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BIBLE ADVOCATE®

November - December 2018

Kingdom
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2018: This We Believe

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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 152 • 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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Subscriptions and Orders

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.

Cover photo: © Rawpixelimages | Dreamstime.com

One-Sixth Prophecy

Greetings! We've come to the last issue of 2018 and our last two statements of faith, regarding prophecy. I hope you have enjoyed this six-issue trip through *This We Believe*. Next year is all about the Great Commission. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Traditionally we have dedicated this issue each year to prophecy. It occurred to me that this represents one-sixth of our annual issues, the same proportion as in *This We Believe*, with two of its twelve statements of faith dedicated to end times.

This got me thinking. What percentage of the Bible is prophetic? Is it close to the one-sixth that the BA and *This We Believe* devote to the subject? Estimates vary, depending on how you define and count prophecy, but one critical source is often cited as a good estimation.

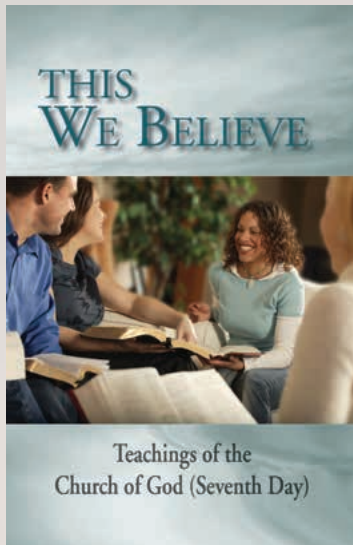
Anglican scholar J. Barton Payne has calculated that 26.8 percent of the Bible is prophetic. In his massive *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, Payne counts 1,239 Old Testament prophecies and another 578 in the New, starting with the prediction of Adam's death in Genesis 2:17. That's 1,817 total, covering 8,352 of the Bible's 31,124 verses — or just over *one-fourth* of Scripture!

Considering Payne's methodology of including both fulfilled and future prophecies in his count, our one-sixth focus on the future coming of Christ and His kingdom is about right. If roughly one-quarter of the Bible is prophecy, we ought to take notice. But caution is needed. I was asked a while back why I wasn't preaching on the blood moons. Well, that came and went, but it illustrates why we don't hear more prophecy from the pulpit. The boundless, fanciful speculation of many discourages the rest from bothering with prophecy.

Fallacious interpreters guessing the day and hour of Christ's return shouldn't deter us from sober end-time teaching. It's essential to the health of the church. Two reasons spring to mind. *Fulfilled* prophecy assures us that the God who has promised also performs, nurturing confidence in God's people. And prophecy *unfulfilled* reminds us that God has ordained a destination that informs our present, cultivating hope in God's people. We can enumerate more reasons that prophecy is important, but these — confidence and hope — are key. May we be filled with both.

— Jason Overman





This We Believe

In the sixth part of this series, we feature our teachings on eschatology and end times, taken from *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*.

Statement of Faith 11

Prophecy

This we believe:

Bible prophecy preserves and strengthens a believer's hope for the Second Advent. It identifies religious, social, and political trends and events, including the rebirth of the nation of Israel, which point to the imminent return of Christ and the eventual establishment of God's eternal kingdom on earth.

History in this world — this present age — is like a straight line with a period at each end. It had a definite beginning, and it will have a definite end.

This Christian view differs with other faiths that see history as circular, not linear. For example, some religions champion the idea of reincarnation that accents not the end of life or of the world, but the endless recycling of human lives.

The Bible, on the other hand, informs us that time, space, and all things had an origin: God created them at the start. Without knowing the exact age of the universe, we do know there was a time when it was not. Time began when space began. All this is reported in the Bible's first verse: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Since the beginning, time has been moving along a straight line toward the end of history as we know it. We are headed somewhere — to a time and place we've never been before.

The same Bible that tells the start of this present world also tells us something of its end — not everything we'd like to know, but what we need to know. The data given in God's Word about what the future holds and the end of this age is one form of what is called prophecy.

Most biblical information about the world's start is found in the first book, Genesis. Likewise, a fair share of information about the end comes from the Bible's later books — the prophets in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New. These, in fact, may be labeled

“books of prophecy,” although prophetic chapters are scattered elsewhere. Fully 25 percent of the Bible is prophecy in some form. . . .

Prophecy’s purpose

Modern times offer many reasons to believe that we live in the closing scenes of history, that the second coming of Christ could happen very soon. The unprecedented events and world conditions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries include many “signs of the times” that support the imminence of His return.

For example, consider the return of the Jewish people to their promised homeland and the rebirth of national Israel in light of Luke 21:20-24 and other texts. Consider the exponential growth of human population and modern technology, the threat to humanity posed by weapons of mass destruction and other potential disasters in light of Daniel 12:4 and Luke 21:25ff. To the careful student of Scripture, these may be more compelling than the common “signs” that have characterized most of human history, like earthquakes, famines, wars, love of pleasure, and general wickedness.

While some focus on the more sensational events they suppose must happen before Christ can return (rapture of the church, appearance of a final Antichrist, Great Tribulation upon Jews, etc.), doing so seems to ignore a more sure word of prophecy: the Lord’s sudden, surprising appearance during mostly normal times (see Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).

More distress and trauma could be ahead for the world in the short-term future, to be sure, but we should avoid the temptation to use each new, darksome headline as another proof that Jesus will come in our lifetime. He may not. Prophecy is not given for us to speculate on the time of the end. Rather, it is given so that God’s people, in difficult times, can be comforted that history is headed somewhere and that all God’s promises for the last great day are in our favor!

For those without the assurance that faith brings, last-days prophecies can serve as a warning of what’s ahead for those who reject Jesus, the only refuge against coming storms. Yes, prophetic passages rightly used are valid tools and motivators in evangelism. Jesus Christ is coming again. Prepare to meet your God! . . .

Are these the last days?

Our world has serious problems: environmental pollution; a one-world economy based on precarious foundations; serious moral and social struggles like abortion, pornography, divorce, diseases, drugs, malnutrition, terrorism, and the possibility of nuclear destruction. What a depressing picture!

But do all these problems prove that we live in the last days just before the return of Jesus Christ? Many Christians believe they do. Some have accepted a scenario of specific events that supposedly lead to a rapture and then the Second Coming, using biblical numerics to set a timetable.

To be sure, the end may be near, but there is great danger in so much preoccupation with eschatology. Let’s consider more evidence — from the Bible and history.

Paul and other apostles evidently thought that the Messiah would return in their generation. Frequently, New Testament writers referred to their time as the “last days” or as the “last hour” (Acts 2:16, 17; Romans 13:11; Hebrews 1:1, 2; James 5:3; 1 John 2:18). These references suggest that all time since Christ’s first advent can be considered as the end time or last days.

For all New Testament writers, it was the end. They all died, but the world went on. Down through the centuries, Christians have typically believed that they lived at the end of the age, that they would live to see the second coming of Christ, that the turmoil and problems of their day were sure signs of the end. Many Christians, including well-respected scholars, have set dates based on various “Bible” chronologies. Periods of 2300, 2520, 1260, 1290,



1335, and 1000 years have been manipulated in various ways to predict the end in the years 1000, 1844, 1914, 1975, 1988, 2011, and others. All these dates have two things in common: They made good sense to many people at the time, and they were all wrong.

Why is there such a preoccupation with figuring out when Jesus will return and with seeing every evil as a sure sign of the end? One reason is that Christians long to be united with their Savior at the resurrection — a blessed hope indeed. Another reason is not so godly. It is the same reason people consult fortunetellers and astrologers: They are curious about the future. Unable to rest securely in the loving arms of their Creator, they want to know what lies ahead. And for every such individual, there is some Bible teacher ready with new proofs of how near the end is or of exactly when and how it will occur. . . .

Real message

Very possibly we do live in the last days. But how sad that all the gloom and doom, all the end-time prognostication, all the date-setting obscure the real message of Christianity. The fact is that it is the end time for this generation. All of us will die. And unless we have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are not ready for our end.

On the other hand, if we have become a child of God through Jesus Christ, then we are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Whatever happens in the kingdoms of this earth, our eternal future is secure as long as we continue in Christ by faith.

