



January - February 2022

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting together, looking at an open Bible. The woman, on the left, is smiling and wearing a red top. The man, on the right, is looking at the Bible with a serious expression. The Bible is open to Psalm 50, and the text is visible on both pages. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

The Gospel of God



Inside

2022: Living the Gospel



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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 156 • Number 1

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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
email: 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.

Your God Reigns!

Welcome to 2022! Living the Gospel is the *Bible Advocate* theme for this year, and in our six issues we will explore what this means for Bible-based believers. We've been encouraging the Church to "focus on Jesus and follow His plan." Put differently, "declare the gospel of God in word and deed." May it be on our lips, and more, may our lives be good news to a lost and anxious world. We begin our exploration in this BA by recognizing that living the gospel means living biblically: "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Our understanding of the gospel of God must be rooted in God-breathed Scripture. The two are closely related. You may be more familiar with the phrases "the gospel of Christ" or "the gospel of the kingdom," and we'll get to those. But the gospel of God is our focus here. It is found seven times in the New Testament (Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, 9; and 1 Peter 4:17). What does the term mean? At least that the gospel is both *from God* and *about God*. Father sends Son, and the Son shows the Father. Jesus is the heart of the gospel, but God is the source of Him and it.

That the gospel originates in God and reveals His nature is behind Paul's insistence that the gospel is not unexpected revelation but established promise in Israel's Holy Scriptures. It is "according to the Scriptures," uniting the Testaments (Romans 1:2; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The gospel of God was preached beforehand, Paul writes (Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:2). The God of Israel was ever pointing her to Christ.

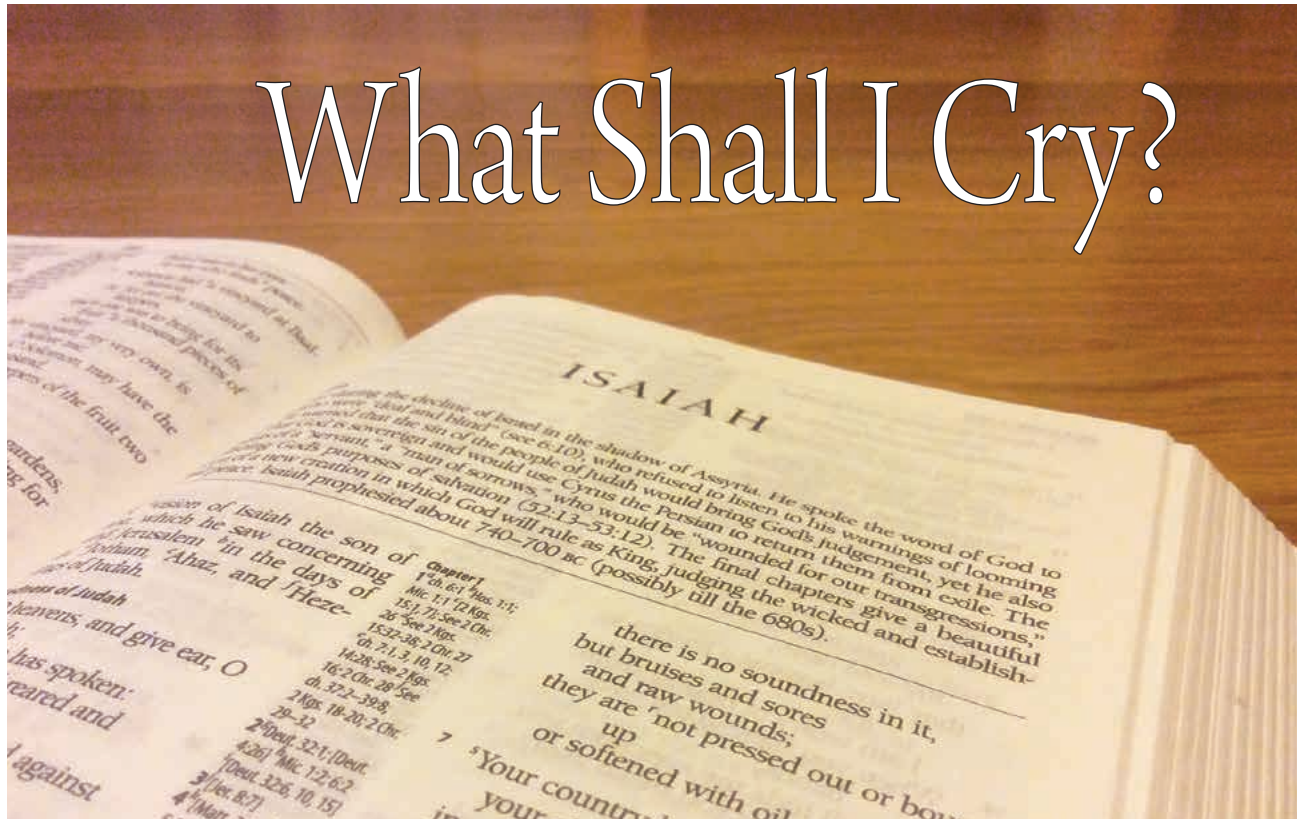
Isaiah is clearest-eyed of those early witnesses: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings . . . who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (52:7).

That's the gospel of God. In His Son, Jesus, God's gracious rule is revealed to all. May our feet and our lives carry the timeless truth and glad tidings.

— Jason Overman



What Shall I Cry?



Finding the good news in the
"fifth Gospel."

by Dorothy Nimchuk

For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given: and
the government shall be
upon his shoulder: and his
name shall be called Wonder-
ful, Counsellor, The mighty
God, The everlasting Father,
The Prince of Peace (Isaiah
9:6, KJV).

It was Isaiah who first penned these God-inspired words. Frederick Handel quoted them, putting them to music for *Messiah*, his most famous oratorio. *Messiah*! Slain from before the world was! Promise became reality in the little town of Bethlehem: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel ["God with us"] (7:14).

Isaiah has much to say about Jesus Messiah — so much so, it's often called the fifth Gospel. What can we learn about this Old Testament book, its author, and the ways it proclaims the good news of Jesus? And, like Isaiah, what can we cry out to our generation?

The author

Possibly born into the royal house of Judah, Isaiah served as an official in King Uzziah's court until the king's death in 740 BC. Thereafter, in vision, Isaiah saw the Lord enthroned "high and lifted up" and seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" The doorposts shook, and the place filled with smoke (6:1-4).

Few prophets were ever privileged to have had such a vision — a relationship with God outside of time, space, and matter, but he didn't feel worthy of it. His initial response was "Woe is me, for I am undone! . . . For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Distraught, Isaiah experienced a touch of a live coal from the altar that purged his unclean lips, and he was ready to answer the question

"Whom shall I send?" with his "Here am I! Send me" (vv. 5-8). Thus began a forty-year service to the King of Kings.

The book

The text of Isaiah's prophecies was one of the best preserved manuscripts found in its entirety among the Dead Sea Scrolls. This major prophetic book of sixty-six chapters roughly divides into two, much like the Bible with its Old and New Testaments (witnesses). The first witness consists of chapters 1-39: God's judgment on the nations, the nation of Judah particularly. Isaiah describes that great day of the Lord: "I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts" (13:13).

Beautiful passages of comfort and promise intermingle with warnings of judgment: "Behold, I lay in Zion . . . a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation . . . [with] justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet" (28:16, 17).

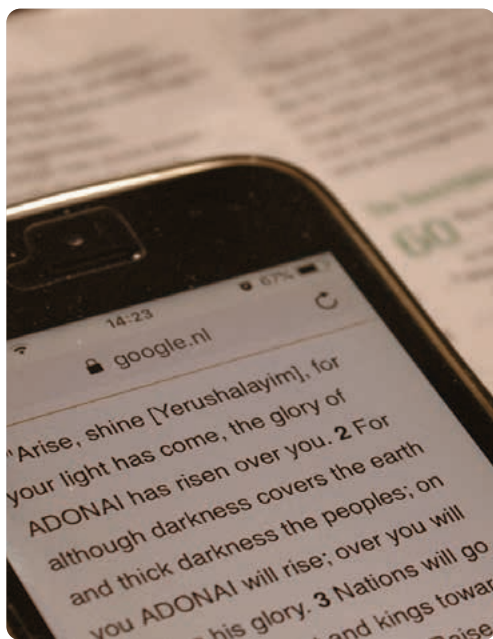
Though the people suffered judgments for their misdeeds, the second witness (chapters 40-66) begins with Isaiah's well-known hymn of comfort: "Comfort, yes, comfort My people! . . . Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (40:1, 2).

