



Shepherd's Voice[®]

M A G A Z I N E

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In this issue...

The Blessings of Revelation

Staying the Course

Confess Your Faults

Children of God

Part 1—The Vital Mission

King Saul's Finest Moment

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Greetings!

Jeremiah wrote that “...let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness on the earth” (Jeremiah 9:24). Jesus Christ has made this abundantly possible, as He came to reveal the Father, the source of life and all existence.

When looking for answers therefore, if a Christian is diligent in his seeking, knocking, wrestling and asking, he will find them. The answers do not necessarily come from a sermon, booklet or magazine, or even some kind of deep Biblical truth, but from divine revelation, which comes from the experiential awareness of God. The answers are transforming in that they bring a higher view of God. Men can only point the way, but it is up to the individual to venture in and through the path.

When the Corinthian Church had struggles Paul did in fact address them in the most pragmatic way possible, and we still see this happening today when resolving issues, but these answers we know are limited. Paul indeed then pointed them to a better way which is love. The apostle John tells us to know God is to love, for God is love (1 John 4:7, 8).

To amplify our subject, we can look at the experience of Jacob. Jacob wrestled with men his whole life, but only until he wrestled with the Lord, did he become free. Even until sunrise, when Jacob refused to let go, after his hip was injured, the Lord asked his name. He said, “*My name is Jacob*”—the deceiver. God helped Jacob to discover himself. For the first time he saw himself as a selfish deceiver. Jacob was ready for a new name and a changed character. God gave him a new name—Israel. Israel means “one who struggles with God.” One who struggles with men becomes proud and fearful if he wins; he despairs if he loses and becomes bitter. But one who struggles with God lives life on a different level. I mention this as



we spend an inordinate amount of time struggling with each other, debating the issues, critiquing each other ministries, analyzing the past. This limits the peace of God that we are promised. Therefore, in the article *The Blessings of Revelation*, we expand on this by looking to the troubles of Habakkuk, where we see how faith in the Lord brings about a higher view of God and life.

In this issue you will find the first installment of *The Children of God*, Norm Edwards introduces this important series. I am often reminded that many young people stop attending church services, so this series is designed to help young adults make the transition from being under parental authority to being under God’s authority. It is given to all as a guide to be more effective in their local congregations which should be a familial environment.

In this fall issue of *SVM* we have added the regular section “*Ask Norm.*” Norm Edwards is known for his candid answers to Biblical questions. Those who have written to *Servants’ News* in the past are encouraged to continue with engaging questions.

In Christ’s Service
Jim Patterson

The Blessings of Revelation

When Jesus Christ came to live amongst us in the flesh, He came to reveal the Father. The revelation of the Father to mankind is the beginning of eternal life and our experience of the Kingdom of God.

When scripture speaks of revelation, it speaks of not mere explanation or new information. Revelation gives us a new view of God. It transports the mind of a believer willing to receive and strive for it to a new level of understanding of his own existence in relation to the source of all life. When we receive, accept and nurture revelation that comes to us, our thinking expands in ways we have never known. Life takes on new meaning.

We cannot possibly do justice to the whole topic on God's revelation to mankind. I don't think the Bible alone can do the subject justice either. Revelation comes to us by experiential awareness. In this article we simply want to bring this fact to our attention, and that the role that faith has in how through faith

God reveals Himself and His expectations to us.

The Lord does graciously reveal Himself to those that earnestly seek Him:

*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him **and manifest Myself to him**”* (John 14:21).

The value of such revelation far exceeds possible explanations we may get from the above. Revelation of God is power, and of great life value to the believer.

Jesus Reveals the Church

The Church of God can become, particularly in the latter days, difficult to indentify entirely in earthly form. We can believe it is an institution, an organism, or a combination of both. Some have defined it in terms of its history. Let's look at Christ's own words when He first revealed the building of His Church, *“And I also say onto you that you are*

Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Without a doubt, the Church is His. He defines who is in it, where it goes, its limitations, its destiny, where it might spring up, and where it stops. Also its measure of success is entirely judged by Him.

We have written before in this publication to be careful of how we judge success of the Church (see *To the Angel of the Scattered Churches – SVM Winter 2010*). When difficulty or differences arise in the Church of God, it is He who will weigh the hearts of those involved. It is at those times and junctures we should not be asking the Lord for an explanation but for revelation. Many are waiting for an explanation of things, but they will be left searching indefinitely. The answer comes not by mere explanation. Men and women of faith have the answers revealed to them that they need, because they



When God seems unfair or during times of doubt, what we need is a higher view of God

always confront problems, and sometimes confronting a problem means struggling with the Lord Himself to find an answer. Those who struggle with God to find answers are the ones that receive the blessing of revelation.

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Jesus Christ knew how we as a people would evaluate our success as a Church, but He counters it by the revelation of the desire of the Father. Indeed, during times of doubt what we need is a new view of God. Faith is our role in the process of receiving revelation.

The Just Shall Live by Faith

A study of the prophet Habakkuk can give us some further insight into revelation from God and faith. His book is where we find the words “The just shall live by (his) faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Why is it the just live by Faith? That is a fair question to ask I think.

Habakkuk was a tormented man who prayed for the Lord’s intervention to end the perversion of justice and violence that was before him. He agonized why the Lord would tolerate these injustices for so long. Habakkuk concerns came deeply within his troubled heart. He was one of those who “sigh and cry” for the iniquities on earth. We need to ask ourselves if we are

like the prophet or somewhat disconnected from the violence on the earth just hoping it would stay away from us.

What were Habakkuk’s hopes in what the Lord would do in ending the lawlessness of his time? Perhaps he wanted a religious revival, an explanation from the Lord for His apparent indifference. The answer included no revival, no explanation. His prayer however did not go unanswered:

“Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told to you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.... They all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand” (Habakkuk 1:5-9).

This was not the answer Habakkuk wanted! The Lord was going to send a treacherous nation to overwhelm Israel and be the instrument of God’s justice. Moreover, we may believe crime must not go unpunished, but should the righteous of the land also suffer so that the wicked may be punished? According to this prophecy, apparently so!

He certainly did not hear of a solution that brought comfort, nor did he get an explanation for God’s choice of such a drastic measure, in fact, he never does. The Lord is sovereign, and does not need to provide an explanation.

Is there a difficulty in your life for which you are seeking resolution from God, or an explanation? There may be a lesson for you in Habakkuk. The answer may be one that is outside your current understanding, and will be transforming.

Stunned by what the Lord has answered him with, the prophet engages God, questioning Him on the logic of a how, He, a holy God would appoint those who although unrighteous, be devoured by those who are even more wicked? (1:12-13). Habakkuk then argues the case of the standpoint on how helpless the people are (1:14-15). The prophet’s third approach: how can God give an already proud and haughty people victory over Judah?

“I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected”(Habakkuk 2:1).

Indeed, fortunately for the prophet, he had the sense to wait for the Lord’s response. Though he questioned the Consort of Israel’s answer, he had enough sense to know he needed correction. Though he may have doubted, he continued to believe for he senses

the answer is beyond him.

“Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” (Habakkuk 2:3).

The answer will happen, but it cannot be spelled out in words. It cannot be fully discerned until the event happens. It is a vision of redemption, given in the context of the end of days. The Lord has already transporting Habakkuk beyond his current paradigm by carrying him well into the future. How can one make sense or use of what the Lord has just responded with? We find it in the next verse: *But the just shall live by his faith, (2:4)*. It is given in opposition to the proud.

The prophet understood that the Lord was eternal, and therefore knew the end from the beginning and cannot be caught by surprise (1:12). We do not have such a capacity to know the beginning and end of things. So there can be, and there will only be one answer: *the just shall live by faith*.

The fact that the just shall live by faith is in and of itself is a great revelation from God, and requires revolutionary thinking about life and salvation for the believer. As stated before, it brings a new view of God. A higher view of God helps us obtain a new way of interpreting all things. It helps

us properly frame matters in their proper context.

Habakkuk saw his environment out of control, the answer coming was out of his control, but nothing is out of God’s control. Do we feel our situation is outside the scope of God’s vision and control? I submit to you no! What is called for in times of doubt is a higher view of God, His Sovereign will and better understanding of His righteousness.

The Righteousness of God

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes ... For in it the righteousness of God is **revealed** from faith to faith (a lifetime of faith from beginning to end); as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’ (Romans 1:16,17)*

We are not called for single acts of faith, but a lifetime of faith. God reveals Himself throughout our lifetime by our steadfast belief, experiencing the work of His Holy Spirit in our lives.

Wrestling with challenges is the only way our faith muscles grow. Men and women of faith confront challenges. Avoidance, leaving it to others, settling for half-truths and superficial answers is to remain immature with limited revelation and understanding. Growing in grace and knowledge often requires soul-searching, doing so with the Lord leads to revelation.

Great Revelation is possible for us now

Without question Paul suffered much in his ministry, but he received tremendous revelation as a result. When he wrote to the Ephesians, he prayed that they too will receive such revelation:

“ ... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you many know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe ...” (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Paul is not deferring his hopes of the above to when they become spirit beings, but to the time of the present. Such amazing revelation does not come by man, but comes from Jesus Christ. I believe Paul could pray for it on their behalf, but could not give it to them. Such revelation comes from personal experiential awareness.

Concluding Thoughts

We think the Lord would be pleased with Habakkuk. He was a man of faith, who confronted God, and earned his answer. With a greater view of God, the Prophet proclaims:

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines;

though the labor of the olive may fail, and yields no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The lord is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's

feet and He will make me walk on my high hills.” Habakkuk 3:17-19)

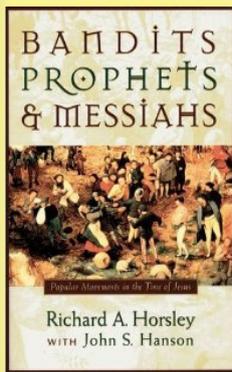
This is a beautiful expression of faith by Habakkuk. We too, from a lifetime of faith and experiential awareness of Christ in our hearts,

will know joy in the God of our salvation, just as Habakkuk did.