What happens on this earth is of great consequence to our children and us in the physical realm. Whether or not freedoms and blessings continue in our homelands should be of great concern to Christians. But whatever the freedoms, whatever the blessings in this life, they will ultimately end. The only ultimate freedom, the only ultimate blessing, the only ultimate security is in the eternal, spiritual realm: the kingdom of God.

From pages 171-182

Statement of Faith 12

The Kingdom of God

This we believe:

The kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven) is realized in three phases:

The present kingdom. The spiritual kingdom of grace exists now as God rules in the lives of obedient believers. This kingdom was announced and revealed through the prophets and the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter this kingdom when we turn from our sin to serve God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The millennial kingdom of Christ. Jesus will return to earth in power and glory to resurrect the righteous dead, bestow immortality and eternal life upon the resurrected and the living righteous, avenge the saints, and be glorified in them. His earthly reign of one thousand years will be a universal kingdom in which all principalities, powers, and enemies are overcome. At its conclusion, the unrighteous will be resurrected to suffer annihilation at the great white throne judgment.

The eternal kingdom of God. God's eternal kingdom will begin when Jesus Christ, having put all enemies under His feet, turns the kingdom over to the Father. God will dwell with the redeemed in a new heaven and a new earth where no disappointment, defilement, or death can enter and where righteousness and peace will prevail forever.

From pages 185-186 **BA**

Learn more about prophecy and the kingdom of God in our free gospel tracts at publications.org. Or order your own copy of *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* at cog7.org/online-store/.



THE BIBLE ADVOCATE



AND HERALD OF THE COMING KINGDOM

"THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH."

Where Standeth Thou?

M. S. Marrs

The Master left a task to do,
To test our faith and patience too,
And train us for a life anew;
—Supernal.

With longing voice He makes the call,
And offers peace to great and small,
And happiness to one and all;
—Eternal.

Then do you wish to take your place
In the game of life, and run the race,
With human zeal and Christian grace;
—Undaunted?

Or will you always, from afar,
Just be content from where you are,
To criticize a shining star,
—Thats wanted.

Pray were you into being brought,
By some who had no careful tho't,
Or have you set good works at naught,
—O Youthful?

Nay Sleeper! Now's no time to dream
Of worldly wealth and pleasures mean,
Yea, rather seek a righteous theme;
—Be Fruitful.

Read this poem, along with the August 1936 issue, at baonline.org.



A Change of Emphasis

In this final entry on Church of God history, our church historian reviews the development of thinking on the end times.

by Robert Coulter

Like most churches of the nineteenth century, the Church of Christ, Michigan, and the Church of Jesus Christ, Iowa, believed that most Bible prophecies had been fulfilled. It was generally believed that the seven churches of Asia Minor, identified in Revelation 2 and 3, represented church eras and that the Christian church was in the Laodicean, or the last church, age.

The Iowa and Michigan churches anticipated the second coming of Jesus as the next great

prophetic event. According to *The Hope of Israel* (October 10, 1863), they expected Jesus' return to be accompanied with the resurrection of the righteous dead to everlasting life, the establishment of His millennial kingdom on earth, restoration of the earth "to more than its Eden glory and beauty." They anticipated that at the end of the millennium, the wicked would be resurrected and annihilated in the lake of fire just prior to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

These churches also anticipated the reestablishment of the State of Israel. This series of beliefs, as a whole, was known in the 1850s as "the age to come" doctrine.

The Michigan and Iowa churches believed the 1,260 years of domination by the Roman church's papacy over the Christian world, spoken of in Daniel 7, had ended in 1798. They believed that Catholicism's

authority would continue to diminish in the years to come until it was ultimately destroyed by the brightness of Jesus' coming.

The Hope of Israel published articles calling believers to come out of Rome's apostasy and accept Bible truth – and the observance of Sabbath in particular – without fear of persecution or the threat of death.

The Michigan and Iowa churches did not believe prophetic interpretations should become a test of fellowship, and declined to establish their prophetic beliefs as doctrines, except for the return of Jesus and its attendant events making up the "age to come" doctrine.

In contrast to the Iowa and Michigan churches' simple eschatology (the branch of theology dealing with the final end of humanity and of the world), the Seventh-day Adventist Church taught a convoluted eschatology: 1) The United States is the

two-horned beast of Revelation 13:11-17 and would be complicit in enforcing the mark of the beast upon Christianity. 2) The three angels' message, with special emphasis on the third angel's message of Revelation 14:6-12 as an end-time message and the outpouring of the seven last plagues of Revelation 15, 16 (which the SDA Church considered future and literal events) is God's wrath upon a sinful world.

Revised eschatology

The churches of Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri organized the General Conference of the Church of God in October 1884. Other than its doctrine that humanity may receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the Conference's simple message was the observance of the weekly Sabbath and the second coming of Jesus, including the tenets of the "age to come" doctrine.

However, the eschatology of the Church of God was completely revised by her president, Andrew N. Dugger, in the 1920s and 30s. He introduced a modified version of the SDA's eschatology to the Church. He taught the revival of papal authority, permitting its future enforcement of the mark of the beast. He wrote that the Church of the 1920s and 30s was preaching the third angel's message in anticipation of the outpouring of the seven last plagues, which he considered future and literal events. He taught Jesus' return would be ushered in by the Battle of Armageddon.

While Dugger's revision of the Church's eschatology met with some resistance, it was accepted by most of the Church's

clerics and members. But it had a devastating effect upon her gospel message. The Church all but abandoned preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to emphasize prophecy and the events that would lead to Jesus' return.

The ministerial body of the Church of God enshrined a mix of the "age to come" and Dugger's prophetic concepts in its revision of *What the Church of God Believes and Why* of 1949. It included the following: 1) millennial reign of Christ on earth; 2) earth restored; 3) three divisions of God's kingdom, which are the present kingdom of grace, the millennial kingdom of Jesus, and the eternal kingdom of God; 4) reestablishment of the State of Israel; 5) second coming of Christ. 6) role of prophecy in pointing to the nearness of Jesus' return; 7) sign of the times demonstrating that the world is in the "time of the end"; 8) outpouring of God's wrath upon sin and sinners in seven literal, future plagues; 9) third angel's message as a last-days message inviting believers to come out of the apostasies of the beast power of Revelation 13:11-17.

However, as the Church of God recognized that her over-emphasis on prophecy was misplaced and she began preaching the grace of God as the only means of salvation through faith in Christ, she reduced her prophetic concerns to two simple statements in our current Statement of Faith ("This We Believe," pp. 4-6).

Growth in grace and knowledge

As we have reflected on the development of the Church of God's theology in the *Bible Advocate* this year, our appreciation has grown for her open creed. It has allowed us to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God who dwells within each believer still corrects and leads us into all truth. **BA**

Robert Coulter lives with his wife, Ida, in Northglenn, CO. They attend the Denver church.



Do you want to learn more about the Church of God's beliefs? Then be sure to purchase a copy of *This We Believe: Teachings of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*. All twelve statements of faith are covered in detail, with space to take notes.

This paperback edition is available for purchase in English and Spanish for \$10. Order it through the online store at cog7.org. For special pricing on bulk orders, call 303-452-7973.





The Last Days

Are the end times an event
two thousand years long?

by Paulo Jorge Coelho

Paul and other apostles evidently thought that the Messiah would return in their generation. Frequently, New Testament writers referred to their time as the “last days” or as the “last hour” (Acts 2:16, 17; Romans 13:11; Hebrews 1:1, 2; James 5:3; 1 John 2:18). These references suggest

that all time since Christ’s first advent can be considered as the end time or last days” (*This We Believe*, p. 179).

In AD 70, when our brethren in Christ saw Jerusalem surrounded by the armies of Rome and the city and temple destroyed, surely many of them were convinced that those were the last days and that the second coming of Jesus was near. Christians of the fourteenth century thought the same when the Black Plague decimated about a third of the European population. The same

has certainly happened with our brothers who witnessed the horrors and violence of World War II in the early 1940s. However, after all these years, Christ has not returned yet.

Were they totally wrong in their interpretation of the prophecies? Amazingly, it’s possible they were all right!

As suggested in the Church’s book of doctrine, *This We Believe*, from the biblical perspective, what we refer to as “the last days” is already a story two thousand years old. In fact, we have good grounds for this interpretation.

