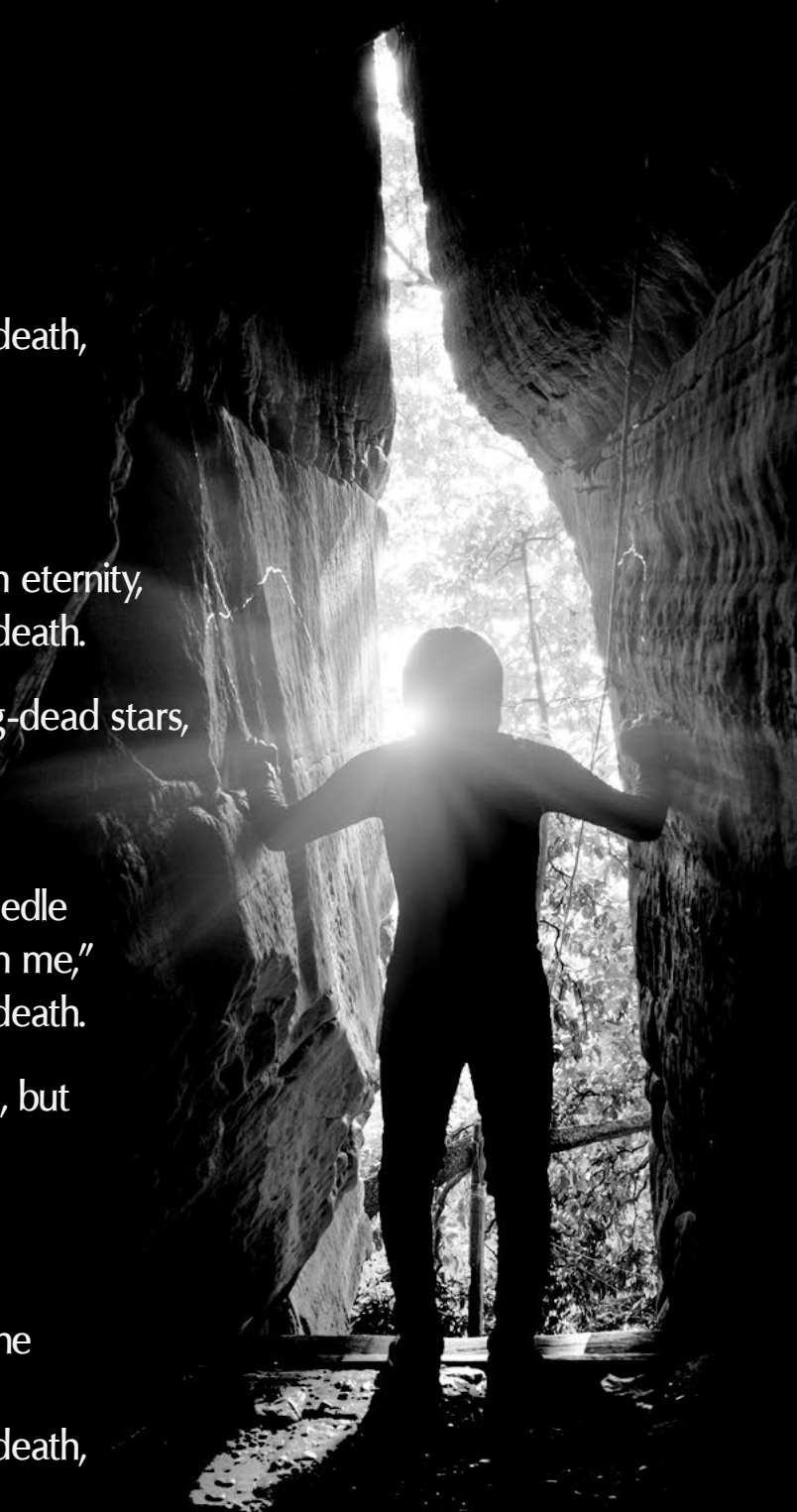
As light that continues shining from long-dead stars,
During moments of snuffed-out hope,
We are never alone in our suffering.