“Hope deferred make the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12)



BOOK REVIEWS



Bandits Prophets, and Messiahs

By Richard A. Horsley

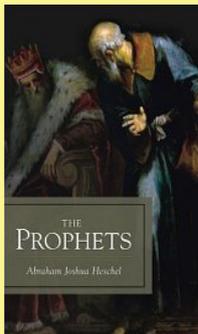
For those people who are interested in understanding the historical setting of the first century Church, Richard Horsley's book Bandits Prophets and Messiahs is a must read. In it he identifies the various groups spoken of in scripture, and lays out their religious, social and political leanings. He explains their origins, roles and influences during Israel's tribulation under Syrian and Roman rule. His identification of a large oppressed Jewish peasant class sheds light upon the economic influences of the time, and aids in comprehending the interplay between the various groups which led to the great revolt of 66 AD.

I would advise to make it a mandatory book to read if one was not inclined to labor through a more theological discourse on the subject. It is well put together, an easy read, and a must for those who wish to speak intelligently on the subject of the first century Church. Most certainly thought provoking and insightful.

Jim B Petersen

The Prophets

by Abraham Heschel



First published in 1962, The Prophets provides a broadened insight to Israel's prophets. Abraham Heschel's portrayal of the prophets begins by introducing these men whose words live on with us today, as some of the "... most disturbing people who have ever lived ...". His study of the prophets reveals that how the prophet is one who feels fiercely; for God has thrust a burden on the prophet's soul. To Heschel, God rages in the prophet's words.

Much of the book presents to us that our God is the God of pathos; He does not reveal Himself in abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world His desire for a personal relationship with His people. Heschel boldly presents that God is affected by what happens in the world, and Heschel helps us see it through the prophet's words.

Those looking to study the prophets of the Old Testament will be well served to study this monumental work of Abraham Heschel. He also gives the reader historical background of the prophets, helpful for finding further context into the life and times of those who brought us so much of the Bible.

Jim Patterson

Staying the Course

This year, citizens living on the East coast endured an earthquake, one of the biggest hurricanes to hit the area, and tornadoes that were a result of hurricane Irene's fury. If God was trying to get our attention; He sure has mine. On the night that Hurricane Irene hit, I was sitting with family and friends listening to the howling winds and lashing rain as it hit the windows. Suddenly, a loud warning sound came over the radio. The weather authorities were instructing everyone in that area to take cover as we were on tornado watch. Living on the East Coast, this is not a familiar drill.

I recall gathering my children, and running down the stairs into the basement. As I sat "hunkered down" in my brother's basement with my husband, two children, my brother's family, and my very dear friend's family imagining tornadoes spinning around us, I began to question if I was deserving of God's protection and hedge that He places around His people. I wondered if God was pleased with the works that I have done lately. Have I been using my talents in a constructive, pleasing way or have I been less focused on the things that should matter most? I prayed hard that night, harder than I had in a while.

In the morning after I woke, it dawned on me how distracted I had become by everyday life;

work, raising children, driving to soccer practices, Boy Scout meetings, wrapped up in family issues, paying bills, you name it! Staying focused is hard work. It takes effort, prioritizing, and constant prayer to walk and stay on that narrow path.

Everyday we are presented with choices and decisions to make: what to eat, what to wear, how to react to situations that arise, how to parent, how to handle stress in our lives. A whole host of decisions are made on a daily basis. I realized that the decisions I was making, was leaving me tired and fatigued. As a result, my once very strong faith began to "teeter" like a child on a see-saw. At times it seems hard to keep strong in the faith. Things happen in our lives that can bring us down and cause us to question the course that we are on. We may experience a death of a loved one, health issues, financial hardship, relationships that go astray; there is a whole host of factors that may chip away at our "armor."

Distractions of this world can also keep us from practicing our faith the way we should. At times it may feel like being on a see-saw; not sure whether to give it the extra time and effort to stay or fight back to the top. Jumping off seems like a much easier choice. It is during these challenging times, when we are most weary,

when our faith and resolve are put to the true test. It is also during these times that we, brethren, must remember to "stay the course... for the mission is worth it."

In II Timothy, Paul writes his last letter before his execution by Nero. In chapter 1 verses 6-7, Paul writes, "*Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*"

This statement reminds us that God has equipped and empowered us for the mission that He has called us to do. We need to remember that when we pray and ask for God's help, He will guide us with His Spirit. It is our job to nurture that spirit by reading His word, praying, meditating, fasting, and attending Sabbath services. When we rely on our own devices, we are left with our own strength. Our own strength can come and go based on our health and other physical factors, but the strength of God is not limited by our physical or mental capabilities.

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," (2 Timothy 2:1).

Another principle that helps us to "stay the course" can also be found in Paul's letter to Timothy.

After Paul tells Timothy to keep being empowered by God he writes, *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”* (2 Timothy 2:2-3).

We are not alone in the mission that God has called us to do. Good soldiers do not suffer alone. They are part of a unit; they fight together, succeed together, mourn together, and they never leave a wounded soldier behind. When one soldier suffers, they all do. The feeling that one is “all alone” can be discouraging and unhealthy. It often leads to depression, anxiety, and physical problems. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are never alone when we have God’s spirit, and we need to remember that we have brothers and sisters in Christ as well. That is why it is important to be with other members of God’s family. “Iron sharpens iron, so one person

sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

Staying strong in our faith also requires us to be single-minded. What does this mean? It means that we stay focused on what God wants and requires us to do. Everything that we do should be pleasing to God. Romans 12:12 says, *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what **God’s** will is—his good, **pleasing** and **perfect** will.”* A double-minded person makes a poor soldier.

“Staying the course” means you are single-minded and focused on carrying out what God has called you to do. This means that we are focused on God’s plan, not fitting God into our own plans. When trials come our way, and they will, we must remember to stay strong in our faith, not waver because we might not understand why things are happening.

In James 1:2-8, James writes,

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” We need to place our trust in God, and pray that His will be done.

“Staying the course” is absolutely vital for all baptized members of God’s family.

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him,” (James 1:12).

The word persevere means to remain, or to recede or flee. When we feel our faith begin to “teeter” we must remember to live by what we know God says in His book, not by how we feel. We need to follow God’s rules, and do what is right even when we are tired and exhausted by what is happening around us. Time is short brethren. We need to seek

Continued on page 11



Confess Your Faults

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”
(James 5: 16 NIV).



Some in the churches of God think brethren should confess their sins to one another. Is that what the above scripture means? To understand what the Apostle James means by confessing our faults or sins, we need to find out who he is addressing in this letter and the context of this verse. This particular epistle is not written to the newly formed church but to the twelve tribes of Israel which are scattered abroad and whom James considers part of the household of God. (James 1:1)

Now we all know from the story in the Old Testament that these people are a stubborn and rebellious lot, just as their descendents are (us). (Psalm 78:8) As far as James is concerned they were not acting like the body of believers but as a carnal people. We see in verse 2 that James addresses them as brethren and admonishes them *to count it all joy when [they] fall into diverse temptations and trials*. So James realizes what kind of world these brethren live in, the trials they experience; he does not excuse them, but encourages them

to set their sights on the Messiah. He explains they need to go to God to get wisdom in sorting out their myriad physical, economical, political and spiritual troubles.

We are much like those Israelites of old, stubborn and thick headed. We also have difficult circumstances to live in... perilous times, corrupt governments and religious organizations, over-taxation, and an immoral society. (read Matthew 24 and 2 Timothy 3:1-3)

We also have our own personal trials and tribulations. Like them, we have an overabundance of carnal nature and much of the time we are not able to control our tongue; are proud when we should be humble, and are too easily caught up in what the world has to offer.

James shows no surprise about trials and difficult living conditions of the Israelites as he begins his epistle with:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2).

We read that Peter also addresses this important issue so it seems the brethren have a problem understanding the purpose of trials in our Christian walk:

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ” (6,7)

For some reason the brethren are taken aback that they should suffer trials and hardship but James wants the brethren to embrace their trials with joy. (1) He says *“the trying of your faith works patience....so let patience have her perfect work.”* (3, 4) In this way they and we will be perfected and wanting nothing and we can see that James believes that’s as it should be.

Even John writes that trials are a necessary part of the Christian path:

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (16:32-33)

So with all these stressors the brethren still have time to fight amongst themselves. In chapter 4 James asks the question, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” (1) Evidently these Israelites cannot get along with each other, can’t find solutions to their carnality. Therefore, James exposes them as a proud people who think they have all the answers. (6) James tells them they need to submit to God ...to have some humility. James is aware of what’s going to happen shortly (fall of Jerusalem) and this is the calm before the storm yet:

In chapter 5 James says to “weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.”(1). He is candid in telling them their sins: “Your riches are corrupted...You have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton; you have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter... you have condemned and killed the just;.” Then he warns them, “the coming of the Lord draws near” (2-8).

In conclusion, James begins to address and give practical advice in dealing with their daily problems. They need to be patient in waiting for the Lord, grudge not one against another, not be offended by one another, endure and pray more.

In verse 13 he says to pray if they are afflicted, sing psalms if they are

happy; have the elders pray for you if you are sick.

If they have relationship problems (fighting amongst themselves) they should admit they have said or done wrong to a brother and move forward. If a brother has sinned he should own up to his fault. “Sorry, I am short tempered.” Brethren need to learn to take things on the chin. Listen to the amplified version of James 5:16

“Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins) and pray [also] for one another; that you may be healed and restored [to a spiritual tone of mind and heart]. The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working].”

James gives hope to the twelve tribes by stressing the importance of admitting your part in the offense with a brother in combination with the power of prayer, using Elijah as an example.

James continues to point them to the resurrection of Christ, helps interpret the new Covenant and brings sense to it all in this epistle. So when it says to “confess your sins to one another” in James 5:16, it does not mean to confess personal sins to your brother but to acknowledge your bad conduct toward them if you have said something or done something you shouldn’t have and forgive one another and pray for one another. It is only God that we should confess our personal sins to: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins...” (1 John 1.9.) God graciously forgives every child of His who has genuinely repented and acknowledged his sin.