Battle in heaven

One of the key biblical texts to help us understand the beginning of the “last days” period is Revelation 12. In figurative language, this chapter approaches the conflict between good and evil as a determining event and marker of a “new age” of the life of humanity — namely, the expulsion of Satan from the heavens and his fall to the earth, with great wrath to influence human beings and persecute the church of God. The gravity of the situation is reinforced by the words of verse 12: “Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

We should note that the expression “he knows that his time is short” is clearly related to the concept of the last days.

When was Satan cast down to the earth in the wake of his defeat in heaven, ushering in

continued on page 27

Questions & Answers



Why does our Statement of Faith (#10) on Christian Living in *This We Believe* keep repeating “As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should. . . .” Doesn’t this water down the importance of obedience?

With you (the questioner), the Church of God affirms the high value Scripture places on obedience as a vital aspect of Christian faith and practice. Dozens or hundreds of Bible texts in both Testaments underscore the importance of keeping the divine moral law: the commandments of God and of Christ. The imperative duty of every man, woman, boy, and girl is to obey God rather than man. The entire Bible constantly conveys the idea that knowing and obeying the perfect Word and will of God is humanity’s whole duty.

Why, then, does the Church, as a uniform preface to her several sub-statements on Christian conduct, insist that human acts of obedience do not and cannot cause (i.e., produce, generate, or bring about) redemption (i.e., salvation)? Primarily, because we also recognize the biblical truth that obedience has its limits.

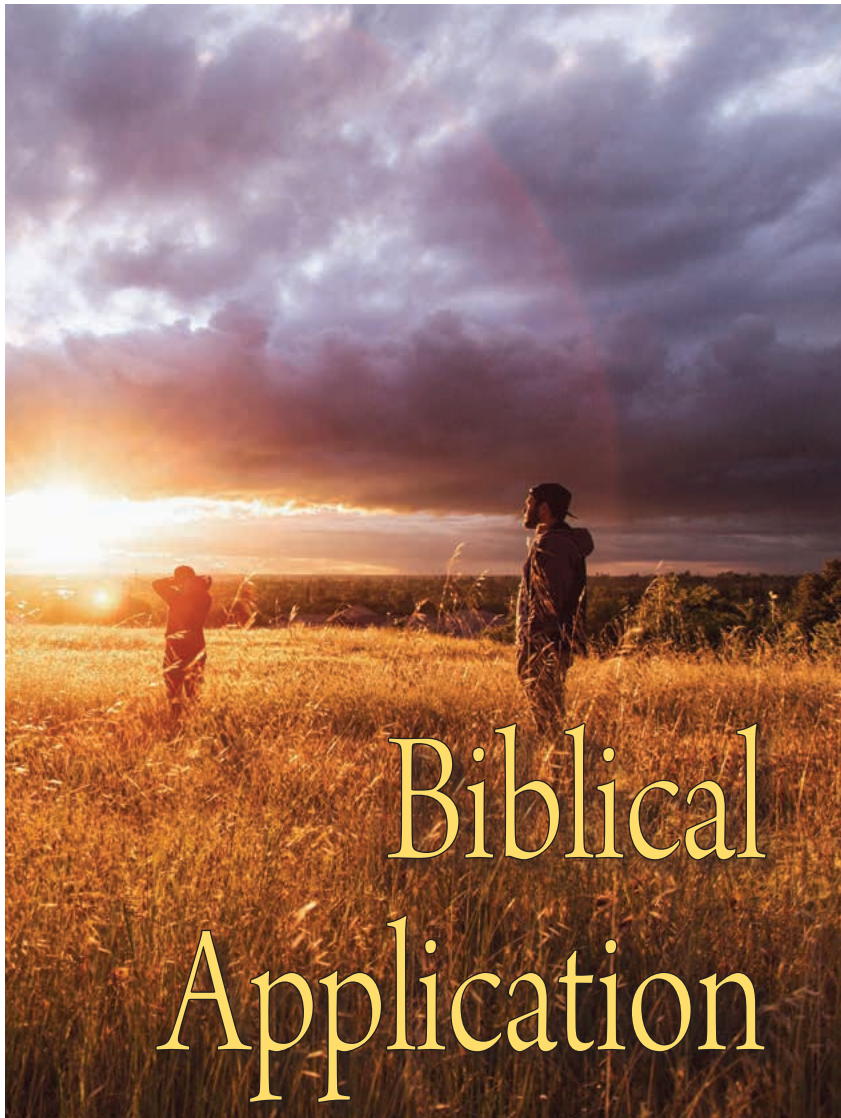
The limits of obedience are not due to flaws in the laws that define sin but to our human flaws — the sin that dwells in us all (Romans 7:12, 14, 16-18). Our inability to perform flawless obedience to the flawless law of God is inseparable from what it means to be human, though freely redeemed and fully justified in Christ (Isaiah 64:6; Philippians 3:9). Thus we affirm the priority of God’s unlimited grace to redeem and save His people through their faith in the perfect work of Jesus, rather than through the limits of their imperfect obedience.

This view protects the glory of God and rejects any human boast for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:29-31; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:9). It recognizes that salvation and redemption require the perfect work of an almighty, sovereign God and that all human obedience and good works are less than perfect, tainted by the tendency to pride and selfishness. It harmonizes with the many Bible texts that indicate our own righteousness (obedience and good works) is insufficient to win the righteousness of God (Isaiah 64:6; Philippians 3:9).

We do not “water down” the importance of obedience to God’s plan when we recognize human obedience as subordinate to the divine mercy and grace received in Christ. Rather, a greater obedience may be enabled through love and gratitude toward God and Christ than can be generated through legal requirement. Properly taught, the gospel of God’s grace in Christ does not water down the beauty of holiness and obedience. On the contrary, grace establishes obedience, elevates its importance, and *waters it up* (Romans 3:31).

Earlier in our *This We Believe* book, Statement of Faith #4 provides a fuller explanation of what we understand Scripture teaches concerning salvation and redemption: “Sinful humanity may be saved from the penalty of eternal death and receive eternal life instead, solely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies” (p. 47). With our salvation foundation laid squarely on God’s grace in Christ Jesus, we go on to affirm over and over that obedience and good works freely flow from that salvation, not the other way around.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Wrapping up our six-part series on the authority of Scripture, we examine the Bible's impact on our lives.
by Gordon Feil

This year we discussed the revelation, inspiration, canonization, and preservation of the Bible. In this last study, we turn to the *illumination* and *application* of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit reveals mean-

ing to people Jesus dwells in. That's the process of illumination. Someone with God's Spirit working in them can understand and obtain from a Bible text meaning that cannot be garnered by people without His Spirit, despite their age and education. How that happens, we don't know; it is still a mystery. When we come to the Messiah in faith, His Spirit illuminates the Bible:

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for

those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

God gives *all* of us understanding. His wisdom is to put the cookies on the bottom shelf so that all His kids can reach them. We do not need somebody to tell us what the Bible means because, as 1 Corinthians 2:13 says. "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches." This does not mean that teachers sharing their understanding provide no benefit (Acts 8:30, 31). It means that even if someone explains a Bible truth to us, we won't get it without God's Spirit opening our minds to understanding.

Illuminating is comparing

So how does this process of the Holy Spirit teaching us, or illumination, happen? Paul says it's by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." *The Bible is understood best when compared with the Bible.* The Spirit compares what God has revealed with what God has revealed. One of the biggest reasons we don't understand something in the Bible is that we have not compared it with what God has revealed else-

where in His Word. God's Spirit gives us that ability.

Now notice Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." *Discern* means to come to a right conclusion on something. The Spirit of Christ makes that possible.

Illumination involves explanation and interpretation, the challenges of study. It takes time to know what was meant for us. Second Timothy 2:15 tells us to "Be diligent. . . ." The word *diligent* means meticulous, implying work over time. The verse continues, "to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed. . . ." Why would you not need to be ashamed? Because you are "rightly dividing the word of truth."

Applying is obeying

Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. . . ." How are we going to understand the wisdom of Scripture? Through obedience, as the verse concludes: "all those who practice it have a good understanding" (ESV). We learn by doing. If you want to understand the mind of God, you have to apply it.

Why do some people read *and do*, while other people read *and do not*? Are we convicted when we read the Bible? Do we see that it is talking to us? If so, that's the Holy Spirit, first illuminating the Word to convict our hearts and then moving us to apply it to our everyday lives.

