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Greetings!

Our cover photo of Penticton, British Columbia on the south shore of Lake Okanagan, was taken during the Feast of Tabernacles this year, where where staff and others associated with *SVM* also attended.

In the latter days, we are told that God will pour out His spirit and many will begin to prophesy (Joel 2:28, 29). We are perhaps reminded of this scripture while reading the article *Need More Prophets than Prophecy*. Writer Norm Edwards draws on personal experience and scripture to look at the need for this spiritual gift from the perspective of desiring to prophesy rather than seeking out prophets. The spirit of prophecy is not limited to major predictions on worldly events of which we may not be certain, but also needed to edify and provide direction for local congregations. Prophecy is also needed in the here and now, and should be prayed for by those looking for direction. This inner spiritual intervention, as I would like to describe it, provides better guidance in dealing

with the present and the future than looking to individuals in leadership who may be too far removed from a congregation. In all cases, no matter how convincing or believed, or how much money is spent promoting a prophetic belief, if it is not God inspired, it will only be a distraction. We hope that this article can help reorient our thinking on the subject.

This last issue for 2013 is intentionally fewer pages than normal so that we can keep our schedule. The Winter 2014 *SVM* issue will continue the Children of God series. We appreciate the positive response from the readers of *SVM* and will look forward to more questions and input from brethren worldwide.

In Christ's Service Jim Patterson



Rainbow penetrates the clouds in Penticton at the Feast of Tabernacles

Need Prophets More Than Prophecy

This writer can still remember the excitement he felt when he first heard a preacher explain that the Bible was a prophetic book, and we could understand the events of our time in advance by reading it. The preacher explained that the prophecies of the Bible were complicated and often symbolic. He also said a firm grasp of world history was necessary to properly distinguish the fulfilled prophecies from the ones in the future. This task obviously exceeded the capability of fledgling Christians, so I needed to get his booklet on the subject. And so many others have had a similar experience, and were excited to take in the book, video or seminar where the future events of prophecy were all explained for

This first encounter is generally most exciting—because one feels that one really knows exactly what is going to happen. But if one reads more widely, sees how many conflicting prophetic interpretations are available, and sees how many such interpretations have failed over the centuries, the excitement wears off.

The approach of some is to ignore Bible prophecy altogether. But the prophetic book of Revelation pronounces a blessing on those who read it (Revelation 1:3), and Christ told us to live by "every word of God" (Luke 4;4). So why should we read Bible prophecy if we cannot put it together and figure out what it all means? Because prophecy gives us a clear general understanding that God will judge the world through Christ (Rom 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:1), and good will be rewarded and evil punished. It shows how God thinks, works and judges. When we need to know what is about to happen, God will show us through direct revelation and through the right Scriptures at the right time.

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7). The entire New Testament is like this. There are no long expositions or charts of Old Testament prophecy explaining how they all fit together. Rather there are numerous references to a few verses showing how they apply to a specific situation as revealed by the Holy Spirit. The New Testament teaching of God continuing to work through prophets in the Church is overwhelming. A few verses, such as the beginning of Hebrews 1:1-2, have caused some believers to think that there are no more prophets:

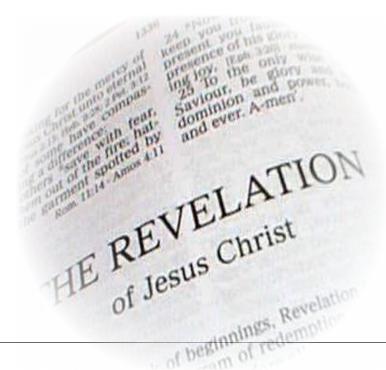
God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Hebrews 1:1-2).

But these verses simply accurately state the greatness of Christ's teaching compared to those of the prophets. Christ's righteous teaching and words of eternal life are so much more important than knowing what kingdom will arise or be defeated. Christ is "heir to all things" and we indeed can be "joint heirs" with Him (Romans 8:17). These verses do not contradict the numerous other

statements of the New Testament telling us about Christian prophets, their prophecies and the need for ongoing prophecies in the Church.

If you are unsure about this, please read the following scriptures to remove all doubt! Many religious groups have doctrines based upon just one or a few verses in the Bible. There are over 40 separate passages about prophets and their prophecies in the New Testament—so many that one might easily get tired of reading them! We have left out verses about the Old Testament prophets and New Testament false prophets to keep the list shorter. If we want God to show us what will happen in the future, we need to "desire earnestly to prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:39). İt is a New Testament teaching we must not ignore!

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13).



"For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:15-18).

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot" (Acts 8:29).

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight" (Acts 9:10-12).

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" (Acts 10:1-3)

Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them" (Acts 10:10-20).

The above pair of prophetic visions were so important, their story is completely retold in Acts 11:4-14.

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea (Acts 11:27-29).

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:1).

Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words (Acts 15:32).

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10).

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all (Acts 19:5-7).

On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-1).

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? (1 Corinthians 12:28-29)

Need Prophets More Than Prophecy

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.... But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? (1 Corinthians 14:1:3-6)

Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all (1 Corinthians 14:22).

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophets one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Corinthians 14:29-32).

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues (1 Corinthians 14:37-39).

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11).

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18).

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership (1 Timothy 4:14).

Do people today have faith that God is able to prophecy through people in their congregations?

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, (1 John 4:1-2).

Note: If there were no true prophets, there would be no need to "test the spirits"—because every prophet would be a "false prophet". But because there are both true prophets and false prophets, we need to "test the spirits."

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants — things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near (Revelation 1:1-3).

The last book of the Bible is a prophecy inspired by Christ, given to the apostle and prophet named John.

But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets (Revelation 10:7).

There is no Old Testament prophecy about a "seventh angel" and very little about a "mystery of God."

Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings" Revelation (10:10-11).

Here an angel is commanding John (or some end-time fulfillment of him) to prophesy. It does not say what he is to prophesy, but it will be given to the prophets when they need it. Similarly, there are two specific prophets, the "two witnesses," prophesied to come in the future at the time of the end. Prophets are found throughout the history of the church.

"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."... These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have

power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.... And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.... The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:3, 6, 10, 18).

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand (Revelation 22:7-10).

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).

Where Are the Prophets Today?

Many have said, "If God is still providing prophets to the church, where are they?" My church—even my whole denomination—does not recognize any." Our national leaders do not recognize any either. That is "business as usual" when it comes to prophets. We must remember that God sends prophets to speak His messages and do His work, which often conflicts with the purposes of political and religious leaders. Political and religious groups tend to only allow teachers and preachers who are educated in their schools or approved by their management. Yes, God might choose to give one of them the gift of prophecy, but since most such groups and their schools do not seek out prophetic gifts, they rarely receive them. Notice these important passages:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! "See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Matthew 23:37-39).

But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John — where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Matthew (21:24-27).