Forgiveness is dependent on confession of sin by those who stumble and fall (kon-fesh’-un (yadhah; homologueo, and their derivatives): The radical meaning is “acknowledgment,” “avowal,” with the implication of a change of conviction or of course of conduct on the part of the subject. (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

James does not allow them to use trials and hardships as an excuse for bad behavior but encourages and points them back to Christ. Trials are our pathway to perfection.

Let’s take James’ words seriously and pray we may be patient in trials; that we stablish our hearts; that we may love and pray for our brethren, for as James tells us “the coming of the Lord draws near.” Amen!



Staying the Course - Continued from page 9

God’s strength and spirit, work together as a team, and have our attitudes and actions in line with Christ’s teachings. I pray that each and every one of us continues to “stay the course,” or maybe even get back on the course because the mission...having a place in God’s coming Kingdom...without a doubt, is worth it.

Paul wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day,” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Will you be awarded your crown that day?



Ask Norm!

Dear Norm,

I have a couple of questions for your consideration that were never properly addressed by [my church] that I know of.

(1) How is it that the world will have gone through uprisings (Matt 24:7), martyrdoms (Matt 24:9); famines (Rev 6:6), plagues (Rev 6:8), a massive earthquake darkening the sun, a meteor shower (Rev 6:12-13), a third of trees being burned (Rev 8:7), comet strike (Rev 8:8) and not be expecting the Second Coming? If you read Matthew 24:38-39 there will be some place on this earth where people seem completely oblivious to what has gone on. The Second Coming will be totally unexpected to these people (Matt 24:43). There will still be governments functioning (Rev 17:12-13) and even capable of fighting a war (Dan 11:40). I don't understand the paradox.

(2) My second question is a lot simpler. How was John the Baptist able to escape Herod's edict that all children under the age of two be killed?

I realize that you are a busy man and that you most likely won't be able to give a direct answer but I hope you will consider what I have asked.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Raymond Chandler



Dear Ray

These are very good questions. Here we go:

(1) I have wondered about this myself at times, but answered it in my own mind based upon further study. First, and simply, without revelation by the Holy Spirit, it is difficult to know which things in revelation are literal, and which are symbolic. Christ interprets the symbols in Chapter 1—the seven lampstands and seven stars in heaven as seven churches on earth and their angels. Almost all prophetic interpreters agree that the various beasts in Revelation are kingdoms. But are the items you mention literal or symbolic?

Regardless of whether they are literal or symbolic, we need to understand human capacity to ignore the clear signs of the times and to keep on going as we always have. One can read the history of the judges and kings in the Bible and find that the people would go on sinning while their kingdom fell apart—not heeding their prophets or catastrophic events. The same thing happened when Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D.—Josephus records much detail.

Even in the last century, governments killed about 262 million of their own people, out of a total world population of about 6 billion—about 4% of the world population (<http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/20TH.HTM>). Yet this was rarely ever a top item in the news—except in the places where the people were being killed. If this amount of killing increased 5-fold, both from manmade sources and natural disasters, would the world reaction be any different? Even if hundreds of millions die from natural disasters, if scientists say that they were caused by sunspots or global warming, will not most people accept it? Won't most people reject the idea that it is a judgment of God? Most of those people who are still alive will keep on going—and if they have the resources, will keep on partying!

(2) The Bible does not say how John was spared from Herod's mass murder, but there are some very good hints. Zechariah received a revelation from an angel to know that John would be born (Luke 1:11), so he may well have received additional revelations as Joseph did to know how to protect the baby John (Matt 2:13-15). B) God is good at protecting babies in danger and does not always do it the same way: He had Moses kept at home for three months, then sent him to Pharaoh's daughter's house (Exodus 2:1-10). He had Joash hidden away by his nurse in the temple for six years (2 Kings 11:1-3).

Herod only killed the babies in "Bethlehem and its districts" but John's parents lived in a city in the "Hill Country of Judah" (Luke 1:39-40). The Bible does not say which city, but it could have been outside

Herod's killing zone. John was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:36). The story of their mothers, Mary and Elizabeth, visiting together (Luke 1:39-56) occurs before Jesus' family fled to Egypt (Matthew 2); That is why Herod was looking for babies up to age two, rather than just newborns. There is some chance that John was old enough to escape. But more likely John "was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Luke 1:80). Zechariah and Elizabeth, whether divinely instructed or not, probably hid him from Herod. Finally, because both were "well advanced in years", Herod's soldiers were probably not looking for babies of men and women in their 50s or 60s.

Thanks again for the question. I had not looked into this latter issue before and learned more about what the Scripture says.

—Norm

Dear Norm,

Thank you for publishing an article about my family [the Last Servants' News, Nov-Dec 2010]. One thing that may (or may not) have added to it: Carson and I were both 2nd generationers as my parents were church members and so was his mother.

It was a fine article. Frank was quite impressed with the contents of this issue.

--Verna

You are welcome, Verna.

Yes, it is valuable to note that both of you came from bible-believing

church families. That makes your five children third-generation, and your 14 grand-children fourth-generation. The question that many parents ask is, "What can I do to be sure that my children grow up to live Godly lives?" Your family has been successful for generations, so we all ought to be able to learn something from you. To me, the most important point is that God was always a part of your lives, in big things and small.

Being able to trust God to have babies delivered at home, to educate one's children at home and to withstand long-term illness at home are important examples. This is not to say that every believer must do these things—some should not. But it shows the willingness to trust God in a major part of one's life when many others would simply "turn the matter over to the professionals". Other believers may have different life issues wherein they and their children learn trust for God: poverty, religious persecution, abusive mates, employment difficulties, etc.

It has been my experience that young people come to God for two reasons: 1) They have seen His ways work in their own family and they want the same thing for themselves; or 2) they have, for some number of weeks or years, lived ungodly lives, suffered from it, and decided to seek God and live for Him. Method #1 is obviously preferable, but most believers certainly struggle to achieve it. As always, each child has their own free will, and some may decide to follow or abandon their heavenly Father in spite of the very bad or very good example set by the parent. It is the goal of the parent to set a godly example—ever seeking to learn from the Scripture, their Father and other



believers—knowing that God is their ultimate judge (2 Cor 5:10), not their friends, not their children.

—Norm

Follow-up letter

I believe an extremely important part of a young person's life is to see God's way of life lived by the parents in day to day living. Children are very able to pick up on hypocrisy, especially if a parent says one thing then does another.

Peer pressure is another area where the parents can be very helpful. I was always taught (and I taught my children) that it doesn't matter what anyone else or everyone else is doing. Our family will do what is right. "... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15).

The children must always know they are loved by the parents and by God. Teach them to pray, and to continue praying, in small and larger things in all of life.

These are a few things that stand out in my mind.

—Verna



Send your questions to:

asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org

A Promise to Claim

The conclusion to Part 1 printed in the Spring/Summer 2011 SVM.

“Mr. Johnson, we don’t usually work on people who are hurt this badly, because they are dead before they get here. But he is alive now - why I don’t know. - but I am going to take him up and see what I can do.”

Sharon and I were in shock. My first thought was to get a team of pastors to anoint Lance. I called our church pastor but he and all the other pastors in the area were at a conference in Atlanta. I called Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) and told Mrs. Taylor, the receptionist, what my situation was. She contacted Elder Don Crook, who assembled a team and they came to the hospital to perform the service.

The Terrible Wait



The surgery took six hours. Each hour a nurse would come out and tell us that the

surgery was going well and he was still alive. I have very little recollection of where the day went but I noticed it was dark outside when a tearful, trembling man approached us, and announced that he was driving the bus when the accident occurred. Sharon and I hugged him and we cried together.

Throughout the evening people came in to sit with us. At one time the lobby of East Ridge Hospital was so full; the hospital staff sent many of the visitors to the cafeteria. Friends and church members came to pray and offer comfort. The word was out, that it would take a miracle from God for Lance to survive.

Finally we were told that he was out of surgery and in intensive care. Elder Crook and his team of elders prayed and anointed Lance. In the blur and murkiness, we vaguely remember our friends and family escorting us out of the hospital and taking us home for the night.

The next morning we arrived at the hospital at 6:30. We sat outside the intensive care ward and waited for the doctor. The intensive care nurses were very kind, they checked on us every fifteen minutes. The first visiting hours were at 11:30, but the doctor phoned the ward and said we could see him for

five minutes, since there was only one other person in the ward.

The sight of our son in those conditions was almost more than we could bear. We tried not to show our horror as we stood there. He was connected to hoses and monitors, with his legs hanging by straps from bed hangers. He opened his eyes and asked, “Who were the others?”

“Some elders from the college came by an anointed you.” Sharon answered.

“I know about them, they left when you did, but who were the others?”

“There were two nurses on duty, but I don’t know their names, shall I find out?”

“No. Who were the four that were here all night?”



“What four?”

“The two at the foot of my bed and the two at the head of my bed.”

“The head of your bed is against a wall.”

“Then I guess we know who they were then don’t we?” He said.

Small Comfort

The doctor was straightforward about the situation. “He could die at any minute,” He announced solemnly. “If he lives, he will never get out of bed. He will never walk; he will always wear a catheter, and maybe a colostomy.”

“Are you saying he may not be capable of getting married or having kids?”

“I wouldn’t count on it.”

I needed to be alone. I needed to talk to God about this. I remember driving by a funeral home on the way home. There was a large crowd of sad and weeping people moving toward cars. “No Lord. Not us.”

For the next several hours I wrestled with God. I began my petition on my knees. Later I paced for a while as I prayed, sometimes I bowed my head, I knelt, I stood and stared out the window. I begged, I pleaded, I threatened, I negotiated, and I shook my fist in God’s face. Hot tears burned my cheeks, sweat soaked my clothing. I had been reading what Glenn Coon said about the ABC’s of prayer, and I wanted to recall a promise from the Bible that I could claim. But no verse came to mind.

Here I was fighting with God, but oddly enough I have never felt so close to him as I did when I was angry with Him. Finally I fell silent. I knelt next to my son’s bed exhausted and despondent. I had not prevailed with God. He gave me no encouragement. Fear and anxiety blurred my thinking.

Out of the silence, Malachi 3:10 and 11 came to mind. Suddenly I was filled with horror. I thought out loud, “Will a man rob God?” NO! No Lord, if I have robbed you, take me; don’t take my son. Is this from you? Is this a warning that my son will not live because I have robbed you?

