



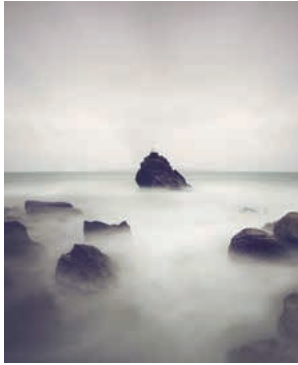
November - December 2016

A large, atmospheric photograph of a forest. Sunlight rays stream through the trees, creating a hazy, ethereal effect. The trees are silhouetted against the bright light. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

ONE HOPE



2016: Discipleship



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A publication of the

Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 150 • Number 6

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

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Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
e-mail: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
orders: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

The Bible Advocate Online appears at
baonline.org.

Disciples Ready!

This time last year, I was just *hoping* to make it through my first year in the editor's seat and to successfully navigate 2016's "Equipped for Discipleship" theme. Well, here we are. We made it!

We have our 2017 theme all lined up. "Reforming – Transforming" tackles the General Conference's Transforming Vision into Reality message with the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation alongside. Stay tuned.

I cannot think of a better way to end 2016 than with "One Hope." We have already surveyed what it means to be and make disciples within the context of our One God and Father, One Lord, One Spirit, One Faith, One Body and One Baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6). I hope you enjoyed that journey as much as I did. Now we conclude by looking forward from here. *We hope!*

The Hebrew word for *hope* means "to be stretched out toward." It's a waiting and a longing. You will find much of this "stretching" in the pages ahead. More important, you'll see that biblical hope points in a particular direction — toward God. He *is* our hope. This is no wish but a sure anchor that holds present and future taut in the faithful future of He who is and has come already.

There is tension on this line, isn't there? If it is merely smooth sailing between here and *There*, what need have we to hold on to the anchor of hope (Hebrews 6:18, 19)? This tension is well expressed by the prophet Zechariah. Just after he prophesied of the coming king of salvation riding on the colt of a donkey, he said — as much to us who long for the second return as to those who anticipated a first, "Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope" (9:9, 12).

Curiously, in Ephesians, just before his seven "ones," Paul told his readers, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling . . ." (4:1; 3:1). The "hope of our calling" (4:4; 1:18) stretches us toward and to our God and is not limited by our circumstances, not by the cell Paul wrote from nor by the waves of history that God's people, present and past, have endured facing the future.

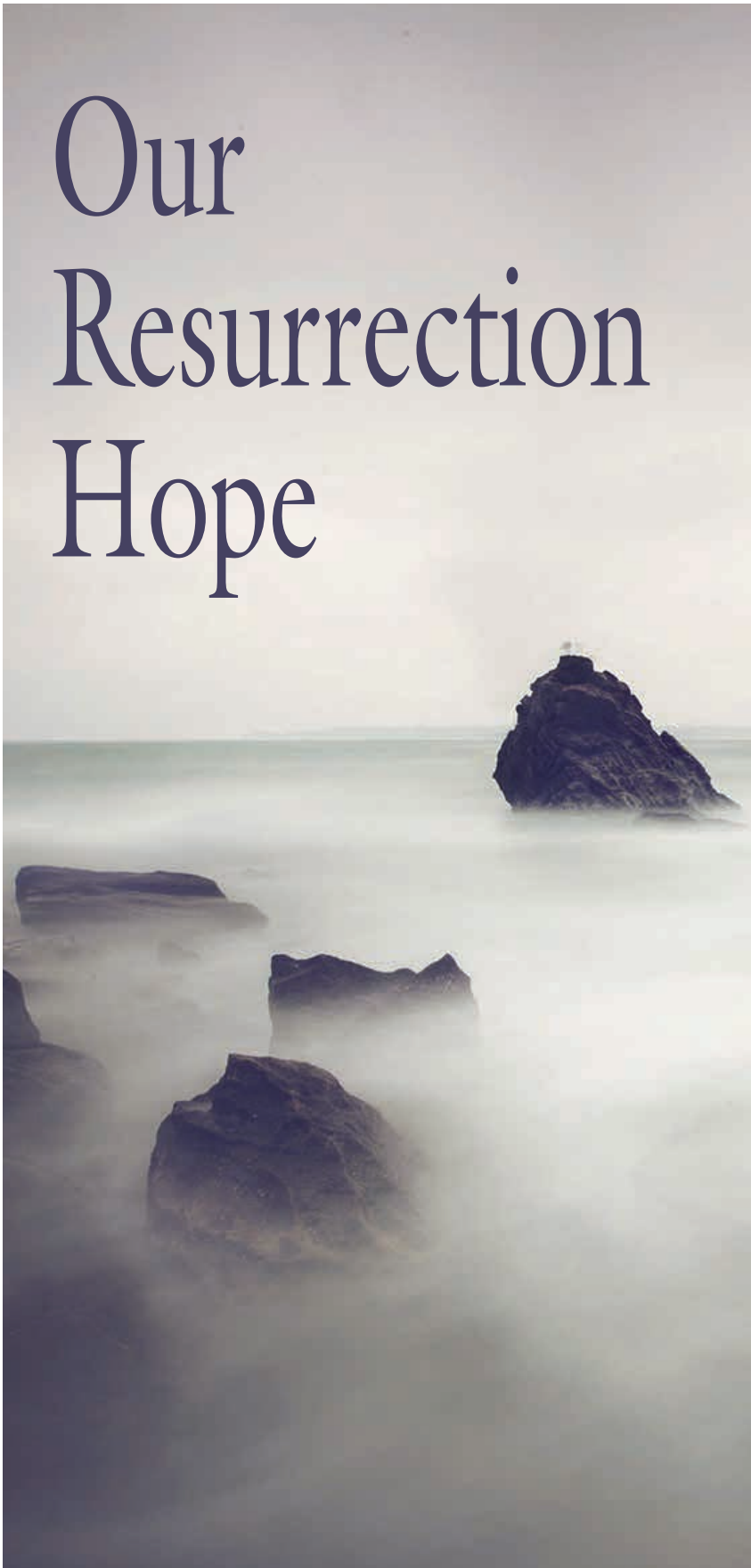
Hang on! With hope, we're disciples ready; we know our calling and share the reason of the hope within us. That calling, that reason is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27; 1 Peter 3:15).

See you in 2017!

— Jason Overman



Our Resurrection Hope



A church historian explains
CoG7's scriptural heritage
of anticipating the Second
Advent.

by Robert Coulter

When my father was converted in the late 1930s, he and Mother began looking for a Sabbathkeeping church as an alternative to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our hometown of Parkersburg, West Virginia. They found the Church of God (Seventh Day) and became members. When they began attending its services, they took my brothers and me to church with them.

I was a young boy who had not been accustomed to attending church, but going with my parents was the beginning of my lifelong relationship with the Church of God.

I enjoyed learning stories from the Bible in our Sabbath school class. One of the earliest lessons I remember was that Jesus loved me and that as my Savior, He promised to return to the earth and give me eternal life.

Years later, when I became a minister in the Church of God and knew many more details about our hope of the resurrection, I was asked how I consoled grieving families at their loved ones' funerals. My answer was simple. I have only one funeral message, and it is the hope we have of the resurrection. I remind the bereaved that their loved ones will live again when all God's saints throughout the ages

are resurrected at Christ's second coming. Every believer should eagerly anticipate this event.

Scriptural promise

The resurrection has been the hope of the saints of God throughout the ages. One of the earliest affirmations came through Job, who lived centuries ago:

"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27).

Much later, the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, describing the loud events accompanying Jesus' coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17) and the instantaneous resurrection when our mortality is changed to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:52). He concluded his description by instructing the church to "encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus about the same great and glorious event: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called" (Ephesians 4:4). Our hope of the resurrection is an integral part of our calling to surrender our lives, in faith, to Jesus Christ.

Foundational belief

Our resurrection hope wasn't a teaching confined to the saints long ago. The Church of Christ in Michigan, predecessor to the

Church of God (Seventh Day), was founded upon the doctrines of Sabbath observance, the second coming of Jesus, and the resurrection of the saints. It believed the only path to an afterlife is by the resurrection of the dead from their graves.

Further, the Church's belief in the resurrection prompted it to name its magazine *The Hope of Israel*, a title inspired by Paul's defense before King Agrippa while a prisoner on his way to Rome:

“Loved ones will live again when all God's saints throughout the ages are resurrected at Christ's second coming. Every believer should eagerly anticipate this event.”

"It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20); "And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. . . . Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?" (26:6, 8).

"Age to come"

Over the years, the Church of God has taught the resurrection is not the only thing that the hope of our calling entails. There is more!

Back when nearly all churches of every persuasion believed that the eternal home of the righteous is in heaven, the Church of God was teaching "the age to come" doctrine — that the eternal home of the saints is on the earth.

Some Sabbathkeepers looked upon heaven as their eternal home, coming immediately after death. Others believed that their resurrection, at Jesus' coming, prepares them to be caught up to heaven for a millennium, after

which they will descend to inhabit the earth for eternity.

But the Church of God has taught that, after being caught up in the clouds momentarily to meet Jesus as He descends to earth (1 Thessalonians 4:17), the resurrected saints will return to the earth. They will inhabit and restore it to more than the beauty of the Garden of Eden. Further, Christ's reign with His saints on earth will usher in the eternal age of God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). This is a summary of "the age to come" doctrine.



The Hope of Israel

The first issue of *The Hope of Israel* (renamed *Bible Advocate* in 1900) was published on June 10, 1863. It gave a partial list of its beliefs, principles largely embraced and taught by the Church of God (Seventh Day) over the past 158 years.