The revealing

Pinpointing John the Baptist's entry in the New Testament, Isa-

iah declares, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (v. 3). Much like our freeways of today, Isaiah describes that Royal Road: building up low spots and shaving down the high; straightening curves and building bridges over difficult terrain. All obstructions swept away, we shall see Jesus in all His glory (vv. 4, 5).

"What shall I cry?" Isaiah asks, as do we. Another revealing:



Flowers fade, seasons change, people are born and die, "but the word of our God stands forever. . . . To whom then will you liken God?" (vv. 6, 8, 18). Like the heavenly parent He is, God in essence is telling His children who had forsaken Him, "I've done everything for you, and this is the way you treat Me? Your carved images can never take My place. I am the Creator of the earth, mighty in power, everlasting, and My understanding is un-

searchable. Those who wait on Me shall be renewed and soar like eagles" (see vv. 28, 31).

The Servant

God's covenant people failed to recognize that Messiah must first come as a lowly Servant bringing salvation to a lost world: "Behold! My Servant . . . He will not cry out, nor raise His voice . . . He will bring forth justice for truth. . . . as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison" (42:1-3, 6, 7).

Neither did they understand that they, as God's servants, having suffered through much adversity themselves, were to share their blessings with the world in a lesser role (vv. 18, 19). Because of their unbelief, the Israelites retained their previously held image of the Servant arriving with pomp and great glory. Therefore, they rejected Jesus, refusing His words and walking not in His ways.

The salvation

However, the Lord said to forget the past and He would do a new thing, making a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. But the people had rejected Him, choosing to weary Him with their sins (43:18-22). Still, He would blot out their sins and remember them no more (vv. 25, 26). Jesus' seventy-times-seven policy in action!

In the next chapter, the Lord promises to pour water on the thirsty and "My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring" (44:3). God's

love of His chosen ones is expressed with deep longing in His calling of Abraham: "Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him" (51:2).

Abraham. His belief in God was counted as righteousness that we may also be found righteous.

"My salvation has gone forth . . . The earth will grow old like a garment . . . but My salvation will be forever. . . . My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation" (vv. 5-8).

Thus says the LORD: "You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money. . . . My people shall know My name; . . . I am He who speaks: 'Behold, it is I.'" . . . Behold, My Servant . . . shall be exalted and extolled and be very high . . . Who has believed our report? (52:3, 6, 13; 53:1).

There follows a well-known passage describing the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on our behalf: He was despised, rejected by men, and no stranger to grief and sorrow. He bore the brunt of our sins. Like sheep, we've all had our turn at wandering, so He took the fall to redeem broken humanity (53:1-12).

The tidings

The Lord so desired to bless His people, yet time after time, they returned to their old ways. Again, what shall I cry? "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your

voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (58:1). Their fasts were selfish, and they overworked their laborers. Rather, they should "loose the bonds of wickedness" (v. 6), relieve burdens, free the oppressed, house and feed the hungry, and extend a hand to their brothers. "Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am'" (v. 9).

Isaiah predicts the gospel and anointing of the Spirit of the Lord upon Messiah to "preach



good tidings . . . heal the brokenhearted . . . proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison . . . [and] proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (61:1, 2). Isaiah expounds at length on the future new heavens and new earth: "And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (65:17, 18).

The Messiah

From beginning to end, the Gospel According to Isaiah points us to Jesus.

"And He shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" On March 23, 1743, Handel's *Messiah* was premiered in London. As the strains of the "Hallelujah Chorus" echoed to the farthest reaches of the vast cathedral, King George II of England rose to his feet, reportedly in deference to Messiah, Jesus the Christ. As one, the audience rose with him, thus establishing a tradition to stand for this grand finale to Handel's *Messiah*.

At the moment the "cloud curtains" rise on the first act of redemption and renewal and the opening strains of the angels' "hallelujah chorus" ring out, accompanied by trumpet sound, we, too, will rise to meet Messiah in the air. We, too, will circle the earth as He gathers His own from every corner, descending upon the Mount of Olives, where He ascended from earlier.

What shall I cry? Jesus said, "Occupy till I come!" Will He greet us with open arms and His "work well done" welcome? The choice is ours, and the burden to share the good news of salvation with others — as Isaiah did. **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk and her husband, Nick (retired pastor), are isolated CoG7 members in Medicine Hat, Alberta.





Soggy Socks

by Michelle Heed

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15, NIV).

My daughter and I walked down the stairs. “Mom, step over here,” she ordered. Absent-mindedly, I obeyed and landed in a puddle.

She blushed as I caught my breath. “I already stepped in the water, and I didn’t want to be wet alone,” she confessed.

Olivia wanted to experience the rough parts of life together. The wet socks and bad days. How could I stay mad? Touched by her need to be understood, I surrendered my right to remain dry. I commiserated with my daughter, experiencing the sting together and then hunting for new socks.

What if this is how God feels about you? About me? He would rather pay the price to understand our pain than to watch us suffer alone. I have a High Priest who sympathizes with my pain, frustrations, sins, and struggles. He was rejected by followers and family. I get the drift that He was a couch surfer, transitionally homeless and yet King of all. His friends couldn’t wrap their minds around His words. This holy Man walked into the puddles instead of watching His kids suffer alone. Jesus knew we would suffer, and He wanted to relate to our scars. How else could we truly adore Him and choose to follow in His footsteps unless He had journeyed a hard road?

Unlike all of us, Jesus walked this hard road without sin, without swearing under His breath or binge-eating chocolates. In the trial, He didn’t gossip or become vindictive. He went through

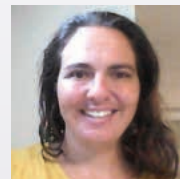
the wet socks, understanding our plight, and He stayed pure in heart through the pain.

This gives us hope and direction for our own soul conditions. We, too, can walk the high road when faced with a trial, since His Spirit lives inside us.

I joined in my daughter’s discomfort, soggy socks, reminding me our High Priest is in our hard times. He knows what struggles are like. He will give us the tools (His Word, His church, His Holy Spirit) to walk uprightly through, and even beyond, the moments that leave us catching our breath.

In our loneliest days, we find comfort in this reality. Soggy socks remind us we are not alone in trials. **BA**

Michelle Heed is a nurse and missionary in Tanzania, East Africa.



Isaiah’s Suffering Servant

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4-6, NIV).



Embracing the good news of
the gospel with the bad.
by Jason Overman

“Which do you want first: the good news or the bad news?” You’ve probably heard that question. It is curious how the news often comes in this pair, especially as it is heard in the gospel.

There is a paradox in the biblical presentation of the gospel — a dichotomy, or at least a dynamic tension. On the one hand, it is the good news of God to humanity, the best news that we could hope for. But on the other hand, this gospel confronts us all with ourselves, with news we humans would rather not hear: the

bad things about us. The gospel delivers both together, as a package. We can’t have the good without facing up to the bad.

Summary statement

Paul exposes the roots of these entangled twins in a well-known text in Romans: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23). Here we find the problem and solution in a nutshell. The first clause summarizes the Bible’s universal witness of God’s verdict on sin: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God” and “The soul who sins shall die” (Isaiah 59:2; Ezekiel 18:20). This is the bad news.

In his brilliant assessment of the human condition in Romans 3, Paul agrees with the Prophets that all the world is guilty before

God: “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one’” (vv. 10-18; Psalm 14:3). We’re all in the same sinking boat. But the very same witnesses told the good news of God’s rescue, found in Paul’s second clause — a gift beyond earning: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”; “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 103:12).

The gospel story is the fateful intersection of bad news and good. This crossroad is where Jesus “was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). Here, the “Guilty!” verdict is turned to “Not guilty!” because Jesus paid our debt of death with His guiltless life. In the Resurrection, God vindicates His Son, and their loving sacrifice

is the source of eternal life for all who will accept their gift in faith.