“Read it.” Said a still small voice.

I reached for Lance’s Bible on the nightstand. I opened to the passage that came to my mind. Malachi 3:10. I read. “Bring ye all the tithes into the store house... and prove me here with, said the Lord of hosts, If I will not open up the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that will be so great that you will not have room enough to receive it.”

Wait! I thought. The warning about robbing God was verse 9.

“Father”, I prayed, “I have returned the tithe since I was

nine years old. Even in those economically depressed days, during my first few years of college, with a wife and two sons I returned the tithe.” This is the promise I needed. In a million years, I would have never thought of Malachi 3:10 as a verse that I could claim to save some one’s life.

“I claim the promise of Malachi 3:10” I prayed. “Open up the windows of heaven and give me the life of my son. There is no greater blessing just now.”

I felt a great relief. Lance was going to live! I knew it. I was weak, but I was sure that his life would be spared. No matter he may never get out of bed, he would live and that was enough for me.

Further Assurance

I had to tell Sharon. I was shaky, but I managed to get up and walk toward the door. But I could not go through the door. A strange pressure against my chest prevented me from moving forward. Then I remembered He said Malachi 3:10 and 11 was the message I heard. I picked up Lance’s Bible and found verse 11:

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, said the Lord of hosts.

You have my word on it!

Can there be a more definite promise than this? He will rebuke the devourer, death, for our sakes. And our fruit shall not be destroyed before its time and he ended by saying "You have my word on it."

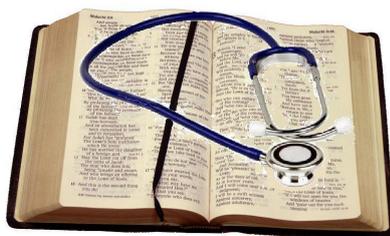
Later that night the phone rang. It was the doctor. "Our greatest fears have happened," he began. "We have a rupture and an infection. You must get here as fast as you can. I don't expect him to make it this time." "Doctor Rowe", I said calmly, "Lance will be alright. You will pull him through; I have God's word on it."

"Look", he said, "I don't believe in prayer, but what ever you do to give yourself relief is your business. But you and your wife need to get here as soon as you

can."

Well, what did I expect? Doctor Rowe and several other doctors told us he would not survive. Even if he did, what kind of life would it be? He would always wear a colostomy, a catheter, and would be fed through a tube. He will not be able to marry or have children or have any kind of life you would want for your children. Sharon and I were willing to settle for his life alone.

All's Well



On a sunny day in late July 1995 I thought about what the doctors

said. I thought about what the doctors had said at the time of the accident. I held Lance's daughter and watched with his wife and mother, as he received the trophy for the most stolen bases in his church softball league.

Lance's brother, Mark, was 11 years old at the time of the accident. He was so impressed with the series of events surrounding Lance's recovery that he decided to become a physician. While in medical school Mark worked with Doctor Rowe for several months, the one who had said he did not believe in prayer. Mark witnessed this great physician offer prayer before all his surgeries. He said he saw first hand the power of prayer in Lance's case, and it changed his life.



It changed ours also.

Read Shepherd's Voice on the web...

The screenshot shows the website for Shepherd's Voice Magazine. At the top left is the logo with a shepherd icon and the text "Shepherd's Voice MAGAZINE". Below the logo is a navigation menu with links: "Request a Copy", "Subscribe by Mail", "Past Articles", "DVD's & CD's", "Bible Study", and "Contact Us". In the center is a featured article thumbnail for "Issue Number 3 Spring/Summer 2011 Contents" with a "Download Magazine PDF" link. To the right of the thumbnail is a quote: "We pray that Shepherd's Voice Magazine readers will hear our Savior's word through these pages and that it will minister to as many as it reaches." Below the quote is another paragraph: "Over the last several years we are aware of those in the Church of God who are dealing with uncertainty, misunderstanding and ignorance of the truth. It has also been reported that a number of congregations have a feeling of stagnation, that 'what to do next' is not understood and the solution feels elusive. Our instruction to *Grow in Knowledge* is to grow in knowledge of who God is and what His thoughts are, what His motivations and desires are about. This comes about by experiencing God in our lives and nurturing His implanted word. The purpose of the Shepherd's Voice is to bring to awareness the truth that is already in us, and at the same time challenge some existing thinking that has blocked development."

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Feast Reports

Feast in Penticton, BC

The 2011 Feast of Tabernacles in Penticton, British Columbia was a marvel to behold. Not just because of its wonderful location, but rather for the people who attended. As usual, the brethren came from various parts of North America. What I found to be unusual and marvelous was that they came from so many different organizations within the Church of God movement. There were also those in attendance with issues of age, health and finance, but we were all together as one large family. At the feast to glorify our Father in heaven and our Lord in Jesus Christ, (Romans 1:11-12) we talked and shared with each other as God's people do. We sang, prayed, laughed and ate together. From the Bible studies, to special music and sing-alongs, to a Paddle-boat cruise on the lake and lunch in the "Lost Moose" restaurant, which is situated on the mountain overlooking the city and valley below. There are, of course, a variety of restaurants in the city and the prices are reasonable. Most meals seemed to be shared in groups. Many long time members of God's Church claimed that this feast was indeed their best ever and I could not disagree. So we are booking it again for 2012 and for even more space in anticipation. God showered us with blessings during this feast, from first to last. We pray that He will likewise bless us in the coming year.

- Alex Kennedy



Those interested in watching the recorded sermons from the Penticton Feast can go to <http://vimeo.com/channels/churchofgod>

Feast in Collingwood, ON

Canadian Church of God in conjunction with the Church of God Outreach Ministries held the Feast of Tabernacles at Georgian Peaks Club, just outside Collingwood Ontario. Services were held every day with guest speakers that included John Shavers, Lawrence Gregory and Jeff Henderson. Several of us from the Chicago area were invited to attend this year and we made many new friends with the faithful. The Canadian Church of God holds regular Sabbath Services in Etobicoke, Ontario.

Those interested in attending can visit their website www.canadianchurchofgod.com for more information, or by contacting SVM.



The Lord's faithful enjoying fellowship at the Georgian Peaks Club.

TALKING TO GOD

Do you talk to God? Why does it seem our prayers are not always answered? God is not a mystery. He simply wants us who are requesting his action to be straight forward in our request. Many ministers attempt to tell us how God wants us to pray. But God tells us how! Do not your children who want something from you make that request as a question? What is the difference between talking to a son or daughter and talking to God? We often do not remember that God also loves us as His children and will do anything for us if we just ask Him just as our children ask of us as parents. God is not a stranger. God is not far from us. He does not get angry when we ask him silly questions or requests. Remember we are His children.

We can look at Matthew 7: 7- 9, as a model for our prayers, *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asked receives; and him that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?”* As direct instruction from God himself how can we change anything? Why would we not be able to talk to him from our hearts and get direct answers? We are told to ask “boldly.” In Philippians 4: 19, *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ.”* We are the recipients of God’s entire storeroom of everything he has including our wants in time of need. It would be an offense to God to hold back because we did not think we were worthy of our request. Do parents refuse to give their children because they failed not to give the parent anything? How often do our own children take something and run from us in excitement? Do we do the same with God? We may if we have not remembered our manners with our parents. Do you treat God with the same manners? He is a parent too. He loves us as His own children.

How does faith assist us in getting answers for our requests? We find a hint in Hebrews 6: 11-12, *“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”* We learn that faith helps us in our requests. Do our children have faith in us providing their requests? Absolutely, because just like our own children, we also ask from God with faith in the belief that God will answer us too. We feel very good asking God for anything we want or need. Just like us as parents we would never give our children a negative answer they have asked us in true faith and happiness. God will gladly answer our sincere prayers with a happy heart and fulfill our request. He knows us like we know our own children. Just as children make frivolous requests from their parents, we may sometimes also make frivolous requests from our Father. But God is patient with us. Remember we are told, *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asked receives; and him that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.”* (Matthew 7:7-9) Our Father wants us to see how kind, gentle, loving, and rewarding He can be to us by answering our prayers. The more often we talk to God in prayer, the more often we will grow in love and understanding of Him as our loving Father.

We do not know the extent God may answer our prayers. We know His love for each of us is expansive. Let us keep going in true faith, not wavering or fearful of our requests from our loving Father in Heaven. He wants us to come to Him in true prayer. He loves giving to each of us generously!



PABC Update

The Port Austin Bible Campus Ministry to the homeless is at its high point thus far. As of mid-November, we have 16 people living with us as Guests: 2 couples, 6 single men, 4 single women and 2 children, ages 2 and 14. So far, we have accepted a total of 106 people to PABC who were in immediate need of housing: 77 adults and 29 children. (Of those, 78 actually stayed with us. The other 23 found something better before arriving here.). Since we began accepting homeless people in June 2010, we have provided 4250 “bed-nights”, which are the number of people multiplied by the number of nights they stayed. Within the last three days, we have had a family of three and a family of five contact us—looking for a place to stay.

At present, our facility for women and families has only one room open, though we could possibly ask some to double up. Our men’s dorm has plenty of room and we have another building we could open up as a women’s dorm. However, both dorm’s have only electric space heaters for heat.

This is neither cost efficient nor a good source of heat. We have had two groups offer to help us put heat in our dorms, but nothing has come through yet. We continue to pray that God will provide our needs.

All of the homeless people staying at PABC are in the legal status of a Guest—like a person you might invite to stay in your home. We can ask them to leave at any time for any reason. Since they have nowhere else to go, most of them are very cooperative—though a few just pretend to be so. We use this “power” to ask them to do what we understand to be best for their lives, from a biblical basis. That usually involves simple principles like loving their neighbor as themselves, avoiding substance abuse, praying when they feel tempted or depressed, working hard, telling the truth, being frugal, etc. This is a big help to some, others still think they know better. It is rare, but when a Guest clearly demonstrates that they do not intend to learn anything from us, but simply wants to receive whatever they can for free, we require them to leave. There are other infrequent cases where we require a person to leave because we believe they are a danger to others here.