Those beliefs are summarized as follows:

1. The Bible alone makes the complete will of God known to humanity in all ages without additional writings.
2. Sin entered the world and brought death, the extinction of life, upon all humanity.
3. Sin is the transgression of the law, and it is by the Ten Commandments we can recognize sin.
4. Man sinned, passing the sentence of death upon all humanity, but eternal life is possible through Christ by the resurrection of the dead.
5. The resurrection of the dead was the hope of the twelve tribes of Israel, the apostles, and early church.
6. God will set up His kingdom on the earth soon, with Christ sitting on David's throne and the twelve apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
7. The reward of saints (life) and sinners (annihilation) will be on the earth.
8. The saints will share the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their innumerable seed on the earth, the abode of the righteous.
9. God will dwell with His saints in the New Jerusalem, and the earth will be restored to more than the glory and beauty of Eden.
10. The saints will have the right to the Tree of Life, from which man was driven because of sin, and will never experience death, sorrow, crying, or pain in God's kingdom.

Gilbert Cranmer, founder of the Church of Christ in Michigan (1858), wrote a poem titled "Glorious Prospect," set to music by his stepson, Adelbert Branch. The refrain of the song says:

Oh, glorious prospect! Fair
Eden restored. Oh, joy beyond
measure. We shall live with
Christ our Lord.

This was his expression of the age to come in which the saints will inherit and restore the earth while reigning with Christ.

Sure promise

Paul expressed the desperation of a life without the hope of the resurrection: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). But we have God's promise of our resurrection to everlasting life. We have His promise to dwell with us in person in His eternal kingdom where there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:3, 4).

Further, God guarantees our resurrection by the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 4:5). Praise God for His love, mercy, and Spirit that guarantee our hope of the resurrection! **BA**

Robert Coulter and his wife, Ida, reside in Northglenn, CO, and attend the Denver church. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





That Man Came!

by **Bryan Brigham**

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8, ESV).

On my worst day in Africa I woke up early, drove several hours into the bush, and got lost several times before finally finding the “church” where I was to teach. Arriving late, I sat with my translator in the hot sun for several hours while the congregation slowly gathered to sing songs under the only sizable tree in the area.

When I eventually spoke to the group, it was terrible. The lesson I’d prepared seemed to fall apart. The crowd looked bored, and I’m not sure what my translator was saying, but it wasn’t what I was trying to say. Afterward, I was invited to a meal of cold rice (and gravel) in a cramped little hut that had been freshly “painted” with cow manure.

I drove home in the dark, fell into my cot without even lighting a lamp, and wept myself to sleep: “Lord, what am I doing here?”

Most followers of Jesus eventually have some “What am I doing here?” moments. At times all our best efforts seem pointless. Isaiah, like most of the prophets, was largely rejected throughout his ministry. By earthly standards, he was a complete failure. And yet, Isaiah was exactly *where* God wanted him

to be and doing precisely *what* God wanted him to do. He was available for God’s use, and that made him a success.

Several weeks after my worst day in Africa, I went back with a team of locals and volunteers to the same village for outreach to the neighboring communities. I returned to camp and discovered an old man talking to one of the women in our group. She told me about their conversation.

“I am a Christian,” he said.

“Wonderful!” she replied. “How long have you been a Christian?”

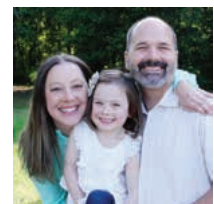
“Three weeks,” he answered.

“Really?” she asked. “How did you become a Christian?”

The old man shifted his weight against his walking stick and lifted his bony, wrinkled arm to point at me, entering the camp with my team: “That man came.”

On my worst day in Africa I learned the lesson of Isaiah 6:8. My success or failure as a follower of Jesus has nothing to do with my abilities and everything to do with my availability. The harvest is up to God; Jesus simply invited me to help scatter the seed (Mark 4:26-29). **BA**

Bryan Brigham writes from Denton, TX.



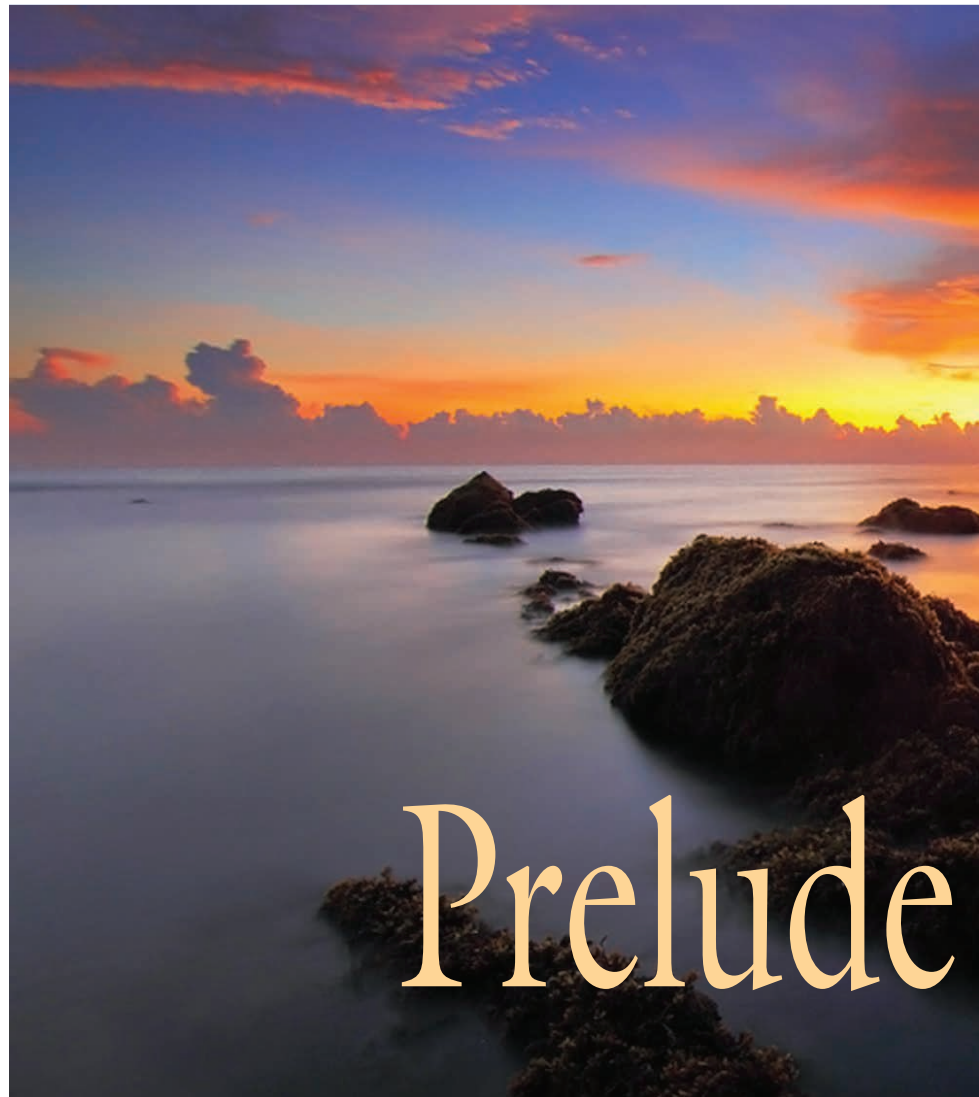
A journey through the Bible
helps us hold on to hope.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

A cry arose from the throats of the milling throng: “Hosanna! He’s coming in the name of the Lord! May He be truly blessed!” Leafy tree branches and robes strewn in the roadway created a “red carpet” welcome. Children begged to be lifted higher to see this great spectacle — a Man riding on a colt of a donkey. Thoughts of Zechariah’s ancient prophecy (9:9) came to mind and precipitated the excited shouts of “Hosanna!” anticipating a government takeover and coronation of this Man. *Messiah. Messiah has come. He has come to save us from this Roman oppression.*

It didn’t take many days before this fickle crowd, with half-averted gaze, witnessed the crucifixion of the One they had expected to be their promised king. Yet another disappointment! God had forgotten His people, and hope lay dying in the streets.

Many of them had witnessed John’s earlier cry from the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord!” Appareled in camel’s hair and with unkempt beard, the man had spoken of repentance and commitment, and warned of wrath to come if they changed not from their evil ways. Many had been present when Jesus approached John with a request for baptism. They had seen the dove descend upon Him and heard the voice from heaven declaring



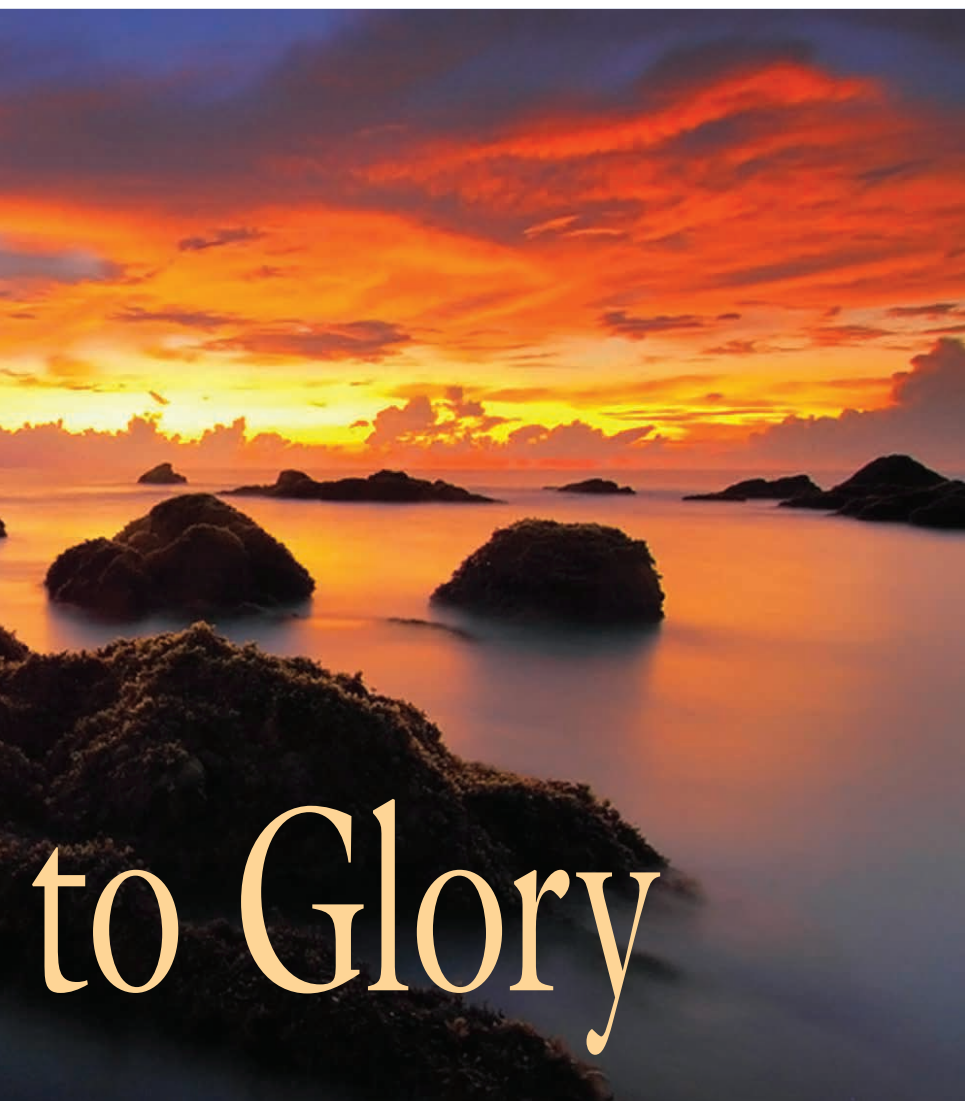
His Sonship. Some of them had even followed His example, gone down into the waters of the Jordan, and submitted to the rite as well. Had it been all for naught?