Going back to 2 Timothy, Paul

says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" for four things: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (3:16). The word translated from Greek as "correction" means the act of fixing something that's been broken. *Instruction in righteousness* suggests disciplined education.

What is the ultimate point of all this? Paul tells us: "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (v. 17). The purpose of Scripture is to transform us, to make us complete, able to do God's will fully. You need instruction? That's your Book! You need

matter how much illumination we have, how much explanation. If we don't have application, we've missed the whole point — the whole benefit.

Are you in love with the Bible? Do you yearn for it? Is your "soul consumed with longing for [God's] laws at all times," as Psalm 119:20 says (NIV)? Is the Bible making a difference in your life? Does "the law of the LORD" revive your soul and bring your heart joy, as it says in Psalm 19:7, 8? Probably not, if you aren't studying the Bible. If you are, it is making a difference.

We have no light in ourselves. In Philippians 2:15, 16, Paul says

“We learn by doing. If you want to understand the mind of God, you have to apply it.”

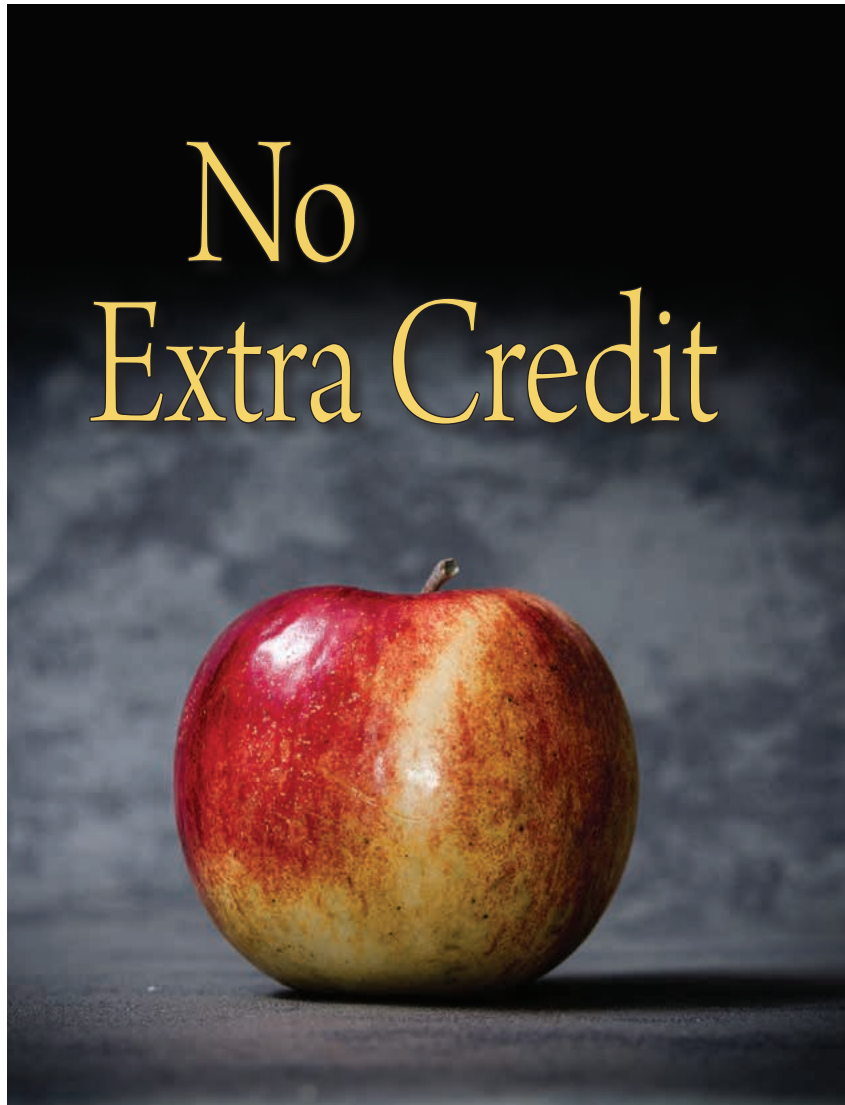
to be convinced of something with proof? It's there! You're broken and need fixing? You got it! You need a disciplined spiritual education? That's there too. It's all there for you, at your fingertips.

Transformed and reflecting

This Book has changed lives; the Bible changed my life. It can change yours too. But it doesn't

that we "shine as lights in the world . . . Holding forth the word of life" (KJV). For the Greeks, that word *light* was used for the light of the moon — not of itself, but reflected. We are the light of the world because we reflect the light from God's Word. The true source is the Sun of righteousness and the living Word (Malachi 4:2; John 1:1).

continued on page 26



Should we blame the devil every time we're tempted and tested?
by **Shadia Hrichi**

I don't remember the exact details that prompted my friend to say it, but I do recall being a young believer at the time, struggling with something that wasn't going my way. I carelessly blamed my difficulty on the schemes of the devil, which led to my friend's gentle correction:

"Don't give the devil so much credit."

It is so easy, even tempting, to assume every trial, struggle, and difficulty we face is rooted in the Enemy's schemes. He's delighted, of course, for this focuses our attention on our problems and away from God, providing fertile ground for the Enemy to plant doubt in our minds as to God's goodness, power, and love.

My friend's statement is a good one. What if we are giving the devil too much credit? Is every difficulty we face really from him?

Temptation vs. testing

I did some research and discovered that in the New Testament, the Greek word translated "temptation" (*peirasmos*) is the same word translated as "testing."* Even more curious, the word is derived from the Greek word *peira*, which means "an experiment." Isn't that comforting? The word itself is neutral; the translation depends on context. If Satan is attempting to entice a person to sin, it's translated "temptation."

However, if God is orchestrating events in order to strengthen a person's faith, build character, or serve some other godly purpose He ordains, then *peirasmos* is translated "testing." At times, we may even think of it as two sides of the same coin. Whenever God desires to strengthen us, Satan is right there trying to tear us down. When the Enemy comes after us to steal, kill, and destroy, God is right there, taking what was meant for evil and using it for good (Genesis 50:20).

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to *test* you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. . . . Therefore let those who suffer *according to God's will* entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good (1 Peter 4:12, 13, 19, emphasis mine).

No one wants to suffer, but Scripture clearly teaches that at times God allows, even wills, suffering for good purposes. Nevertheless, just as we need to be

Careful not to give undue credit to the Enemy, we must never ascribe any kind of evil to God, no matter the outcome. God is holy. He never wills or orchestrates sin or tempts anyone with evil (James 1:13). If we suffer as a consequence of evil desires (whether ours or someone else's), we can be certain it is of the devil.

Understanding suffering

On the other hand, if suffering is intended for our good, then it's from God (Hebrews 12:6, 10). Other types of suffering are simply the tragic, but natural, consequence of living in a sin-cursed world. However, all too often we ascribe any kind of challenge as Satan's doing.

In one sense, this is true in that, had God prevented Satan from deceiving Adam and Eve in the garden, sin and suffering would never have entered the world. Alas, sin and suffering have entered. Yet perhaps the more difficult question to grasp is why God, who is good, all wise, and all knowing, allowed it to happen.

While we may not understand why God does everything He does, He has, in His grace, revealed to us who He is: loving, holy, patient, all-knowing, good, and so much more. We must cling to these truths whenever we undergo trials and are tempted to doubt God's wisdom, goodness, or love. It should be no surprise that whenever God orchestrates events to strengthen our character, build our faith, or draw us closer to Him, the Enemy will be lurking in the shadows, looking for an opportunity to entice us away from God.

May we, like the apostle Paul, resolve to trust in God's revelation of Himself and, if we must suffer, to trust He will empower us to even rejoice in our ordeal: "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope . . ." (Romans 5:3, 4).

The word *rejoice* in the above passage is *kauchometha* in Greek and literally means "to boast." Therefore Paul is not suggesting that we should enjoy suffering, but rather that we can boast in what it will accomplish for God's glory.

Then, in light of this precious gift, we can truly rejoice:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [who] caused us to be born again to a living hope . . . to an inheritance . . . kept in heaven for you. . . . In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3, 4, 6, 7).