This is an intersection that everyone must pass: the crossroad of guilt and gift, of human offense and divine offering. Many will travel that road with back stiff, head high. They will pass by. The gift is freely given but only received on bended knees with head bowed, accepting the good news with the bad. Of this acknowledgment of sin and a Savior beyond self, Paul finds inspiration from David again:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity . . . I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" . . . You forgave the iniquity of my sin (Psalm 32:1, 2, 5; Romans 4:7, 8).

Stumbling stone

But here the paradoxical nature of the gospel goes deeper still — if the good news is stubbornly rejected because we won't contend with the bad, much less confess it. Turning the truth upside down, we are offended by the idea that our offenses made the cross of Christ necessary. We hold on to the lie that we are actually pretty good, or good enough — surely! And so the gospel of Christ is the good news of salvation for those who can accept the news, but an offensive stumbling block for those who cannot.

Notably, the Prophets revealed this divine dichotomy, and the apostles applied it to Jesus Christ:

"The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel" (Isaiah 8:13, 14).

Therefore thus says the LORD God: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily" (28:16).

Blending the two texts, both Paul and Peter quote Isaiah as pointing to Christ and contrasting those who believe with those who stumble: "As it is written:

“We hold on to the lie that we are actually pretty good, or good enough.”

‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone [Greek: *proskomma*] and rock of offense [*skandalon*], and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame’” (Romans 9:33; cf. 1 Peter 2:6-8). In this inspired conflation of Scripture, Christ is both a foundation stone for one and a stumbling stone for another. The Rock of Ages and the Rock of Offense.

Using the same stone imagery, Jesus warned, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'? Whoever

falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (Luke 20:17, 18; cf. Psalm 118:22).

Either way, the good news breaks you. That's not bad news if some are broken in the way of repentance, but it is bad for those who reject the news. They will be crushed in God's judgment. Paul disclosed to the Corinthians this mysterious dichotomy of how the gospel results in these contradictory ends:

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block [*skandalon*] and to the Greeks foolishness,

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

Savior and scandal

For the religious and the irreligious alike, the cross is scandalous. This English word is derived from the Greek word *skandalon*. Often translated as "offense," the New Testament's usage of the term is influenced by the Old

“A society built upon
personal rights has little tolerance
for personal guilt.”

Testament and is often based on particular passages (as seen above). In its biblical context, *skandalon* (and the closely related word *proskomma*) refers to a stone or obstacle that causes one to trip and fall. A stumbling block. According to *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, the metaphor denotes something that causes a fall into sin or unbelief.

The gospel paradox is most intense here. Jesus is Savior for all who believe, but for those who reject Him, Jesus is scandal. We overlook this aspect of the gospel — the awesome fear of God’s judgment and grace. But Paul’s Jews and Greeks, the religious and the pagan, are with us still. The gospel remains a foolish scandal to many today.

The pop atheist and evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, is the preeminent example of the unbelieving pagan. Not limiting his biting critique to the infantile and delusional foolishness of the gospel alone, he aims his criticism against the Bible and God himself. The god in whom Dawkins disbelieves is “a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic

cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomachochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

Goodness! He sounds offended, indeed! While believers do not recognize in this description the grace and truth that is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, variations of Dawkins’ diatribe are found with increasing regularity on social media. But as Paul has shown us, this is nothing new. These voices simply echo the Greeks of his time, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

At the same time, for well-meaning progressive religionists, the temptation is to remove the scandal, to make the gospel more palatable to modern sensibilities. It is the way of many liberal churches. But a domesticated Christ is not the Christ of the Bible; it is one of our making — no Christ at all. This inculcates faith as therapy, not transformation. It may appeal to our felt needs, but a subjective Christ is not Savior and Lord. He is merely

what we wish Him to be, rather than who He truly is.

A diluted, agreeable gospel is a false gospel all the same, because it attempts to take the good news without facing the bad. As the Christian theologian H. Richard Niebuhr once famously remarked of this liberalizing Christian tendency, “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.” A lesser gospel will not do.

Staying strong

We live in a post-Christian, postmodern nation. To a large extent, our culture has already weighed the gospel and God and found them wanting — a foolish scandal of an irrelevant Book to be rejected. We also live in a time of easy offenses. A society built upon personal rights has little tolerance for personal guilt. The gospel offends because it encroaches on our perceptions of autonomy and self-determination. The good news seems bad to some because it affronts our fears and exposes our pride.

And we must let it. We must embrace without compromise the full weight of the gospel of God, the good news with the bad news. It can’t convict or restore without breaking some and offending others. If in preaching Christ crucified, Paul refused to avoid “the offense of the cross,” then neither should we (Galatians 5:11).

Beloved, do not be offended. Be a scandal for Christ instead!

BA

Questions & Answers



Which is more important: Jesus' birth or His resurrection, and why?

I like your question. It pushes us to think great thoughts and face great questions, like "Who is God? Who is Jesus? What did He/they do? How should we respond?"

Jesus Christ's time on earth began and ended with incomparable events. At the first, God's Only Begotten entered human history when He was born in a Bethlehem barn. Then, over thirty-three years later, the Son was killed as a common criminal, buried in a borrowed tomb, raised to eternal life, and returned to the Father's glory in heaven, where He came from.

Your question refers to the first of these two Christ events by condensing it into two familiar words: *Jesus' birth*. In theological language, this is commonly called the *Incarnation of Christ*. The Word that was *with God* and *was God* became a man and lived among us, beginning in Bethlehem (Matthew 1; Luke 2; John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-3, et al.)

Those of us who avoid traditional Christmas festivities, due to their link with false religion and dubious cultural practices, should take care not to lose much of Scripture's truth concerning Incarnation. If Christ was not fully divine, if He did not lay aside eternal glory at His birth to become one of us, then our hope may be built (is built) on something less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Because of the exceeding importance of Jesus' birth (i.e., His incarnation) to launch the Bible's salvation story, it is proper to ask how that ranks alongside the awesome apex event of His rise from the dead. Just as we broadened *birth* to *incarnation* for a broader perspective of your question, we will broaden the term *resurrection* to

include the Lord's return to the Father's presence soon after He exited the tomb. Just as Christ's resurrection is inseparable from the cross event that preceded it, it is also inseparable from His ascension that soon followed.

The terms *incarnation* and *humiliation* comprehend more biblical truth than *birth* does in naming Christ's descent from heaven as a human. The same is true of Christ's atonement and exaltation. They capture more of the glorious meaning implicit in His death, resurrection, and ascension than any one of those events alone — as biblically rich as each of them is!

Thus the whole scriptural story of salvation in Christ is double-hinged in time: first by the coming/birth/incarnation of our Lord Jesus and second, by His death/resurrection/ascension to the Father's throne, from where He will soon return in power and great glory. Both birth and resurrection denote stupendous miracles of God's power and grace: The great ineffable Creator becomes our Savior in human form. His defeat and death at Satan's hands are upended by the "impossible" truth that the crucified and buried God-man lived again and lives forever.

Rather than deciding which of the two is more important, we recognize Christ's birth and resurrection as the first and second great scenes in the divine drama of redemption. God ordained both birth and resurrection — humiliation and exaltation — as equal halves of the complete divine-human experience, including that of His Son on our behalf.

Your positively provocative question leads this writer to the opinion that the twin miracles of Christ's birth and resurrection are of equal importance in the divine drama of redemption.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Abraham and the story of
the gospel of God.
by **Daniel Flores**

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).

In the above passage, Paul writes that God announced the gospel in advance to Abraham. It's an interesting statement, and one that raises questions. Why was the gospel preached to the father of the faith long before Jesus came to earth? Was something happen-

ing that made him need to hear good news?

Sin and death

Let's start all the way back with Adam and Eve. Their disobedience to God resulted in death, something that God had warned them of: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

The pain and suffering caused by sin and death struck Adam's family when Cain, their oldest son, disobeyed God's word and killed his younger brother, Abel. What a terrible day it must have been when Eve heard that she would never hug or talk to her son again!

Adam lived 930 years and died, Genesis 5:5 says. From that moment on, death reigned. No

matter how long the patriarchs lived, sooner or later they all died. The phrase "and he died" is repeated eight times in Genesis 5. You would think that people would have changed the way they lived after realizing that everyone was dying, but they didn't. Disobedience got worse.

By the time of Noah, Jehovah saw that there was great wickedness on earth (6:5) and decided to send a flood through which "All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died" (7:22). Only Noah found favor with God, and only he and his family survived in the ark. But even Noah, after another 350 years, died. Everyone dies.