But on the Day of Pentecost, just after that fateful Passover execution of Jesus, crowds from every nation milled in the streets again. This time they were attracted to Peter, who declared that the Man they had crucified was indeed alive and well, that God had raised Him from the dead. Thousands heeded the day’s appeal for repentance and baptism into the risen Christ. And hope was renewed!

Christ-directed hope is the story of Scripture.

Beginning

From the beauty and serenity of the bountiful garden, Adam and his wife were ousted because of their disobedience to the Creator. Bereft of that relationship and realizing too late how precious it had been, they were encouraged when God held out an olive branch of promise: “And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall



to Glory

bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). The controversy between good and evil brought on by sin would culminate in the Seed of the woman winning the final conflict. Hope lifted up its head.

Life went on. Generations came, departed, and others followed. God saw that the people had become full of depravity to the point of no return. In this darkness, He found one man, Noah, who became God's preacher of righteousness, begging folks to repent of their evil ways. Decades passed as Noah built an ark of gopher wood per

God's blueprint. In this craft, he and his family (eight persons), plus a sampling of all creatures upon the earth, were saved from a great flood that encompassed the entire globe.

When the waters receded and the earth was dried, they emerged into a world washed fresh and clean, with a rainbow promise to never flood the entire earth again. God's earlier instruction to Adam was repeated to Noah: "Multiply and fill the earth." A new beginning, and hope sprang to the challenge.

The seed, corrupted in Eden's garden, once more produced

evil. But Abraham caught God's eye, and God called him to become a father of a people that would serve Him. Abraham believed, and hope endured. But Abraham was informed that four hundred years of captivity awaited his descendants, at which time deliverance would come. Under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, cruel Egyptian captivity was left behind, and hope was restored.

There followed the long, disjointed history of Israel that alternated between disobedience and subservience to the Creator God. Through Judges and Kings, Bible history relates the yoyo effect of their trust and disobedience. Israel's greatest king, David, led well and sang often of hope: "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You" (Psalm 39:7). But sin still lurked among the Israelites, as well as forgetfulness.

God sent prophets who reminded His people of their calling. The prophets warned of wrath to come but also issued a promise of a coming Messiah, the son of David, to bring salvation.

For unto us a Child is born,
unto us a Son is given; and the
government will be upon His
shoulder. And His name will
be called Wonderful, Coun-
selor, Mighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah
9:6).

This future King would be born in Bethlehem and become "Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). For those who paid heed, hope was indeed renewed. Hope in Messiah.

Middle

Many maidens in Israel hoped they might be the chosen to bear the promised Child (Isaiah 7:14). Two such women of hope are forever remembered in the annals of history. Elizabeth, barren wife of the priest Zacharias, was privileged to bear John, the forerunner of Jesus. And Mary, an espoused virgin, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, brought forth the Christ Child (Luke 1-2). Hope was realized, but maybe not as they expected.

Jesus fulfilled multiple prophecies through His birth, life, ministry, rejection, death, and resurrection. Following His death,

following the Resurrection, the disciples witnessed His ascension into the clouds and thus into heaven. Jesus left them with the promise to return and set up His kingdom. This gave them a resurgence of hope.

Persecution arose and, as a result, Christians spread over the entire known world. Peter wrote to those of the Dispersion to remain faithful. Through the resurrection of Christ and in His mercy, God had “begotten us again to a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). Believers were no longer under the curse of illegitimate birth that led to death under Satan’s regime. Instead, they were kept

awaiting us. Well over two thousand years have transpired since the promise was made. Time has evoked a lack of interest, blind false teachers leading the blind, a world in disarray, helpless and hopeless. Indeed Jesus wondered if, when He came, He would find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8).

However, all is not lost. A lamp of truth still shines out of the darkness. The faithful few still await His coming with great expectancy, holding on to hope.

Jesus keeps His promises; He will come. He will return in the clouds, even as the disciples saw Him leave (Acts 1:11). Our duty — nay, our privilege — is to watch and be ready to meet Him. Do we busy ourselves with amassing money, planning for retirement and all the fun trips we will take? Do we view Christ’s coming as something far future, something we can deal with, one day, after we have accomplished our dreams of wealth, health, and happiness in the here and now?

Look up! “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40).

One hope! The same Messianic thread of hope held out in the Garden of Eden has never been cut and is held out to each one of us today. Hold on to hope in Christ — that single, strong, enduring thread of eternity spun before the beginning of time that reaches out and takes us to the promise. **BA**

“The faithful few still await His coming with great expectancy, holding on to hope.”

many people were disconsolate, including the disciples. But His resurrection and appearances more than rejuvenated them.

But where was hope taking them? Still at loose ends, Peter said, “I’m going fishing” — back to the only trade he knew prior to meeting the Master — and the others went along. Jesus met them at the lakeshore, where He had breakfast cooking over an open fire. On a mountain nearby, He gave them the commission to go and teach all nations concerning Him and salvation. Forty days

by God’s power through faith and hope in the One who was ordained before the foundation of the world. The prophets of old knew that they spoke of things yet future — things to be revealed according to God’s own timetable. Peter went on to say that the Father had an incorruptible inheritance on hold for each of those who held onto that hope.

End

The same message is for us today. Our trials will seem as nothing compared with the glory

Dorothy Nimchuk
and her husband,
Nick, serve the CoG7
in Medicine Hat,
Alberta.



Questions & Answers



Jesus taught us that, to be like our Father in heaven, we should love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and forgive those who sin against us seventy times seven. Elsewhere, the Son and His Father speak of horrific punishment reserved for their enemies in the final roundup: eternal damnation, blackness of darkness forever, fire that shall never be quenched where their worm does not die and the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever. I find that our Father is either unable or unwilling to walk the talk. Does God practice what He preaches and what He expects of His children, or not?

Good question you asked, and the answer Scripture gives is a good one too. Yes, God practices what He preaches! This truth should cause even the wicked to rejoice, if they only knew and believed it.

Yes, our heavenly Father blesses those who curse Him and brings good to those who hate Him. He does this by making His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and by sending rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:44, 45).

And yes, our Lord Jesus loves His enemies and forgives people 490 times and more. He loved the rich man who refused His invitation to sell all, take up his cross, and follow Christ (Mark 10:21, 22). He prayed for the forgiveness of those who nailed Him to the cross (Luke 23:32, 34).

God's written Word for His children is consistent in preaching love, acceptance, and forgiveness among the human family, not hatred, separation, and vengeance. If God were to practice eternal torment of His enemies in hellfire, He would be inconsistent indeed — a

hypocrite God. But the God of the Bible will practice no such thing!

We pause here to reflect on the scriptures alluded to in your "elsewhere" sentence: Matthew 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43-48; Jude 7, 13; Revelation 14:10, 11. These texts have led some to think that the fate of evil people will include conscious torment in eternal hellfire. We beg to differ.

Consider that "eternal punishment" may speak of the endless death state of those punished, not the experience of being punished eternally. Consider also that "blackness of darkness forever" suggests a nothingness, an annihilation, of which none who experience it can be aware.

Consider also that "unquenchable fire" may cool when its fuel is consumed, as did the unquenchable flames that destroyed ancient Jerusalem (Jeremiah 17:27). In like manner, the Gehenna fires of a later Jerusalem were also a garbage dump where worms constantly consumed whatever was not burned up.

The "smoke that ascends forever" is like saying that the results of the fire are never reversed. This phrase does not require that the human fuel for the fire will burn for an eternity, but it does affirm that the fire's destruction is forever.

From these and a hundred more texts, we conclude that God will not practice eternal torment. Vengeance rightly belongs to our Lord, Creator, King, Savior, and Judge, it is true; and the Judge of all the earth shall do right. But the Bible affirms often that His *mercy* endures forever — never His anger!

For a clear and compelling study on this topic, contact the Bible Advocate Press (bap.orders@cog7.org) and request the free tract *Will God Punish the Wicked Forever?*

— Elder Calvin Burrell



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Prophetic Pair

Judgment and hope: two themes that must be held together.

by Israel Steinmetz

Jonah is a strange book, not just because a prophet gets swallowed by a fish or God grows a plant and sends a worm to eat it. It's strange because it's the story of a prophet who wouldn't pronounce judgment on Nineveh for fear that God would be merciful. Jonah is strange because it's the story of a pagan people who were promised judgment but somehow hoped God might spare them. It's strange because it's the story of a God who eagerly relents from judgment so He can give life instead.