If there was no prophet greater than John the Baptist, (Matthew 11:9-11) and if the leaders of his day refused to recognize him, what makes us think that the leaders of our day will recognize any true prophets today? This writer has met people whom he believes have the gift of prophecy, but they are often in small congregations or keep a "low profile" in larger ones. In most cases, they have said or done things in conflict with popular or leader's opinions, so are not held in high esteem by the brethren.

As an example, throughout the New Testament, the leaders and most of the common people were looking for a Messiah who would establish a physical kingdom apart from the Roman power. Even after Christ's death and resurrection, his own disciples where still asking about this (Acts 1:6-8). That was their prophetic interpretation. So of course, the teaching of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, which was from God, did not fit in with the doctrine of the day. And so today's prophetic interpretations

have detailed descriptions of "the rapture" or a "place of safety", the "beast" and his "mark", the "battle of Armageddon" "Christ's return,"etc. God knows more than today's prophetic interpreters. So when He speaks through prophets today, He will probably not always agree with popular prophetic interpretations.

While the Bible teaches us to listen to prophets in meetings of brethren (1 Corinthians 14:29), the overwhelming teaching is not to seek out prophets to hear, but to "desire to prophecy" (see above references). While there is no guarantee that anyone will receive any particular spiritual gifts, desiring them certainly means they are worth praying for. We can pray to receive the gift of prophecy. We should be willing to pray for it over a long period of time—just as we might pray for family members, a better job, a new home, etc. We should pray about using it for good, not for selfish reasons. We do not want people to say, "Look at him, he's spiritual" or "Look at her, she's a prophetess." We should pray for strength to withstand the persecution the gift of prophecy usually brings

Sometimes, we may not feel that we are righteous enough to receive the gift of prophecy. Do not worry. Nobody is "righteous enough" to receive it. It is an undeserved gift from God! If we do have unrighteousness in our lives, we continued on page 23

Introduction Chapter for the Upcoming Book *The Everlasting Covenant*By Jeff Patton

(Edited by Jim Patterson for SVM)



An Introduction for Believers

A core theme running throughout the Judeo-Christian Bible is that of covenant. It's all about the bonds of relationship that have always dynamically existed—in one form or another—between God and those He calls "His people." This is what covenant is all about!

This book is NOT just nice to know theological eye-candy or extraneous knowledge useful only for a religious trivial pursuit board-game. Rather it discusses the Holy Scripture's version of meat n' potatoes.

God's everlasting covenant is what helps guide His believers throughout history on a day-to-day basis through good and bad times. It reveals how a Holy, Omnipotent, Omniscient God proposes to clean up and then adopt a sin-prone bunch of mortals like us into His divine, perfectly righteous family so that we can all live happily ever after—in glorious harmony together for all eternity!

"And they lived happily ever after?" Isn't this an idea only found in fairy tales and fictional fluff stories cooked up by Hollywood to entertain those wanting a break from the daily grind? Nevertheless, the reality in this case is truly stranger than fiction.

The story of God's everlasting covenant isn't a fictional fairy tale, but rather factual programming. It is a gritty documentary that deals with humanity's real stuff, often up close and personal. The storyline in this divine production runs continuously and coherently from Genesis to Revelation. But it's a weaving, complicated storyline that encompasses many personalities, cultures, and places. Each of these experiences adds a little more plot development that moves the divine narrative along to its climax: the fulfillment of the mysterious

transcendent hope in God's great plan of redemption.

Do You Know How to Live with One Covenant Partner?

God's covenant, like all relationships, is a two-way street. If you are a believer, your hope for personal salvation, meaning a life beyond this present temporary physical existence, is inextricably dependent upon God faithfully keeping His covenantal promises made to His people!

After all, we are mere mortals. Most of us die in less than 100 years. The Bible does NOT teach that we are naturally born with an immortal soul (Ezekiel 18:4 & 20; Acts 3:22-23; Hebrews 10:26-31 & 39; James 5:20). In the Western world, the immortal soul idea was promoted in the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato. But the consistent message of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation is that only the Bible's God has inherent eternal life within Himself (1 Timothy 6:16). Consequently, all of God's people absolutely depend on Him to faithfully fulfill His side of the covenant relationship and to share His eternal life with us.

For the wages of sin is death [a total cessation of existence, a termination of consciousness], but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, (Romans 6:23 English Standard Version [ESV], emphasis mine).

Are you interested in living forever? Do you have authentic biblical faith? How can you tell if you do? Authentic faith as described in the Judeo-Christian scriptures is not mere belief, or some spur-of-the-moment public profession; it is not gushing emotionalism; it is not celebrity worship; it is not just clicking a "like" for God or Jesus on Facebook, or tweeting #Jesus-lovesme on Twitter.

The authentic faith taught by the Bible is all about experiencing God's divine persuasion within. It results in a changed life, changed thoughts, and changed behavior. It means practicing God's sort of family values that includes the willingness to pitch in and to work on His behalf. It means a total giving of yourself, including your time and money. It means being willing to take a stand for what God says is right even when this is deeply unpopular and politically incorrect.

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, (Mark 12:30 New Living Translation [NLT]).

So, are you really interested in living forever? If so, then you must be willing to live forever in covenant with the Bible's God! Have you wholeheartedly bound yourself to Him in love and obedience? Are you faithfully trying to live up to your divine covenantal partner's day-today expectations of you? Loving Him the way He wants? "Do you feel that you have a good grasp of what God really requires of you in order to keep up your part of the of the covenant relationship? Or do you think you define this divine relationship on your terms?

What a question! These days about half the adults in the Western world can't even maintain a successful marriage covenant with a human partner whom they can physically see, hold in their arms, and kiss. So, what about faithfully living in a spiritual, everlasting covenant with an invisible divine Partner?

Obviously, many people in the 21st Century are failing to understand the nature of what they commit themselves to when they make a marriage covenant with a wife or a husband. As a society, we've reinterpreted the marriage covenant from what God originally intended.

Today, it no longer means a life-long, robust monogamous commitment—to love, to honour, to cherish, to obey, whether in sickness or health, for richer or for poorer till death do us part. Now, instead, many think of marriage as being merely conditional. They see it as a provisional coupling agreement that can be easily terminated by either party whenever and for whatever reason.

As a result, we as a society have transformed the divinely instituted marriage covenant intertwining one man and one woman for life into a secular contract permitting serial monogamy and a succession of new sexual partners. I call this a marrygo-round. One can get married and divorced as often as one likes so long as the appropriate paperwork is filed. But the Bible's God hates this degeneration of the human marriage covenant that He instituted to bind together a man and a woman in order to create stable families. He hates this society's high divorce rate, which leads to the emotional and sexual abuse of millions. But these days who cares what the God of the Bible thinks?

And this you do as well: You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless, (Malachi 2:13-16 New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]).

There are far too many people on today's marry-go-round who call themselves believers but who are in essence cheating on both their marital and divine covenantal partners! As a direct consequence, most people in the 21st Century do NOT understand what's involved in successfully living in covenant with the Bible's incredibly loving but also highly jealous God.