Turning point

The fact that all have sinned and no one lives forever is not

good news. In fact, the Bible says that after the Flood, human lifespan became shorter and shorter. In Genesis 11, after the Tower of Babel and prior to God's call of Abram, each of the generations had their children at a younger age.

However, with Abram, it was a different situation. He married a beautiful woman who was ten years younger than he, and it appeared they were going to be a blessed family. But things didn't turn out like that. Death haunted Abram's house when his brother, Haran, died and when his father, Terah, died at the end of Genesis 11. In addition to this, Abram learned that his wife, Sarai, was barren (vv. 27-31).

It's not a pretty picture, then or now. Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, the bad news of suffering and death became a reality for every family on earth. But thank God, He did not leave things that way. Genesis 12 begins with the word *Now*, indicating a new beginning and contrast with what came before. God turned the bad news, the sad and cruel reality of death, into hope and blessing. Here, as Paul quotes in Galatians, God has good news for Abram: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (vv. 2, 3).

Through Abraham, God promised to transform everything.

Deliverance

Later, Abraham's family traveled to Egypt and lived there. In that foreign country, God exalted them: "The children of Israel . . . multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7).

But by the hand of Pharaoh,

Israel was forced to work without compassion. In bondage, their lives were made bitter by his cruel demands. The day came when the Israelites could no longer bear so much pain and suffering in slavery, and they cried to God for help. When God heard their groaning, He remembered the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He looked on the children of Israel and was concerned about them (2:23-25).

God had more than compassion; He planned to act and liberate them. He saw their affliction, heard their cry, knew their anguish, and came down with a double purpose: to deliver them from oppression and bring them to a better place (3:7, 8). As Paul

through whom God promised an eternal heir. Paul tells the good news that a thousand years later, according to the promise, God raised up Jesus as Savior to Israel (vv. 18-23).

Do you notice all that God gives in these passages? The gifts of God climax in the gift of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. As Paul concludes, "the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent" (v. 26).

Salvation

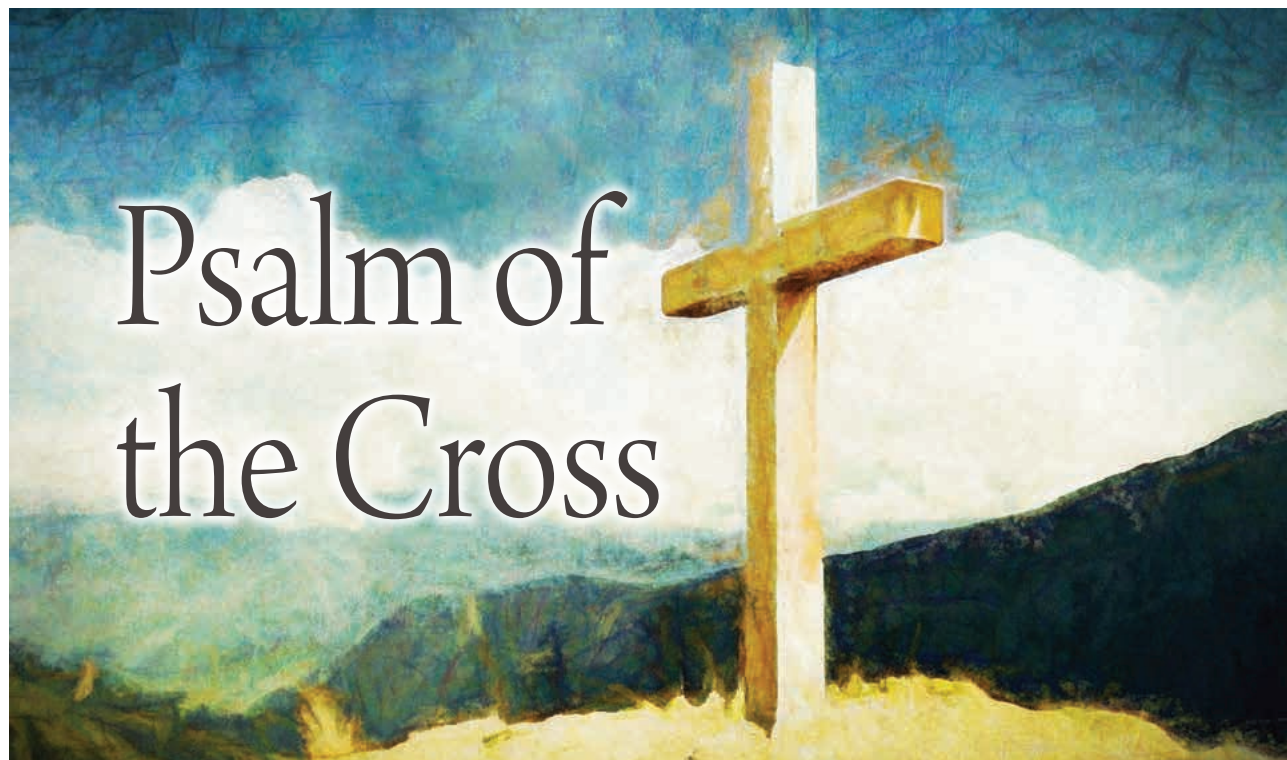
The gospel of God belongs to God. Nothing escapes His knowledge and power: "I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).



preached in Antioch, God took Israel out with an uplifted arm (Acts 13:17). God also endured them for the forty years that they walked in the desert. He gave them an inheritance in a new land and afterward gave them judges for 400 years. And when they asked for a king, He selected Saul. When his reign ended in disaster, God gave them David,

Every hour approximately 6,400 people die around the world; every minute, 107 people. This means that every second, two people die around the world. Medicine, science, and technology have advanced, but they cannot and will not prevent dying. Our reality is that death is everywhere, for the wages of sin is death.

continued on page 24



Another way of looking
at Jesus' cry in His hour
of death.

by R. Herbert

Two Gospel writers, Matthew and Mark, record that near His death, Jesus called out in a loud voice with what might seem to be a strange statement:

"Eli, Eli, lema sabach-thani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabach-thani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

While Matthew records Jesus' words in Hebrew, Mark records them in Aramaic. But the words are almost identical, and the meaning is the same.

These verses have long been

interpreted as Jesus bearing the sins of the whole world and God, who cannot look at evil (Habakkuk 1:13), turning away from His Son, who was left in near despairing isolation. Because sin cuts us off from God, the argument is made, and because Jesus at that moment represented all sinners, God totally cut Himself off from His perfect Son.

But is that what those terrible words really signify? Did God really turn away from His only Son, who had lived a life of perfect obedience all the way to death itself (Philippians 2:8)?

Although we may think that is the case, no scripture says it. And how do we mesh that concept with the fact that it was because God loved sinners so much that He sent His Son to die for them (John 3:16)? Or the fact that God looks on and deals personally with every sinner He calls? Or that we have it on scriptural authority that "nothing can sepa-

rate us from the love of God in Christ" (Romans 8:38, 39)?

Hint

There is a more positive way to understand those words of Jesus.

Jewish rabbis have long utilized the principle of referring to a scriptural passage by means of a few of its words, knowing that their hearers would mentally supply the rest of the passage. This method of teaching (called in Hebrew *remez*, meaning "a hint") was certainly used in Jesus' time. He employed it frequently.

For example, in Matthew 21:15, when the children of Jerusalem shouted praises in His honor and the priests and teachers of the law became indignant, Jesus responded by quoting only a few words from Psalm 8: "From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained praise" (v. 2, NHEB). But the religious lead-

ers would have realized that the rest of this passage states that children's praises will silence the enemies of God.

Jesus was almost certainly using this technique when He said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the opening line of Psalm 22, the great messianic psalm that foretold the smallest details of the Messiah's death. Every biblically literate Jew present at the Crucifixion would have been reminded of the prophecies made in that psalm: the insults of the mocking crowd (vv. 6-8); the dying thirst of God's Servant (v. 15); the "dogs"/Gentiles who pierced His hands and feet (v. 16); the casting of lots for His garments (v. 18) — simply by the "hint" of Jesus quoting the psalm's opening verse.

These words were also the only ones Jesus spoke "with a loud voice" on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Jesus spoke these words in His agony to all present, and all present would have likely recognized the intent of the small *remez* that referenced the whole psalm it was taken from.