Peculiar prophet

The book begins with God telling Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me" (1:2). But Jonah runs — or rather sails — in the other direction and doesn't return until he's cast overboard in a stormy sea, and then swallowed and regurgitated by a giant fish. In the belly of the beast, Jonah prays, acknowledging the weight of his well-deserved judgment. But strangely, his prayer ends with hope: "Salvation is from the LORD" (2:9). The fish vomits Jonah.

Jonah proceeds to Nineveh and delivers God's message: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned" (3:4). But strangely, Nineveh is not overturned. Instead, from common person to king, they believe in God and repent of evil, hoping God

might spare them (vv. 5-9). And of course, but strangely, "God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it" (v. 10b).

God's anger is appeased, but strangely, Jonah's isn't. Jonah finally reveals why he fled:

"Please, LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life" (4:2, 3).

Strange indeed.

Before the story ends, Jonah hopes God might end up destroying Nineveh after all, and gets a front row seat. God,

strangely merciful, provides for Jonah's comfort during this ill-advised viewing party. But when God removes the plant, Jonah's strangeness takes center stage. The imminent death of over one hundred twenty thousand people thrills Jonah, but he's heartbroken when a plant dies. Stranger still, the story ends with God asking Jonah an unanswered question: "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh?"

Jonah Complex

Jonah suffers from the Jonah Complex. And he's not alone. Many of us are suffering from one or more of the five symptoms: 1) We've received God's mercy, but we're unwilling to extend it to others; 2) We resist God's command to take His message to the world; 3) If compelled to speak, we will publicly condemn sinners but not offer them salvation hope; 4) We become angry at God for showing mercy instead of judgment; and 5) We care more for our personal comfort than the lives of people.

While we suffer from the same heart malady as Jonah, our form of the Jonah Complex isn't identical to his. He understood the relationship between judgment and hope in prophecy, but because he didn't like it, he refused to prophesy. We don't understand the relationship between judgment and hope in prophecy because we don't like it, and so we read prophecy all wrong.

Judgment and hope are the twin themes of prophecy. Read any prophetic passage in Scripture, and you'll see these two sides of the same coin. *Biblical prophets were God's messengers*

to call people to covenant faithfulness. They did this primarily by sharing messages that promised judgment for unfaithfulness and hope based on God's faithfulness. This was true whether the prophets were looking back to past events, commenting on the present, or peering into the future. Judgment for sin and hope of salvation are themes that give continuity to the diverse prophetic messages of Scripture.

“We don't understand the relationship between judgment and hope in prophecy because we don't like it.”

Judgment is the inevitable result of sin. Sin and death are inseparable; those who trade in one will be compensated with the other. Sounds like the first half of a familiar verse: "For the wages of sin is death." The second half is where hope enters: "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). *There is no prophetic judgment on human-*

ity that cannot be reversed by receiving eternal life in Christ. We all were dead, condemned, the objects of God's wrath. But God loves the objects of His wrath. And He loves to freely save them (Ephesians 2:1-10). This is why prophecy always contains both judgment and hope. Prophetic judgment is the bad news; prophetic hope is the good news. Prophetic hope is the gospel.

Gospel prophecy

To read prophecy aright, we must interpret it through the gospel. Jonah didn't like this, but at least he knew how to do it. He knew that a message of imminent condemnation (forty days till disaster!) was nothing more and nothing less than the final cry of a God desperate to show mercy.

What then, do you suppose, are the prophecies of Jesus and the apostles regarding our world? If every judgmental word of prophecy is a precursor to a word of hope, behold the hope that fills the New Testament! Unfortunately, it's hard to read prophecy this way when we've been taught otherwise.

We've been taught to pull words of condemnation, disaster, and judgment out of their gospel context. We've learned to insist that these predictions of a "doom and gloom" future in which everything gets worse and worse are inevitable, that God has determined people will not repent, that the future is sealed, and that nothing can be done to delay judgment or bring the hope of salvation to the condemned.

Of course, all we have to do to reject this way of thinking is to

read Scripture. We must look at the countless times that words of condemnation brought conviction of sin, belief, and repentance and at the countless times hope triumphed and tragedy and mercy triumphed over justice. Do some New Testament prophecies predict a dark and dismal end to this world and most of its inhabitants? Yes. Does this mean God has decreed it to be this way and nothing can be done to change it? No!

These dire predictions of death and destruction are warnings of judgment. Behind each of them is the promise of gospel hope that God's kingdom will overflow with those rescued from the kingdom of darkness, that those condemned to die will be pardoned by the grace of Jesus Christ, that nations now set on violence and evil will choose peace and righteousness instead. It is the hope that God has not abandoned His creation, Christ has not surrendered to the Devil, and the church has not lost the battle with the powers of darkness. To read prophecy aright, we must interpret it through the gospel.

The starting point for this sort of reading is to be cured of the Jonah Complex. Rather than gloating in the eventual destruction of evil people, let us instead glory in our God who is "gracious and compassionate . . . slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." Let us remember that Scripture's prediction of future events was almost never deterministic or fatalistic. Rather, prophecy looked ahead to futures contingent upon response. Yes, continued rejection of God would bring terrible judg-

ment. But belief and repentance would bring incredible hope! God is determined to finally judge the wicked, but He doesn't want anyone to perish. He is at work in the world through the Spirit and the church to change the future.

How tragic if we sit back and accept that the earth is "going to hell in a hand basket." How heartbreaking if we do not com-

*“To read
prophecy aright,
we must interpret
it through the
gospel.”*

mit ourselves anew to rescuing the perishing. How unthinkable if we lend our support to political, economic, ecological, and other cultural movements that treat humanity as disposable and creation as destined for destruction.

End and beginning

Christ is coming back to establish His kingdom on this earth. He is returning to renew and recreate all things. As we read prophecy, let us never read the words of judgment without interpreting them through gospel hope. Let us remember the truth of this hymn:

This is my Father's world,
should my heart be ever sad?
The lord is King — let the
heavens ring. God reigns — let
the earth be glad.
This is my Father's world.
Now closer to Heaven bound,
For dear to God is the earth
Christ trod.
No place but is holy
ground. . . .
This is my Father's world. O
let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong
seems oft so strong, God is
the ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
the battle is not done:
Jesus Who died shall be
satisfied,
And earth and Heav'n be
one.

— Maltbie D. Babcock

The end of time is the beginning of a new era. The end of the world is a new beginning. The darkness of the future is giving way to the Light of the world. The destined death of sinners is giving way to the Resurrection and the Life. The God who warns of judgment is the God of hope who loves the objects of His wrath, dies for His enemies, and is determined to make everything right. Let this reality be the anchor of our one hope, and let it teach us to read prophecy through gospel eyes. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz is dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry. He lives in San Antonio, TX, with his wife, Anna, and their seven young children. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.





Because We Prayed

by **Barbara Palmer**

"You never know what a day will bring," I told my daughter, Pam, on Friday morning, July 29, 2016. I said these words of encouragement, hoping that the day would bring her and her husband, Rick, good news. I didn't know then how much I would need the same encouragement.

My husband, Glen, and I were putting up strawberry freezer jam that afternoon. Glen was filling jars with the second batch, and I was starting a third, when he suddenly sat down at the kitchen counter and put his head in his hands. "Is there a problem?" I asked.

"I have a tightness in my chest," Glen answered, sweating.

"I'm taking you to the emergency room," I told my husband and called Pam to see if she and Rick could finish the jam while I took Glen.

While I was on the phone, Glen got up to go to the living room but couldn't make it. He called my name and fell to the floor. I quickly called 911.

David wrote, "I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will never be shaken. . . . Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from Him" (Psalm 62:1, 2, 5, HCSB). Amazingly, God gave me the calmness to make that call, do what needed to be done over the next several hours, putting one foot ahead of the other as if I were in a protective bubble.

The paramedics arrived but couldn't find Glen's blood pressure. By this time, Glen was sweating profusely and turning gray. On the way to North Suburban Hospital, a fire truck followed the ambulance, sirens blaring. That usually doesn't happen. An EKG performed in the ambulance was fed directly to a cardiac team at the hospital. That team met us at the emergency entrance and took over.

They cut Glen's clothes off of him and prepped him for surgery.

The news from the EKG wasn't good. The large artery to Glen's heart was 100 percent blocked, so Dr. Pacheco put two stents in. Afterward, the medical team told us that Dr. Pacheco had run into difficulty but that the procedure had been a success. The doctor stopped by the waiting room as well and confirmed that, though Glen had been in serious trouble, they completed what needed to be done.

Word about this spread among the staff. The next morning, the cardiac doctor on call came in Glen's hospital room and said, "So, I get to meet the man Dr. Pacheco saved last night." Because I realized how close we came to losing Glen, chills ran down my spine, and I praised our loving Father, who divinely touched Glen and worked through the medical professionals to spare his life.

I heard later that when she first heard the news, our oldest daughter, Teri, sent out an urgent prayer request to many different people in many different places. A good number of them immediately stopped and prayed.

I'm amazed but not surprised. Prayer explains why I felt fortified and uplifted while I called 911 and while we waited for the outcome of the surgery. It was as though Glen's name were being flashed in bright neon lights in the very throne room of God, summoning our loving Father's intervention and protective care. God isn't finished with Glen yet, retired as he is. God still has things for him to do.

A saying is posted above my study desk and prayer corner at home: "Something will be different today because we prayed!" Something was different the day of Glen's heart attack — thanks to the prayers of God's people everywhere. And though we don't know what a day will bring, our heavenly Father does! **BA**

Barb and Glen Palmer live in Thornton, CO, and continue to serve the CoG7.





Sing an Evening Hymn

by Whaid Rose

The phrase “the evening and the morning,” repeated throughout the first chapter of Genesis, underscores life’s daily-ness. In case you haven’t noticed, life is very daily: It happens one day at a time. Each day, part of life’s rhythm of work and rest is therefore to be joyfully and gratefully stewarded as God’s gift to us.