Of course for those following alternative lifestyles, who don't even bother with the formalities of getting married in the first place, the possibility that such commitment-adverse people could really understand what it means to live within a divine covenant is even less likely. To summarize, because we as a society have lost our understanding of the marriage covenant between a man and a woman, most people no longer intuitively understand from personal experience what it means to live in covenant with the Bible's God.

Is Salvation For Everyone?

Anyone who is an outsider to, or a non-participant in God's covenantal relationship is, spiritually speaking, lost! As the Apostle Paul soberly reminded believers:

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, (Ephesians 2:1, ESV, emphasis mine).

I cannot over-emphasize the point that from the perspective of the God revealed in the Holy Scriptures if you are struggling with lack of hope or feeling cut off from God, an understanding of His covenant with His people may be exactly what you are missing! Despite the immense importance of this subject, if I asked the average believer or theologian today to explain the nature of God's everlasting covenant and the role it has played and continues to play in the lives of God's chosen people—I would receive both blank looks and conflicting answers.

Yet for Jesus of Nazareth the centrality of God's everlasting covenant and the role it plays in God's great plan was foremost in His mind during the closing hours of His ministry as a mortal human being. The gospel of Matthew records that He revealed to His disciples during the Last Supper:

"...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28 ESV).

Finding the straight and narrow path to achieve salvation and eternal life isn't for the faint of heart. Nor is it for the many—at least not as things presently stand.

Are you shocked? Sure most people would say they would love dearly to have a never-ending life with an abundance of good things:

a life full of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Well, many would say, maybe not that bit about self-control or practicing abstinence.

The reality of today's world is that most people focus on pursuing instant gratification. If you offer them one cookie now in this present world or ten cookies later in the Kingdom of God, they'll take the one cookie right now, please and thank-you. They think getting stuff —like money, sex, and power—and getting it right now is the "pursuit of happiness." As I already mentioned, "Do your own thing" is the motto of most people as they rush about trying to get the largest possible slice of "the good life."

As I write this, in today's mail I received a come-on from one of America's largest retailers who are just moving into Canada. They sent me a bold red envelope with a single white circle in which is printed: "Get instant happiness in Nanaimo." According to this retailer you get this instant happiness by signing up for their credit card and buying their stuff.

The result of this materialistic addiction to instant gratification is of course, our experience of life in today's world—sometimes it's good but sometimes it's bad. It's like eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, which separated Adam and Eve from their close relationship with God. The first bite was sweet, but the after taste was bitter.

Our present civilization is completely invested in the same original error that was made at Eden: we insist on taking to ourselves the right to decide what is good or evil rather than relying on divine revelation; we insist on exalting man-the-created as the measure of all things rather than God the Creator. The ancient Greeks blatantly worshipped idols made in their own image while this civilization does the same thing in effect—but with more subtlety.

So life is the way it is, today, because most people now living do NOT have an authentic relationship with the living God of the Bible and are NOT on the way of salvation that leads to eternal life. Almost 2,000 years ago the Apostle John warned us to avoid mixing up our priorities in this life!

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. **But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever,** (1 John 2:15-17 NLT.

Many Are Called But Few Are Chosen

Would it surprise you to learn that Jesus of Nazareth insisted that the salvation He enabled would only be found by the *few* in number during this time period that we call "today"? More to the point, when the saints coming marching in at the return of Christ to this Earth, will *you* be there among that number? (Matthew 24:30, 31)

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," (John 10:10 ESV).

A main character from the old cartoon strip *Pogo* once put it this way, "I have met the enemy and he is us!" Due to our repeatedly demonstrated flaws and weaknesses, the Bible insists that God will extend mercy only to the few now, but to the many later. The Bible plainly teaches that Jesus is coming, again. This next time, however, He is coming in order to fully establish the Kingdom of God in order to end the age of human misrule. According to the Bible the Kingdom of God is not merely a

sentiment or a feeling in a believer's heart. The prophesied Kingdom of God will replace the current political, financial, and social leadership who are misleading humanity to such a degree that they will completely destroy humanity if not for God's direct intervention in world affairs to prevent it (Matthew 24:22).

So, what will Jesus do when He returns? Those who have appropriately feared, served, and loved Him will be rewarded. But He will punish those who have promoted that which led humanity to its enslavement to sin and to the Earth's environmental degradation (Matthew 13:41, Revelation 11:18).

If you care about the message contained in the divine narrative, God's Holy Scriptures, you should NOT take it for granted that you've got it made; that it's all up to you; that you can do what you like when you like; that you can name it and claim it. Why? Because you are not the measure of all things!

Doing your own thing may be today's dominant philosophy, but that doesn't make it the ultimate reality. The Judeo-Christian Bible clearly teaches that you must be willing to carefully pay attention to what your Creator has to say about your salvation. This divine narrative is the Creator's road map given to you so that you can arrive at all the saints' desired safe haven: the Kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul Admonishes All of Us Who Call Ourselves Christian

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed [obey is something that many Christians have trouble with and shy away from.], so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, (Philippians 2:11-13 ESV, emphasis mine).

If you think of yourself as a believer, you must pay attention to what your Saviour says in regards to obedience!

The concept that only the few—those who are obedient and diligently working out their salvation with fear and trembling—will be saved is probably completely alien to what you may have heard from your favorite

Sunday televangelist, minister, or priest. But if you are open-minded to what the Bible actually has to say, then this book about God's everlasting covenant may help you. It will show you things in the Scriptures that are astonishing. It focuses on the forgotten key to what it means to live in the dynamic covenantal relationship that God makes with His chosen people. God offers you life eternally. Does it seem a bother to take some time to read and think about what He has to say to you?



Are You Too Busy Even For Eternal Life?

Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem. Someone asked him,

"Lord, will only a few be saved?"

He replied, "Work hard to enter the narrow door to God's Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Then you will say, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' And he will reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.'

"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. And people will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God. And note this: Some who seem least important now will be the greatest then, and some who are the greatest now will be least important then,"(Luke 13:22-30, NLT, emphasis mine).

Jesus, obviously, tried to drive this startling point home because he revisited it during his ministry:

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14, ESV).

Jesus' point is obvious. The *many* lack the commitment, passion, single-mindedness and the repentant, humble state of mind to eagerly follow the Word of God rather than argue with it. That's what the Matthew 13 series of parables—short allegorical lessons—teach. In fact the reason Jesus taught the crowd—the *many*—in parables was NOT to make His meaning more clear, but rather to hide from the *many* the spiritual substance and implication of His teachings!

Then the disciples came up and asked Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered them, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to *them.* For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough. But whoever does not have, even what he has [a physical life, a bit of spiritual insight] will be taken away from him. For this reason I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

You will listen and listen, yet never understand; and you will look and look, yet never perceive. For this people's heart has grown callous; their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn back— and I would cure them.