We require all guests to attend weekly meetings where we deal with physical issues affecting everyone at PABC. We also usually teach a basic Bible lesson there. We do not require anyone

to attend our Sabbath services or daily Bible studies, but some do of their own will. One would never want to trivialize repentance and baptism into something that one does just to get a place to live, or to be better looked upon. We refused to baptize one person who was obviously insincere. We did baptize another and he continues to study with us.

The spiritual benefits of this arrangement are wonderful on both sides. People who have never had much exposure to the Bible and the truth in it often receive it with gladness. When they see that we care for them, they care about what we teach. For the six of us who run PABC, it is a marvelous opportunity to learn to apply the Scriptures in a great variety of situations—training to reign with Christ.

If anyone is interested in becoming involved in this ministry, please read more about us at portAustin.net/pabc/homeless and call at 989-738-7700. Nobody is paid to work here, but you would receive free lodging and food. There is ample opportunity to get to know a variety of people, encourage them in their daily tasks, work with them here on the grounds or in the kitchen, and teach what you have learned from the Scriptures in a one-on-one or small group basis. In a time when all levels of governments are cutting back services, this ministry will continue to increase.





Scribe's Square

Where did Nadab and Abihu Go Wrong?

One of the most puzzling transactions and occurrences in the Old Testament is the account where two priests offered a burnt offering before God and were punished by God with death. In Leviticus chapter 10, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered fire before Yahweh, the God of their nation Israel, which God had not ordered them to offer. As soon as Nadab and Abihu did this, fire issued from the presence of Yahweh and devoured them. For millennia, biblical scholars and casual scripture readers alike have wondered what exactly did Nadab and Abihu do wrong, and why their transgression was punished by death. The scribe will herein attempt to answer these questions.

Before exploring theories on this subject, let us review the facts. *“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron took each his censer, and put*

fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered [strange] fire before Yahweh, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth from the presence of Yahweh and devoured them, and they died before Yahweh. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what Yahweh has said, “I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.”” And Aaron held his peace. (Leviticus 10:1-3, Revised Standard Version used throughout, the name Yahweh used instead of “the LORD”).

Various explanations have been offered as to the nature of the offense of Nadab and Abihu, some better than others. Some followers of this story have opined that Nadab and Abihu were drunk with wine when they offered fire before Yahweh. They believe this because of God’s command later in this

same chapter that priests drink no wine or strong drink during such time as they exercise their priestly duties in the tent of meeting. (See Leviticus 10:8-11) This explanation is weak because drunkenness is not mentioned in the Nadab and Abihu account and verses 8-11 of Leviticus 10 appear to be unrelated to the previous seven verses, the author appearing to be addressing new subject matter. Others speculate that the brothers’ offense was their failure to prepare their incense using myrrh, aromatic onyeha, galbanum, and frankincense as prescribed in Exodus 30:34-38, but this is not likely because those ingredients were probably unobtainable to the Israelites in the days of their wanderings in the wilderness. Another theory is that Nadab and Abihu went wrong in that they took it upon themselves to enter in the holy place behind the curtain in

front of the cover of the ark; but this theory is also inadequate because the Bible does not say that they did this. It has also been proposed that Nadab and Abihu erred in that they presumed to make an incense offering without the authority of Moses or Aaron. While this theory may have a modicum of merit to it, it fails to account for the fact that the Bible places more emphasis on the manner of these priests' sacrifice rather than the sacrifice itself.

The nature of the sin of Nadab and Abihu may not be ascertained with absolute certainty, but it is apparent that they were guilty of self-will and irreverence.

The self-will of these two priests can be deduced by the statement in Leviticus 10:1 that Nadab and Abihu offered "strange" fire before Yahweh and that Yahweh had not commanded them to offer such fire. The Hebrew word, *zuwr*, translated in this passage as "strange" or "unholy" means foreign, irregular, or unfamiliar. The New International Version uses the term "unauthorized fire." Nadab and Abihu made an offering to God using a fire that God had not authorized. As mentioned above, God's formula for such an offering is provided in Exodus 30, but this formula may have come later. If God's instructions pertaining to preparing an incense offering had indeed not been given yet or if these instructions did not apply until a future time, then Nadab and Abihu "got ahead of themselves" and proceeded to make a burnt offering to God before receiving instructions from on high as to time, place, and manner. They were determined to

worship God in a way that was fit to themselves, not in a way that was fit to God.

Nadab and Abihu's irreverence is indicated by the post-punishment statement by Yahweh that he will show himself holy among those who come near him and he will be glorified before all the people. In slaying these two priests with fire, God was driving home the point that appearing before him should not be taken lightly and that any person performing a religious duty or rite in front of a group of people must give God the glory, vindicating his honor before the people. (Incidentally, Moses would eventually be excluded from the Promise Land because he did not sanctify Yahweh before the people of Israel; and King Herod would be struck dead because he did not give God the glory during a speech he was making. See Numbers 20:1-13 and Acts 12:21-23)

In this age where burnt offerings and animal sacrifices are not required of Christians, what may we learn from the Nadab and Abihu story?

First, we must be careful to avoid approaching, worshiping, serving, or petitioning God in a "strange" or irregular way "such as he had not commanded" us. The presence of God is so awful that it will kill a man unless he is appointed to approach God and is prepared in body and mind. (See Hebrews 12:29; Leviticus 16; Judges 13:22-23; Genesis 32:30; Exodus 3:6; Deuteronomy 5:26) It is not enough to shun those things that God has strictly forbidden, but we must be careful not to "get

ahead of ourselves" and proceed to do things without instructions from God. (See also Proverbs 3:5). God's word cannot be added to or redacted from. Just as the strange fire which Nadab and Abihu offered to God did not have God's stamp of approval, there are many doctrines, customs, philosophies, and practices in churches today that God never put His Divine stamp of approval upon.

Secondly, we must be careful to always give God and Christ the glory in whatever we do, especially before other people. God did not permit blasphemies and public mockeries of Himself back then, and he does not permit such things today. (See also Colossians 3:17)

Lastly and most importantly, we must remember that we may not approach, worship, or serve God without being accompanied by his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me.*" (John 14:6) All of the rites, observances, and regulations given to ancient Israel with their sanctions for failing to strictly adhere thereto served as proof that the Israelites, and all of humankind for that matter, could not have a working relationship with God without the intervention of God's Son, Jesus Christ, who died for all our sins. (See Galatians 3:19-24; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 10:1-10; Hebrews 10:10; Colossians 2:16-17; Matthew 27:51; Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:12) Let us thank God for the privilege we have to freely approach, worship, serve, and petition God through his son Jesus Christ.



Scribe's Square Response

A 12-hour Sabbath? Optional Convocations?

In the 2010 Winter edition of *SVM* this scribe covered the Lunar Sabbath. A reader took exception to this scribe as follows:

“Brother Malone’s arguments for or against Lunar Sabbaths make the erroneous quantum leap of assuming that whichever day wins out, one should “go to church” on that day! In elementary terms ... there is NO commandment, statute, precept or ordinance to support such an assumption! YHWH’s Torah clearly segregates only “three times in a year” when the children of Elohim are to appear before YHWH: 1. Exodus 23:14-17, 2. Exodus 34:23 & 3. Deuteronomy 16:16 outside of their own estates or homes.

The “tradition” of weekly Sabbath travel & instruction by select authorities began with the genesis of synagogue rites IN THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY... and that only as a stop-gap against the pagan customs of the weekly worship & sacrifice!

Is there anything inherently wrong with convoking for weekly scriptural study? Certainly not! It’s just not commanded or even presumed to be needful. See Exodus 34:21. REST

(H’7673)...what Elohim did in Genesis 2:2...is what we are to emulate. Not travel, etc.

In a very similar vein, from the time of the Babylonian exile the Yahudite authorities began the custom of observing a 24-hour Sabbath “day,” when our Master clearly acknowledged, “Is a DAY not 12 hours long? in John 11:9. Again; is it a sin (or unrighteous) to rest for 24 hours? Most assuredly not! But neither is it somehow MORE righteous to rest for an extra 12 hours. This would seemingly fit comfortably into the man-devised righteousness that Yahusha depicted in His parable in Luke 18:9-14.”

THE SCRIBE’S RESPONSE:

We thank the reader for reading our essay and writing us with feedback. He presents some intriguing questions and suppositions.

The reader is correct in stating that the male Israelites were commanded to appear before Yahweh at a place of the Lord’s choosing three times a year. (Deuteronomy 16:16). This fact, however, does not necessarily negate the need of ancient Israel

and subsequently followers of Christ to assemble on the weekly Sabbath.

In Leviticus 23:3, Yahweh states that the Sabbath is a “holy convocation.” The word convocation is the translation of the Hebrew word, *miqra*, which means an assembly or gathering. Without evidence that this gathering was a domestic gathering, it is safe to assume that this was an inter-household gathering of some sort. It was not the pilgrimage festivals requiring a national gathering mentioned in Deuteronomy 16, but it was an inter-household gathering nonetheless.

If a weekly assembly on the Sabbath day in the synagogue was a man-made custom the Jews adopted after the Babylonian captivity as the reader supposes, then Jesus had every opportunity to denounce it or abstain from it. But Jesus, “as His custom was” went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” (See Luke 4:16). This custom was followed by Paul and the other apostles and even by Gentile Christians. (See Acts 17:2 and Acts 15:21). The author in Hebrews 10:25 exhorts followers of Christ not to forsake

the assembling of themselves. The Greek word translated assembling is *episynagōgē*. So arguably, the writer was saying that the brethren should not forsake the “synagoguing” of themselves. It is also interesting to note that after this exhortation comes the warning about sinning willfully which apparently forfeits a believer’s salvation, which the reader should take heed to notice.

As for the question of a “twelve hour” Sabbath, the evidence supports keeping the Sabbath a full twenty-four hours. In Leviticus 23, Yahweh commands “*from even unto even shall ye keep your Sabbath.*” One might argue that this command only pertains to the Day of Atonement, but, again, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we must conclude that it refers to the keeping of the Sabbath in general. If the command pertained to just the Day of Atonement, then Yahweh might have said, “*from even to even shall you keep this Sabbath.*”

There are those who argue that only the daytime portion of the seventh day or any other feast day is holy. They do so on grounds that the Hebrew word *yom* may come from a root word which means hot. To be honest, the Bible really does not absolutely address the nighttime portion of a given date. Back then, society was not advanced enough for nighttime activities. Sunset definitely ended the previous day,

but because the nighttime was practically negligible, one might at least make an argument that the time of demarcation from date to date is unclear. (See John 9:4 “*night is coming when no one can work*”).