This has inspired morning and evening hymns, to elicit pause and assist our praise at both ends of the day: at morning, for new mercies, fresh grace, unsoiled opportunities; at evening, for blessings received, work accomplished, dangers escaped, and sins forgiven.

Therefore, having featured Harriet Beecher Stowe’s morning hymn (“Still, Still, With Thee”), it seems fitting to include one written for evening. Among evening hymns, one of which made it into CoG7’s *Worship in Song* (“Day Is Dying in the West,” #333), my favorite is John Ellerton’s “The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended.” The simple yet elegant tone of this nineteenth century hymn endears many to it. Its worldview provides helpful perspective: Though it often doesn’t seem like it, God is in charge of the world. Thus, its hopeful ending: “But stand, and rule, and grow forever, ‘till all Thy creatures own Thy sway.” What a comforting note on which to end a toilsome and anxious day.

But this hymn’s predominant emphasis is the church’s unceasing prayers and praise, set in relation to the sun’s daily circuit around the earth. (Psalm 19:4-6 is clearly on Ellerton’s mind as he penned these lines.) The sun beckons night in one place as it awakens dawn in another, causing round-the-clock prayers and praise to rise from the worldwide fellowship of God’s people: “The sun, that bids us rest, is waking/Our brethren ‘neath the western sky,/And hour by hour fresh lips are making/Thy wondrous doings heard on high.” The sun always shines somewhere, as somewhere the lips of the saints are always being heard. God lives and *gives unto each day what He deems best*.

Evening hymns help us value the gift of each day, given by the One who neither sleeps nor slumbers (Psalm 121:4). They help us connect “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11) with “Bless be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits” (Psalm 68:19). They amplify the meaning of Jesus’ admonition to not worry about tomorrow, for each day has sufficient trouble of its own (Matthew 6:34), and give us confidence in God’s promise to match our strength with the demands of each day (Deuteronomy 33:25).

So sing an evening hymn. *His praise shall sanctify your rest.*



The day thou gavest, Lord,
is ended,/The darkness
falls at Thy behest;/To
Thee our morning hymns
ascended,/Thy praise
shall sanctify our rest.

We thank Thee that Thy
Church unsleeping,/
While earth rolls onward
into light,/Through all
the world her watch is
keeping,/And rests not
now by day or night. . . .

The sun, that bids us rest,
is waking/Our brethren
‘neath the western sky,/
And hour by hour fresh
lips are making/Thy
wondrous doings heard
on high.

So be it, Lord; Thy throne
shall never,/Like earth’s
proud empires, pass
away:/But stand, and
rule, and grow forever,/
Till all Thy creatures own
Thy sway.

Hagar's Song

(Genesis 16:6-15)

And she called the name of the Lord that
spake unto her, Thou God seest me
(v. 13a, KJV).

Amazing Grace! Thou leadeth me
To places not yet known.

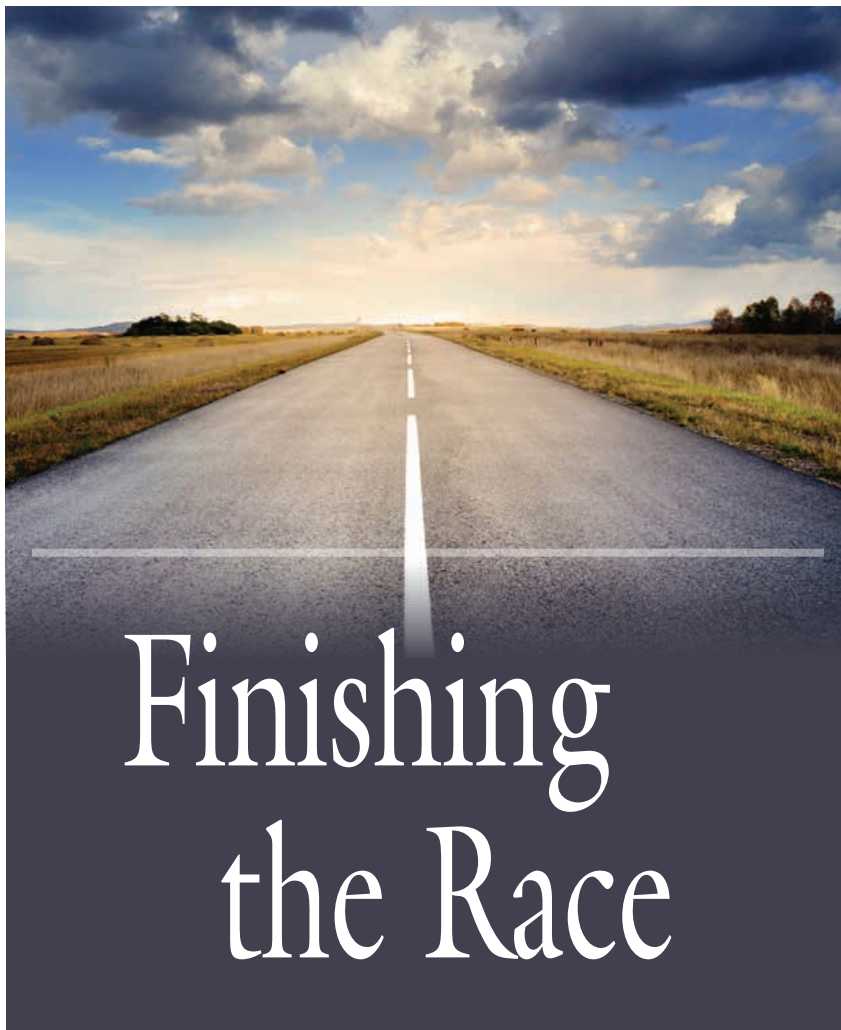
Underneath Thy guiding wing
I have found my home.

My Protector! My Deliverer!
Let all my worries flee.

What may come rests in Your hands
For You're the God that seeth me.

Carla Pollard





Finishing the Race

Three possessions are
needed to endure
to the end.

by Grace Carpenter

The gravestone of one of my ancestors reads, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7, KJV). This metaphor-filled declaration by Paul to Timothy came when the apostle neared death in prison. Now especially meaningful at the end of an Olympic year, finishing the race signifies the dif-

ference between endurance and despair.

Just what is this race we’re running? It’s not the rat race, not a “keeping up with the Joneses” lifestyle nor the struggle of keeping up appearances. No, the race the apostle Paul referred to represents following and serving Jesus Christ to the end, whether that end is death or Christ’s return, regardless what obstacles appear in the path.

Special contest

Finishing the race requires endurance. But how do we keep going with so much to deter us? From church spats to the stress

of daily life, from feeling so different from others to wondering just when will Jesus come; addictions, distractions, comparisons to others — all conspire to knock us out of the race.

Even our own perceived failures at such things as career or marriage can discourage us spiritually. The Tempter attempts to use our weaknesses as justification to quit — even temporarily, like the hare that raced against the tortoise in Aesop’s fable.

Who would ever think that a slow, short-legged creature in a constricting shell could finish a race ahead of a speedy rabbit? However, the tortoise demonstrated endurance in the face of slim odds. Endurance is not simply powered by positive thinking, such as the train engine that chugged, “I think I can, I think I can” up the mountain.

Rather, a combination of factors supports the endurance needed to continue with Christ to the end. Christ himself finished the race set before Him, though faced with detractors. We can look to Him for an example of endurance through vision, focus, and commitment.

Vision

Children are masters of vision. They look forward to their next birthday, sometimes far in advance, not always understanding clearly how long the wait may be. They have dreams of the special day filled with cake and gifts. We are all endowed with this ability to visualize a possible future, bringing hope amid the struggle.

When Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world, He was referring to an invisible kingdom

seen with spiritual eyes, one that currently anticipates His future, final, visible kingdom (John 18:36). Seeing ourselves as part of that kingdom, now and forever, gives us the vision that motivates us to persist in the race through rough terrain.

As Jesus faced the roughest terrain of His earthly life — His trial and crucifixion — He saw Himself “sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Similarly, the early church leader Stephen, after angering a Jewish council that suspected him of blasphemy, further incited the council by sharing his vision of “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56).

As we lift our own eyes above this passing earth to envision our seat “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6), rough patches on the course seem smoother.

Focus

Any serious athlete will agree that you can’t go far without intense focus. Inherent in this word is the idea that thoughts unrelated to the task at hand must go. An Olympic swimmer glancing at the competition may lose a precious one-hundredth of a second — enough to lose the gold.

From age twelve, when Jesus astounded the teachers in the temple with His understanding (Luke 2:46-49), to the day He was lifted up into heaven, Jesus’ emphasis was on His Father’s business and His own role in it “to suffer and to rise from the dead” (24:46). He fulfilled His purpose to provide remission of sins by His death and our

repentance (vv. 44-49). Christ’s life exemplified throwing off distractions, such as the Devil’s sly offers in the wake of His baptism (4:1-13) and extreme suffering as He laid down His life. Jesus not only demonstrated focus but also taught the importance of it for His followers in saying, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (9:62).

Focus is a matter of choices. What do we really want?

*“We can look
to Jesus for
an example of
endurance.”*

Commitment

Finishing the race requires commitment, which stems from the conviction that “He is, and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). The over-confident hare of Aesop’s fable took a break from the race, convincing himself it wouldn’t make any difference. He did not diligently pursue the prize.

My own experience tells me I reap spiritual rewards of guidance and grace when I sow time

and attention in my walk with the Lord. The temptation to grow sluggish is strong, but those who are diligent until the end inherit the promises (vv. 11, 12). Again, we see an example in Christ: “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). In the same spirit, Christians commit to following Christ where He goes (12:26).

Grace for the race

The Christ we follow sympathizes with our weaknesses and temptations along the way. However, we are expected to come to Him boldly for grace to help our need (4:15, 16) and to not give up and wallow in a pit of failure. When we don’t succeed at some goal in life, a well-meaning supporter will likely remark, “Well, you gave it your best shot.” Thankfully, in Christ, we need not rely on our best shot to finish the race for the crown of righteousness given by the righteous Judge for all who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

Even so, if we are to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1), we must first lay aside whatever weighs us down and, by God’s grace, run the race to the finish.