"But your eyes are blessed because they do see, and your ears because they do hear! (Matthew 13:10-16 HCSB).

Do you want to go the broad, easy way to destruction with the many? Or, do you want to seek out the narrow, hard way that leads to eternal life with the few? The choice is yours.

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14 ESV).

Do Not Let Them Get You Down

Cynically minded secular people mock Christians and Christianity in general due to examples of blatant hypocrisy among the religious. Pedophile priests? Greedy televangelists? Adulterous ministers? As a result *many* secular people discount the validity and importance of God and His word because of such blatant bad examples by people who call themselves Christians. They judge the Maker by the failures of His supposed representatives.

And without doubt a corrupt church leadership has had a disproportionately bad effect on the public. The cynics feel justified discounting the message of the Bible because of those bad messengers.

But the greatest negative influence on the public's perception of Christianity is due to the failure of the rank and file, the average everyday person who professes to be Christian. As believers we need to ask ourselves, "Why are there such great discrepancies between the things Christ taught and practiced and what many of those who identify themselves as Christians actually believe and do?"

For example, in 2011, the Guttmacher Institute a non-profit organization that works to "advance reproductive health" uncovered the fact that **two out of three women having abortions in the United States identify themselves as Christians** of either the Catholic or Protestant persuasion. Despite the strong position of some,

ordinary Catholics are 29 per cent more likely to have abortions than ordinary Protestants! In countries where Catholicism is the dominant Christian religion, such as Brazil or Peru, abortions are performed at a significantly higher rate in comparison to the worldwide average (http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/christianethics/abortion_1.shtml, Retrieved June 9, 2013).

I attribute this hypocrisy gap between Christian teaching and worldly reality to the powerful allure of our materialistic world. That would be nothing new. Much of modern Christianity is impotent—spiritually speaking—when it comes to having the power to transform the daily lives of its adherents in a way that makes them stand out positively from your average unbeliever in a critical moral issue such as abortion.

The Christianity practiced in the first century A.D. was empowering. It was vibrant and dynamic. The Church then was lead by converted Jews such as the apostles Peter, James, and John from Jerusalem. Those leaders were filled with the Holy Spirit. They wrote the New Covenant scriptures. They practiced what they preached and were willing to die for it! The Church then was dramatically different from today's politically correct, human-traditionoriented Christianity, which is NOT creating "new and improved" believers who are powerfully living in the newly refreshed covenant with God the Father and our elder brother Jesus Christ.

So what has changed? Today, the average person identifying himself or herself as a Christian— as well as all the secular, of course—are ignorant about what it means to live in the dynamic two-way relationship of covenant with the Bible's God. This is why this book about the covenant is needed.

So don't let any of the dumb or the hypocritical infesting today's religiously confused version of "Christian" Babylon grind you down! Check out for yourself what the Bible really says.



Where Two or Three Have Gathered Together in My Name

Scribe's Square

A lawyer's discussion of Biblical laws

An often mis-used or misunderstood Scripture is Jesus' statement in Matthew 18:20 that He will be there in the midst when two or three people have gathered together in His name. Some have used this statement as proof that it only takes two or three persons to form a congregation. It is often used as an excuse not to associate with fellow followers of Christ and to simply hold services by themselves or with their immediate families only, claiming that they are fulfilling the commandment to hold a holy convocation on the Sabbath by having a meeting of at least two or three. It is also used as an excuse for failure to pray for God to grow their congregation or to get out and evangelize. But our Lord's statement in its entirety concerning this matter is as follows:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:15-20).

As one can see, Jesus' statement specifically applies to the administration of justice and winning back a sister or brother who has sinned against you. If a follower of Christ sins against another, the offended party, according to Jesus, should go to the offender one-on-one and attempt to convince the person that he or she is wrong. If the offending party repents, then he or she has been won over. But if the offending party does not repent, then the offended party should take another person or two along so that the matter may be discussed and heard in the presence of two or three witnesses. This follows the ancient command by Yahweh recorded in Deuteronomy 19:15 that a single witness shall not count against a person accused of a crime and that the charge can only be sustained upon the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If the person in need of correction does not listen to the counsel of two or three witnesses, then the matter should be taken to the congregation. If he or she refuses to listen to the congregation, then the congregation should ostracize him, treating him as a sinner such as a tax collector or a pagan.

Jesus, therefore, was teaching that where two or three saints were gathered together in His name to resolve a Matthew 18 conflict, God would be present in their midst to establish His righteous judgment. This prevents a dispute being left unresolved simply because the congregation cannot get together to hear it.

In addition to its specific application in the administration of justice, there also may be a general principle underlying Jesus' statement that He would be there in the midst where two or three are gathered in His name. For example, in Acts 16, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as they were being held in prison. God responded to their acts of worship and sent an earthquake which shook the foundation of the prison, leading to the conversion of the prison guard and the freeing of Paul and Silas. And in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, the writer discourages the individual from going at it alone, saying that two persons are better able than one to withstand an attack and that a threefold cord is not easily broken.

But what about two or three persons who gather together for a holy convocation on the Sabbath or even claim that they make up a congregation? Are they fulfilling the commandment to hold a holy convocation and to not forsake the assembling of themselves together? Maybe, maybe not.

The Bible clearly states that on the Sabbath day (and God's annual holy days for that matter), God's people are to hold a holy convocation, or a sacred gathering.

The appointed feasts of Yahweh which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed feasts, are these (Leviticus 23:2).

The word translated "convocation" in Leviticus 23 and throughout the Old Testament comes from a Hebrew word (*Miqra*), meaning "something called out, that is, a public meeting (the act, the persons, or the place)." and (Strong, James. Entry for 4744 Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1923.) In Ancient Israel, these convocations were often, if not always, called with the sound of a trumpet (Exodus 19:13; Numbers 10:2-4; Psalm 81:3).

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated "church", *ekklesia*, literally means a body of people or an assembly. It is mostly used to refer to a single Christian congregation or to the entire body of Christ, and it was even used in one instance to refer to a riotous mob (Acts 19: 32, 33 & 39).

Based on the above Biblical definitions and examples, a holy convocation should be understood as "a public gathering that is assembled by a calling of some sort." ("What is a Holy Convocation?" at http://truthofyah.net/studies/holyconvocation.html). A deliberately small, unpublicized meeting does not meet this criterion. The fact that a holy convocation is called or proclaimed also implies that it is an inter-household gathering, not a domestic gathering. If only two or three people show up, then so be it. If the congregation must meet in a person's home for want of a public building, then so be it. But everyone (absent dire circumstances) should be invited.

Please also note that God does not honor all assemblies. It is possible to hold a convocation that is not a holy convocation.

Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of assemblies--I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they have become a burden to Me, I am weary of bearing them (Isaiah 1:13-14).

A gathering, therefore, must be called by God to qualify as a holy convocation.