Seen this way, we realize that Jesus' words "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" were His last great teaching, an abbreviated reference to all of Psalm 22 — the final proof He offered that He was, indeed, the One about whom the psalmist prophesied.

Fuller understanding

Understanding Jesus' words as a *remez* of Psalm 22 is not to argue that sin cuts us off from God, but to urge us not to presume that this is why Jesus

uttered these words. We should temper that concept with a fuller understanding of God's love, that God always loves us as His children despite our sins. This means that God still loved His Son at that awful time of His shouldering of our sins. Jesus himself told His disciples shortly before His crucifixion: "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (John 16:32).

In fact, near its end, the very psalm that Jesus quoted contains, not words of His rejection as He suffered, but words that Jesus knew He could trust completely: "For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him" (Psalm 22:24).

Applying all of Psalm 22 to Jesus' crucifixion, we realize that as He hung on the cross, fully human and bearing the full weight of human sin and death, His Father did not reject Him and had not "hidden his face from him." The Father loved Jesus till His last breath. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" was quoted for our benefit as a summary of the prophecies Jesus was fulfilling in laying down His life for us. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name), Ph.D., was trained in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. He writes for a number of Christian venues. Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*, except where otherwise noted.



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Thursday, April 14

"Do this in remembrance of Me"

(1 Corinthians 11:24).

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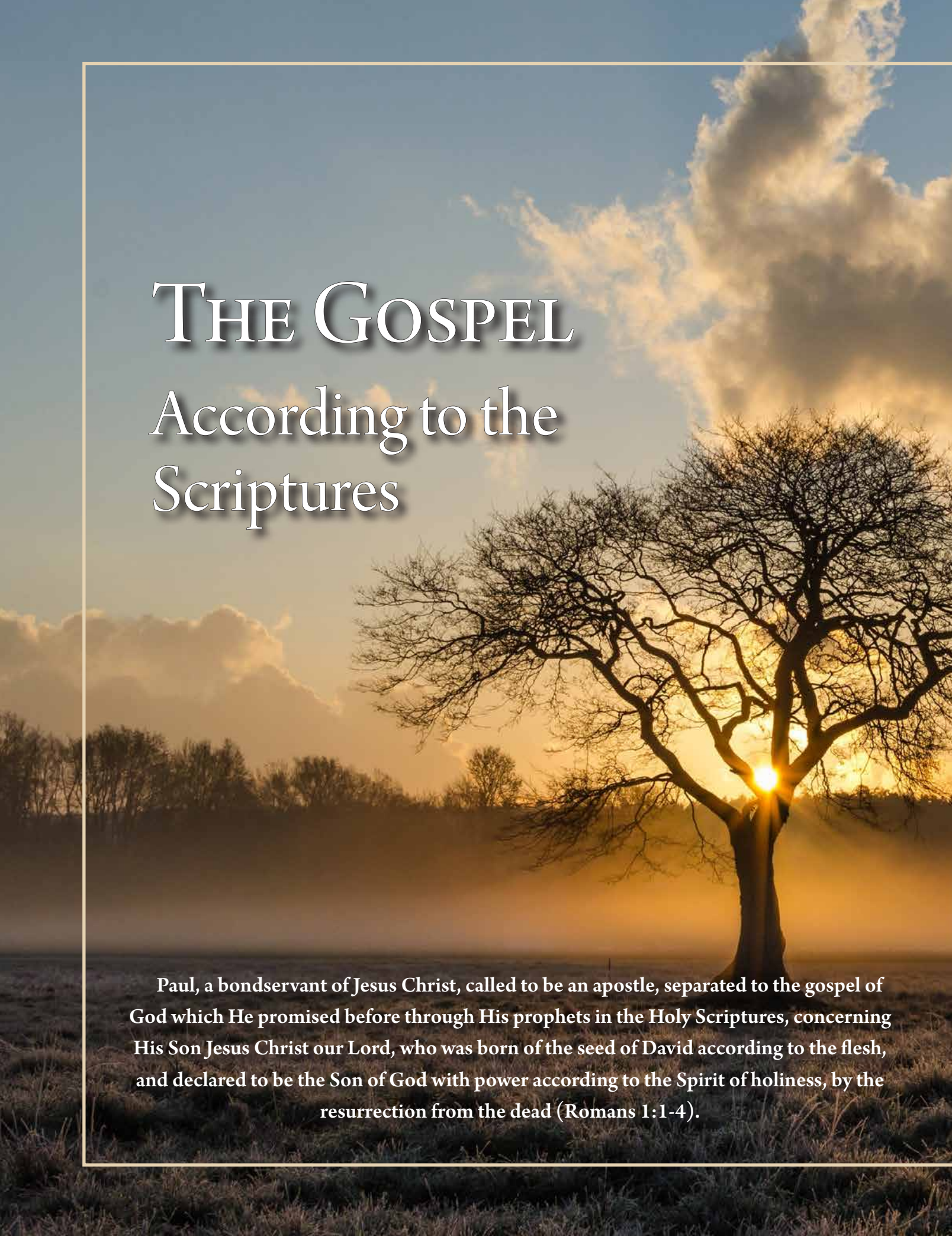


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THE GOSPEL

According to the Scriptures

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1-4).

The Beginning . . .

ADAM →†

And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise
your head, and you shall bruise His heel
(Genesis 3:15).

ABRAHAM →†

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you .
.. And you shall be a blessing. . . . And in you all
the families of the earth shall be blessed. . . . And
[Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted
it to him for righteousness (Genesis 12:2, 3; 15:6).

JACOB →†

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a
lawgiver from between his feet,
until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the
obedience of the people (Genesis 49:10).

MOSES →†

The Lord is my strength and song, and He has
become my salvation; He is my God, and I will
praise Him . . . The Lord, the Lord God, merciful
and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in
goodness and truth (Exodus 15:2; 34:6).

The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet
like me from your midst, from your brethren.
Him you shall hear . . . And the Lord your God
will circumcise your heart and the heart of your
descendants, to love the Lord your God with all
your heart and with all your soul, that you may live
(Deuteronomy 18:15; 30:6).

DAVID →†

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with
your fathers, I will set up your seed after you . .
. and I will establish the throne of his kingdom
forever (2 Samuel 7:12, 13).

PSALMS →†

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose
sin is covered (Psalm 32:1).

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I
make Your enemies Your footstool" (Psalm 110:1).

Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in
Your sight no one living is righteous (Psalm 143:2).

ISAIAH →†

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as
white as snow (Isaiah 1:18).

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned,
every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on
Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

JEREMIAH →†

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when
I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31).

EZEKIEL →†

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within
you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh
and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

HABAKKUK →†

But the just shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:4).

JOEL →†

I will pour out My Spirit in those days. . . . [then]
whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved
(Joel 2:29, 32).

MALACHI →†

Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the
way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will
suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger
of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is
coming (Malachi 3:1).

... The End



Elements

by Brian Franks

Discipleship is one of the most important aspects of the faith, though many parts of Christianity today don't seem to practice it. Many things might stand in for discipleship: reading a book about a Christian subject, for example, or listening to sermons and going to church each week.

However, though beneficial, these and similar activities are not exactly pure discipleship. Despite their blessings for us, their shared limitation is their broad aim. It is almost impossible for these practices to pinpoint the specific areas we need to grow in and walk us through the change.

This is where personal discipleship comes into the faith, and we see it in three great biblical examples: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and His twelve disciples. Three elements shine through in each: shared time, shared presence, and shared ministry.

Shared time

Joshua spent forty years as Moses' assistant (Numbers 11:28; cf. Joshua 14:7-10)! Though the shared time in the other two examples is shorter, it is still a significant amount of time. Elisha seems to have followed Elijah for about six years (parts of Ahab's, Ahaziah's, and Jehoram's reigns) until Elijah was taken away in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2). Jesus' disciples followed Him in the flesh for about three years.

The intensity of these examples is how closely these pairs lived together. They surely didn't limit themselves to once-a-week meetings. Rather, they lived life together for years because effective discipleship takes a lot of time.

This extended time allowed for many opportunities, both formal and informal, to address issues and refine strengths. Elisha stuck like glue to his teacher, and only a whirlwind separated them in the end (vv. 2, 4, 6). Jesus showed His disciples what to do in ministry, and they talked privately about what they didn't understand (Matthew 13:10-23; 16:5-12; Mark 4:34). Joshua was always near Moses or God (Exodus 33:11).