Being threaded through the eye of a needle
Like Job, "What I feared has come upon me,"
Traversing the valley of the shadow of death.

We become accustomed to everything, but
departing,
Yet God stands with us in our trials.
We are never alone in our suffering.

As runners about to break the tape in the
Final — most important — race of life,
Traversing the valley of the shadow of death,
We are never alone in our suffering.

Robert B. Robeson



Remembering What God Has Done

continued from page 21

shared a few new rocks he had added. I rejoiced to see how God had used these stones of remembrance to bless him and help him remember God's faithfulness and love. After his wedding this summer, I gave him an opal heart rock with *Marriage* written on it and the date.

Stones of remembrance have blessed our family. Maybe some sturdy stones could help you share special moments too. **BA**

Yvonne Kays

writes from Bend, OR.



Esther and the Jews

continued from page 23

Finally, the words "Never again" will be realized. War will cease. We will live in a beautiful, peace-filled world. In the meantime, perhaps the most powerful weapon we have as Christians is the one Esther used: prayer. **BA**

Sarah (Lemley)

Whitney writes from Kalama, WA, where she lives with her husband, Luke, and their three children.



Bible-Based Riddles

Joshua — Esther

Who Am I?

I surveyed and got people engaged to build and restore.
Did not trust those, not of us, who kept knocking on our door.
Weapons in hand I kept to our plan and finished gates and wall.
Sabbath observed and people purged, I truly gave it my all.

When husband and sons died I changed my name.
Relative gleans wheat and barley, so I am sustained.
Near kinsman takes a shoe and marries daughter-in-law, too.
Life becomes sweet again; the Lord made things anew.

A prophetess under palm tree I judge Israelites.
Barak I tell, "Go fight the Canaanites".
He's not strong, I must go along, so victory to a woman goes.
Praise to God belongs, we sing in song; He conquered all our foes.

Zidonian, worshiper of Baal, husband king of Israel.
A Carmel test for my table guests, the prophet I assail.
Vineyard acquired, husband expired, eunuchs gave me flight.
Skull, feet and hands was my last stand, on Israel I was a blight.

I am a Hittite and one of David's mighty men.
David tried to use me to cover up his sin.
He took my wife, committed sin, God's word defied.
Joab puts me in heat of battle so that I would die.

Answers on page 30. Excerpted from 250 Old Testament Riddles by David Keith Robinson. Used by permission.



Global Church: A New Era

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In November 2023, delegates from thirty nations met in Nigeria, West Africa, for the meeting of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC). It was historic and special for several reasons.

First, it was the first time the IMC was held on the continent of Africa. This was indeed an extraordinary occasion that will be remembered by those in attendance.

Second, we saw the birth of what is now the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation as a global church. Following its 2016 Congress in Argentina, IMC President Ramon Ruiz appointed a committee tasked with fulfilling the mandates of a resolution approved by the Congress in session: to prepare a plan for the creation of a global Church of God (Seventh Day) organization. The plan would be presented and discussed for possible adoption during the next IMC meeting.

Members of the Global Church Administration Committee were Whaid Rose (chairperson, US), Ramon Ruiz (IMC president, Mexico), Bryan

Cleeton (US), John Klassek (Australia), Paulo Jorge Coelho (Portugal), Robert Crawford (United Kingdom, Africa), and Tluang Kung (Myanmar).

Thanks to the committee's dedicated efforts, the global church organization bylaws were successfully presented, discussed, and eventually approved after several amendments by the attending delegates.

We are now in a new era. The old has passed, and we now look forward to new beginnings. Change carries with it challenges, but by the grace of God, I am confident that we can navigate those to the glory of God for the growth and development of the global Church of God.