The purpose of a holy convocation is to be instructed by God. Another literal meaning of the original Hebrew word for "convocation" is *rehearsal*, a "re-hearing" of what has been taught (Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. London, UK: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, exact publication date unknown; *Abingdon's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, mowed*, (#4150), *Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, Madison, NJ: Abingdon Press, 1983). (See also Nehemiah 8:8, "they listened to the reading.")

No matter how busy people get earning their livelihoods, caring for their families, having their fun, or even doing good works for Christ, they still need to pause every now and again to hear from God. There is no such thing as a holy convocation without a receiving of instruction from God.

But Yahweh is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him (Habbakuk 2:20).

God certainly recognizes small groups—or even individuals for that matter—gathered in His name when they are forced to meet by themselves because of sickness, hardship, persecution or other compelling reasons. Some small groups may even be fleeing from larger but intolerably corrupt or stale congregations. Forming new congregations for the purpose of "preaching the Lord Jesus" to new people is certainly in line with the New Testament notion of God sending out workers into His harvest to spread and multiply the Word of God (Acts 11:19-6; Acts 12:24). But individuals and cliques separating themselves simply because they cannot get along with the brethren is a completely different situation.

Circumstances may yield a congregation of merely two or three, but our Savior wants us to pray that God the Father sends additional sisters and brothers to assist us in the work of God. Jesus said,

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

The condition in God's law of having a minimum of two to three witnesses present to verify the truth of a matter should not be used as an excuse not to meet with other brethren or not to desire growth in one's congregation. We must be careful not to turn God's minimum into a maximum.

Dear SV Magazine,

I know I don't write very often. However, I just finished my Spring 2013 Shepherd's Voice Magazine. I find the subject matter to be very interesting and applicable.

I am so happy to be on your mailing list, too. Its very "energizing" spiritually to read your articles. As we trod these harder days, I pray we can all be unified and strengthened through prayer. I yearn to hear my FATHER say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the Joy of your LORD."

Times are trying and I fall a lot. But, through God's grace and mercy He picks me up to trod on . Bless HIS HOLY NAME.

Please keep me on your mailing list. I pray you all had an uplifting and blessed Feast.

Love in Him, Terry, Michigan.

Dear Terry:

Thank you for your encouraging letter. The Scripture mentions the spiritual gift and practice of exhortation in many places. Those of us who write articles are frequently involved in the learning and teaching of knowledge, which has an important place. But there is also a need to exhort one-another to follow through and do the things that we already know:

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6.9).

With all the sin abounding today, many wonder why we bother to follow God when feeling they do not have to. But the overwhelming truth of the Scripture is that everyone will have to obey God some day (Isaiah 11:4; 45:23-24; Daniel 12:1-3; Micah 4:1-4; John 5:26-29; Romans 14:10-12; Philippians 2:10; Revelation 5:13-14; 19:21). Christ will reign with the righteous who have risen from the dead (Psalm 50:3-5; Matthew 19:28; 24:30-31; Romans 8:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Timothy 2:12; Jude 1:14-15).

Ask Norm!



And from our reading from this morning's Bible study, something I had never noticed before, Christ will be reigning with those who volunteer to follow Him now.

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power... (Psalm 110:1-3, NKJV).

September 10, 2013

Dear Norm,

I was born and raised SDA. I had to go the rebel way for many years. Our gracious Creator found me "bleeding" on the floor of a solitary jail cell, and took my pain. A couple weeks later, after continuing in prayer and Scripture, I was reading Tozer's "Pursuit of God" and a Messenger from heaven gave me the message: "Daughter, keep on the way you are going and you will be accepted." (more or less--not in words). Though I've sinned since then. I've never looked back and strive to know and obey. I'm not sure if I will be SDA or Church of God, but I know I want to obey the Bible way. That is why choosing a Sabbath keeping church was the easy part.

My husband (of 36 years this month), was born a heathen, but is now a Christian. His health has prevented much progress in the learning area and prevented church attendance, but his whole demeanor has softened, and he also wants to be rebaptized. I believe the Holy Spirit has been at work in him. He wants to be an SDA as he is leery of cults and is unable to read as I can. I know you are not a cult.!! This is probably more and less than you wanted, but I just let it come out! Must stop or it won't go at all!

Thank you for all the reading materials in the mail from [various church groups]. VERY interesting and exciting. I so want to attend Feast of Tabernacles. We are disabled and poor, and our vehicle was stolen February but maybe next year! I'm planning a fast as well as I'm physically able on the Day of Atonement this year. Please pray for us and our daughter who was baptized SDA but wound up a fundamental Baptist of all things! and their beautiful 3 year old son. Well she loves Jesus! Praise the Eternal!

Your sister in Christ Jesus, F.W., New Mexico

Dear F. W.,

Thank you very much for your open and honest letter. You are facing situations that are common to a great many believers, although many are not as willing to talk about them.

I believe the "messenger from heaven" whom you spoke of was an angel. The Bible certainly records many instances of angels giving our Father's messages to people in dire situations. I have spoken with other believers who have received a similar message in jail, in some great illness or other difficult time. Frequently, God sends other brethren to encourage people when they become believers. But in some cases, especially yours, there is nobody who can go to you, so he sends an angel.

However, nobody should get the idea that conversions involving angels are somehow more holy than others. I say

this because some make the mistake of thinking they do not need to heed the admonition of brethren because they think God will always send an angel if He has anything to say to them. On the other hand, some brethren may question their own conversion because they did not have some kind of powerful spiritual experience and others did. God works with each of us according to His wisdom, which exceeds ours. Some people simply make a logical decision to repent and be baptized, and then God places His spirit in them. Others need a supernatural sign, but should not consider a sign as an elite form of calling.

Sincere believers are frequently faced with a complex decision in regard to which congregation to attend. The Bible certainly encourages us to regularly assemble with other believers (Hebrews 10:24-27). The biblical purposes for such assembly are:

- edifying each other with sound doctrine
- group worship and prayer
- evangelistic and charitable work

Most congregations do those things, though they vary greatly. For example, one group may serve families or young people very well, but do almost no charitable or evangelistic work. Another group may greatly help the poor, but have less inspired teaching. Each family unit will have to pray about what is best for them. Unfortunately, many church groups add some or all of the following not-so-biblical purposes:

- centralization of collection of tithes and offerings
- standardization of doctrine
- exclusion of teachers and teachings from believers in other groups
- proclamation that some other or all other groups are false churches

These purposes sometimes cause only minor difficulties, but can also make attendance very difficult for the sincere believer. Even so, this writer is aware of members who attended congregations for decades with which they had significant disagreements. Their

leaders never found out because they were quiet about their disagreements so they would be able to fellowship with the brethren. Just as you mention that you have had some sins, so those who form and manage churches have some sins (1 Corinthians 1:11-15; 3:1-9). But God's work can still be done in spite of them.