Consider that God commanded that no one should be found on Mount Sinai, lest they die, and yet we find Joshua taken halfway up the mountain by Moses (Exodus 19:12; 24:1, 12-14). An abundance of time spent between teacher and disciple(s) shows through in these examples.

The question for us today is if students and teachers are willing to take the time to invest in effective discipleship. Our schedules are busy with family, work, and church commitments. But time spent in discipling is critical to bear fruit in students' lives.

Shared presence

Though this has already seeped into the first point, physical presence is important in discipleship. Despite the benefit of technology to instantly cross oceans through video calls and several other means, the work of discipleship is still best done by occupying the same space. Certainly, discipleship can be done from afar, but even this approach betrays the problem.

From afar has several disadvantages compared to shared space. I've been disciplined, and have disciplined others, through

of Discipleship

both of these approaches. Students and teachers meeting in person easily, speaking face to face, and working side by side (the third element) is far superior to phone calls, emails, and video calls. There is better supervision, more chances for feedback, and more to be observed for both parties.

In our biblical examples, the disciples witnessed Jesus' miracles, saw His body language and heard His tone of voice. Joshua witnessed all the trouble Moses went through for forty years. He saw the parting of the Red Sea, fire on the mountain, plagues in the desert, the people murmuring and complaining and rebelling, and all the while saw how Moses handled it. He also observed how Moses approached God's presence on the mountain and in the tabernacle.

A student who lives near their teacher can witness the ministry personally in any situation — not just the planned, formal moments but the ordinary, everyday moments too. The combination of *time spent together* (the first two elements) powerfully shapes a disciple and invests in their spiritual growth. This allows the disciple to learn everything they can from the teacher, to ask or

be asked targeted questions, and have deep conversations.

Time and presence also allow the teacher the opportunity to observe the things that need to be addressed in the student, things that may never be observed at all in an email or video call-type of discipleship. At a distance, much can be hidden, in both directions, and only what each party wants to show may be displayed during their limited, planned interactions.

Shared ministry

The final element is about doing the work of ministry together. Jesus did not drag around a bunch of spectators; He put His disciples to work repeatedly (John 4:2; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-20). Joshua and Elisha assisted their masters, serving in ministry roles. Joshua was sent out as a general to lead a battle (Exodus 17:9-13). Ultimately, this prepared Joshua for his major work when he led the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land (Joshua 10:40-42). Elisha traveled with his master and assisted in any way he could (1 Kings 19:21), eventually doing many of the same works and miracles (2 Kings 2:13-15; 4:1-7, 32-37).

Likewise, in discipleship today, the students should eventually be put into proper ministry roles, under the supervision of the teacher. This allows them to move from being an observer of ministry to a doer of ministry.

Given these biblical models and principles, have you been disciplined? If you are a mature Christian, are you discipling others? Whether student or teacher, prayerfully approach discipleship and seek the Lord continually in the process. God often works through human hands and hearts to bring about the growth in disciples through teachers who submit to Him. **BA**

Brian Franks is pastor of the congregation in Tulsa, OK, where he lives with his wife and four children. He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College.





Reading the Bible
for all its worth.
by Calvin Burrell

Christians are people of the Book where “Thus saith the Lord” and “It is written” are found throughout.

God’s Word began with the cosmic, creative speaking of the Father, came to earth in the Living Word that is the Son, and was inspired as the written Word of the Bible by the Spirit — one matchless revelation! It is to our everlasting benefit that we receive it today, and every day. Here’s how.

1. Read it silently, just for yourself. Get a reading plan and get started — just one proverb or one psalm a day will do to begin with. As a teenager, I accepted the National FYC’s challenge to take in a chapter a day, with prayer. I’ve missed more than a few days along the way, but what a difference it has made in my life over the long run! God’s Word has been a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

2. Read it aloud so you can hear it. This engages more of you in the process — ears *and* eyes. It doubles the likelihood that grace *and* truth get into your mind and heart. Faith, says Romans 10:17, comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. When you read

the Word aloud, faith is sure to follow.

3. Read and hear it in groups — like family Bible readings, like interactive small group studies, and in larger meetings where one preaches or teaches the Word while others listen and learn. People do not live well by bread alone, but by every precious word from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

4. Read or hear it electronically on your phone or talking Bible, on radio or television, or on your latest device. Fair warning: Modern electronics come with a million distractions, many of them a hazard to spiritual health. If we don’t use our devices primarily for positive purposes, like taking the pure milk to “grow

thereby" (1 Peter 2:2), we are better off without them.

5. Read it in good literature

— like the BA and other faith-based magazines or books in which words of grace and truth are among the main ingredients. To those for whom the Living Word is the true Light of the world, illumination of that reality shines forth in a thousand places.

6. Sing it.

The Psalms and many other verses have been set to music with familiar tunes. Along with their Bibles, more than a few devout Christians carry a hymnbook with them. Most or all great gospel and church music is Bible based. When the word of Christ dwells in us richly, then singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with grace in our hearts to the Lord happens often (Colossians 3:16).

7. Study it.

Bible lessons for personal growth are widely available. Or do it yourself, like this: With Bible, pen, and paper at hand, read Genesis 1:1-3; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3. Jot your take on the main teachings of this classic trio of texts. How are they alike? How does each add to the other two? With a concordance, locate other verses with the word *word*; list five from each Testament that speak to you. Then read Acts 17:11 (NIV) to learn why some early Christian believers were "more noble" than others.

8. Memorize it. A basic level of biblical recall is having read and heard a passage often enough that it rings familiar when you hear or read it again. That's good. The next level is having the passage so fully and indelibly written on your heart-mind by the Spirit that you can say the whole thing without peeking. That's memorization. Here's what the psalmist said that the Bible on the inside could do for him: "Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). Either God's Word will keep us from sin, or sin will keep us from His Word.

9. Meditate on it. After we've read and heard the Word to a level of familiarity, then we can recall and re-chew it, mulling it over in our mind. Just as a cow regurgitates her food and contentedly chews her cud for more taste and nutrition, so can we ruminate and meditate on the Word we've previously taken. A remarkable Bible promise is that if you consistently meditate on

God's Word with full intent to obey its teaching, "then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

10. Live it. James, the Lord's brother, urges that we not be content with merely hearing God's Word, but follow through to the doing (James 1:22).

Neither reading nor hearing nor singing nor studying nor memorizing nor meditating, nor all of these combined, gets us to the highest purpose of God's Word. As helpful as each of these may be, they are not ends in themselves but only means to a much greater end. God's primary goal for His Word will become reality in us when His kids just go **do it!** **BA**

Calvin Burrell is former editor of the *Bible Advocate* and former director of GC Missions. He lives with his wife, Barb, in Stayton, OR. They attend the Marion, OR church.



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Sharing Jesus with those
who don't want to hear
about Him.

by Jeri Stockdale

The news wasn't good. "Neighbor Bob just got home from three weeks in the hospital. If you want to see him, you better visit soon."

Our hay supplier's words echoed in my ears. Ugh. I'd stayed away through the COVID-19 time because Bob was fighting cancer, a battle he'd been waging for five years. I'd known Bob for the twenty years we'd lived in our valley, but I wasn't sure I'd learned to read the man well. I sometimes brought him cookies or sweet bread, and we traded stories

about area wildlife or neighborhood drama. I shared about my children's escapades. And sometimes we ventured into the craziness of the world, dipping our toes in the waters of politics and skirting around the issue of faith.

When his cancer diagnosis was made, I felt an urgency to share Christ with Bob, but in a gentle way. I was ever mindful of the signs posted on his front door. *Is There Life After Death? Trespass and You'll Find Out. No soliciting. Leave your religion at the door and I'll leave my shotgun in the closet.* Imprinted on my brain, these signs added to my uncertainty.

Sharing a story

Bob's immediate decision was to not have chemotherapy. His adult children worked to persuade him, but he wouldn't listen.

I decided to try. I shared the story of my then twelve-year-old son who'd been diagnosed with a brain tumor. I explained that the chemo and radiation were hard and scary, but Justin found faith, and God walked with him through those times. "If chemotherapy gives you more time with your loved ones, it's worth it." I added, "If my twelve-year-old son can do this, you can too."