Rather than blame the devil

“Just as we need to be careful not to give undue credit to the Enemy, we must never ascribe any kind of evil to God.”

Genuine faith

Finally, like Abraham who was called to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah, we can trust in God even in the testing of our faith. He never tests us because He needs to assess our faith. God is omniscient; we are the ones who are uncertain. God tests our faith so that we can praise Him ("boast" of Him) when we discover that our faith, a gift from God himself, is truly genuine.

for everything bad that comes along, we can keep the right perspective, knowing that God is working *all* things for good in our lives. ^{BA}

* In the Old Testament, there is no Hebrew word translated "temptation."

Shadia Hrichi writes from San Jose, CA. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



Letters of Hope

by R. Herbert

When we think of the book of Revelation, the first things that come to mind are mysterious symbolism and apocalyptic imagery. But one of its most significant characteristics may be one we tend to miss: a consistent message of hope to the persecuted church.

Persecution is described in all parts of Revelation, and its historical context provides a reason for this. John's apocalyptic writing most likely dates to the AD 90s, during the reign of Emperor Domitian. The persecution of Christians reached a climax at this time. Many were executed, and John himself was banished to the island of Patmos.

When we see this historical context clearly, we grasp the importance of Revelation's message of "hope despite persecution." We see it in John's introductory words to his fellow believers: "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ . . ." (1:9) — words that set the tone for the whole book.

We especially see this theme of endurance under persecution in the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3). These are written as imperial edicts, but John makes it clear that Jesus is the king of kings (and emperors) to whom we must listen. Just as imperial Roman edicts proclaimed, for example, "Hear what Domitian says," so the letters of Revelation all include "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, et al.).

Just as imperial edicts would often say "I know what you have done" to their recipients, so the seven letters repeatedly stress Christ's words: "I know your works . . ." (2:2, et al.). The letter to Smyrna makes this theme clear: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty . . . Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. . . and you

will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (vv. 9, 10).

We can learn much about persecution and hope from these seven letters. Consider two vital facts:

1. The letters, except for Sardis and Laodicea, contain encouragement regarding perseverance in persecution. But persecution is not mentioned in Sardis and Laodicea. They are said to be either asleep or blind.

2. Conversely, each church is given some correction, apart from Smyrna and Philadelphia, historically the two most persecuted churches. Of the seven, the most fiercely persecuted congregations are the only ones praised without reproach.

Thus we must never presume persecution comes upon believers because they are not sincere or holy enough. If anything, the opposite is true: Churches that are not persecuted may not be spiritually alive.

This is not just a message regarding persecution in John's time (1:19). Today Christianity is the most persecuted religious faith in the world. More people have reportedly died for their belief in Christ during the last century than in all nineteen previous centuries. In the twenty-first century, the number has increased even more. But if there is a single, unifying message in Revelation's letters to the churches, it is that God sees their trials and promises that whatever is taken from them by persecution will be returned in the kingdom at an infinitely greater level — whether relationships, positions, possessions, or life itself. In this we rejoice! **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern languages, biblical studies, and archaeology.

Kingdom Come

Oh how we seek that kingdom come
When Satan's rule is finally done
And peace is on this earth at last,
With sin and evil finally past.
How happy we all will be;
The patriarchs we'll finally see
And hear their stories of the past,
Then join together at trumpet's blast.
The flesh will be gone and, in Spirit, we
Shall see our Father, eternally free.
The holy days we knew before
With our families we will love all the more.
To Jerusalem we all will come
To worship Father and His Son.

Now in eternity I see the child
Snuggled to the beast, once wild.
Earth was such an uphill climb,
Looking forward to the final time.
I'm glad those days at last are done;
The flesh is gone, our victory won.

Kingdom-Focused

by Israel Steinmetz

Kingdom. It's one of the grandest ideas in Scripture. We see it in the beginning when God fashions a realm and commissions His image-bearing creatures – man and woman – to take dominion and rule on His behalf (Genesis 1:26-28). We see it in Abram's call to become great and for his greatness to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth (12:1-3). We see it in the forming of the nation of Israel as a kingdom of priests to represent God in His earth (Exodus 19:1-6). We see it in God's promises to raise up an eternal heir to rule over His kingdom (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6, 7).

Most importantly, we see it in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who announced the coming of God's kingdom in His life and work (Matthew 1:1–2:5; 4:23; 12:28). Jesus was the second Adam (Romans 5:12-17; 1 Corinthians 15:42-49); the promised seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-16); the son of David who would reign as King for all eternity (Matthew 21:1-9). Jesus was the fulfillment of all God's plans and promises from creation. Through Jesus' death and resurrection God reestablished His rule and reign over all of creation.

However, much to the surprise of Jesus' earthly contemporaries,

God did not establish His kingdom in its fullness (1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Hebrews 2:5-18). Rather, He *inaugurated* His kingdom in the seemingly insignificant work of Jesus and His disciples. This kingdom would spread like yeast through dough, growing slowly, exponentially, like a mustard seed grows into a great bush (Matthew 13:31-34). This would be a gracious and benevolent kingdom in which leaders are servants, first are last, weak are strong, sinners are welcomed, and new life is freely given to all who will receive.

In time, Jesus would return to complete the redemption and restoration of His creation. All the kingdoms of the world would come under the reign of our Lord and His Christ (Revelation 11:15). A thousand years of Jesus establishing His rule on earth would culminate in a final judgment of all evil (20:4-15) and the rebirth of creation in a new heaven and new earth in which God would reign forever (21:1-5).

This is the story of the kingdom. It is the great, all-encompassing narrative of Scripture – the theme that ties everything together. But something is missing from the story above: our place in the kingdom as Jesus' followers.

Does your congregation teach and practice spiritual disciplines? The BA's online sister publication, Artios Magazine, would love to feature you in an upcoming article. Please share your story by emailing editor@artiosmagazine.org.

Leadership

Kingdom purpose

The last thing Jesus told His disciples before leaving the earth was that they would be His kingdom representatives on earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8). As the Father had sent the Son, so the Son was sending His disciples in the power of His Spirit (John 20:19-23). They would be Jesus' ambassadors, joining God's mission to redeem all of creation by sharing the message and ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Jesus' followers would be a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 1:6; 5:10), carrying the kingdom of God throughout the earth. People would be rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13, 14). In this clash of kingdoms, the gates of hell would not prevail, for the King himself was committed to building His church (Matthew 16:13-19).

What an incredible story! And what a tragedy that the church has all too often forgotten our part in it. In our obsession with our doctrines and righteousness, our programs and traditions, our separation and survival, we often forget our purpose. We are here to represent the King of Kings as He establishes His loving rule over His creation. We are God's emissaries on earth, called to

fulfill humanity's original assignment to reflect God's glory to the rest of creation and reflect the worship of creation back to God. Everything we are called to do as God's people is in service to this great mission of advancing the kingdom and hastening Christ's return. Christ delays so that more people will come to repentance and new life (2 Peter 3:3-13). That is why we are here.

Kingdom mission

Our King has left us with a kingdom commission. He has assigned us to be messengers of God's good news. He has filled us with His Spirit so that we can bear compelling witness to the love of Christ that compels us to live for something greater than ourselves (2 Corinthians 5:14). Our mission is not simply to become better people or even to become a better church. Our transformation from sinners to saints is not only for our benefit but for the benefit of others (Matthew 5:16). Our transformation from a divided and broken people into the people of God is for the salvation of the world. Christians are called to rule and reign with Christ now, in the millennium, and for all eternity.

As we embrace our identity as leaders in our various realms of influence, let's be sure that we

remember our part in this story. Our influence in home, school, community, church, city, state, nation, and world is to be *kingdom focused*. Our goal should be full, abundant kingdom life for us, our families, our neighbors, the stranger and foreigner — even our enemies. The church corporately and believers individually are the temple of the Holy Spirit on earth (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). As God's temple, we are where God's presence is seen and felt on earth. Like salt flavoring food and light shining in a city (Matthew 5:13-16), we are called to advance the kingdom of God through love, forgiveness, righteousness, hope, healing, and reconciliation.

In an age that calls us to war, domination, division, hatred, partisan politics, and power grabs, may we embrace the servant-hearted, kingdom-focused leadership of our King, who came to serve and sacrifice Himself for the salvation of the world. **BA**

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Promise of a New Thing

Trusting God through
life's sad endings and
new beginnings.
by Yvonne Kays

Sleep eluded me. Tears slid down my cheeks as I tossed and turned.