Having been elected as the first president of this new Federation, I have accepted this position with much humility. I am conscious of the awesome responsibility of providing leadership for God's people around the world. I want to thank God for Pastor Ramon Ruiz, and the great service he has given over many years to the IMC. His work and contribution will never be forgotten.



I thank God that I am not alone. I am surrounded by a wonderful group of brothers who I know are committed to the task. Together I know we can accomplish great things through Christ.

As the Federation, we have carefully considered our vision, purpose, mission, and authority, which I will share in brief with the hope that we will embrace and take ownership to God's glory.

Vision: The Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation is a fellowship of churches and conferences, connected across this world, yet united in its diverse gifts, talents, cultures, and callings. Its corporate identity is in its commitment to the centrality of Christ and the observance of the Ten Commandments including the Seventh Day Sabbath (Rev 14:12) as it increasingly reflects the image of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12) and thereby achieving a greater vision than the sum of its individual parts.

Purpose: The purpose of the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation is to facilitate the development, unity, and growth of its churches and conferences around the world, forming them into a cohesive and vibrant Christ community. The Federation joyfully fulfills its unique role in the greater Body of Christ, and in the world, through the transformative power of the gospel, teaching biblical truths and its application, until Jesus returns.





Mission: The Mission of the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation is to achieve by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, its stated vision and purpose through an administrative structure that is defined by Godly leadership, measurable goals and objectives, clear communication, a sustainable financial model, with innovation and creativity in an environment of trust, mutual accountability, and a commitment to assist, encourage, and understand one another. The Federation prayerfully embraces Jesus' heart for the church He is building – in reconciling lost humanity to God, through Jesus' blood for the glory of the Father to the ends of the earth.

Statement of Authority: With Christ as its head (Colossians 1:18), with the Bible as its sole authority for doctrine and Christian conduct (2 Timothy 3:16), with its commitment to walking a healthy balance between autonomy and interdependence (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2-5), and with its bylaws and organizing documents, the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation retains the right to function as a global ecclesiastical entity, to seek and protect the spiritual well being of its members, to conduct the business of the church, including the faithful stewardship of finances, to protect itself against liability and civil interference, and to protect its membership and material interests.



As members of the board, we share the vision, purpose, and mission of the Federation. However, I crave your sincere prayers for us, so that we will continue to be led by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the mandate of the Federation to the glory of God.

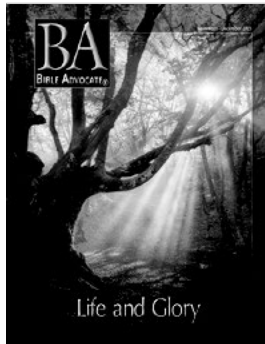
On behalf of the board, I express my sincere appreciation to the leadership of the Nigerian conference, and in particular to Brother Felix Obuah, whose hospitality, love, and care for the delegates exceeded all expectations. May the Lord continue to bless them for their labor of love.

*Robert I. Crawford, President
Church of God (Seventh Day)
International Federation*





Readers Write



Understanding Jeremiah 29:11

When I read your editorial in the [November-December '23] BA ("A Future and a Hope"), it struck a chord with me. When I saw Jeremiah 29:11, I immediately quoted it word for word from memory in the King James Version.

I prefer the word *peace* (KJV) in place of *prosper* as some versions have it. In Webster's Dictionary, I feel that some may take *prosper* to mean increase in monetary wealth. I'm of the opinion that *prosper* in God's dictionary has nothing to do with money. . . .

After my wife passed away, a family friend sent me a sympathy card. I was not familiar with Jeremiah 29:11, so I looked it up and memorized it but could not see what was in it for me. Over the next several weeks I kept mulling that verse over in my mind. One day as I was on my way to pick up some machinery parts, I was shedding tears over the loss of my [wife]. All at once I felt a peace come over me like none other that I had ever experienced. It was as if the weight of the whole world was lifted off of my shoulders. I was then

shouting praises to the Lord and crying tears of joy instead of sadness. I felt like this was the message [of Jeremiah 29:11] to me that my friend wrote in that note with the sympathy card.