Don’t despair; endure! **BA**

Grace Carpenter

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Are You Tired Yet?



A heartening call to persevere in watching and waiting.

by Tom Wilkinson

A preacher was pacing the floor, so one of his friends asked him, “What’s the trouble?”

The preacher replied, “The trouble is that I am in a hurry, but God isn’t.”

How often in today’s world have you just wished it would all be over and Jesus would return? Numerous prophecies of Christ’s second coming in the Old Testament and scores more in the New Testament encourage us about this event. So we watch and wait.

Skeptics and prognosticators

But waiting is hard. One problem is skeptics all around us — something Peter predicted:

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

On the other extreme are the misguided, inaccurate prognosticators. Televangelists and writers have made a fairly good living telling us when Jesus is going to return. Their charts and graphs and timetables make you think they know what they’re talking about. But they don’t! Ever since the church began, people have been setting dates.

The first recorded prediction was AD 381. Then there was AD 500 and AD 1000. A friend of Martin Luther's liked the year 1533. Isaac Newton predicted AD 1715. William Miller claimed the Second Coming would occur in 1844, while Jehovah Witnesses have predicted His return several times, including in 1914. A book declared the rapture would be in 1988. When nothing happened, the year was changed to 1989. Many people prophesied the world would end in 2000, and even a movie was released foretelling the end of the world in 2012.

But what did Jesus say?

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:6-8).

Notice Jesus said "birth pains." Women do not normally have one pain and then deliver the baby. Could it be that numerous birth pains have to take place before the end of time? We do not know the day or hour (v. 36). That's why Jesus told us not to predict but to prayerfully watch (Mark 13:33; 1 Peter 4:7).

Priorities

Many of us are tired of watching and waiting, caught in between the skeptics and prognosticators. Maybe we're turned off by all the false predictions. Maybe we're distracted (if not skeptical), lulled into a false sense of security despite what's going on

around us. It's easy to get caught up in today's hustle and bustle. Technology, for instance, makes life so much easier and connects us with many different things, but it also can detract us from God's Word and from our ultimate goal.

What is our number one goal in life while we wait for the Lord's return? Let me put that another way: What *should* be our number one goal in life? It should be "his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

“What truly matters is being with God in His kingdom.”

Our secondary goal should be to help our family and others toward that goal.

That's it. That's the list. Anything else in life is just window dressing and will fall into place. It's great to have a good job, a nice home, a good car, and other things. But those earthly possessions will pass away (vv. 19-21).

What truly matters is being with God in His kingdom. If we're not doing things that are pleasing to our heavenly Father,

we're living dangerously. Is that really what we want to do? We all make mistakes and don't do enough, but we should want to do more. We should want to get closer to God through His Son Jesus Christ, and that means watching and waiting patiently.

Prepared

We live in a world that is getting more corrupt by the day, where Satan tempts us in a variety of ways. It's not easy to stay focused, to watch and wait. But we must keep our eyes on God. Anything that gets in the way of seeking Him and His kingdom has to be eliminated.

Jesus said it best in Luke 21:34-36:

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

It's true: God isn't in a hurry (2 Peter 3:8). But don't lose hope. Don't get tired of watching and waiting. Remember, Jesus is coming soon! **BA**

Tom Wilkinson is the administrator for the CoG7 in Walla Walla, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





Jeremiah shows us how to
thrive in troublesome times.
by Pat Jeanne Davis

The weather forecast called for a sunny, dry day, so my husband and I and our son decided to go on a picnic. Later, while we walked a favorite trail along the creek, a storm arose. My family dashed for the car, thankful for its protection.

We drove out of the valley and onto the main highway, homeward bound. As we got closer, the sky revealed a spectacular rainbow in front of us. "The sign of the covenant God made, a promise to never again destroy with a flood," my son said from the backseat.

The weather forecaster had gotten it wrong. Our heavenly

Father's predictions, however, are never in error. The summer storm, with its destructive potential of lightning, thunder, strong winds, and heavy downpour, is comparable to the darkening times we live in. As I looked into the clearing sky and gazed upon that rainbow of promise, the word *hope* sprang to mind — the certainty that what God has promised is true, has occurred, and will happen in accordance with His Word. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, the apostle Paul says, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen. . . ."

Hope is never a static or passive thing. Look up the word, and you will find reference after reference pointing out its active results in the lives of those who truly have a biblical hope and live accordingly. Such a hope doesn't leave us idle, drifting, or throwing up our hands.

Hope

A biblical hope is not an escape from reality or from our problems. At times a stressful situation is not of our making and is out of our control. Perhaps your family, your business, your own hopes and dreams are crumbling around you. These days we must place our hope in God alone. Belief in a sovereign, loving God gives us the insight to know what is true, and we do not lose hope amid life's setbacks and disappointments. Our hope will be based on God's promises. It will be dynamic and life sustaining.

Today, as in the days of Noah, wickedness is rampant; warnings are refused. Waywardness will be recompensed. But if we dwell on the news that is so readily available, we can become disheartened by the extent of evil. The fabric of society appears to be ripping apart, a time foretold in

God's Word (2 Timothy 3; Luke 21:25, 26).

As the world self-destructs, its violence born from godless roots, we can turn to Psalm 91:5 for assurance: "You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day. . . ." Only when we call to mind the Word of the Lord do we find peace and hope for the future. The prophet Jeremiah knew this source of hope: "O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble . . ." (14:8).

Obey

Jeremiah had a difficult message to deliver. He loved Judah, but he loved God much more. The book of Jeremiah records the final prophecies to Judah, warning of oncoming destruction if the nation did not repent. The prophet called out for the people to turn back to God, "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear . . ." (7:24). He recognized the inevitability of Judah's destruction due to their unrepentant idolatry and immorality.

As painful as it was for Jeremiah to deliver a message of judgment to his own people, he obeyed what God told him to do and say. We too are to obey even when it is difficult to trust in God's perfect plan. Jeremiah reminds us, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord . . ." (17:7).

Praise God

The consequences of sin and disobedience were severe for Israel. God allowed the Babylonians to besiege, plunder, and destroy the city of Jerusalem. Solomon's temple, which had

stood approximately four hundred years, was burned to the ground. God reveals through this story that a lifestyle apart from His commands leaves us destitute and lost.

Jeremiah, an eyewitness to these events, is credited with writing Lamentations. This book consists of five heart-wrenching cries of anguish because the Chaldeans had broken down the terraces and completely destroyed the walls of Jerusalem.

The third lament stands alone as a song of praise amid the misery and crumbling ruins. There in the middle of the book is Jeremiah's song of hope: Jerusalem

Jeremiah 23:5, 6. The prophet describes Him as a Branch from the house of David, the King who would reign in wisdom and righteousness. Just as Jeremiah did, we must place our hope in God. His great faithfulness will carry us through this great time of trouble upon the earth.

When our Lord's disciples inquired as to what would be the sign of His coming, Jesus described all the things that must come to pass before the end of the age (Matthew 24). Our Lord instructed us to watch and pray so that day does not take us unawares.

While we await the further

“A biblical hope is not an escape from reality or from our problems.”

would be rebuilt because God's mercy and compassion never fail; they are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22, 24).

Expect

Today the consequences of sin and disobedience surround us. The systems of this world are not based on Christ's righteousness. We live in a time when most institutions, including the family, are falling apart. We too weep for the destruction and loss of life we see.

But the Lord is not slack concerning His promises. Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Jer-

revealing of God's purposes, we can say with a strong and confident expectation, "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). And while we wait for the storm to clear, we can live as we should — expecting, praising, obeying, and hoping. **BA**

Pat Jeanne Davis
writes from Philadelphia, PA.



The Militant

Christ-shaped mission in violent times.

by Jonathon Hicks

The New Testament says we are engaged in a powerful battle. But before we get to this, we should understand that another type of battle was taking place in the time of Jesus and that how Jesus fought transforms how His disciples make war.

In the story of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:31-44) Jesus' mode of combat subverts contemporary uses of force. To grasp this story's full impact, we need to understand the mindset Jesus was transforming.

Zealot movement

Have you ever heard of a place called Gamala (or Gamla)? Although it's not one of the better-known cities of Israel during Jesus' day, and not even mentioned in the New Testament, Gamala created a family that would spell the doom of Israel by influencing the same people Jesus was preaching His gospel to.

Gamala, just northeast of the Sea Galilee, sits on a steep hill and takes its name from the camel (*gamal* in Hebrew) hump it sits on. On this hill lived about

two to three thousand people, a decent-sized city for the region of Galilee. Capernaum, one of the largest cities, had around ten thousand inhabitants. Built as a fort during the Syrian wars three centuries before Christ, Gamala never surrendered its military bent. Surrender, however, is not the only way to lose one's soul or one's self.

Judas the Galilean, who came from Gamala, picked up and developed the anti-Roman sentiment growing in Galilee. Six years after Jesus was born, the Zealots, led by Judas, became a sect of Jewish religion. By using military force against their Roman oppressors, they sought to obtain the freedom God promised.

Many in Galilee at that time latched onto this militant understanding of how God's rescue would come. So when the taxation demanded by Rome was at its worst — during a census — Judas the Galilean capitalized on the negative sentiment and led a revolt against Rome. The rebellion was quickly squashed, but the movement was not. Gamala was one of the cities in Galilee to fight against the Roman armies in AD 66. Judas' son James was put to death in AD 46 by the Romans, who no doubt saw him as potentially stirring up the same trouble his father did. Furthermore, Judas' grandsons led two

of the three groups of Zealots who revolted against Rome and defended the temple in AD 66. If you don't surrender, then you die. And these Zealots refused to surrender.