I don't know if my words were a turning point, but chemotherapy bought him five more years.

Now we were at another turn in the road. I wrestled with God as to how I could share Christ with Bob while there was still time. I woke in the night, tossing and turning and thinking through the exact words, the scripture verses, and the way I would share so it would flow together.

The weight of the responsibil-

ity was heavy. "What if I mess up the words, and Bob hardens his heart? Lord, this should be a gift to give, but I'm full of worry. Please take away my anxiety."

In the quiet, His Spirit spoke. *This isn't all on your shoulders. Don't you think I've had others speak into his life? Don't worry about what you will or won't say. Just go visit him, love him, and be a good neighbor.* God's peace settled over me as the burden lifted.

Sharing a gift

The next day I was tied up with canning pear sauce and couldn't get away to visit Bob, though I wanted to. Again, the Lord gave me His peace about the timing of my visit.

Meanwhile, I tried to think of a gift I could bring him. Chocolate bars were a favorite, but that and anything else I considered didn't seem right. Finally, I realized the answer was right in front of me: a jar of my pear sauce.

The following day, I went to town for an appointment. On the way home, I stopped at Bob's house, a little apprehensive because he had two visitors already. I decided to try anyway. I could at least drop off the pear sauce.

His son, Bobby, answered the door. His eyes brightened when he saw me, and he was pleased by the gift. "Dad's not eating much, and it's difficult to find something he likes."

The Lord knew that, but I hadn't.

"Dad had a rough time yesterday, but he just woke from a long nap. I think he'd enjoy a visit." So my visit wouldn't have worked out yesterday. Once

again, God's timing was perfect.

Bobby showed me in. My eyes adjusted to the darkened room, illuminated only by the light reflected from a nearly wall-size flat screen television. Bobby turned the volume down and re-joined his friend in another room, giving Bob and me a chance to visit in private.

Sharing Scripture

My neighbor lay in a reclined hospital bed, with pillows propping him up as he watched the news. I looked past the machines connected to Bob's thin body and took in his failing state. His gaze met mine and his eyes lit up. He was pleased to see me.

I noticed then Bob was wearing a cross necklace. My heart-

"Are you familiar with John 14?"

"No, hon."

"It's one of my favorite passages."

He wanted to hear it, so I plunged in and recited the passage for him.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we

“I wrestled with God as to how I could share Christ with Bob while there was still time.”

beat quickened. Was this God's sign for me to speak? *Patience.* We talked about his hospital stay and his cancer, his children and mine, and the state of the world. He was happily engaged in our conversation, and we visited for over an hour.

"Bob, do you ever read the Bible?"

"Yes. I have two different ones."

know the way?" Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

Bob's eyes lit up as I recited the verses. Suddenly empowered, I repeated, "Let not your heart be troubled. He knows we'll have worry and be anxious, but He is preparing to meet us when it's time to go home."

Sharing prayer and time

I took Bob's hand and squeezed it, our gaze meeting with an understanding I'd never witnessed before. When I offered to pray for him, Bob eagerly accepted. "Dear Father, I ask for You to strengthen Bob for this journey. I pray You'll relieve his pain and help keep his eyes focused on You. Be with him and prepare him to meet You, just as we all must prepare to meet You one day. Thank You for being with us through everything."

With tears in his eyes, Bob thanked me while squeezing my hand. Yes, God had prepared Bob for his homecoming, through others as well as me, working in ways I couldn't have known.

"Would it be all right if I come visit again?"

"Please. Anytime, hon."

And so, I did. Several times. We got to know one another in a way we hadn't in the past twenty years.

And yet, those years weren't a loss. I realized the days of simple conversations had been a crescendo to the most important discussions we were having now. And when Bob finally passed, God's gift to me was the assurance in my heart that without a doubt, my neighbor was in the arms of Jesus. **BA**

Jeri Stockdale writes from Poulsbo, WA.



Beforehand

continued from page 13

But God sees and acts for us. The good news declared beforehand to Abraham was manifested in Jesus Christ. By Him, God has changed everything.

That is the gospel of salvation Paul preached in Antioch. At that moment in history, he claims, the word of this salvation had been sent. He speaks of the unjust death of the Savior Jesus and that God raised Him from the dead. He says that at that very moment they, the witnesses of Jesus, were announcing the gospel of the promise, made first to Abraham.

The gospel of Christ "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). It has the power to turn pain and suffering into peace and hope, and death into life. It is the gospel promised from the beginning:

The gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (v. 1-4).

The gospel of God is the answer to the old problem of sin and death that started long before Abram. It gives eternal life in Christ Jesus because He has defeated death.

Ahead

Read the wonderful news of the gospel, promised for the future:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3, 4).

The gospel continues to be heard and shared for the "obedience of the faith among all nations for His name" (Romans 1:5) — just as Abraham did. This gospel of God gives abundant life so we can dwell in freedom and obedience as He transforms us for His glory. **BA**

Daniel Flores is the pastor of the McAllen, TX church and president of the North American Ministerial Council. He writes from Mission, TX, where he lives with his wife, Kerenha, and their four children.



Don't miss this issue's
Online Extra:

"How to Find the Love of Your Life" by Bob Hostetler



Hear Me, Lord

(Genesis 18:20-33)

Out of Your orchestra of many voices,
I lack the power of timpani, the charm of harp,
sweetness of violin, richness of cello.
I am the least ping of a string,
a chord untuned, yet I know
You accept my tries, Oh Lord,
and direct me, for my whole life
is a song I sing for You.

Pat Leonard



From the Editor's Desk

Bible Adventure

I received *The Bible Adventure* a couple weeks ago. In my opinion, it is a required book for Bible study. After reading the Bible thru several times in the past 40 yrs, this book has cleared much up. We read of wars, forgiveness, more wars, trials and tribulation with a lack of understanding of the real concept of it all. Thank you to all who spent many hours to clarify difficult to understand stories.

I do have one question: are the Jews spoken about from the tribe of Judah or of all Israel? Thank you for your time. I am a former WCG member.

E. D.
Online

Editor's note: Thank you for your encouraging words. I'm happy that The Bible Adventure has been a blessing to you. As to your question, the word Jews originates from the Hebrew Yehudi. In the Old Testament, where the word appears nearly 75 times, it refers to those from the tribe of Judah, or the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 16:6; 2 Chronicles 32:18; Jeremiah 34:9). Over time, though, the term began to be used generically for all Israelites, whether practicing the Jewish religion or not. In modern Hebrew, the word Yehudi is still used to refer to both Judeans in particular, as well as to the Jewish people in general.

Holy Spirit

The Zambian [church] appreciates your good work for our Lord Jesus Christ. Our church and members stand for you in prayers.

Why do some people call the Holy Spirit the Holy Ghost, because God is not the God of dead but [of] the living.

S. S.
Online

Editor's note: Thank you for your comments. We are happy to hear that you are blessed by the Bible Advocate magazine in Zambia.

As to your question, I think the reason some Christians refer to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost is that, nearly half the time, the King James Version of the Bible translated the Greek word Pneuma as "Ghost" instead of "Spirit." So two different English words were used to render the one Greek word. This caused confusion, but they basically function as synonyms in the KJV. Other Bible translations, including the New King James Version, consistently translate Pneuma as "Spirit" instead of "Ghost." Pneuma, in other contexts, can also refer to a spirit or ghost in general (Mark 6:49; Luke 24:37).

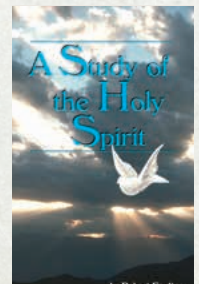
Praise the Lord! "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. . . . For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him" (John 4:24; Luke 20:38).

BAP Books and Literature

The Bible Adventure
by Calvin Burrell
\$9.00
(English only)



A Study of the Holy Spirit
by Robert Coulter
\$1.50
(English only)



Tracts

God and the Divinity of Christ
.19¢ each



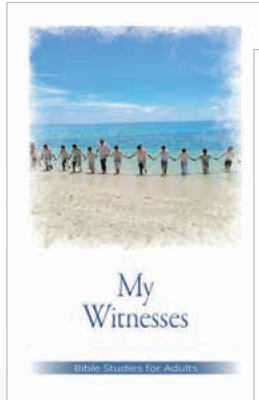
God and the Holy Spirit
.21¢ each

(English and Spanish)

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GC Ministries News

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North American Ministerial Council

October 3-8, 2022

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Think the Old Testament is too old? Not needed? Learn how wrong these impressions are in Artios' Lead Up article "Mining the Old Testament for Treasure" by Loren Gjesdal. Find it at <https://baonline.org/mining-the-old-testament-for-treasure/>.