We encourage you to visit several congregations in your area and attend the one where you can best learn and be a blessing to others. Until you are able to find a new vehicle, you may have to attend a church that is willing to pick you up. You might be interested in the Church of God, New Mexico, PO Box 5363, Albuquerque, NM 87176, 505-889-293, mail@cognm.org, meeting at 4923 Prospect NE (San Mateo @ I-40). They are conducting a Feast of Tabernacles in Albuquerque this year as well.

I have prayed for your daughter, but I am certainly not worried about her. I know of many young people who see some of the difficulties in the seventh day churches and opt for evangelical Bible-believing churches for a time. There are good things to be learned there. Later, they may be stirred to study the Sabbath from the Bible on their own and learn more truth. Spending one's younger years in a Bible-believing church is much better than spending it in rebellion, promiscuity, substance abuse or jail. Always remember that God wants each person to be wholeheartedly committed to Him-not simply to keep the practices that their parents had before them. A young person who is truly committed to God, even with some error, is much better off than one who is simply living by laws he has always followed, but has no commitment and may stop them all at any time when some temptation or trial comes along. It took most of us older believers years to arrive at our current beliefs, and it will probably be the same for your daughter.

November 18, 2013

Dear Norm,

Greetings and Salutations to you in the Names of Yahuah El Elyon and His Son Yahusha the Anointed One.

I'd like to address a question to you that I know you've been asked many times in

the past, and have even been asked by me, and I just wasn't satisfied with your answers because I felt that they didn't really address the issue in whole. So, for the benefit of your Sacred Name readers of SVM, I'd like to ask you a few questions regarding the issue of the Sacred Names and hopefully you can see fit to publish these questions in an upcoming issue of SVM's "Ask Norm!" section. This is inspired by Jim Patterson's article "The Simplicity and Beauty of the Gospel Message" and his side-bar on page 7 of SVM's Summer 2013 issue.

- In various Encyclopedia's, i.e. Britannica and Americana, the etymology of the word "God" is given, and is said to be the word that the Teutonic pagans applied to their personal object of worship. On conversion of the Teutonic races to "Christianity" the term was applied to the Supreme Being of the Sacred Scriptures. With this knowledge in mind, are we not in violation of the Torah command found in Exodus 23:13 which says: "And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other Elohim, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth." If we call our Elohim by the name "God"?
- 2) Many secular and biblical dictionaries attribute the word "lord" to the Hebrew word "ba'al". With this knowledge in mind and considering verses such as Hosea 2:16-17 in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 11:31, should we not avoid using the term "lord" in referring to our Elohim?
- 3) And finally, knowing that the religion of Judaism has made Talmudic laws prohibiting the utterance of the Sacred Name, should we therefore trust Jewish sources such as "The Encyclopedia Judaica" that endorses the pronunciation of "Yahweh"?

I look forward to your answers to these questions as I'm sure that most of your Hebraic Roots and Sacred Name readers will as well. Until then, take care and Yahuah bless you!

In Mashiyach Yahusha,

John J. Adkins #B-235577 Lakeland Correctional Facility 141 First St

Coldwater, MI 49036

Dear John,

Thank you very much for your letter. I realize that this is an important issue to many people.

First of all, I certainly do not have an objection to people using what they feel is the most correctly pronounced or translated form of the name of our Heavenly Father. When I am among individuals who use those names, I use them as well, in order to communicate effectively and non-offensively. I am glad that you still regard me as a fellow-believer, as some who use sacred names do not regard non-users as brethren, which is the fundamental concern presented in the Summer 2013 issue.

When I write or speak to the general public, I do not use "scared names" because I follow the example of the New Testament writers who had the same problem that we do, today. They took the gospel message to many different peoples whose languages had words for "god" that were often associated with "false gods". Yet we see no effort whatever to try to teach people to pronounce the name of the Father and Son in Hebrew, or to specifically translate the meaning of the Hebrew names into native languages. Rather, it appears that they used the existing words in the language the people already had. Notice what the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) inspired on Pentecost:

"And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling Mesopotamia, Judea Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:8-11).

These people were certainly not all born speaking Hebrew or Aramaic. If they were, there would be no miracle here. And since they were hearing about the "wonderful works of God", they were certainly hearing Him mentioned in their own native language as well. The word translated "God" in Acts 2:11, above, and nearly every other place in the New

Testament is from the Greek Theos. This word was used by non-Christian Greeks to refer to their pagan gods (Acts 14:11-12). How did the apostle Paul, when speaking to the Greek leaders in the Areopagus deal with a Greek sign dedicated to the "unknown Theos"?

"for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD [Theos]. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:" (Acts 17:23).

There is no doubt that this sign was in Greek. The question at hand was about the supreme being, the creator of the universe. If Theos was unacceptable, Paul certainly could have ignored this sign and simply declared the Father's name and title to them. But he felt he could reach them best by comparing the true Father to the "unknown Theos" that they had been ignorantly worshiping. So today, I believe it is much more important to teach people about the true God and His Word, rather than try to teach the pronunciation of His Name in Hebrew, where in doing so adds another layer of complexity to the gospel message. The issue is further complicated by the numerous different pronunciations used by my numerous Sacred Name friends. I have read many extensive papers about why various pronunciations are correct—and I could not clearly show how only one is right and the others are in error.

I realize that some claim the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic and then translated into Greek. While I have seen some evidence for that in Matthew, Revelation and a few other books, there is very little evidence of it for most of the rest of the New Testament. (I have a copy of Hebrew Gospel of Matthew by George Howard—but that text does not contain the Sacred Names either). Indeed, there are numerous places where the New Testament writers deliberately give us the Hebrew word for something in addition to the Greek, but they make no effort to tell us to use Sacred Names:

And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this

cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will (Mark 14:36).

The Hebrew for "father" sounds like "abba", so Mark used the equivalent Greek letters to make the sound of the Hebrew word. Then he wrote pater, the Greek word for "father". He could have done the same thing for the names of the Father and Son at any time, but he did not. Even when our Messiah was dyingand could no longer be judged or condemned for anything—Mark was inspired to record His saying in Hebrew as well as Greek:

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" 35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" (Mark 15:34).

Again, Mark uses Greek letters to make the sound of the Hebrew words. Here Christ uses a derivative of the Hebrew El, a short form of Elohim, to refer to His Father in Heaven. But then Mark goes on to use the word Theos in his Greek translation, not indicating that he or his readers commonly used El or Elohim in their prayers. In fact, Christ's use of Eloi seemed uncommon enough that those standing by thought He said "Elijah"—Eliyahu in Hebrew. There are many other places in the New Testament where the writers include the Hebrew or Aramaic words within their Greek, but none are about the names for the Father or Son (Matthew 1:23; Mark 5:41; John 1:38, 41-42; 5:2; 19:13,17; Acts 1:19; 4:36; 9:36; 13:8; Romans 8:15; 11:4; Galatians 4:6; Hebrews 7:2; Revelation 9:11; 16:16).