History and custom, however, tend to support a demarcation at sunset. During creation, the narrator states, “*And the evening and the morning were the first day.*” (Genesis 1:5) In Nehemiah 13:19, the captain Nehemiah “*as it began to be dark before the Sabbath*” commanded that the gates of Jerusalem be shut to keep merchants out. John 19 states that the Jews did not wish for Christ’s body to remain on the cross after sunset because the Sabbath was approaching. These passages indicate that sunset rather than sunrise is the demarcation between one date and the next.

Theologically, a 24-hour Sabbath makes more sense. God leaves six days for our own work and recreation, but sets apart the 7th day. To only consecrate twelve hours, that is 1/14th, of the week rather than 1/7th of the week is not symmetrical. When God created the heavens and earth, did he only rest for 12 hours? Not likely. During winter months, there could be as little as 9 hours of daylight. Setting apart for God only 9 hours of the seventh day out of an entire week seems awkward.

The view that inter-family Sabbath gatherings was introduced into Israel after the captivity or that the Sabbath begins in the morning or is kept for “12 hours” has neither the evidentiary support in God’s Word nor the corroboration of Israelites and Christians throughout history. It is a novel idea, and it should not be adopted without more supporting evidence. The very idea that during the exile, new time reckonings were introduced to the Jews that neither Jesus nor the apostles caught and denounced is dangerous.

One cannot maintain that all of Scripture is inspired by God and yet contend that new customs and a different way of time reckoning were sneaked into Israel without the sanction and approval of the Holy Spirit and without subsequent correction by God’s own Son who came to the earth. One cannot maintain the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and go along with the notion that the pre-exile Old Testament records accurate customs and time-reckoning while post-exile writings and the entire New Testament contain inaccurate and pagan customs. Such reasoning would allow us to pick and choose which parts of the scripture we believe are inspired and which parts we believe are not.

We hope this response is helpful.



Children of God Part 1—The Vital Mission

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1).

It is a wonderful blessing to know that our Father in heaven looks down on us and loves us, just as a good earthly father loves his children. The human father may not always agree with what they do—he may even let them hurt themselves or send them correction so they can learn lessons. But he still loves them. And our heavenly Father does the same.

It is even more wonderful to realize that some day we, the children of God, will grow up, and reign with our elder brother Jesus Christ. Even if you have read the book of Romans many times, we hope you will again carefully read the greatness of His promise, here in the New Living Translation:

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God **are children of God**. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when He adopted you as **His own children**. Now we call Him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that **we are God’s children**. And since **we are His children, we are His heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory**. But if we are **to share His glory**, we must also share his suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when **God***



will reveal who His children really are.** Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day **when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.(Rom 8:14-23, NLT)

This is not a parable or figurative language. This is the Apostle Paul explaining the very purpose of mankind and the literal reward for those whose lives are lived for God. This concept of reigning

with Christ is found many other places in Scripture. Here are a few more:

So Jesus said to them, *“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve*

*thrones, **judging the twelve tribes of Israel**. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life”* (Matthew 19:28-29).

“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2Timothy 2:12).

*“Don’t you realize that someday we **believers will judge the world**? And since you are going to judge the world, can’t you decide even these little things among yourselves?*

Don't you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life" (1Corinthians 6:2-3, NLT).

This is a fantastic teaching. It is not taught nearly enough. But God expects action on our part to receive this reward. (1Corinthians 3:15; 2John 1:8) We do not want to be like Judas, who gave up his ministry. (Acts 1:16-20)

Ways to Prepare to Reign with Christ

How do we prepare to judge the world and reign with Christ? One method is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:2, above: judge ordinary disputes among other believers. If two other brethren are having a dispute, and they ask you to help, you should be willing to hear both of them and render your judgment based upon the principles of scripture. There is a temptation to say, "I don't want to get involved in that controversy." But those who are learning to reign with Christ should be willing to listen and help if they can. Learning to judge justly is more important than entertainment or obscure religious study. Even so, such opportunities may be rare. We should not be meddling in other's affairs seeking to judge them when we are not wanted.

Opportunities to hear both sides of a matter and render a biblically just judgment also occur in our workplace, especially in supervisory roles, or in legal and government jobs. However, even the most Spirit filled believer may be greatly limited by rules of the job that are contrary to biblical teachings. The believer is often left with the choices of quitting/losing the job, or going along with

the secular rules and praying "Your Kingdom come".

Biblical judgments can be learned in some Christian communities, missions and ministries. In these, people may have the options of heading the godly judgment, or losing their present source of shelter, food, etc. So the believer's opportunity to help others through righteous principles is great. Again, few Christians have these opportunities available.

But there is another way available to nearly all of us, nearly all the time, where we can apply the principles of Godly judgment. It is the very first thing God commanded: Raising children! (Before you say "I don't have children, keep reading".)

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.

Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground" (Gen 1:27-28).

Adam and Eve were literal Children of God. (Luke 3:38) They were given the job of creating the rest of mankind in a "pass it down" sort of way. (Gen 3:20) Indeed they had a great many children, grandchildren, etc. but did not raise them very well. Several hundred years later, mankind was so evil that God thought about killing them all (Genesis 6:5-7), but saved Noah because "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations" (Genesis 6:9). At least some good child rearing had been accomplished there!

Also, Abraham, the father of the faithful (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7) was noted for his good childrearing:

"For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do



righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Genesis 18:19).

God said this about Abraham even before Isaac, his son of promise, was born! Ishmael, his son by his servant Hagar, was only 13 at this time. (Genesis 16:16-17:27) Nevertheless, God saw that Abraham, from the way he used his authority over those around him, had the righteous character that was necessary to bring up children that would follow God. Indeed, his son Isaac, his grandson, Jacob, and his great grand children, the heads of the twelve tribes or Israel, were faithful to God.

If they seek the opportunity in faith when they are young, most people have a chance to marry and raise children. Of the rest, nearly all have an opportunity to interact with other’s children. Jesus, who never married, and who had the most important job on the planet, still had time for children:

Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:2-3).

But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14).

Newborn children are dependent upon adults for everything. They are weak, immobile, uneducated, defenseless, unable to command others, and required to comply with whatever those around them may

do. They benefit by those who are good to them, and suffer immensely from those who are bad. All of these vulnerabilities fade as the child grows—at different rates for different children. But parents and everyone who interacts with a child have the opportunity to use their superior abilities to do the child good, to do him evil, or, as most often happens, to not really care—a subtle form of evil.

Article Series for You

If you can read this, this article series is for you.

If you are a parent, this series will help you raise your young people.

If you are a young person, this series will help you make the transition from being under the authority of your parents, to being directly under the authority of God, to raising children of your own.

If you are a Christian without children, this series will help you do your part in bringing the children in your congregation to God. Sure, the main responsibility for every child lies with his or her parents. But the responsibility to bring every person to Christ lies with every Christian (1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:6).

It will help everyone to be more effective in working and leading in their church congregation. The apostle Paul clearly listed good childrearing as a necessary requirement to be an overseer in a congregation:

He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot

manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? (1 Timothy 3:4-5, NLT).

Even more importantly, this article series will help everyone be a better child of God, ready to reign with Christ when he returns to reign in his kingdom. In general, raising children requires a great amount of self-sacrificing effort and love. There is no guarantee that they will give that back—they may or may not provide any “return on investment”. This is what Christ did for us.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

The parent who raises a child because the parent wants a friend or wants to be loved is rarely successful. The parent who has self control, who is just, who does the right thing for the child, even when the child is angry at his mother or father, fares much better.

The young person who feels mistreated by their parents, will not succeed by simply rejecting the authority of their parents, but must learn to replace it by personally replacing it with God’s authority in their lives.

The Mission is Vital

If anyone doubts the importance of interaction with children in preparation for the Kingdom of God, notice the last three verses of the Old Testament.

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the

statutes and judgments” (Malachi 4:4, NKJV).

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Malachi 4:5-6, ESV).

Wow! This prophesied reconciliation of fathers to children and children to fathers needs to occur before the Day of the Lord (Christ’s return), or we get destruction! This is what happened in Noah’s day and God doesn’t want it to happen again. (Genesis 9:11) This article is not about the who, how and when of the prophesied Elijah, but about the importance of parent/child relationships. The keys to good relationships are right here. These verses are the transition between the godly teachings of how to bring up physical children in the Old Testament, and how to become spiritual, eternal children of God in the New Testament.

Turning the hearts of children to parents and parents to children is not just head knowledge, religious tradition and practice. It is about doing, on a daily basis, what it just, good and true. That is what Christ will do when he returns, and that is what every believer should want to do.

The Law of Moses with Statutes and Judgments

Most of the “Christian world” has generally forgotten the law and especially the statutes and the judgments. They have taught that the

law is “done away” or “nailed to the cross”. Whereas the Bible teaches:

“the law *is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*” (Rom 7:12),

Christ has redeemed us from the “*curse of the law*” (Gal 3:13), and the “*handwriting of requirements that was against us*” (not the law itself) has been “*nailed to the cross*” (Colossians 2:14).

Indeed, the law is good, but humans are simply not able to do it on their own. The law promises abundant physical life for those who obey, but the new covenant is based upon better promises (Hebrews 8:6-7). We must rely on Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection for eternal life. By the power of God we will do good works, not of ourselves:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV).

Without knowing the Old Testament, a Christian does not understand the mind of God. While the Spirit leads us into all truth (John 16:13), the path the Spirit takes is often through the written Word of God. When Christ, who had the Spirit without measure (John 3:33), was first tempted by Satan, He answered this way: “*It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’*” (Matthew 4:4). Indeed, Christ continued quoting Scripture

to answer the rest of Satan’s temptations.

King David also understood the need to study and learn righteousness from the law, statutes and judgments:

“May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees. May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous. May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight” (Psalms 119:171-174).