Think the Old Testament is too old? Not needed? Learn how wrong these impressions are in Artios' Lead Up



A different method of
evangelism.

by Ramon Ruiz

Given the impact that the phenomenon called COVID-19 is having on us and the need to respond as a church to this new reality, we recognize, among other things, the great opportunity to fulfill the mission that the Lord Jesus Christ commands us. Likewise, we reaffirm that the church is not a building or house of prayer where we have gathered week after week through the years, but rather the group of believers wherever they may be.

In response to this ongoing reality we're facing, we present to you the biblical foundations of

our faith and the strategies to establish family groups for personal evangelism and local church growth.

Biblical foundations

Every Christian mission must look for its roots in the redemptive revelation of God, contained in the Holy Scriptures. There we find its origin, the source of its inspiration and reason for being.

The statements we list below are simple points that support the biblical-theological framework for the work of family groups.

God has a plan that He is carrying out. As the Word revealed by God throughout history, the Bible communicates the immense love of God and His decision to redeem creation from the slavery of sin. It reveals the

constant presence of God and His powerful intervention in human life as He saves and liberates throughout history (Genesis 12:3; Psalm 96; Isaiah 55; 65:16-25; Acts 17:24-31; Romans 8:19-23; Ephesians 1:3, 4; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 20:1-4).

Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of the universe. According to the ancient promises and proclamations of the prophets, Jesus is a sacrifice for sin, achieving the redemption of the world. Jesus Christ is the only way, sufficient and perfect to reconcile and save the lost, thanks to His death and glorious resurrection.

Because of these two monumental events, God has re-exalted Jesus as Lord. He reigns with full power and lordship over all creation, especially over His church, to reconcile in Him all things (Matthew 28:18; John

3:16; 14:6; Acts 2:22-26; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:17-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 1:9-19; Hebrews 13:8; 1 Peter 1:18-21; 2:21-25).

The church has a mission. In their call and redemption, Jesus' community of faith has a reason of their own to be sent. The Lord has charged them to proclaim good news and become a sign of the kingdom of God in the world. The church is commissioned to be salt and light in a corrupted, dark place, announcing the gospel of Christ to the lost. In short, the community of faith is sent to preach, to serve, and to give themselves just as our Savior, Lord, and Master did (Matthew 5:14-16; 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 2:9; John 20:21).

Each believer is a minister. Throughout the Bible, we discover God's purpose for every human being. In all His chosen people, He looks for personal sacrifice in obedience and love toward Him. God's divine desire is to form people made up of holy priests and ministers who will serve for the benefit of others.

In the New Testament, we find a clear calling for each believer to become a servant (minister: *diakonos*) and slave (*doulos*) who embodies the gospel's redemptive purpose. This means that every believer is called to exercise their ministry to edify the body of Christ. This ministry consists of being sent out, of becoming a living witness of the faith in evangelizing and personal discipleship, teaching the gospel, and sharing

the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:5, 6; 5:10; 20:6).

The family is our foundation. The ministry of all believers is a family (home) experience in the New Testament context, except when particular conditions occur in the church, such as persecution.

At home, Christians have their first opportunity to make their faith and preaching a reality — to give a coherent and authentic testimony of what Christ has done in their lives (1 Timothy 5:8). When a family is willing to go beyond preaching and serve others, the Lord will provide what they need to accomplish their ministry. In a world that increasingly confuses moral and spiritual values, the Christian family must emerge as a healthy and pure reality of love and trust in God (Philippians 2:15).

From our homes, the teacher develops skills, and testimonies solidify. In this environment and beyond, we can proclaim the love and salvation that the Lord has made a reality in us (Acts 10:1, 24, 30, 33; 16:31; Mark 5:19; Luke 5:19; John 4:53; Matthew 5:16).

Definitions

Before we cover strategies for effective family groups, let's briefly define a few terms.



Family groups for church growth system: a method, based on the Bible, that helps the church fulfill God's mission in five main areas: evangelism, worship, edification, communion, and service.

Family group: A gathering of five to twenty people who meet once a week in a member's house in order to fulfill the mission of the church.

Goal of a family group: to bring new believers into the body of Christ, to baptize and disciple them. Once this is accomplished, the group should multiply into other groups as much as possible. The lifespan of the family group lasts until it stops being productive.

Photos on pages 29-30 are of the brethren in Lima, Peru



Strategies

Forming a family group

The group is made up of two or three church families who live close to each other. One of those families is the host of the group. A responsible leader should be in charge of sharing the Word of God. A musician should lead in worship.

Operating a family group

Church members who make up the group must

- choose a day and time to meet weekly, preferably on non-established worship days;
- meet for an average of one hour each week;
- focus on the Word of God and teach it.

Group members are encouraged to bring guests, who may be their own unconverted family members, friends, or neighbors.

Work of the local pastor in the family group system

A pastor committed to the work of groups must

- encourage the congregation to open their homes to establish groups;
- make sure that all members are part of at least one family group;
- appoint responsible leaders for each group;
- train leaders on their weekly topic;
- supervise the development of each group so that it fulfills its purpose.

Key factors for a family group to achieve its purpose

- Each pastor must be seriously committed and involved with evangelization.
- Every member of a local church must belong to at least one family group.
- Members of the group should invite guests.
- Allow the Word of God to be preached at each meeting.

With these strategies in place, we can reach the world with the gospel no matter what obstacles we face. May God's blessings be on our homes for the sake of His kingdom.

Ramon Ruiz is president of the International Ministerial Congress and pastors the Melbourne church in Dallas, TX, with his wife Rebeca. They have one son, two daughters, and several grandchildren.



Editor's note: To learn more about the home evangelism model that was pioneered with great success in the Mexico Conference, look for the Home Evangelism BAP lessons in the second quarter adult quarterly. Order at cog7.org.





God's Purpose and Plan

The calling of every follower of Jesus Christ is to make additional disciples of Jesus. Our Lord said it this way: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV).

Though not explicitly stated, sharing the gospel is the necessary first step. People need to learn many things once they become Christ's disciples, but the starting point must be Jesus — who He is, what He did, and what that accomplished. That's the good news that leads to forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. The biblical gospel is Christ centered.

One of the sermons I have been sharing this year presents the gospel in terms of its *heart* and of its *hope*. With a tip of my hat to Pastor John Piper, I have been describing the heart of the gospel as consisting of four essential elements: 1) an Event: Jesus died and rose again; 2) an Achievement: By His death in our place for our sins, Jesus made it possible to receive forgiveness for sin and become the righteousness of God; 3) an Offer: God offers anyone who believes in Jesus and receives Him as Savior and Lord the forgiveness and imputed righteousness that He made possible; and 4) an Application: When someone does believe in Jesus and does receive Him as Savior and Lord, Jesus' achievement is applied to that person, and they are forgiven and judged by God to be righteous.

My sermon concludes with two additional es-

sentials that I have been describing as the hope of the gospel: God's purpose and God's plan. Having a purpose without a plan to accomplish it, or having a plan without a purpose, are both senseless situations. So it should not surprise us that God has a purpose and a plan. The apostle Peter captured both in one verse! "For Christ also died for sins once for all time, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18, NASB).

God's purpose? The restoration of His creation to Himself. God's plan? Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and the application of Christ's achievement to those who believe and receive it.

I'm calling God's purpose and plan the *hope* of the gospel because these are God's means that the plan will succeed and the purpose will be fulfilled. Once you see it, you can track it through Scripture and history. In Genesis 3, God curses the serpent and promises a coming One who will crush its head. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham that all peoples will be blessed through him. In Deuteronomy 18, God speaks through Moses of a coming One. Through the Old Testament prophets, God promises, "He's coming! He's coming!" And in the Gospels, Jesus proclaims, "I'm here!"

From beginning to end, it is God's purpose and God's plan and God's glory. We're invited to be part of it! That's good news worth sharing.

— Loren Stacy





Photos (L to R): Burundi •
Chile • India



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