I realize that there are very few New Testament manuscripts that do have Sacred Names written into the margin or even the text. However, there is little evidence that they are the most accurate copies of the original manuscripts, but it is more likely they were produced by an ancient group of "Sacred Name" believers. The vast majority of the thousands of manuscripts have no hint of Sacred Name usage. We are doing a very dangerous thing if we claim that the original New Testament taught the use of Sacred Names, but that it was somehow intercepted by translators who removed the correct names and all the teaching about them. If we claim such, we are teaching that the Scriptures were under complete control of people who could have inserted or removed any doctrine that they wanted. This works against encouraging people to trust and live by the Scriptures.

To answer your questions specifically:

I do not believe that the use of the word "God" today is any different than the use of the Greek Theos in the New Testament. Both these two and even the Hebrew Elohim are assumed to mean the true God to believers, but all three can be used for false gods (2 Kings 19:18; Gal 4:8). I have checked several etymological dictionaries, and they give a variety of sources for the meaning of both "god" and theos. Some trace them to a specific deity and some do not. It is not clear. I do not think we should base a major doctrine on unclear history. The more important point is that virtually nobody in Christian nations today thinks "God" means anything other than the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whereas, the names of the false Gods that the Israelites were told to avoid were gods that were actively being worshipped by the nations round about them. They were not to adopt the names and practices of those clearly false gods. Righteous men of the Bible use the word ba'al in place names and personal names that may have had their roots in ba'al worship, but which are no longer actively involved in it (2 Samuel 5:20; 6:2; 13:23; 2 Kings 4:42; 1 Chronicles 5:23; 14:11; 27-28; Ezk 25:9).

2) The word ba'al is usually left un-translated in most Bible translations—it is not translated "lord". The Hebrew adonay is translated "Lord" over 430 times in the Bible, and refers to our Father in Heaven. It means "master", essentially the same as our English "lord". While I do not think "LORD" is the best translation for the divine name (YHWH, Yahuah,

Yahweh, Yaveh, Jehovah, etc.), I do not think it is inappropriate at all to use it. Our Messiah said "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (John 13:13). The Greek for "Lord" here is Kurios, the standard word for "Lord" in the New Testament, and the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew adonay. If our Messiah or John thought it was important to use Hebrew names and titles, this would have been a great place to set the record straight. But instead, our Savior went on to teach a lesson about washing each other's feet. The scripture you cite in Hosea must be taken in context:

"And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she has said, 'These are my wages that my lovers have given me. 'So I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot," says the LORD.... "And it shall be, in that day," Says the LORD, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' [Hebrew Ishi] And no longer call Me 'My Master,' [Hebrew Ishi] For Lori! [Hebrew baali] For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, And they shall be remembered by their name no more (Hos 2:12-13, 16-17).

The Israelites were clearly involved in the Baal-worship practices, not just having the wrong name. I realize many Sacred Name believers have used this verse to say we should stop using "Lord" because it is like calling Him "Balli," but I have yet to find one who follows the other half of the verse and begins calling Him "Ishi"—my Husband. I think this is all a reference to the future marriage of our Messiah.

3) I agree that we should not automatically trust sources such as the Encyclopedia Judaica for the pronunciation of the divine name. On the other hand, I have seen and heard so many other sources on how the name should be pronounced that I cannot authoritatively say which one is right. If our Father wanted to be sure that the pronunciation of His Name was clearly preserved, He could have

done it. There are so many things the Scripture clearly commands that I do not believe we will be judged severely—if at all—for things where the Scripture is unclear or totally silent. I would rather avoid "doubtful disputations" (Romans 14:1) and use my time to house the homeless, feed the hungry, preach the Gospel, feed the flock or help people unjustly imprisoned to go free.

In addition to the law of the Old Testament, we have many Scriptural examples of how the law was carried out. We never find a place where people are striving to worship the Eternal, but are punished because they are using a title or name from another language. Those whom the Eternal corrected were those who had false practices and were worshiping false deities and denying our Father's teachings.

Thank you for your letter. I hope this helps much of the brethren. By the way, I have heard more than one person say that in prison, where there is often a great Muslim influence, using Yahuah is helpful in drawing a distinction from "Allah", who also claims to be the "God of Abraham". If that makes the Gospel easier to preach, then please use it. However, for most of my ministry, I find using the names "God" and "Jesus" are best for bringing the Gospel to people who already have a Bible, but who simply have not read and obeyed it enough. The last thing they need is a new Bible with different divine names.

I have known John Adkins for years and am sure that he would appreciate mail from any of our readers who might want to write him.

Questions?

asknorm@shepherdsvoice magazine.org

2013 Feast of Tabernacles - US Honey Creek Resort State Park

This 2013 Feast in Moravia, Iowa, was a wonderful blessing from God to this writer, and to 400 other people who attended. They came in all age groups, from elderly people with white hair, to numerous teens, children and babies. Younger people actively participated in studies, prayers, activities, main music and the children's choir. There were quite a few newcomers who were celebrating their first Feast, and eight baptisms!



Many Pray Over Newly Baptized

With plenty of wonderful group meals, activities and opportunities for fellowship, many of the people found no reason to leave the Resort at all during the entire eight days. This was truly a joyous time of fellowship with the brethren. The "progressive dinner," where brethren ate each course of their meal at a different cabin, was a great way to introduce brethren to one another. People are usually not hesitant to ask for their food, and often that was the start of many good conversations.

The music was excellent—a wonderful praise to our God. Most services began with traditional hymns, then transitioned to more modern praise and worship music for the remainder of the service. A great variety of musicians and styles were heard—everyone found something in which they could participate. The special music was inspiring and some was very professional in quality.

For those who liked a lot of music, some days had music services. For those who like a lot of study, there were more seminars than one could possibly attend. For those most interested in fellowship, the group meals, the excellent on-site restaurant, the spacious grounds, and the numerous little table and chair settings throughout the resort provided abundant opportunity.

Morning group workouts, outdoor soccer matches, boating, swimming, basketball, and numerous other activities were present to satisfy the physically active. The older generation were often seen utilizing the several miles of walkways for more moderate exercise.

A booth was constructed just outside of the main meeting area, giving the participants a chance to focus on the scriptural lessons taught in Leviticus 23:39-43; Nehemiah 8:14-17.

At the conclusion of this Feast, this writer heard more than one person remark something like, "Why can't life be like this all the time?" "It can be." Sure, we cannot afford to maintain a feast level of existence in this world. One of the things the Feast pictures is life as it should be in the Millennium. When Isaiah 11:9 is fulfilled, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea," we will not have so much waste from crime, corruption, bad weather, sickness, etc. When the fruits of everyone's labor are all used for good, we will have the ability to live a Feast-like existence every day.

Norm Edwards

2013 Feast of Tabernacles - Eastern Canada Collingwood, Ontario

The Feast of Tabernacles in Collingwood Ontario was hosted by the Canadian Church of God in conjunction with the Church of God Outreach Ministries was another great success in 2013.

At its peak, an estimated 50 people attended. There was much to enjoy, including inspiring messages, fellowship, visits to a nearby amusement park and to the city of Toronto, and other activities.