Two days before, my husband died from a sudden heart attack. My world shattered, my heart ripped apart. Married for twenty years, two had become one; half of me was gone.

I stared into the darkness, a myriad of details about the upcoming service swirling through my brain. Then, totally clear, words cut through clamor.

I will do a new thing.

Prayer walk

Startled, I remembered hearing these words before.

Four years earlier, I had gone to the Oregon Coast with my prayer group for a retreat shortly after my fiftieth birthday. Getting older had never been an issue for me — until this birthday.

A half a century old. How has it happened so quickly? I'd never had a child of my own. Menopause now dashed that hope forever. Hormones decreased, reality hit; depression cloaked my heart.

My prayer walk usually elicited joy, but that day tears filled my eyes as I trudged along the shore, watching wild waves crash against the rocks.

A long rod of smooth wood in a tangle of seaweed drew my eye. Pulling it from the pile, I sat down on a huge driftwood log to

exam it. It reminded me of Moses and his staff. He was eighty years old, tending sheep in the desert, when God called him to lead the children of Israel out of slavery.

Hmm . . . maybe I'm not too old to be used by God.

Taking the sturdy staff in my hand, I started climbing up the steep hill toward the cabin. Suddenly, words reverberated clearly in my heart: *I will do a new thing.*

Back at the cabin, my concordance directed me to Isaiah 43:19, and I recorded His promise in my prayer journal. With new hope, I determined to look forward, not backward.

Repeated promise

Now, four years later, God repeated the promise.

Surely my husband's death can't be the new thing God is

promising. I closed my eyes and pondered the meaning. I remembered God had given Abraham the promise of a son and repeated the promise several times before Isaac arrived many years later. Joseph, too, had suffered years of slavery and imprisonment before the reality of his dream materialized and God's good plan unfolded.

Maybe God has a new plan, a good plan, for me.

I heard the promise twice. I would choose to believe it.

Grief support

Friends and family came alongside in the first weeks following my husband's death. Returning to work kept me focused on my responsibilities and the needs of others. Still, raw pain and profound emptiness permeated my soul.

I sought help. Grief counseling sessions were provided through my employee assistance program. Reading books about grief and attending support groups brought deeper understanding of this wasteland of the heart. I was not alone; others, too, suffered and needed comfort.

Every morning I found solace in the Psalms. Scriptures that spoke to my heart and events that brought comfort were recorded in my journal. God knew my pain; He had promised to bind up the broken hearted and to care for the widows, a word I first recoiled from when I realized, *I'm one of those now.*

Darkness and distance

Despite my efforts, profound darkness shrouded my soul. A Christian friend reported feeling wrapped in a cocoon of God's

love and carried through her grief. I wanted to feel His presence, to hear words of comfort. But heaven was silent, and God seemed far away.

"I must face the darkness," I wrote in my journal late one night.

Words of hope flowed from Scripture the following day: "When I sit in darkness, the Lord himself will be my Light. I will be patient . . . God will bring me out of my darkness into the light, and I will see his goodness (Micah 7:8, 9, TLB).

Regardless of my determina-

anti-depressant, and reluctantly I agreed. The medication did mitigate the pain, and the emotional tidal waves subsided.

Unrelenting, the season of grief continued, as loss after loss struck. In a span of four years, I lost not only my husband but both my parents, a dear cousin, a beloved aunt, one of my best friends, and my dog. Wave after wave of grief washed over me, and I struggled to stay afloat. Daily I clung to God's promises like a drowning person to a life raft in a raging sea, no shore in sight.

“I wanted to feel God’s presence, to hear words of comfort. But heaven was silent, and God seemed far away.”

tion to be patient, a deep depression enveloped me as fall arrived with dreary rain typical of Oregon's Willamette Valley. Smothering darkness obscured the future and cloaked my world in gray. I felt confused and bone-tired; tears flowed often. Still, I was aghast when a friend gently suggested I might benefit from medication.

Is it that obvious that I'm not doing well? Aren't my faith and prayers enough?

My doctor explained that grief can trigger chronic depression. She recommended an

Hope and healing

A quote from Elisabeth Elliot stirred hope:

When our souls lie barren in a winter which seems hopeless and endless, God has not abandoned us. His work goes on. He asks acceptance of the painful process and our trust that He will indeed give resurrection life.

I prayed to accept.

As time passed, God's sustaining hand and healing touch were evident. Finally with my doctor's



Now What?

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel” is a mandate we’ve endeavored to fulfill for over 150 years through the printed word. Since October 1996, we’ve gone into all the world a different way, through the online ministry of *Now What?* Stories on this site depict real people with real struggles like depression, despair, and disease. When we’re at our wits’ end, when we wonder what to do next, Jesus provides the answer.

As we look forward to studying the Great Commission through the BA’s pages next year, we urge you to peruse the archive of *Now What?* and share the contents with a hurting world in need of hope.

Visit nowwhat.cog7.org.



permission, I stopped the medication. A normal ebb and flow of emotions resumed.

Healing has been slow, but it is happening. It has been six years now, I thought one rainy spring evening as I turned into my driveway after work.

Little did I know that a great adventure lay just around the corner. The following month God brought a lonely Christian man into my life through eHarmony. After a whirlwind courtship, we married in May, two months from our first date. Within a few years I retired, and we relocated to Central Oregon, closer to his daughter and grandchildren.

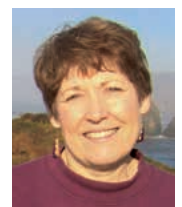
Suddenly, everything was new. A young marriage, still growing and developing. A new home, with grandchildren only minutes away with snuggles and giggles.

A new climate in the High Desert. Instead of rain, winter brought snow and bright sunshine almost daily. Sandy trails wound through sagebrush and junipers. Sparkling mountain lakes and rippling rivers offered new adventures.

A new church home presented new opportunities for service. New friends and neighbors. A new dream of writing. New joy!

Our faithful God had indeed done a new thing in my life. He transformed me, healing a broken heart as He tested and matured my faith. And I forged a deeper trust in my Abba Father through the darkest night of my soul. **BA**

Yvonne Kays writes from Bend, OR.



“Resurrection Commission”

Jesus gave His church a Great Commission. “Go make disciples of all the nations” looms as the pinnacle of our calling as co-workers with God. His mission to rescue and restore creation to His good purposes is our mission too. So central is this vocational vision to the life of the church that the *Bible Advocate* is devoting 2019 to the subject. Our “Resurrection Commission” theme recalls that Jesus’ directive originated in His defeat of death and His authority over all. His commission isn’t accomplished by mere humans, but through the confident faith of a people caught up in the resurrection life flowing from Father to Son to us, by the Holy Spirit.

The call to this monumental task is exciting and humbling, and we want to be found faithful to and effective in it. Therefore, the six issues of 2019 will explore the details of Christ’s “Resurrection Commission” — and you can be a part of it. Do you have a conversion testimony you’d like to share with our readers? If so, we invite you to send us your best work (500-1,000 words) to be considered for publication in 2019.

— Jason Overman, editor

- **January-February:** To the Mount - Matthew 28:16 — Leaving and Coming to the Risen Lord
- **March-April:** See and Worship - Matthew 28:17 — Our Foundational Response to Christ
- **May-June:** All Authority - Matthew 28:18 — Focusing on Jesus’ Resurrection Power
- **July-August:** Go and Make - Matthew 28:19 — Commissioned to Evangelism and Baptism
- **September-October:** Teach and Obey - Matthew 28:20a — Disciples Learning to Do Jesus’ Will
- **November-December:** I Am With You - Matthew 28:20b — Not Alone as Immanuel Goes With Us

To access our submission guidelines and a fuller list of themes, please visit baonline.org.



Paul's advice on staying ready for Christ's return.

by **Marcellus George**

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10).

I actually saw a grown man twiddling his thumbs not long ago. That is unusual these days. We are more likely to see people watching screens on cell phones, televisions, computers, or game devices in doctors' offices, restaurants, traffic lights, subways, and airports.