I would like your permission to copy your editorial and send it to my friend. She is 90+ years old and still very much alive.

Incidentally, Jeremiah 29:11 is inscribed on my headstone. . . .

J. C.
Cotulla, TX

Editor's note: Thank you for sharing your heartwarming story. God bless you. (And I like the KJV's peace better than prosper too.) Feel free to share my editorial with your friend. Blessings in Jesus Christ, our true hope and future.

Timely and prophetic

"Threads of Prayer," by Lydia Harris [November-December '23], is a reminder of the great value and glory of prayer. Her account was inspiring. Jason Overman's article connecting two well-known verses (I could quote both!) to then, for the Jews, and now for us and those to come is so timely. In fact, the magazine's theme to close out the year, "Come and See," is prophetic! Only God could have known what would occur in Israel on October 7. But then, through the Holy Spirit, BA produced hopeful articles for such a time as this. "As the world falls apart. . . ." But God!

K. B.
Port Saint Lucie, FL

"Sandwich Generation"

Editor's note: The following comments were posted in response to a Now What? story, "Surviving in a Sandwich Generation," which addresses a unique challenge in caring for aging parents.

This article is wonderfully written and thorough in its explanation of the complexity of caring for aging parents while still raising children. [I'm] better because I read it. Thank you for the education!

F. D.

This is a great article! It should be very helpful to many people.

R. B.

This is beautifully written and powerfully stated. I believe these words will remind many they are not alone.

S. M.

Riddle answers (p. 25)

Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:11-20; 4:15-18; 13:15-31)

Naomi (Ruth 1-4)

Deborah (Judges 4, 5)

Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:19; 19:2; 21:15; 2 Kings 9:30-37)

Uriah (2 Samuel 11:3-21; 1 Chronicles 11:41)



Now Therefore Arise

The opening sentence of Joshua is epic. “Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying, ‘Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel!’” (Joshua 1:1, 2, NASB throughout).

This is God’s direct call of Joshua. He probably expected it because he had long served God, Moses, and the people of Israel as Moses’ right-hand man. Numbers 11:28 describes Joshua as “the attendant of Moses from his youth,” and Numbers 27 reveals that God had Moses formally identify Joshua as his eventual successor (vv. 18-21). I imagine that Joshua and everyone else would have been amazed if God had not spoken to Joshua following Moses’ death.

Still, God’s call upon Joshua must have been unsettling to him for a number of reasons. It came directly from God, not through someone else (“the LORD spoke to Joshua”). It came at a time when Joshua was grieving the loss of Moses (“Moses My servant is dead.”), a loss that left a major leadership vacuum. And it was so blunt: “Moses is dead. Now you’re in charge. Get up and lead.” Wow!

There can be no doubt that Joshua was a capable person. He demonstrated his potential on different occasions in different roles and responsibilities. However, up until this moment (God’s direct call), it was always under the supervision of Moses. Moses had been ultimately responsible. But now, he was gone, and Joshua was responsible. He must have felt the weight of the responsibility he was being given. Was he up to this calling? Could he step into Moses’ sandals?

God immediately provided promises and admonitions perfectly designed to encourage a person who needed encouragement: “Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (v. 5); “Be strong and courageous” (v. 6); “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go” (v. 7); “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (v. 9).

Did God’s encouragement work? Yes, it did! Verses 10 and 11 read: “Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ‘Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it.’”

Joshua got up, took charge, and led, just as God had commanded him.

God calls each of us who truly believe in Jesus to different roles and responsibilities. And just as God encouraged Joshua, God encourages us. If we, too, will be strong and courageous in the Lord, and if we, too, will meditate on God’s Word day and night, we will enjoy the successes that God provides to those who are faithful to Him. “Now therefore arise”!

— Loren Stacy



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