Speakers included Lawrence Gregory, Edward Malone, John Crissinger, Lawrence Mitchell, Royce Mitchell, and Bill Rollins (via video).

As he is known to do, Mr. Gregory spoke about the state of the church in a message titled "Short Beds and Narrow Covers" that was based on Isaiah 28. His other themes were "Dwelling With God" and "A Solemn Assembly."

John Crissinger discussed a recent trip to the Middle East that included a guided tour conducted by Messianic Jews. Learning some of the geography of Israel may help one better understand some New Testament sayings, Mr. Crissinger explained.

In "Learning from the Mistakes of Others," Mr. Malone elaborated on the mistake the Israelites made in the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. In another message, "No Excuses, Let's Just Serve Our God," he encouraged the brethren not to make excuses for failing to serve God.

Royce Mitchell's messages included "Shaking Faith" and "Hanna's Story." Rollins' three videotaped messages included an inspiring message encouraging the saints to not only know of God, but to actually know God.

Unseasonably warm weather allowed for fun at a nearby amusement park in Collingwood's Blue Mountains community, as well as a bus tour of Toronto, which is about 80 miles south of Collingwood. Among other activities were a pizza night and a "fun show" that included comedy acts, skits, musical selections, and even a Bible trivia game show.

David Harrell







The unseasonably warm weather allowed for fun at a nearby amusement park in Collingwood's Blue Mountains community as well as a bus tour of Toronto which is about 80 miles south of Collingwood

2013 Feast of Tabernacles - Western Canada Penticton, British Columbia



Many of the Brethren were able to assemble in the Rose Garden for a group photo



Ernie Weber, Jeff Patton and Alex Kennedy enjoy a laugh



Brethren engage each other during the cruise around Lake Okanagan

The Feast of Tabernacles, 2013 in Penticton, held in the beautiful idvllic setting of the Okanagan Valley was the best Feast ever. We enjoyed great fall weather and each day we were able to walk to the Days Inn for services where we were warmly greeted and welcomed by our Church family. We were encouraged by many wonderful inspiring messages given by a variety of speakers and most of the messages and the abundant, lively hymn singing was webcast and archived for the benefit of brethren who were unable to attend the Feast (http://cogwebcast.com/events/ feast-of-tabernacles-2013/).

Many of us are isolated and do not enjoy the blessing of weekly Sabbath

fellowship all year-round and it's this coming together which makes the Feast so special. Many different, enjoyable activities and celebratory meals were shared and appreciated by all: potlucks, a mountain steamtrain ride, a paddle boat excursion, walks through the local gardens or along lake-view trails, and vineyard tours and wine tasting all added to our enjoyment of God's festival. It is the family atmosphere and learning the true joy of God's ways that is the highlight of these Fall Holy Days.

The youth were very active participants in the daily youth bible study that focused on the Garden of Eden and living the way of the tree

They performed some wonderful special music and crafted take-home message-magnets for the brethren to help us all remember that we are, "fearfully and wonderfully made." The family togetherness at the Feast makes us realize how much we love and need one another in this. our spiritual journey. God knows that we need, for our spiritual survival, the memories of joyful camaraderie, hymn singing, special music, relevant and meaningful biblical teaching, that help sustain us throughout the coming year, 'till we all come together again in joyful reunion.

Jean Jantzen/Jeff Patton



Captain Warren Poffenroth has the Wheel



The Leader Family from Winnipeg are all Smiles



A group of young people huddle together



Sisters Heidi Poffenroth, Wendy Burton and Melanie Davie, with Duane Nicol smile for the camera

Watch Live Sermons on-line...



2013 Feast of Tabernacles - US Glenwood Springs, Colorado

Hosted by the Grand Junction Christian Church of God

In the Fall of 2013, the Grand Junction Church hosted the Feast of Tabernacles for the 14th time. This year at the historic and famous <u>Hotel Colorado</u> in Glenwood Springs. Weather was mild and cooperated during the eight days, allowing abundant fun and fellowship.

Among the many amenities in Glenwood Springs is the Hot Springs Pool, open all year in all weather. The Colorado River and the town of Glenwood Springs, with numerous additional restaurants and shopping, is just a short walk across a connecting pedestrian footbridge.

Opening Services began the evening of September 18. Each day we had a different speaker from various parts of the country. One day was unplanned and "open" for families to do those activities that just an afternoon might not be sufficient to do, and / or to allow attendees and those serving to just relax. Attendees included many affiliations and came from all parts of the country, the Midwest, Northwest, California, Arizona, Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Michigan, and, of course, Colorado.

It is planned that we will meet at this site in Glenwood Springs once again in 2014. The year following, 2015, we are expecting to again meet at the Wine Country Inn in Palisade, CO. For information, visit our website at: www.ccofgod.org

Richard Traver



View of the Courtyard at Hotel Colorado, with Iron Mountain behind



Inside the Fairy Caves at Glenwood Caverns





Glenwood Springs as seen from the mountain top



Luncheon in open air patio with valley 2000 feet below

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continued from page 7

need to repent, seek forgiveness and overcome—whether we receive the gift of prophecy or not. It is not something that one has to "work up" or "get the right feeling to receive."

Whether it is a dream, a vision, a voice or an overwhelming feeling, most people know when God has clearly spoken to them. The prophets of the Bible were completely honest about what they saw or heard, and were very careful not to add to it, take away from it, or confuse their own interpretation and feelings with what God gave them. Sometimes, they had to be content not to understand it (Daniel 12:8-9). One can always judge by making accurate records of revelations and then seeing if they come to pass as understood.

As the time of the end approaches, we need more prophets, not less. Local prophets can help each person and each group survive and be a powerful witness in the tribulations to come. The gift of prophecy is not vulnerable to electronic surveillance, network failures, police action, restrictive laws or religious censorship. It works in any language, custom or culture. It works no matter what other nations and churches do.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew (7:7-8).

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2014 FEAST OF TABERNACLES

2014 Feast of Tabernacles Bermuda & Caribbean Cruise

Sponsored by the Church of God Downers Grove Pastor Ken Svehla

9 night sailing out of Cape Liberty to Bermuda, St. Maarten, San Juan and Labadee.



For further information contact Amber Warrington 630-373-4683 marjoryamber 1@yahoo.com
For information on church services, contact Ken Svehla at mosaic 2016@aol.com or 708-785-3651.

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Who: All members of the Churches of God

What: Feast of Tabernacles Bermuda & Caribbean Cruise (many activities geared toward singles)

When: October 9, 2014 departure from Cape Liberty, New Jersey

Inside Stateroom from \$1,005.56 per person

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Above group prices include all taxes, fees, and gratuities. Prices are per person based on double occupancy. Triple and Quad staterooms are available. Please contact Kathy for pricing. Additional category staterooms are available at the current pricing. **To guarantee your cabin, first deposit is due December 5. **