Waiting has changed. How we wait has changed. Even staying focused on what we are waiting for is harder because the worldwide presence of technology blunts the edge of both longing and dreading of joyful or fearful expectation. Distractions threaten to overtake us.

The apostle Paul had a lot to say about waiting. In fact, he wrote to the Thessalonian believers twice to encourage them to look forward with eager anticipation to the day when Jesus returns. Both letters to the Thessalonians include lengthy descriptions of Christ's return, with an emphasis on watching expectantly for it to happen. What should a Christian do while waiting for Christ to return? We can learn from four things Paul told the Thessalonians to do while they waited for this day.

Witness

Paul starts by commending the Thessalonian believers for the impact of their witness, even in the midst of their suffering. Their words and their actions showed that they followed the true and living God, and this witness had influenced all of modern-day Greece (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10). Their conversion had been complete, and they became genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul says the Thessalonians' response to persecution gives him cause to boast about them (2:14, 15). He is probably referring to the same kind of suffering he experienced when he and his companions were driven out of Thessalonica after a short visit (maybe three weeks), following accusations that they were trying to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:1-8). Paul thus encourages the believers to continue witnessing for Jesus Christ.

From this we learn that as we witness to friends, neighbors, and co-workers, we may find some open to the truth of the gospel. Rather than become discouraged by our culture's general secularization, we are called to shine Jesus' light in our sphere of influence. Continuing to witness in the face of opposition gives us the opportunity to demonstrate the truth of the gospel.

Want God's Word

Next, Paul directs his readers to continue in their desire for God's Word. He commends them for accepting his teaching, not as the word of men but for what it really is: God's Word (1 Thessalonians 2:3-6;

3:13). They should search the Scriptures and verify the truth of Paul's words (Acts 17:11). Paul points out that this is a conscious decision, based on their recognition that the idols they had worshipped did not offer them the truth of Scripture.

In order to know God's heart, we also need to be immersed in God's Word daily and choose to do what it says. In our world, many voices compete for our attention. Mass media constantly tries to suck us into the world's value system, selfishness, and materialism. In so doing, the media markets a kind of happiness that is not permanent and that

holy (or sanctified) lives. Though surrounded by all kinds of temptations, they are to keep themselves sexually pure (1 Thessalonians 4:1-5). Their lives should reflect Christ's supernatural love in their relationships with one another (vv. 9, 10), as well as encourage those who had lost heart because of persecution (5:11, 14). Rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks would also result from living Spirit-filled lives (vv. 16-19). In short, the believers should walk worthy of their calling.

We learn from this that our lives should be distinctive. We should stand out not just for the

“ God makes it clear that no matter when Jesus returns, He should find us actively working, both for His kingdom and in the earthly sense. ”

often opposes God's Word. God calls us to reject what the idols of the world say and search His Word for what He wants us to do prior to His return.

Walk worthy

Paul's third admonition to the Thessalonian believers is to live

things we oppose on a moral basis but for possessing the quality of a holy and consistent life. As people observe our joyful and thankful lifestyle, they will realize that we value other things more than passing pleasures and fun.



Work

Paul's final admonition for these Thessalonian believers is to continue working (4:11, 12). This seems an odd command, yet evidently some people in Thessalonica thought that since Jesus would return soon, they could quit their jobs. Perhaps they would sit and watch for His coming and expect others to provide for them while they waited. Why work, when work is difficult?

Paul spells out the high value of work in this passage. It is not only the means by which we provide the daily necessities for our dependents and ourselves, but also a way of maintaining a witness before an ungodly world. Elsewhere Paul mentions that by doing our job well, we actually show our employers that being a Christian results in excellence (Colossians 3:23, 24). While Christians are called to provide generously for the poor (especially orphans and widows), Paul rejects the idea that able-bodied people can be idle.

This point teaches us that our work should be permeated with a heavenly purpose. God makes it clear that no matter when Jesus returns, He should find us actively working, both for His kingdom and in the earthly sense. God commanded Adam to work. Following Jesus sanctifies our work by making it a means of witnessing to others and of providing for our family and ourselves. Paul stresses that believers should keep working until the day of the Lord's return.

If you are eagerly watching for signs of the times and waiting for Christ's return, do not get distracted by technology, laziness, or apathy. Read Paul's letters to the believers living in Thessalonica almost two thousand years ago. His advice is pertinent today. May we live by it! **BA**

Marcellus George writes from Fort Wayne, IN.



Biblical Application

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Biblical authority

There is a power in the Word of God: "Let there be light"; and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Creation power! Yet beyond that is a power spoken of in Romans 1:16: "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Gospel power! This Book contains a word of power that can change us, taking us from illusory lives of temporary, physical existence and turning us into something real and permanent and everlasting. That is a *huge* power.

I don't know where you are in your Bible study or what your study habits are, but I encourage you to study your Bible daily. If you don't already, start somewhere — maybe with the big books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, the Gospels, or Romans. Or just start at the beginning and work your way through. But make it a habit. Don't let the day go by without having some time in the Bible while praying about it.

The Bible has authority because it is God's Word for us and to us. It can impact our lives in a way that no other book can or ever will. We become as we behave. With the Spirit's guidance, let's read the Bible and apply it, and receive God's blessings for doing so. **BA**

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The Last Days

continued from page 10

the last days period? Revelation 12:11 says that the victory of the celestial battle between the forces of good and evil was achieved “by the blood of the Lamb.” Paul reinforces this idea in Colossians 1:20, where the apostle says that the cross of Christ had a redeeming effect, not only on earthly creation but also on the heavenly. He speaks more about this victory in 2:15: “having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

The infinite value of Jesus’ sacrifice raises a logical, easily understood conclusion: Satan suffered a decisive defeat almost two thousand years ago, when Jesus completed His redemptive mission of humanity on the cross.

Last battlefield

The war is not over. It has been transferred to earth as the last battlefield. But the final outcome is already determined on earth just as in heaven by the victory of our Savior Jesus Christ. The desperate effort of Satan in these last days is like the danger of a beast cornered, recognizing that these are his last days. The last two thousand years are proof of his despair, and the time that still remains, until the second coming of Jesus, will not fail to confirm this despair.

The words of Jesus reinforce this interpretation in a direct and clear way: “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the

prince of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31; cf. vv. 32, 33; Luke 10:17, 18).

The shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross two thousand years ago was, is, and will be the striking point in the reconciliation between creation and the Creator. Integrating this into the text of Revelation 12, we can easily conclude that this moment in history is the beginning of the last days.

We may ask, Is it logical that the last days last for nearly two thousand years? If we look at

the New Testament, but it may appear strange to many misguided prophetic interpreters.

Above all, the understanding of the last days should warn us to take care of the salvation that God puts at our disposal. We must not let the devil and his hosts, definitively defeated two thousand years ago, take away our privilege to be victorious with Christ in this final war between life and death.

Let us keep this warning clearly in mind as we humbly go back

“What we refer to as ‘the last days’ is already a story two thousand years old.”

this through the divine dimension, and not by limited human means, there is no contradiction. The apostle Peter wrote, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8).

Consistent teaching

The foregoing arguments seem to support the suggestion of *This We Believe*, which heads this article. The biblical revelation that the last days began after the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is consistent with the revelation of

to the laboratory of prophetic interpretation and reformulate our understanding as God reveals His light to us. **BA**

Paulo Jorge Coelho lives in Lisbon, Portugal, with his wife, Luísa, and their two children. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



An extended version of this article is featured in the March-April 2012 issue of the *Sabbath Sentinel* (bible.sabbath.org).



Mail Bag



This We Believe?

In the [July-August '18] issue of the *Bible Advocate* you had an article called "This We Believe." In the article there were various subjects discussed, such as tithing, clean foods, holidays, etc. In addressing each subject, the same phrase was used at the beginning . . . to explain why each was or wasn't legitimate. The phrase used was "As a result — not as a cause — of redemption, believers should" tithe, eat kosher, not go to war, etc. I know that this is meant to show that we are not redeemed because we are good, but we are good because we are redeemed. That is true, and yet it seems like we are making light of God's sovereignty. Is it still acceptable to fear God and tremble at His word? Am I being legalistic if I don't lie because God Almighty said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness"? I had a conscience before I was saved. I feared breaking God's law before I was saved. It seems like in trying to defend ourselves from accusations of legalism, we have watered down the ideal that God has standards that are eternal. I realize that the things discussed in the article would probably be labeled as "not

the weightier matters of the law," but the main thing I question is the concept that if we are saved, we will just start being good and we don't need God's Word or His law to tell us how to live.