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9, NIV).

The law, statutes and judgments are not some boring rules for a bygone society. When understood in today’s perspective, they contain the solutions to the problems of our modern nations and governments. The biblical donkey is today’s car; the ox, a tractor; the horse, a military vehicle; the city gates, the county courthouse, etc. The foundations of local government, elections, separation of powers, multiple levels of courts, bankruptcy and land reform are all found in the Bible and have had great influence on the founders of our nation.

The biblical laws governing personal relationships are as applicable today as they were back then. They are

excellent for raising children. Today, there is much confusion about family, marriage, cohabitation, sexuality, homosexuality and how they relate to personal happiness and fulfillment. Ever increasing incidents of depression and suicide are testimony to the trauma caused by people living lives contrary to God's formula for love and joy.

The judgments of the Bible are all important to the Christian. Why? As this article began, the ultimate purpose of the Christian life today is to be ready to judge the world with Christ at His return.

How can we judge with Christ if we do not know how He judges? The Law, with the statutes and judgments were not God's mistake, but God's wisdom to teach obedience to sinful people. (Deuteronomy 4:5-6) It shows all of us His great righteousness and our sin (1John 3:4; Romans 3:23) so that we know we need to be reconciled by Christ's death and saved by His life. (Romans 5:10)

Turning Whose Hearts?

What does it mean to turn **the hearts of fathers to their children** and **the hearts of children to their fathers**? We are not attempting to provide the full interpretation of this prophecy here; however the prophecy expresses the importance of familial relationships before God. The first half is about changing the fathers—the older people—to care for the young people and make them a priority—which often does not happen today. This, of course, is vital for training believers to be ready to reign with Christ.

The second half is about helping the

children. They need to be brought to God for their own benefit, and so that families can exist in love and peace. Raising godly children whose hearts are with their fathers is something very important to God—He does it. Any effort to provide godly unity in Christian families must teach parents to be good parents and children to be good children. Too often, Christian teachers neglect one, the other or both. As noted previously, Jesus shocked the teachers of His day by taking time for children and explaining that their faith is a model for adults to follow (Matthew 19:14; also Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16; John 13:33). What did He say was the most important commandment?

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.' And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:29-30).

Jesus was citing the law from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Observant Jews recite these verses twice a day and most Christians know them, too. But what are the verses surrounding this "greatest commandment" in Deuteronomy?

"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be

prolonged" (Deuteronomy 6:1-2).

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

The message here is nearly identical to the end of Malachi. God wanted to turn the hearts of the people to His law with the statues and judgments. He wanted His people to turn the hearts of their children to their parents. He wanted this to be a continual way of life, not just in a weekly church meeting or a religious school.

More than a History Lesson

Some Bible scholars have suggested that Malachi is talking about turning the hearts of people to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the fathers of the faithful. That conclusion ignores the reverse instruction to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are dead (Heb 11:8-13) awaiting the resurrection of the rest of the believers. (Heb 11:35-40) Nobody is turning his or her hearts anywhere now. Even more to the point, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew God, but they never heard of Moses—who was born long after they died.

Turning the hearts of children to fathers is **not** an academic exercise in indoctrinating our children with our religious heroes and history. It is about uniting families under the God who lives

today and who will raise people from the dead so they can be His children forever. The Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious leaders of Christ's day tried to turn the hearts of the people to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they did not understand the living purpose of the living God:

"And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:9-10).

*"But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? **God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.**" And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching" (Matthew 22:31-33).*

We have already cited the verses showing how Abraham was commended by God for his approach to his Children, and how he was successful for multiple generations. The Bible says nothing good about the family relationships of corrupt first century religious leaders. And this is what it says about the effect of their religious "children":

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are! (Matthew 23:15).

It is not enough to teach about historic fathers. We must have their faith. We must do what they did.

They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39).

It Is Everyone's Job

Throughout history, raising children has frequently been considered "women's work" or "servants' work". Today, the job is frequently left to public schools and daycare centers. In all too many cases the job is done by television, the Internet, other children or even nobody. It ought to be regarded as the most important work of parents and the community as a whole.

This is not to say that our news media should be filled with stories of 8-year-old Jane's creative writing or 10-year-old Timmy's tee-ball game. They do not need notoriety for things that largely do not affect others. Our modern day history is primarily the history of the doings of adults—as is biblical history. But children must be considered a part of these events, they must be taught about these events, and they must be taught that they will shape history when they grow up.

When children are involved in significant events, their stories should not be ignored just because they are children. The Bible records significant stories of children, sometimes even of babies, with men such as Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau, Moses, Samuel, Jehoash, John the Baptist, Jesus, and others including a courageous youth who went to a military leader to help deliver Paul

from a conspiracy. (Acts 23:12-24) The Bible records healings of children by Jesus, Elijah and Elisha.

How often, when you are hearing an important political or religious message, are children involved? Would you involve a child if you were giving such a message? What did Jesus do?

*"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then **Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-3).***

Consider the religious speakers you listen to. Would they ever do this? Or would it be too undignified to talk to a child and draw attention to him? Remember this is an important subject being discussed. It is about who is the most important in the coming government.

Furthermore, this was not Jesus' own child—he did not have any. Jesus either already knew this child, or he had such a way of speaking to the child that he would trust and obey a stranger. The wording strongly suggests that Jesus actually picked him up and "set him" (Greek *histemi*) in the middle of the group. How many religious teachers today have this kind of relationship with children who are not their own? How many think it is important?

When I was a child, I can remember that most adults were



Christians are children of God in training to reign with Christ. The unifying of families through the teaching of the law with the statutes and judgments is something that God has wanted since the time of Adam.

content to ignore me and mostly wanted me not to do anything bad. But occasionally, I would meet adults who really seemed to care about me and what I would do with my life. That was wonderful. It was also rare. When I was a single adult, to some degree, I joined the ranks of the uncaring. Babies seemed like people who were too little to do anything of value. Other people's children seemed like distractions at church services or other organized settings. If they bothered me too much, I would let them know, in rather unkind terms.

Let us learn from a single brief example of a young child that is being disruptive while his parents are attending a meeting. First of all, the parent should recognize that

the time of the child is valuable, and arrange for the child to have something to do quietly while the meeting is in progress. If the child becomes disruptive anyway, the child should be corrected from the standpoint that life requires him to be quiet during the meeting and that he can be quiet—not that his parents are angry with what he is doing—or even, sadly, angry because he exists right now.

What if the child is distracting to someone else and the parents of the child are either unaware or unwilling to do anything about it? This other person should have the same outlook as the parents—to correct the child in love because this is the right thing to do for the meeting and for the child. The message should not be “I don't

like what you are doing” or “I don't like you.” It should be “these people need to hear” or “here is something else interesting you can do”. Even though the typical reaction is “He's not my child”, the Christian must acknowledge, “he is God's child.”

I have met people who regularly carry interesting or educational things for young children, so they can help out another parent who has to keep a child quiet at an important moment. That may seem odd to some people. But it is common to carry around credit cards, combs, facial tissue, and utility knives, nail clippers and a host of other things to tend to one's own needs or the needs of others. Is not it also reasonable to carry something to help with peacefully

raising young children?

This is not a campaign to encourage all adults to carry toys. You might accomplish the same thing by knowing how to make paper airplanes, by knowing songs or games that children like, etc.

There are thousands of other examples where individuals should encourage and help young people of all ages, even though they are not their own children. When you visit a new congregation or attend some other event—do you consider meeting and talking only to people your age? Or do you consider people of all ages important? If the Christian is serious about reigning with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:4-6), we all must learn to appreciate, help and occasionally correct other's children in love so that we can do the same for God's children when we reign with Christ.

Think of this from the perspective of a new person considering whether they should attend with your congregation regularly. Would they want to join a church congregation where most young people leave? Is that what they want for their children? If the children in a church, who know their parents and see their example, do not want to follow them, why should anyone else want to follow them?

Helping children to grow into adult

believers should be considered in every church decision. It should be considered personally every time we attend at congregation. It is an evangelism work that God has given us.

In many cases, the problem is not that a congregation lacks the Holy Spirit to do God's work. It is a matter of lacking the commitment to do the work. Do we say, "Send us enough money and when we have enough, we will do the work; but if we don't get enough, we won't do it?" We do not take that approach for personal things we want. When we want something, we make a plan how we will get it and work hard to carry out that plan. God expects the same for His work.

Non-denominational believers, scattered as they may be, may be the best equipped to do the work of uniting the hearts of children and parents, both in their own congregations, and among new believers they reach.

For generations, denominational religion has built big church buildings and schools to reach their young people. But they have mostly turned their hearts to church denominations and organizations—to their sets of beliefs and doctrinal statements. God wants people to look to Him first, and to have peace in their families second, not letting human religious organizations interfere. It is not necessary to formulate a massive plan to change the world.

God is in charge. But we need to prepare our hearts to start turning the hearts of parents to children and children to parents with the people we know—in our families, in our congregations and in our neighborhoods.

Conclusion of Part 1

Christians are children of God in training to reign with Christ. The unifying of families through the teaching of the law with the statutes and judgments is something that God has wanted since the time of Adam. It happened during the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and it has been commanded since the time of Moses. Both parents and children need to be taught. All Christians should want to understand it and to do it. It is what we need now, and what we need for His Kingdom. If any one thinks those old boring principles do not apply today—especially to modern teenagers, they need to keep reading.



We will see!

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground"
(Gen 1:27-28).

King Saul's Finest Moment



Saul summons Israel to fight the Ammonites who have besieged Jabesh-Gilead and threatened to gouge out the eyes of all the city's able-bodied men. Two episodes appear in the top panel of the page. On the left, the people of Gibeah meet Saul as he returns from the field, driving two oxen. The news they tell Saul of the plight of the men of Jabesh-Gilead so angers the tall young leader of Israel that he slays his oxen, cuts them into pieces and gives the pieces to three men. These messengers will take the pieces to every part of Israel and announce that the cattle of any man who does not fight the Ammonites with Saul will receive the same treatment.