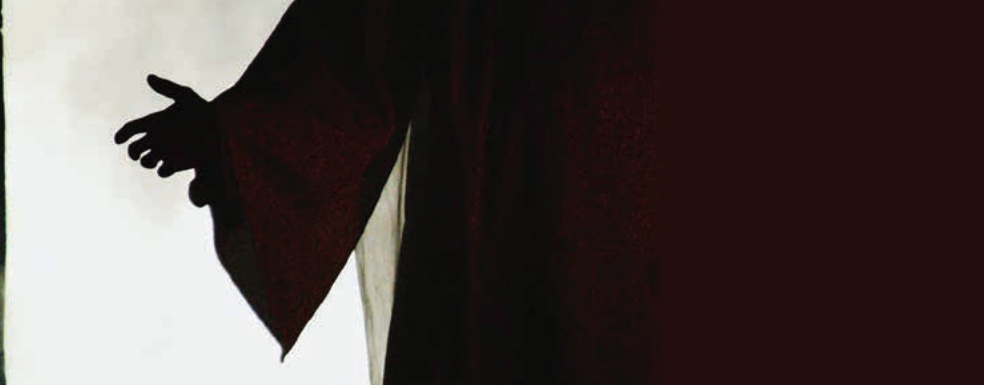
After the destruction of the temple, the death of Judas' grandsons, and the massacre at Masada, the Zealot movement dwindled and eventually died in one last attempt at revolution: the Bar Kochba revolt of AD 135. But for our purposes, we need to realize that from at least the time when Judas the Galilean began uniting his militia (AD 6) until the destruction of the temple (AD 66), the Zealot spirit was alive and well, especially in Galilee and Gamala.

Feeding Zealots

With this background, let's consider Mark 6:31-44. Because of the demands of ministry, Jesus was concerned for the disciples' well-being, so He took them in a boat to a deserted place. However, when they arrived, the desert was not so deserted. Five thousand men were waiting for them.

Men here is gender specific, meaning only people of the male sex. And five thousand of them were congregated in the wilderness, which is strange. We must recall that among the three closest cities (Capernaum,

Messiah



Bethsaida, and Gamala) there were probably only about eight to nine thousand men. This story gives the impression that every able-bodied man in the vicinity flocked to where the people knew Jesus would be. Only one cause could draw all these men without women or children to this desolate place on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee: zealotry.

This is exactly what John's Gospel tells us was happening. John 6:15 says that Jesus knew they intended to make Him king. On that very night, they planned to crown Him and make that the first night of the Jesus revolt against the Roman Empire.

Jesus and the Twelve landed where they intended, not ignorant of this fact. They saw the crowds, and Jesus had compassion on them because He knew what was happening. With deep pity and love, He taught them because they were sheep without a shepherd.

Within this phrase too — “sheep without a shepherd” — we catch the militant nature of the congregation. In four separate Old Testament passages the phrase is used with the same wording, and all four have strong links to a military leader (Numbers 27:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:2). Interestingly, in the face of all these revolutionary point-

ers, Jesus taught and fed. Even though He had all the support He could have asked for militarily, He refused to be the militaristic Messiah in the way people wanted. Rather, He opted to give the people the word of God and instruct His disciples to pass out bread from God.

People wanted freedom from Roman oppression; Jesus wanted freedom from death. They desired to be delivered from the chains of taxation; Jesus desired to deliver them from the Evil One. They were desperate to be loose from impure governors; Jesus was desperate to loose them from sin. Jesus showed Himself to be the militaristic Messiah prophesied centuries before, but to the *real* enemies of Jews and all humanity.

Fighting Jesus' fight

We take up arms with Jesus in the same way. Paul says, “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). And in another place,

Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine

power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

So let's engage in the cosmic battle of thoughts and spiritual forces of evil that Jesus defeated through death and resurrection, and will completely defeat at His second coming (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Let's not muddle around like the five thousand in militaristic fever against humans, but let's take Jesus' compassion as a cue to have compassion on the humanity He died for.

May the compassion Jesus had, and has, drive us to spread His teaching and nourishment to all the world, as the disciples did that day. May we not waste our energies battling flesh and blood but put those energies to proper use in being strong in the cosmic battle that Jesus already won. May God use us powerfully. **BA**

Jonathon Hicks and his wife, Danielle, pastor the CoG7 in Lodi, CA. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Bible. This article is available at baonline.org, complete with footnotes and extensive research.



Without Hope . . .



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by Jason Overman

In preparing for this issue of the *Bible Advocate*, I read every passage in the Bible about hope.

There are scores of them; Scripture is teeming with hopefulness. But scattered among these are several references to those without hope. These caught my attention because we need not look far to see the hopelessness that engulfs our world.

Jeremiah 29:11 displays the great hope that Old Testament Israel possessed: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” But Scripture is also aware of the futility lodging at the core of the wicked, without God or hope (Job 27:8; Proverbs 11:7).

This hints at a historical contrast between the worldviews of God’s biblical people and the surrounding cultures of that time. In his careful study on hope,¹ E. Hoffmann notes that the pervasive witness of the Old Testament is that there *is hope in God*. It identifies Yahweh as the object of hope more than seventy times. Interestingly, contrary to this portrait, we have no extant prayers from Babylonian sources that refer to the gods as their hope.

The evidence is even more compelling in the New Testament. The simple saying of Paul, “I have hope in God . . .” (Acts 24:15), summarizes a rich body of hopeful texts centered on Christ, while also revealing the stark disparity with the Greek world he inhabited. Hoffmann observes that the idea of hope as a basic religious orientation is unknown to the Greeks. The philosopher Seneca, for instance, saw hope as the very epitome of “an uncertain good.” In this worldview the average person is finally hopeless against the forces of sin and death.

Paul addressed this state of Godless hopelessness when writing to the Gentiles of Ephesus. He described their sad condition prior to Christ as one of

alienation from God’s people: “having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12). In Scripture, “no God” equals “no hope.”

We find ourselves in a similar situation. Writer David French recently documented just a small slice of this hopelessness in his article “America, 2016 — Killing Ourselves, Killing Each Other,”² where he comments on the “unprecedented” gang violence and drug overdoses that occurred in Chicago and Cincinnati, respectively, in a single month and week this summer. This kind of despair plays out in a thousand different ways across our neighborhoods and countries every day.

Some turn to political policy or social factors to account for the nihilism of our time. But Scripture already affirms what David French suspects, that at root, this is a spiritual crisis. This culture of death reflects hopelessness derived from Godlessness. If God is dead, as Friedrich Nietzsche claimed and as post-Christian culture increasingly validates, then the vacuum of godly hope seen in the Babylonian and Greek cultures of Bible times is merely a precursor of our times. But there *is* hope!

As I surveyed all the Bible verses on hope, I noticed that it is paired with one virtue more than any other. Over and over, hope is in company with rejoicing (or gladness and praise): “Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope” (Acts 2:26; cf. Psalm 16:9; 71:14; Proverbs 10:28; Romans 12:12; 15:13).

Rejoice in hope! We are the answer, the antidote, to the hopelessness of this deathly world because we have that “one hope” found in Christ. So “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you . . .” (1 Peter 3:15). The world awaits our joyful reply. **BA**

¹ E. Hoffmann, “Hope,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume 2 (1986), Colin Brown, editor, 238-244.

² nationalreview.com.



Careless speech

I wish the article by John LeBlanc ["The Gospel of Restoration," p. 12, July-August] had been edited more thoroughly before being sent to print. Twice he uses a euphemism for taking God's name in vain. Webster's Dictionary defines *gosh* as "an altered pronunciation of God" and "a euphemism for God."

God and Jesus each taught

the vital nature of clean speech. . . .

The *Bible Advocate* is read by an unlimited variety of people. Surely some are struggling to clean up their speech. What impact will it have on them when they see a substitute for God in their magazine? That is the kind of speech they are desperately praying to be delivered from. This issue of the *Bible Advocate* will be read by others throughout the years to come. Someone, a generation from now, might read LeBlanc's article and conclude that careless speech is fine for Christians. From a favorite children's song: "Be careful little tongue what you say."

J. L.
E-mail

This is a welcomed reminder. I'll be more careful to root out such thoughtless euphemisms in the future. — Editor

Words of grace

Amazing words of grace for all of us! Thank you, Calvin ["Fruits and Gifts," p. 18, July-August], for bringing such words of love and works for all Christians . . . Thank you for your fruit and gifts you have shared with us!

R. P.
BA Online comments

Reader and artist Heather Murray of Western Grove, Arkansas, was inspired by the 2016 BA theme of Discipleship and the seven "ones" of Ephesians 4:4-6. Can you find all seven (One God, One Lord, One Baptism, One Faith, One Spirit, One Body, and One Hope) represented in her one-of-a-kind painting? View a larger version at baonline.org.

Thanks, Heather, for sharing your remarkable talent with the body of Christ!

Blessed by BA

I am an inmate at C.M.V. at Los Lunas. I came across one of your *Bible Advocate* publications and I LOVE IT! I used it for a month as part of my daily Bible study. Please . . . please . . . add me to you mailing list.

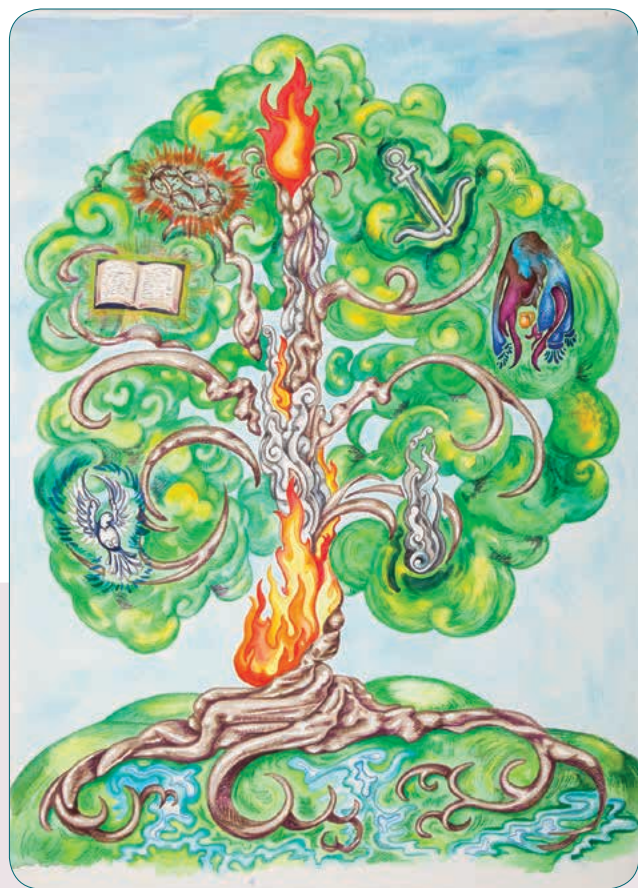
E. G.
Los Lunas, NM

I have received the BA for almost 60 years and am blessed by the truths taught within the pages of this magazine, which are scriptural. My prayers are with those who receive magazines worldwide, drawing closer to the Lord.