J. W.
Shawnee, OK

Editor's note: Thanks for this insightful comment. See page 11 for a response from Elder Calvin Burrell.



Caring for the church

I admit I let the BA lie around for a couple of weeks before I turned to the first page and read Jason's words about caring for the church [September-October '18, p. 3]. It was an excellent reminder that the church has always been mine. I've always claimed her but so often fail to love her the way I should. Jesus reminds us in John 21:15 to feed His sheep. I promise to do more, to be there more, and to share more of her wonderful benefits with others.

C. B.
Silverton, OR

Prison ministry

Off and on over the past 6 1/2 years that I've been down, I've read your BA magazine and I've

really enjoyed it. I get them from the chapel *if* there's an extra one or *if* I just happen to find one in our day room. . . . I read your article from Sept.-Oct. 2018 "An Unusual Congregation" [p. 14] to all my Christian brothers at our Sunday church service. It touched my heart, and I had tears in my eyes as I read it [to] our congregation, and when I read it, I told my Christian brothers, "My brothers, this is all of us in one way or the other." After I was done, I was told thank you for sharing that. But my thanks goes out to God first off, then [to] Roy Borges, an inmate who had you print it, and then God for allowing me to share it with my Christian brothers here at Airway Correctional Center. . . .

D. R.
Airway Heights, WA

Praise for quarterlies

I would like to thank all the Sabbath school staff for the tremendous effort you do printing and reproducing the Sabbath school material every quarter. It has been a great blessing to our church, and a great tool helping me in my pastoral duties.

Brethren, please continue doing this great job. Maybe you can't see all the fruit of your faithful work, but I know you will see it when our Lord Jesus Christ returns for the second time.

Don't let the challenges and troubles of this life discourage you. I hope the opposite happens. I hope that in the middle of those challenges you can see the mighty hand of God closer to you.

A. M.
San Antonio, TX



G. C. Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS

2019 First Quarter Adult Study

Christ and Covenant is the title of the first quarter study. Christ's plan and mission invite and require us to first be intimately related to Him (covenanted) before we go into the world to make disciples. Once we are, the Holy Spirit fills and equips us to fulfill the Great Commission, all while we grow in intimacy with God and other believers. The result of the Spirit's work through the new covenant is described in the book of Acts: God added to the church daily.

In this first quarterly, we explain the concept of covenant in general and the new covenant in particular. We then give examples of how the new covenant affects the inner man to eradicate sin and recreate a person sold out to God and equipped to do His will. We also explain how this impacts every part of our lives, including our interaction internally in the body of Christ and externally with other individuals, institutions, and even governments.

Order Sabbath school quarterlies at <https://cog7.org/online-store/>.

Children's Curriculum

Intermediate. In *The Fruit of the Spirit* students will learn that when Jesus left His disciples to go back to His Father in heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to teach, comfort, and guide them. These lessons focus on the virtues contained in the fruit brought into the lives of believers by the Holy Spirit.

Primary. *Journey of Faith – From Abraham to Joseph* teaches students that the Bible characters



we're studying this quarter were people just like us. These lessons focus on the stories in Genesis, from the birth of Isaac to Joseph being sold as a slave. The emphasis this quarter, throughout all these Bible stories, is faith.

Preschool. Lessons in *Prophets and Kings* introduce students to some of the kings of Israel and Judah, as well as to the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Students will learn that the Lord God is the only true God. We can trust Him to take care of us and to fight for us.

Apology Regarding Bill Hybels Reference

The publication schedule for *Bible Advocate* magazine requires articles to be received by the editor over two months before that issue arrives in our readers' hands. Such was the case with Loren Stacy's "Last Word," which appeared in the September-October issue. This article includes a quotation from Bill Hybels. In the time since this article was submitted and edited, serious allegations of misconduct against Bill Hybels, and statements from the leaders of his church that they believe the allegations to be true, have been made public.

We wish it known that our inclusion of a Bill Hybels' quotation in no way indicates our approval or acceptance of the behaviors in which Bill Hybels is alleged to have engaged. Such behaviors cannot be, nor are they, tolerated within the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day). We apologize for any concern or emotional pain this reference to him may cause any of our readers.

— Loren Stacy and Jason Overman

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, 2018.

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 10,615.



Around the World



Pastor Lawyer Obara, Nigeria



IMC Zone 5 Convention parade



Agyemang Duah, Ghana



Children's presentation

“Becoming a Christ Centered Church” was the theme of the 2018 IMC Zone 5 Africa Convention in Offinso, Ashanti, Ghana, West Africa, held August 8-13.



Faces of the Church in Africa



Glorifying God in music

Representatives from 16 African countries* participated, with international visitors from Australia, Jamaica, Germany, UK, US, and Canada. The convention featured inspiring sermons, presentations, devotions, song and dance, fellowship meals, and various workshops focused on the ten-point Vision of a Vibrant 21st Century Church. Participating leaders plan to share what they learned with leaders and members of their respective countries.



Gratitude for the Crawfords



We are family in Christ

As you look at these few photos, join in the celebration of what took place at this convention. See additional photo and video content at imc.cog7.org.



Worship expressed in dance



Interview with Abrahams Odongo (right, Kenya) and Job Emmanuel (Rwanda)

*Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, DR Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe



Brother Karell Wilson, Jamaica, sharing the first sermon of the convention



Truth is the Daughter of Time

Almost 2,000 years ago, Aulus Gellius, a Latin author and grammarian, observed, “Veritatem Temporis filiam esse dixit,” or “Truth is the daughter of time.” Approximately 1,450 years later, Sir Francis Bacon used that proverb, as did Matthew Henry, author of the biblical commentary *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Approximately 300 years later than that, I first encountered this ancient saying in Henry’s commentary.

My wife, Karen, and I begin most every day with God’s Word and a 16-ounce tumbler of hot coffee. August 1 of this year, we read the final three chapters of Daniel. In them Daniel receives a visit from an angelic being who describes a horrific future of conflict between evil kings of the North and kings of the South and someone described as “a contemptible person” (NIV). These scriptures speak of a then-future “abomination that causes desolation” and provide a timeframe of 1,290 days and 1,335 days from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away until the end.

Two ironies strike me concerning this portion of Daniel. First, a narrator introduces the vision Daniel is about to describe, and concludes, “He understood the word, having received understanding in the vision” (10:1, NRSV). But in chapters 10-12, Daniel testifies that his questions about the meaning and timing of what he has seen and heard are to be shut up and sealed “until the time of the end” (12:4, NIV). His personal testimony does not assure the narrator that Daniel fully understood all he saw and heard. In fact, it ends with the angel basically telling Daniel, “Go live your life. You’ll be OK ‘at the end of the days.’”

The second irony is this: Even though Daniel apparently did not understand as much about this vision as he would have liked, and though the angel twice declared that these words were shut up and sealed until the time of the end, this prophecy of the future seems to be one of the most studied, speculated upon, and argued prophecies in the Bible! Is it possible that some prophecies of the future God does not intend us to fully understand?

I, too, wonder and speculate about the correct understanding of what Daniel reveals in chapters 10-12. After reading them, I Googled Daniel 10-12 and came across Matthew Henry’s commentary on these scriptures. Henry provides a rather thorough review, complete with numerous historical references, of the many interpretations of Daniel’s vision already put forward by 1714. Some argued that the prophecy had been fulfilled. Others argued it was yet future. Still others believed that the prophecy had been partially fulfilled but that parts of it remained to be fulfilled in the future. It was then that Matthew Henry, without stating strong preference for any of the possible interpretations of Daniel 10-12, simply wrote the proverb: “Truth is the daughter of time. I interpret that to mean (as the old hymn says): We’ll understand it better by and by.”

Prophecy undoubtedly fulfilled is a great faith builder. Prophecy possibly yet to be fulfilled is interesting to study and speculate about. Let’s not let our various preferred interpretations divide us, particularly where certainty is impossible. Truth is the daughter of time.

— Loren Stacy



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Colorado and
additional offices



GC Convention
July 1-6, 2019
Albuquerque, NM