After the age of the judges when the children of Israel did what was right in their own eyes and before the ascent of the dynasty and royal line of David, from whom our very own lord and savior Jesus Christ is descended, there reigned in Israel a king named Saul who is historically regarded as a strong and brave man whose very own disobedience, enviousness, insecurities, and paranoia were the undoing of his kingdom. But perhaps King Saul's finest moment as King of Israel was when he rallied his fellow Israelites and defeated the aggressive and intimidating Ammonites.

Saul defeats the Ammonites

The story begins with the appointment of Saul by the prophet Samuel as leader of the people of Israel. In a series of casting of lots, apparently ordained by God, Samuel lined up all twelve tribes of Israel. Upon casting the first lot, the tribe of Benjamin was selected. To narrow the choice, another lot was cast, and the clan of Matri was chosen. The clan of Matri took its place in the line, and Saul, the son of Kish was selected among the clan. Saul, apparently either shy or overwhelmed by the moment, disappeared, hiding himself in a pile of baggage. When Samuel asked about Saul's whereabouts, it took God Almighty Himself to reveal that Saul had hidden himself in the baggage. After the people fetched Saul, Samuel addressed the people, appointed Saul to lead Israel and instructed Saul and the people concerning the duties of kingship.

A group of troublemakers, however, mocked Saul and refused to congratulate him, saying "How can this man save us?" But Saul held his peace.

As soon as Saul was appointed, an enemy disrupted the peace. Nahash, the king of Ammon encamped his troops outside a neighboring city of Jabesh Gilead, preparing them for war against the city. The men of Jabesh offered themselves as slaves to Nahash, only asking him to name the terms of surrender. Nahash insisted that the citizens of Jabesh be spared only upon the condition that he gouge out the right eye of every inhabitant of Jabesh. Instead of fleeing or refusing Nahash's demands, the people of the town asked for more time to think it over. They then sent messengers to Saul to ask for help.

It is unclear if Jabesh at the time was an Israelite controlled city, a protectorate of the Israelite kingdom, or a city of people closely allied with Israel. In a recently discovered version of I Samuel found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, known as 4QSam, the text of I Samuel 10 adds that King Nahash had previously attacked the Israelite tribes of Gad and Reuben and gouged out the right eyes of those Israelites. Seven thousand Israelites escaped and fled to Jabesh. If the 4QSam version is true, then this could explain why the people of Jabesh Gilead asked Saul for help.

The messengers reached Saul's hometown of Gibeah and alerted the people about what was going on. The people burst out into an uproar, and then Saul showed up. He had been plowing in the field behind oxen.

When Saul heard about the happenings in Jabesh, the Spirit of God came upon him and he burned with anger. He grabbed an ox, cut it into pieces, and distributed the ox parts throughout all of Israel, warning

them that they would suffer the fate of the ox if they did not join together with him and stop the Ammonites.

The dread of Yahweh fell upon the men of Israel and they "came out as one man" to join Saul. Saul's volunteer army then launched a surprise attack upon the Ammonite troops, destroying most of them. The Bible says that "no two of them were left together."

When Saul and his army returned from their victory over the Ammonites, the people of Israel were joyous. But loyalists to Saul wanted to execute those who had previously opposed Saul's elevation to kingship. Saul, however, refused to punish his former detractors. Saul said that no one would die that day and that Israel should enjoy the victory God had just given them. Said Saul, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today Yahweh has wrought deliverance in Israel."

Then Samuel suggested that Saul be formally proclaimed king once again. Samuel said to the people: "*Come and let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom*" (I Samuel 11:14). The Israelites then went to Gilgal and made Saul king over Israel once and for all.

Parting with their right eyes

These transactions and occurrences both teach us useful lessons and beg very important questions. Upon threat of annihilation by King Nahash, the men of Jabesh were willing to part with their right eyes to save their physical lives. What does this teach us concerning what we ought to be willing to part with to save our spiritual lives? Remember,

Jesus said that if our right eye offends us, we should pluck it out and that it is better to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than to perish with both eyes. If the men of Jabesh under threat of physical death deemed their right eyes dispensable, then what are we willing to dispense with to follow Jesus Christ and escape eternal death? (Both Jesus and this author are speaking metaphorically).

Saul plowing in the field

When news reached Saul concerning the threats of the Ammonites, Saul was plowing in the field. If Saul had previously been anointed king and thereafter given the duties of kingship, why would Saul be plowing in the field at such a crucial time? Why would he not be sitting on his throne? And after the victory over Ammon, why would Samuel and the Israelites have to go back and renew Saul's kingship? Perhaps the answer lies in the word choice used by the author of I Samuel who in chapter 10 states that Saul was first anointed "captain" over his people Israel. The fact that the Hebrew word *nagid* (captain, leader) was used and not *melek* (king) may indicate that Saul, at first, was not acknowledged as king, but simply as one who went before and led his people. If Saul was indeed king, then maybe the kingship—being a brand new position as it was - was only a part-time position then.

But perhaps the best explanation for Saul plowing in the field was that Saul had refused to or procrastinated in assuming his duties. Although he held his peace when a group of dissenters scoffed at his appointment as leader, Saul - being the shy, modest, and under-confident man

that he was - may have simply gone back to farming and herding. Whatever was the case, a seemingly unfit Saul plowing in the field was able to - with the help of the "Spirit of God" - rise to the occasion and rally his fellow countrymen.

Righteous anger

When news reached Saul concerning the threats of the Ammonites, the scriptures say that Saul burned with anger. Was this a good thing? Is there a place for anger among God's people today? Yes. When another person is being abused or mistreated, it is the duty of righteous people to burn with anger. Like King Saul, we may be safe and minding our own business, plowing in the field. But just as the threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the people in Jabesh become Saul's business, threats to the health, safety, and welfare of our neighbors should become our business.

Dissenters turned supporters

When the Israelites came together to fight the Ammonites, the Bible says they "came out as one man." This means that the men who had previously mocked Saul joined in Saul's crusade to defeat Nahash and the Ammonites. What brought about their change of heart?

The scripture says it happened when "the dread of Yahweh fell upon the people." Indeed God has the power to one day make your nastiest naysayers "come out as one man" behind you in support for your righteous cause. We must be comforted by this fact and always mindful that it is God alone who changes the minds and softens

the hearts. Jesus once said, "No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44)

But when the dissenters are finally turned into supporters and God gives us the victory, how will we react? Will we be like the loyalists who demanded that Saul's detractors be punished? Or will we show the forgiveness of King Saul, who discouraged the people from seeking vengeance and encouraged them all to enjoy the victory that God had given them? There is a tendency among God's



people to think they are alone. Being mistreated, persecuted, and mocked by outside people can certainly contribute to this feeling. In fact, this feeling can even lead to a temptation to shut the very doors of salvation to others. Indeed there are some Seventh-Day Christians who teach a doctrine called closed probation in which they contend that there will come a time when God will completely remove the availability for repentance and salvation from the world. It is almost as if they want people to perish. But we must have the attitude of King Saul who in his

finest moment behaved like God, who is "not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Saul's Kingship

Although King Saul's kingship over Israel would eventually come to a tragic and sinful end, the above transactions and occurrences show us an understanding and forgiving Saul. A Saul who like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ "receives the submission of rebels, and even pleads their cause." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary)

This story about Saul should also teach us an important lesson about the time, place, and manner in which God calls a person for a certain task or work. Whomever God qualifies, he qualifies. If He equips and readies a person for a specific task, then that person is the person who should fulfill that task. That person's previous ineptitude or

subsequent disqualification may not matter to God at the moment. God may be using that person *pro hac vice* (L. "for this occasion"). If Saul did nothing else right in his life, he fulfilled the will of God on this one occasion.

Even from the life of King Saul, a man who most biblical scholars regard as a scoundrel, we can look at its finest moment and learn some important lessons about sacrifice, leadership, moral indignation, redemption and forgiveness.



Spiritual Leaders

Today, when we think of leaders, we often think of a loud, maybe even braggadocio people who command the people in their organizations and families, making sure that things get done their way. But what does King David, one of the most successful leaders of all time, say?

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! (Pslm 119:9-10, ESV)

“The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: ‘He who rules over men must be just, Ruling in the fear of God’” (2 Sam 23:3)

The last quote of David came when he was about to die. At the time, the written word of God consisted mostly of the first five books of the Bible, and possibly Joshua, Judges and Job. While most of those books address the physical “do’s and don’ts”, David understood that seeking God was a matter of the whole heart—of earnestly desiring to please God on both a physical and a spiritual level, not simply comply with physical requirements. He knew that reading the Scriptures, even the little he had, was they key to a good heart before God. What would happen if our leaders, today, read and followed these verses every day?

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. 19 You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. 20 Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Deut 16:18-20).

You may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16 Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ 17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. 18 And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel” (Deut 17:15-20).



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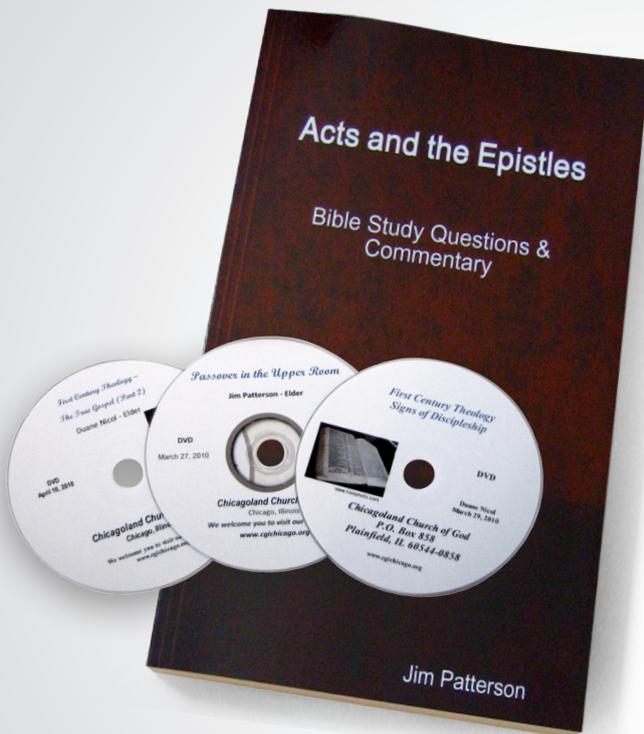
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