T. M.
Halsey, OR

I'd like to thank the *Bible Advocate* staff for a job well done and for the beautiful pictures and wonderful, insightful articles.

W. W.
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago





CoG7 In Action



Ministers and observers worked and fellowshiped during the North American Ministerial Council September 12-17.

NAMC Meets at Ridgecrest

Ministers of the North American Ministerial Council completed their 2016 meeting at Ridgecrest Conference Center in Black Mountain, North Carolina. For six days 103 ministers elected officers and standing committees, and discussed eight resolutions brought before the council. Elected at the meetings were . . .

Executive Committee: Samuel Holland (president), Jhabel Chagollan (vice president), Monico Muffley (secretary).

License and Credentials Committee: Ken Lawson, Steve Kyner, Monico Muffley, Noe Reyes, Eddie Villalba, Oscar Mata.

Nominating Committee: John Marlin (chair), Chip Hinds, Brian Larson.

Among the actions taken on the resolutions were adopting a Policy Statement on Homosexuality and authorizing the creation of a Committee on Women as Deacons to prepare a study and report to the 2018 council meet-

ing. (For the full NAMC report, visit cog7.org).

Other highlights of the meeting included the council president appointing an Evangelistic Event Planning Committee (Brian Franks, chair; Ruben Beard, David Ross, Paul Pedersen, Narciso Betances) and an outing to the Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove. Pastor Whaid Rose delivered a sermon that evening titled "Do the Work of an Evangelist."

Sabbath services consisted of a presentation from the executive team (Loren Stacy and Jody McCoy) titled "Transforming Vision into Reality." Order TVR posters and booklets at cog7.org/posters.

Our ministers were encouraged to become better partners as we labor together. Each pastor is an important communication link in building a vibrant 21st century church.

— Sam Holland
NAMC President

Quarterly Series on Vision

The BAP is excited to announce a four-part quarterly series for 2017 based on the General Conference's "Transforming Vision into Reality" message. These adult quarterlies will also be suitable for junior and senior high Sabbath school classes and will explore CoG7's ten-point vision: Christ Centered, Spirit Formed, Bible Based, Sabbath Celebrating, Distinct Yet Inclusive, Passionate in Worship, Compassionate in Service, Engaging in Witness, United in Fellowship, and Committed to Discipleship. We hope our whole church will study these 52 lessons together in 2017, and so more closely realize the vision God has given us. Order *Part 1 - Christ the Word* today at bap.orders@cog7.org.

Asleep in Jesus

Orabelle Dugger Youngs, beloved wife of the late Elder Victor A. Youngs, died August 28, 2016, at age 88. She was born August 1, 1928, to Elder Andrew Nugent and Effie (Carpenter) Dugger in Stanberry, Missouri.



Victor and Orabelle married in 1949 at the CoG7 in Marion, Oregon, and they served congregations in Ontario, California; Nampa, Idaho; Walla Walla, Washington; and Portland, Oregon. Orabelle is survived by three siblings, ten children, 54 grandchildren, 103 great-grandchildren, and a multitude of nieces, nephews, and friends.

For more, visit “Memorials” at cog7.org.

Curriculum

It's not too soon to start thinking about first quarter 2017 Bible studies.

Intermediate: *Jesus' Ministry* teaches students why Jesus came, how He cared for people,

and why we must accept Him as Savior. They will also learn that we can be confident that Jesus' promise of eternal life will be fulfilled.

Primary: In *Kings and Prophets*, lessons center on the stories in 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings — from David bringing the ark to Jerusalem to Elisha healing Naaman of leprosy. Students will witness what happens when people obey God, then disobey Him. Most important, students

will learn that God loves and provides for us and is eager to forgive us when we've sinned.

Preschool/Kindergarten: *God – Always in Control, Always with a Plan* starts with Noah and the Flood and ends with Joseph saving his family from the famine. Students will see that God is in control, keeps His promises, and has a plan to bring good out of the worst situations. They will see that if we truly trust God, we will obey Him.

STATEMENT

Of the ownership, management, and circulation (required by the Act of Congress of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code) of the BIBLE ADVOCATE, published bimonthly at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2016.

Publisher: Bible Advocate Press, 330 West 152nd Ave., Broomfield, Colorado.

Editor: Jason Overman, Box 33677, Denver, Colorado.

Owner: The General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), 330 West 152nd Ave., Broomfield, Colorado 80020.

The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed through the mail and otherwise, to paid subscriptions during the 12 months preceding the date shown above is 11,930.



Bridging the Gap

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Thank you for your generosity and prayers. Without these, our ministries cannot do their good work.

Doing kingdom work together that none of us can do alone.

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International Congress

On Mission

Myanmar

The Church of God (Seventh Day) in Myanmar began in 2010 with various beliefs and untrained leadership. With support from G. C. Missions, a building was constructed in 2013 for the Yangon church and national Bible school. The school's primary vision is to train men and women and equip them with leadership skills. Three students have completed two-year diplomas and are now serving the Church full time: two in Mindat, Chin State, and one in Mainuai, near Kalay Valley. Many more will go as missionaries and build churches. The current number of workers is expected to increase by 50 percent in 2017 through the Bible school ministry.

The Church's doctrinal statement, *This We Believe*, has been translated into Burmese and is being taught in local churches as a means toward unity. In this way, the Church is gradually becoming more orderly and systematic.

The orphanage ministry began this year with a few orphans and many challenges. The vision is to provide them education in the fear of the Lord so they can grow and become fruitful persons under our guardianship.

If an organization grows, the financial need to sustain its growth is inescapable. With this in mind, a fish pond was purchased in Mainuai as an investment. The pond needs re-digging and upgrading to facilitate more fish.

Meanwhile, this country's Buddhism becomes more and more hostile to other faiths. There must be a way for the gospel to reach unbelievers — a way for which God is designing and preparing His church.

— *Tluang Kung*
General Secretary

Pakistan

Pakistan came into being in 1947. It is a peaceful country with four seasons and good land for agriculture.

By our law and constitution, every religion and caste is free to offer its prayers. CoG7 is safely working in nearly every region of this country. We have good relations with other religions: Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Ahmadi, and others. We are trying our best to reach the unreached with the Word of God through churches, sewing centers, Bible schools, widows' support, and medical treatment. Our wish is to start a CoG7 Pakistan television broadcast and youth leadership training in different cities. We also want to start a mobile medical clinic to reach new areas.

CoG7 Pakistan Seminary is going well, as are new Bible training classes in Karachi. I am thankful because under your patronage and with your guidance, CoG7 Pakistan is growing. Please keep Pakistan in your prayers.

— *Bishop Dr. Shamas Pervaiz*

**Don't forget to
pray for the
IMC Sabbath,
November 5,
2016. And
remember world
missions in your giving!**



Two Hopes

I sometimes speak with people about their assurance of their salvation. “If Jesus returns tonight,” I ask, “will you be welcomed into His kingdom to spend eternity with Him?” Too often, the surprising answer from those I know to be fully committed to God is “I hope so.” Further discussion reveals theirs is an uncertain hope. It is the hope of an employee seeking a raise. He thinks he’ll get it, but he can’t be sure until it shows up in his paycheck. It is the hope of a young couple buying their first house. Their offer has been accepted, they’ve signed the papers, but it’s still in escrow where almost anything can happen.

“Are you saved?”

“I hope so.” Uncertain hope.

I thank God that there is a second type of hope: certain hope. This is expressed throughout the New Testament epistles regarding Christ and salvation. It has been described as a “confident anticipation.” It is the hope for things already reality in God’s mind, though not yet fully received by God’s children: “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it” (Romans 8:24, 25, NASB throughout). We “wait eagerly for it” because we know that this present and promised blessing will be fully received. We know this without a doubt because God himself has promised it: “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge” (2 Corinthians 1:21, 22).

This certain hope is the reason that those who have been saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8) need not doubt or fear the return of Christ. For believers, Christ

“is our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1), and His appearing is our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:11-14). If someone has the mistaken notion that he can and must earn salvation (I’ve been there!), no wonder his hope for salvation is uncertain. But for those believers who take God’s Word for it, our hope is certain. It is the confident anticipation that God’s promises will be fulfilled, made more certain by the evidences of the Holy Spirit working within us: “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (3:5-7).

The seven “ones” of Ephesians 4:4-6 are seven realities that unite all believers and are listed as reasons to preserve peace and unity within the body of Christ. One of those is “one hope of your calling,” our shared confident expectation of receiving all that God has promised us, during our lifetimes and throughout eternity, in Christ.

“If Jesus returns tonight, will you be welcomed into His kingdom to spend eternity with Him?”

“I sure will! I have been saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on my behalf that I might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

In Christ, we have hope.
Certain hope.

— Loren Stacy





General Conference Convention

"Worthy is the Lamb"

July 3-8, 2017

Springfield, Illinois

You won't want to miss this gathering!

- ❖ Revision of bylaws, fellowship with friends and relatives, inspiring worship, fun and Spirit-filled activities for children, youth, young adults, and seniors.
- ❖ Activities in historic Springfield, Illinois, home of Abraham Lincoln.
- ❖ Spacious, comfortable rooms in the Crowne Plaza Springfield, the largest convention hotel in central Illinois.

Look for more information in future issues of the BA.

